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The Alt-Right on the Foundational Principles of American Politics

One purpose of this chapter is to determine whether Alt-Right thought represents a radical break with American political principles. The issue is important, but not because radical breaks are necessarily bad while fidelity is necessarily good, or vice versa. The real question is what is being broken with or adhered to. American political principles are a variation on the philosophy of liberal democracy. A fundamental break with liberal democracy is a matter of deep concern not because fundamental breaks are bad but because liberal democracy has served the country and the world well and the alternatives to it are very unappealing. Another concern is *how* one breaks with or adheres to the principles of liberal democracy, or any political philosophy. Breaking with liberal democracy can contribute usefully to political discourse if the overall quality of thought behind the critique is strong; unintelligent advocacy is not helpful. How, then, by these standards, does the Alt-Right critique of American foundational political principles measure up?

Before we take up that question a potential misunderstanding must be addressed. This chapter presents a good deal of material to show that the Alt-Right's racialist and inegalitarian account of American foundational principles is grossly incorrect. The point, however, is not that American political principles, and still less American political practice, are entirely free of racism and provided, from day one, a perfectly satisfactory vision of the liberal democratic ideal. As theoreticians of democracy and equality, the American founders and their followers often fell short. Regarding American political practice, slavery, segregation, and the continuing struggle for racial justice are only the most obvious examples of how the nation has never fully lived up to the promise of its stated principles. In deciding whether the principles of the American founders were or are racist, each person must take an honest look at the full record. The main argument of this chapter is that the Alt-Right interpretation of our foundational principles is neither honest nor comprehensive. Anyone who wants to argue that America was indeed founded on racist principles will have to provide much better evidence and reasoning than the Alt-Right does. That some legitimate scholars have judged the founders guilty of racism hardly vindicates the Alt-Right's shoddy reasoning, which this chapter documents.

The Alt-Right on the Declaration of Independence

Before we look at what the Alt-Right has to say about the Declaration of Independence, some brief remarks on the document's overall structure are useful. Stephen Toulmin's famous model fits the Declaration's argument well.[1] The argument's *claim* is "therefore . . . these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent States." This claim is supported with *evidenc*e in the form of a list of grievances against the king of England. The list is long, with thirty-nine grievances given (if each of the nine examples of "pretended legislation" is counted as a separate grievance). But why should a list of grievances, however long, prove the colonies are free and independent? Supporters of the divine right of kings would argue that revolution is never justified under any circumstances. What is needed is a *warrant*—an assumption shared by the speaker and the audience—that explains why the evidence supports the claim. The Declaration's warrant comes in the following passage of its second paragraph:

> Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experi-

> ence hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

If the Declaration's readers accept that "a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably . . . absolute Despotism" justifies revolution, and if they acknowledge that the long list of grievances is accurately so characterized, then the claim of independence is established.

But will the Declaration's readers accept the warrant of its argument? Jefferson is canny enough to deploy a warrant his largely Anglo-American audience will have trouble rejecting. For the Declaration's warrant is a close paraphrase—nearly a plagiarism, by today's standards—of the authoritative political philosopher of its time, John Locke. Here is the relevant passage from Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*:

> *Revolutions happen not* upon every little mismanagement in publick affairs. *Great mistakes* in the ruling part, many wrongs and inconvenient Laws, and all the *slips* of humane frailty will be *born by the people*, without mutiny or murmur. But if a long train of Abuses, Prevarications, and Artifices, all tending the same way, makes the design visible to the People, and they cannot but feel, what they lie under, and see, whither they are going; 'tis not to be wondered, that they should then rouze themselves, and endeavor to put the rule into such hands, which may secure to them the ends for which Government was at first erected.[2]

By Jefferson's day it was widely accepted that Locke's argument had established the legitimacy of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which no political faction wanted to deny. By obviously lifting his words from Locke, Jefferson forestalls even Loyalists and Tories from rejecting the right to revolution. Indeed, the entire second paragraph of the Declaration is a distillation of the *Second Treatise* calculated to elicit near universal agreement from contemporary readers.

The openly Lockean roots of the Declaration are important because they provide an answer to several objections often raised on the far right against America's founding document. Jefferson's words are hardly arbitrary "gauzy bunk," "ceremonial language," or "we-only-said-that-to-get-her-into-bed" drivel, as contributors to Alt-Right sites have claimed.[3] The second paragraph's language has to be exactly what it is, recognizably borrowed from the *Second Treatise*, in order to command agreement from anyone unwilling to disparage the foundational Glorious Revolution, and so to serve as a warrant.

Further, the obvious Lockeanism of the Declaration illuminates what the document means by "self-evident," and rebuts far-right scorn of that phrase. Alt-Right progenitor Samuel Francis disdainfully comments that if Jefferson's propositions were self-evident, "there would never have been any dispute about them, let alone wars and revolutions fought over them. No one fights wars about the really self-evident axioms of Euclidean geometry."[4] But the Declaration does not assert "these truths *are* self-evident"; it asserts, "*We hold* these truths to be self-evident."[5] The claim is only that "we," the document's author and audience, already accept and demand no further proof of its Lockean principles, which therefore can serve as its warrant. The truths of the Declaration are presented as self-evident in a rhetorical, not philosophical, sense and its argument implies no strong claims about their epistemological status. Indeed, the final language of "self-evident," which was suggested by Benjamin Franklin during the editing process, represents a backing away from the theological and philosophical overtones of Jefferson's original formulation, "sacred and undeniable."[6] Therefore the Declaration's argument does not, as Francis and other critics have claimed,[7] rest on the validity of Locke's tabula rasa theory, or any theory, of human understanding or nature. Nor does the document logically assume the state-of-nature account of the origins of government, as Calhoun and other antidemocratic thinkers have argued, even though its exposition is consistent with that theory.

Another important point about the language of the Declaration concerns the word "men" in its most iconic phrase. It seems Jefferson used that word to refer to people of both sexes. The 1756 edition of Samuel Johnson's dictionary gives the first definition of the word "man" as "human being" and the second as "not a woman."[8] Nothing in the text of the Declaration suggests only males were being referred to. In this book the phrase "all men" is meant to include women too. To avoid confusion I use the phrase "all people" whenever that seems appropriate.

The ground of the Declaration's truths is simply the political experience of its audience, as Locke and others helped them interpret it.[9] Historical events and their social consequences convinced the Anglo-American world of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—from political thinkers like Locke and Jefferson to the people on the street they influenced—that the broad outlines of what is now called liberal democracy served well enough to merit acceptance. Whatever weaknesses there may be in Enlightenment philosophy do not necessarily undermine that conviction, which has since been reinforced by the Civil War, the twentieth-century contests with totalitarianism, and the ongoing struggles for human rights. A truly radical rejection of the principles of the Declaration—as interpreted and modified in light of experience and reflection—is nothing less than a repudiation of the entire ground and structure of modern liberal democracy. The question now raised is whether Alt-Right thought really represents such nihilism.

"All Men Are Created Equal"

The best way to appreciate the radicalism of the Alt-Right is to note that it is based on an explicit and fundamental rejection of the principle that all men are created equal. A few quotations will show that this is indeed the position of Alt-Right thinkers.

Here is Richard Spencer, who describes himself as "one of the founders of the Alt-Right as we know it"[10] and edits *Radix Journal*:

> Alexander Stephens, Vice-President of the Confederate States of America . . . stressed that the Confederacy was based on the conclusion that Thomas Jefferson was wrong; the "cornerstone" of the new state was the "physical, philosophical, and moral truth" of human inequality.
>
> Ours, too, should be a declaration of difference and distance—"We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created *un*equal." In the wake of the old world, this will be our proposition.[11]

Interestingly, Spencer does not quote Stephens's specification of what the cornerstone truth of the Confederacy was: "Its corner-stone rests upon the great truth, that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery—subordination to the superior race—is his natural and normal condition."[12] (That the most radical spokesmen of the Alt-Right also assert the inferiority of blacks is taken up in more detail in chapter 7.)

Jared Taylor considers himself and his website, *American Renaissance*, part of the Alt-Right. He too excoriates Jefferson's famous dictum:

> Jefferson didn't believe all men were created equal . . . and to handcuff Jefferson to those five words is profoundly stupid. The Declaration of Independence explains to George III why the colonists wanted out. It starts with rhetorical throat-clearing in which the signers say they are *the King's* equals and have the right to leave. When the founders got around to writing the rules for actually running their new country—either in the Articles or the Constitution—they didn't put in any gauzy bunk about equality.[13]

Greg Johnson, editor of *Cross-Currents Publishing*, also rejects Jeffersonian egalitarianism. He writes:

> The true Right, in both its Old and New versions, is founded on the rejection of human *equality* as a fact and as a norm. The true right embraces the idea that mankind is and ought to be unequal, i.e., differentiated. Men are different from women. Adults are different from children. The wise are different from the foolish, the smart from the stupid, the strong from the weak, the beautiful from the ugly. We are differentiated by race, history, language, religion, nation, tribe, and culture. These differences matter, and because they matter, all of life is governed by real hierarchies of fact and value, not by the chimera of equality.
>
> The true right rejects egalitarianism root and branch.[14]

Hunter Wallace (the pen name of Brad Griffin), founder and editor of *Occidental Dissent*, answers the question, what is the Alt-Right?, as follows: "We don't belong to the liberal family . . . nothing is less self-evident to us than the notion that all men are created equal."[15]

Perhaps Alt-Right author Gregory Hood, writing in *American Renaissance*, achieved the ne plus ultra of vituperation against the Declaration's cornerstone when he wrote: "No phrase in history has done more harm than 'all men are created equal.'"[16] Then again, Hood's extraordinary claim was anticipated by the Alt-Right's forefather, Samuel Francis, who maintained that Jefferson's phrase "has to be considered one of the most arcane—and one of the most dangerous—sentences ever written, one of the major blunders of American history."[17]

Such excoriation of the Declaration's iconic phrase coming from the American right wing is highly unusual. In his recent history of the American far right, the political scientist George Hawley notes:

> Even the most vocal and extreme figures associated with the American conservative movement will express reverence for the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence and in their rhetoric they often emphasize that their preferred policies will ultimately lead to a more equitable society. They may argue that their interest is in equality of opportunity rather than equality of results, but in either case, they are careful not to reject equality as an ideal.[18]

Here Hawley is writing not about mainstream conservatives but about right-wing critics of American conservatism, as the title of his book has it. In other words, as recently as just a few years ago even the very far right embraced Jeffersonian political egalitarianism. (Obvious exceptions are violent and quasi-criminal operations such as the KKK and neo-Nazis.) Even the John Birch Society expressed pride in "the environment for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness enjoyed by the average American Negro" and in "the governmental principles of our once great republic, and the gradual progress we had been making . . . towards a still better framework for human life on the part of individuals of all races, colors and creeds."[19] So the Alt-Right of today is much more radical in its criticism of Jeffersonian egalitarianism than previous right-wing extremists were.

When conservatives did speak about equality they offered, as Hawley notes, not a rejection but a clarification of the concept. In the past, when conservatives interpreted the idea that all men are created equal, their point was that people are obviously unequal in certain traits: some are strong and some are weak, some are tall and some are short, some are intelligent and some are not. Hayek took that position when he wrote in *The Constitution of Liberty:*

> To rest the case for equal treatment of national or racial minorities on the assertion that they do not differ from other men is implicitly to admit that

> factual inequality would justify unequal treatment; and proof that some differences do, in fact exist would not be long in forthcoming. It is the essence of the demand for equality before the law that people would be treated alike in spite of the fact that they are different.[20]

It was not just conservatives who interpreted Jefferson's dictum to apply to political rather than factual equality. The social democratic philosopher Karl Popper, for example, argued that "'equality before the law' is *not a fact but a political demand based upon a moral decision*; and it is quite independent of the theory—which is probably false—that 'all men are equal.' "[21]

The point is, earlier expositors of the proposition "all men are created equal" were clarifying that the equality in question was not one of traits or characteristics but of rights and political status.

The Alt-Right disagrees with Hayek and Popper. Its thinkers either (1) explicitly reject not only the "factual equality" *but even the political equality* of all people, or (2) introduce so many qualifications and modifications of Jeffersonian political egalitarianism as to render it a dead letter, or (3) deny that Jeffersonian egalitarianism should extend to nonwhites.

EXPLICIT REJECTION OF POLITICAL EQUALITY Richard Spencer offers an explicit rejection of political equality. Here is an excerpt from an interview I conducted with Spencer:

> TM: So you reject the idea that all men are created equal?
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> RS: I reject that statement totally. I reject it in all its forms and context. . . . I reject it in the hardest way possible.
>
> TM: Let me just try to be quite clear on that. . . . We're talking . . . not about . . . intelligence, any factual, biological equality. We're talking about political equality in the sense of everybody has the same package of inalienable rights. Now what do you make of that reading of the Declaration?
>
> RS: I reject that utterly. I think that's just silly. Thomas Jefferson might as well be talking about everyone has the right to a unicorn.
>
> TM: Hayek says "It is the essence of the demand for equality before the law that people would be treated alike, in spite of the fact that they are different." Now, interpreting "all men are created equal" in that sense, can you accept the idea of all men are created equal?

> RS: Well I think that's much more attractive . . . but I would actually still reject that. First off, I really can't get over my defense that human beings do not have rights. . . . There is no deep right that any human being is born with or possessed with. You acquire a right by becoming a member of a community. So basically, Jefferson gets it backwards. . . . You owe it to your own children, to your neighbor, to your race, to your nation to treat people differently, to not treat them equally. . . . Like a Hispanic immigrant is just never going to be a member of my family and my people and my civilization. . . . This is not like a license to treat people with utter, abject immorality. Of course not, but . . . I don't owe this Hispanic immigrant anything. He's not part of my group. And in fact, I have a duty to treat him differently.[22]

In an interview with me, Mike Enoch, editor of *The Right Stuff*, expressed an equally radical inegalitarianism:

> ME: We have equal rights, basically is what he [Jefferson] is saying. . . . I think that I don't agree with that because rights are socially constructed; rights are created by the state. The state is a group of people that create the norms of society and back those up, you know, with the threat of violence. . . . And that's what creates rights, and it grants those rights to, you know, to the people that it grants them to. . . . I do not believe that the state has a duty to provide equal rights.[23]

These statements are entirely dispositive on the matter of whether the most radical Alt-Rightists fundamentally reject Jeffersonian political equality; they do. But other Alt-Right thinkers are—or present themselves as—somewhat less radical.

JEFFERSONIAN EQUALITY OF RIGHTS MODIFIED AND QUALIFIED INTO NOTHING Jared Taylor and frequent *VDARE* contributor James Kirkpatrick are examples of Alt-Right thinkers who modify and qualify Jeffersonian egalitarianism into a dead letter. Here is an excerpt from my interview with Taylor:

> TM: Tell me in what sense you think the phrase "all men are created equal" is "nonsense" and "gauzy bunk," etc.

JT: Because there is no two men on Earth who are created equal. We all differ in countless, countless ways. Even identical twins are not created equal in terms of the measurable traits of all human beings. . . . We are equal in the sense that all men do have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We are equal in that regard. . . . [In] that sense, that very limited sense, Jefferson could have left off the entire five words "All men are created equal" . . . and the meaning of the document could have been the same but this aspect; this notion of the rampant equality would have been absent from American mythology.

TM: It's obvious, and I think it was obvious at the time, that if anybody thought Jefferson was saying, "Oh, I mean all men are equally tall, equally smart, equally strong," everybody would have laughed at him. So clearly what's being talked about here are certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. You don't have a problem with that, do you?

JT: No, but . . . I think in the context of that document, those words have a meaning, the meaning of those words is equal to zero. In other words, I think his intent could have been gotten across simply by saying, all men have an equal right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

TM: However . . . the phrase as I'm interpreting it and as, for instance, Lincoln interpreted it . . . equality doesn't mean color, size, intellect, moral development, social capacity. It's all about inalienable rights. In that sense . . . you don't have any problem with that phrase?

JT: No, no I don't. Furthermore, I do underline this idea that because he did use this, in my words, meaningless five words. They have been blown up to . . . have this hold on the American imagination that has been extremely dangerous.

TM: You're concerned that the phrase "all men are created equal" might be taken [to mean] . . . Jefferson is saying we're all equally strong, equally smart. And you're saying he would've been better off to leave that out, as long as he was clear all men, understood as men of all races of course, are equal in terms of political rights. Is that correct?

JT: Well, not necessarily.

TM: Explain. Ah! Now we put our finger on it, Mr. Taylor.

JT: He's saying those three things.

TM: Yes . . . "endowed by the creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." So my understanding is the full complement of political rights is held equally by all people of all races. You don't have any problem with that, do you?

JT: Maybe he's saying that, maybe he's not.

TM: Well, what are you saying?

JT: The fact is I don't think it's useful to quibble over what Jefferson meant, and I don't think we necessarily have to tie ourselves [to] whatever interpretation we give of the Declaration of Independence.

TM: Whatever Jefferson said, you have no problem with the assertion that all men, in other words, people of all races, have certain equal political rights and are political equals to one another. That's your position, right?

JT: No, it's not my position either. There are differences between citizens and noncitizens. There are differences between the mentally competent and mentally incompetent. There are differences between people who are behind bars because they've committed a crime and people who are free. . . . To the extent that you're trying to find in the people that are classified as the Alt-Right, some willingness to deny certain rights to people of certain races, you're not going to find it in me.

TM: Okay, that's clarifying. All right, thank you. So let me ask you this, then. So we're agreed people of all races have the same political rights?

JT: Hold on. So long as they are citizens of the United States, because noncitizens don't have lots of the rights that [citizens do].

TM: To have the right to vote you need to be a citizen. However, if you're a noncitizen, you still have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The government cannot just show up and blow you away on the ground that, hey, noncitizens don't have any rights. Correct?

JT: Well, on the other hand, they have no right to pursue happiness in the United States if their visa expires.

TM: There's no question that governments have the right to institute immigration laws. I would simply say this, you hold the right to pursue happiness, but if you're here illegally you can be asked to leave, and you go pursue your happiness somewhere else.

JT: Absolutely.

What, then, is Taylor's bottom line on Jeffersonian egalitarianism interpreted as equality of rights? In this interview Taylor said "we are equal in the sense that all men do have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" and that he would not "deny certain rights to people of certain races." Excellent. But when asked specifically, four separate times, Taylor would *not* say his position was "people of all races have certain equal political rights and are political equals to one another." In fact, he asserted, "No, it's not my position either." That is, once it is stipulated that "all men" refers to people of all races, Taylor's support for equality of rights becomes impossible to pin down.

And what to make of Taylor's claim that the pivotal phrase of the Declaration—"all men are created equal"—is just "meaningless five words" that could be struck altogether without changing the meaning of the document? In fact, eliminating those words would be inconsistent with Jefferson's argument, strikingly change the meaning of the Declaration, and undermine the equality of rights Taylor says he supports.

To understand why this is so, I recall Spencer's explicit rejection of even the qualified understanding of Jeffersonian egalitarianism as simply a matter of rights rather than factual equality. Spencer said, "There is no deep right that any human being is born with or possessed with. You acquire a right by becoming a member of a community. So basically, Jefferson gets it backwards."

That is, for Jefferson, people are born with rights; they do not receive them from the community. Jefferson has to take this position because he is making a case for revolution. Rights are primary and communities are to be judged against them. If the community regularly violates your rights, the problem is not with your rights but with the community, against which you may rebel if absolutely necessary. For rights to serve as such a standard of judgment, men have to be born with them—*created* equal.[24] If the community decides what rights you hold it can moot your call for revolution by simply revoking or denying the rights you claim to have. In calling for revolution, Jefferson cannot take that position. And if the community is the final arbiter of what your rights are, what is to stop the community from simply defining your rights however it pleases, and then declaring, without possibility of appeal, that despite appearances, all is well and you are equal?

Thus the denial of equal creation leads to a denial of equal rights and is a prolegomenon to a defense of slavery. This line of argument was developed by the apologist for slavery John C. Calhoun. Calhoun denounced "the prevalent opinion that all men are born free and equal; —than which nothing can be more unfounded and false." He held that men, "instead of being born free and equal, are born subject, not only to parental authority, but to the laws and institutions of the country where born and under whose protection they draw their first breath." One's political status is then to be determined by the laws and institutions of the country, which can and should apportion rights unequally, based on perceived merit. According to Calhoun:

> It is a great and dangerous error to suppose that all people are equally entitled to liberty. It is a reward to be earned, not a blessing to be gratuitously lavished on all alike; —a reward reserved for the intelligent, the patriotic, the virtuous and deserving; —and not a boon to be bestowed on a people too ignorant, degraded and vicious, to be capable either of appreciating or of enjoying it.[25]

Political equality thus becomes not an inalienable right one is born with but a reward to be doled out by the community or country to the virtuous, but not to "a people" too vicious to make use of it. Of course, in Calhoun, the ignorant, degraded, and vicious people in question turn out to be blacks, who deserve only slavery.

It is precisely to forestall interpretations like those of Calhoun and Spencer and to prevent equality of rights from becoming a dead letter that Jefferson's five iconic words are indispensable to the meaning of the Declaration. Taylor completely undermines his claim to accept the equal rights of all men when he disparages Jefferson's phrase as "meaningless."

James Kirkpatrick, a regular contributor to *VDARE*, in correspondence with me similarly modified Jefferson's words so as to undermine political egalitarianism:

> TM: So to make my question more precise, do you believe "all men are created equal" in the sense of having equal political rights?
>
> JK: No. And neither did Jefferson, obviously. There's a nuanced way in [which] this expression is true, in the sense that no *citizen* should be deprived of life, liberty or *property* without *due process*. This is obviously what Jefferson meant. . . . But things get taken to their logical conclusion. When you reduce your political philosophy to a slogan, "all men are created equal," eventually people start believing it. . . . It's all very

> well to invent abstract universal rights in an all-white Christian society in which only property owning males vote. Today, it's hard to take some of these premises seriously. But I also have no illusions about some return to monarchy or whatever else.[26]

Kirkpatrick begins by bluntly denying that all men have equal political rights but then admits the idea is true in "a nuanced way." But the nuances turn out to make all the difference.

Note that Kirkpatrick's modification of the Declaration specifies not "all men," but only citizens. He therefore makes the same Calhounist move that Taylor does: only citizens are equal, and since citizenship is a matter of law, one's political equality depends on whoever makes the law. Thus an enormous loophole is left open for lawmakers to decide that entire classes of people are not citizens at all and therefore are politically unequal. Of course, this is exactly the move the Supreme Court made in the infamous *Dred Scott* decision, which held that blacks were not citizens and that a compromise in Congress that restricted slavery in some parts of the country was not constitutional.

Also, in Kirkpatrick's formulation, the rights that are held "unalienable" in the Declaration become subject to "due process." Thus one can be deprived of one's rights as long as established procedures are followed. But what if established procedures systematically leave entire classes of people at a disadvantage?

Kirkpatrick does the most damage to the Declaration, however, when he replaces "pursuit of happiness" with "property." Much has been written about why Jefferson preferred his formulation to "life, liberty, and property," as the thought was often put in his time.[27] In any case, Jefferson's right to the pursuit of happiness embraces a broader range of human affairs than the right to property, if property is understood in the narrow sense of possessions. Further, specifying a right to property would have provided slaveholders with the argument that they had a right to their slaves, whom of course they considered property. In contrast, slaves or any subordinated people can vindicate their claim to equality by appealing to a right to the pursuit of happiness.

It is a historical matter of fact that the Confederate supporters of slavery altered the Declaration's key phrase exactly as Kirkpatrick does. After the election of Lincoln, seven states of the Lower South were the first to secede. Five of those states sent official commissioners to the slave state that remained in the Union to urge them to secede. To a man, these commissioners based their arguments on the defense of slavery and white supremacy rather than on states' rights or anything else.[28] Characteristic of these arguments were those of Mississippi's commissioner to Georgia and Alabama's to Kentucky. William L. Harris of Mississippi, in his address to the General Assembly of Georgia, gave Alt-Right fear-mongers of "white genocide" something to think about when he asserted his state "had rather see the last of her race, men, women, and children, immolated in one common funeral pyre than see them subjected to the degradation of civil, political and social equality with the negro race."[29]

Hardly less ferocious was Stephen F. Hale in his letter to Kentucky's governor, in which he argued that "the triumph of this new theory of government"—that is, "the equality of the races, white and black"—"destroys the property of the South, lays waste her fields and inaugurates all the horrors of a San Domingo servile insurrection, consigning her citizens to assassinations and her wives and daughters to pollution and violation to gratify the lust of half-civilized Africans."[30]

Harris and Hale based their arguments on Jefferson's trilogy of rights, suitably edited, of course, just as Kirkpatrick does. Harris claimed, "Our fathers secured to us . . . protection to life, liberty and *property*" and that "citizens of the South have been deprived of their property" because the North was not effectively enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act.[31] Hale similarly argued that "the primary object of all good governments is to protect the citizen in the enjoyment of life, liberty, and *property*," and argued, "Will the South give up the institution of slavery and consent that her citizens be stripped of their property? . . . It is impossible. Disunion is inevitable."[32]

Let us here ignore the neo-Confederate propensities of *VDARE* and assume that Kirkpatrick rejects these apologies for slavery. But it is a matter of record that the substitution of "property" for "pursuit of happiness" that he now makes opened the door to such arguments and today could be put to similar bad use. Kirkpatrick's rewording of the Declaration, far from being a matter of mere nuance, entirely vitiates the document's world-historical proclamation of political egalitarianism. This cavalier disdain for the foundational principles of American democracy is an excellent example of the Alt-Right's intellectual recklessness.

Another regular contributor to VDARE, Steven Sailer, would also undermine Jefferson's dictum. Here is Sailer in the process of denying the idea that America is a "proposition nation," one based on the acceptance of certain foundational ideas:

> Consider the most famous of all the Propositions: "All men are created equal."
>
> Well, guess what, I don't believe it—not in the sense of empirical equality of capabilities. But that interpretation has become increasingly dominant. . . .
>
> What I do believe in is the spiritual, moral, and legal equality of humans. . . . Jefferson and the signers of the Declaration probably meant something similarly sophisticated.
>
> Unfortunately, they didn`t quite end up saying that.[33]

The Declaration is not exactly right, argues Sailer, because Jefferson "appears to have made a typo by leaving out the word 'in' in his most famous sentence," which should read, "'all men are created equal, *in* that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.' "[34] Because of this lack of a "bit of proof-reading,"[35] Sailer claims, "The relentless momentum in American public life is toward enshrining 'All men are created equal' as totalitarian dogma."[36]

Sailer's proposed edit of the Declaration is less damaging to the document's overall argument than Taylor's but nonetheless deserves comment because it raises important questions. Sailer's argument is that Jefferson and the signers meant to assert "the spiritual, moral, and legal equality of humans" but "didn`t quite end up saying that" and instead implied an "empirical equality of capabilities," all because of a sheer typo or proofreading error that dropped a crucial word.

But there is no evidence of such a gross mistake. In none of the Declaration's early drafts did the word "in" appear at this point and then get accidentally left out later.[37] Further, the drafting committee that drew up the document included, besides Jefferson, two other masters of the English language—John Adams and Benjamin Franklin—who made important changes but never suggested Sailer's proposed insertion. In her definitive account, "Mr. Jefferson and His Editors," the historian Pauline Maier described the attention lavished on the drafting process as "an act of group editing that has to be one of the great marvels of history" and notes that "the delegates who labored over the draft Declaration had a splendid ear for language."[38]

Thus, Sailer is arguing that a meticulous editorial process involving the collective genius of America's greatest literary talents let pass, for want of a bit of proofreading, a gross typo that transformed the meaning of the Declaration from an assertion of "the spiritual, moral, and legal equality of humans" into a "totalitarian dogma." This implausible and entirely unsupported claim is another example of the true offenses of the Alt-Right: intellectual carelessness, poverty of thought, and rhetorical excess.

Why Taylor, Sailer, or any reasonable person should think the Declaration makes not the vitally relevant claim of equality of rights but the obviously absurd assertion of an "empirical equality of capabilities" or of all men being "equal in terms of the measurable traits of all human beings" is a mystery. In fact, as far as I have been able to determine, *no* informed thinker has *ever* maintained that all men are factually equal in these senses. There is no danger of the idea of radical, factual egalitarianism becoming "totalitarian dogma" because no serious person—and certainly not Jefferson—has ever said anything so preposterous. Why, then, does the Alt-Right fulminate against an interpretation of the Declaration no sensible reader has ever held? The most reasonable answer is that these Alt-Right figures simply do not accept the Declaration's political egalitarianism and, after occasional perfunctory and ambiguous statements of good will, knock the foundations out from under that principle. But whatever the answer, the Alt-Right's hyperbolic disparagements of America's foundational document are down on all fours with similar rhetoric of Calhoun and other defenders of slavery and serve only to discredit altogether rather than clarify Jeffersonian egalitarianism.

REFUSAL TO EXTEND EQUALITY OF RIGHTS TO NONWHITES Another way to seemingly embrace Jeffersonian egalitarianism partly but still leave the door open to discrimination is to deny that the phrase "all men" was meant to extend to nonwhites. Jared Taylor makes this move in his monograph *What the Founders Really Thought about Race: The White Consciousness of U.S. Statesmen*, where he writes: "Today, the United States officially takes the position that all races are equal. . . . Many Americans cite 'the all men are created equal' phrase from the Declaration of Independence to support the claim that this view of race was not only inevitable but was anticipated by the Founders. . . . They are badly mistaken."[39]

Right at the start of his essay, Taylor runs into the obvious objection to his claim that the founders rejected the political equality of the races: doesn't the plain meaning of "all men" refer to men of all races? Here is how Taylor deals with this obvious problem:

> Despite what he [Jefferson] wrote in the Declaration, he did not think Blacks were equal to Whites, noting that "in general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection." He hoped slavery would be abolished some day, but "when freed, he [the Negro] is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture." Jefferson also expected whites eventually to displace all of the Indians of the New World. The United States, he wrote, was to be "the nest from which all America, North and South, is to be peopled," and the hemisphere was to be entirely European: ". . . nor can we contemplate with satisfaction either blot or mixture on that surface."
>
> Jefferson opposed miscegenation for a number of reasons, but one was his preference for the physical traits of Whites. He wrote of their "flowing hair" and their "more elegant symmetry of form," but emphasized the importance of color itself: Are not the "fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one [whites], preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immovable veil of black, which covers all the emotions of the other race?"[40]

The passages Taylor quotes show that Jefferson believed blacks were more emotional than whites and not as good-looking. Jefferson was, of course, wrong, and reading these comments is very disheartening to modern admirers of Jeffersonianism. But do they show that Jefferson held, as an essential principle of his political philosophy, that blacks were not the *political* equals of whites and that the principle "all men are created equal" did not apply to blacks?

To start answering this question, let us first note that the unpleasant passages Taylor cites come not from the Declaration but from Jefferson's other writings. They are not part of Jefferson's expressed political principles but are opinions expressed in other contexts and not necessarily incorporated into his political philosophy. Further, a very simple examination of the drafting of the Declaration of Independence shows that Jefferson clearly meant to extend the principle of political equality to all men, blacks as well as whites.

Jefferson's original rough draft of the Declaration—that is, the text before it was edited by Congress—contained a number of charges against the British king that were not included in the final draft that Congress approved. One of these passages accused the king of foisting slavery on the American colonies:

> He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of *infidel* powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce: and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, & murdering the people upon whom *he* also obtruded them; thus paying off former crimes committed against the *liberties* of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the *lives* of another.[41]

The key feature of this passage has been pointed out by the distinguished political theorist and student of the Declaration, Danielle Allen.[42] In it Jefferson acknowledges the "sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people"—that is, black Africans being carried into slavery—and specifically recognizes these persons as men, or rather "MEN." The striking capitalization is in the original. Thus we have a clear proof: if the foundational statement of American political principles famously asserts "all men are created equal," and then goes on to specify blacks are "MEN," it follows that this philosophy does in fact extend that equality to blacks.

It is true that Congress edited this passage out of the Declaration, but not because there was any objection to the idea that blacks were men.

South Carolina and Georgia had never opposed the slave trade, which they wanted continued, and so demanded that the whole discussion of slavery be struck.[43] Jefferson had to bow to their wishes. He never repudiated his claim that blacks were men and—despite his disparaging remarks about blacks' hair texture, complexion, intelligence, and so forth—never suggested that the unalienable rights of the Declaration did not extend to blacks.

Another favorite Alt-Right argument claims that since the 1790 Naturalization Act made only "free white persons" eligible for naturalization, therefore the phrase "all men" in the Declaration must really mean "all white men." Thus a *VDARE* article argues: "Of course, the Declaration of Independence does assert that 'all men are created equal,' but what exactly the Founders meant must be assessed in the light of the fact that many were slaveholders—and that the 1790 Naturalization Act restricted citizenship to 'free white persons.'"[44]

But this citation of the 1790 act, far from showing that "all men" in the Declaration really means "all white men," in fact shows exactly the opposite. The wording of the Naturalization Act shows the statesmen of the founding generation could and did specify race when they wanted to. If, therefore, they declined to specify race in the Declaration's iconic phrase, then "all men" means precisely what it says—not just white men but *all* men irrespective of race. Further, citing the wording of a policy provision subject to revision in order to trump the principles enunciated in a foundational statement of philosophy puts the cart before the horse. That legislation does not always live up to first principles does not necessarily speak against the principles. In that case it is the legislation that must give way. Or perhaps in the press of trying to balance a variety of principles, the legislators felt, rightly or wrongly, some could not be fully realized at a particular historical moment. Of course, in due time, it was the policy that was revised to align with the Declaration, not the other way around, which suggests it was the principle of political egalitarianism that was found to be sound.

Another argument deployed by Alt-Right thinkers to deny the phrase "all men" was meant to extend to people of all races involves pointing out what the Declaration says about Indians. The relevant passage comes up in the list of grievances charged against the king: "He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions."

Alt-Rightists claim the disparaging reference to "merciless Indian Savages" implies the unalienable rights of the Declaration were not meant to extend to Indians and nonwhites generally. Thus James Kirkpatrick of *VDARE* has said, "After all, Jefferson did not consider slaves part of the polity nor the 'merciless Indian savages' he condemns in the document. Nor did women have equal political rights in the sense of having a right to vote."[45]

And according to another *VDARE* contributor, "Our Founding Fathers often spoke in universal language but really only practiced their beliefs within the context of European descendants. Thomas Jefferson claimed 'all men are created equal' and then called Indians 'savages' in the very same document."[46]

There are two errors here. First, Jefferson's unfortunate characterization of Indians nowhere says they are not men, nor does it deny that they enjoy the same unalienable rights as everyone else. People of all temperaments, levels of "civilization," and behavior enjoy the same set of primordial rights under the philosophy of Jeffersonian democracy. Yes, this means even killers and criminals, however merciless or savage they may be. Of course, such rights, while unalienable, are not absolute. Since all persons enjoy them, one person's rights are limited by those of everyone else. If I mercilessly murder someone, I certainly may be punished for violating *his* rights. Such punishment in itself does not violate *my* rights, which never involved a license to murder. It is a mistake to think that when a convicted criminal is punished his rights are therefore taken away. So the Declaration's disparaging description of Indians does not imply that they or nonwhites in general do not enjoy exactly the same rights all men do.

Second, it may be that the founders only *practiced* their beliefs within the context of European descendants, but the question is about their *principles*. As we have seen, the plain language of the Declaration and the history of its drafting show the unalienable rights it describes were meant to extend, in principle, to people of all races. That granted, the founders faced the tangled question of how to realize those rights in practice. As a practical matter, and however unfortunately, an immediate end to slavery and the granting of voting rights to women were politically impossible in the founders' day. Further, the political agenda of the founding generation was already crammed with world-historical challenges, including independence and the restoration of republicanism. Therefore, some of the founders, including Jefferson, felt the best that could be accomplished regarding slavery was a repatriation of enslaved persons to Africa. That was, of course, an utterly wrongheaded, unrealistic, and immoral judgment. But the founders' bad judgment on that issue doesn't prove they did not believe, or that the Declaration does not mean, that in principle, equal rights ought to be extended to all people. Over time, the impossibility of repatriation became obvious, antislavery sentiment spread widely, and an end to slavery became a live political option and finally a reality, as did women's suffrage. In other words, it took a long time for the principles of the Declaration to be fully understood and then realized. Such is the nature of the struggle to achieve liberty. That obvious reality doesn't undermine the validity, then and now, of the principles of the Declaration.

In short, the political equality of all people, regardless of race, is a central principle of the American founding philosophy as expressed in the Declaration. Even if, in the founding era, that principle was not fully articulated in all its detail, or realized in political practice as much as would have been desirable, the principle remains valid. That should be obvious, at least to Americans of today.

VDARE'S CAUTIOUS SUPPORTERS OF "ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL" Some contributors to Alt-Right sites do accept Jeffersonian egalitarianism so long as it is made very clear that the equality in question is strictly one of rights, but remain doubtful that such equality can be realized in a multiracial country like the United States. Writers of this persuasion can be found at *VDARE* but seldom at other Alt-Right sites. *VDARE*, though some of its contributors consider themselves Alt-Rightists, is thought of by its founder and editor, Peter Brimelow, to be a forum site that publishes anyone who has something to say about what he considers to be the "post '65 immigration disaster."[47] Thus *VDARE* carries the relatively mainstream syndicated commentators Patrick J. Buchanan and Michelle Malkin, including columns in which they express support for Jeffersonian equality of rights.[48] And other writers more closely associated with the site show greater sympathy with Jefferson's words than do other writers considered in this chapter.

Brimelow himself in an interview acknowledged that all men are equal in the sense that they have the same bundle of political rights and said that "obviously people aren't created equal but what the founding fathers meant is that there's a moral equality."[49] John Derbyshire is a frequent contributor to *VDARE* who prefers the term "dissident right" to Alt-Right.[50] He agrees with Brimelow's assessment of Jeffersonian egalitarianism but is skeptical about whether it can be realized in a multiracial society:

> Well, as an idea it's obviously absurd. We're not all created equal. Some are tall, some are short, some are fast, some are slow, some are smart, some are stupid. It's obvious that we're not all created equal; you can't take it too literally. In the context of this sort of ceremonial language that the Declaration is using, I think the best translation of it would be that it's just an 18th century gentleman's way of saying that we're going to start a new social order, and there won't be any blood aristocracy. There won't be any aristocracy of blood in our new social order. That's what I think he was saying. . . .
>
> On the other hand, if you're going to say that different racial groups, different races, people with different kinds of ancestry, people from different local varieties of the human species—which they are—have general statistical differences between [them] . . . but we're going to treat them equally. . . . That's a somewhat different proposition and it's clearly in practice much more difficult to me. . . . I would put that in the basket labeled worthwhile ideals. Whether it can be obtained in practice, is much more difficult. . . . It's a grand idea. I would love to live in a society like that. Whether a society like that can actually exist, is an incredible problem. And the evidence to date is maybe it can't.[51]

Here Derbyshire makes some of the same criticisms of Jeffersonian egalitarianism that we have already found wanting and implausibly argues that the phrase's main point was merely to reject blood aristocracy, an issue that is not mentioned in the document at all. But at least Derbyshire acknowledges political equality among a diverse population as a worthwhile, though perhaps impractical, ideal, and states he would love to live in such a society. At this point in the interview I couldn't resist asking the following question:

TM: "It's a nice proposition, but can it work in practice?" Gee, I can think of a country . . . [where it] comes pretty close to working in practice, can't you?

JD: Well, let me think. Well, India doesn't do too badly; they've got a lot of groups there.

TM: That wasn't what I had in mind. . . . What do you think I'm thinking?

JD: Um, I don't know?

TM: How about the United States of America?

JD: What?

TM: How about the United States of America?

JD: No, it doesn't work well here at all.

After this exchange we discussed how successful the United States has been in achieving the Jeffersonian ideal of equal rights for people of all races. Derbyshire pointed out that black social progress after the end of legal segregation has not been as great as had been hoped. He also cited affirmative action as an example of unequal treatment of different races. I argued that the issue is whether political equality of the races has been at least more nearly approximated. Less success has been achieved with equality of social outcomes than could be wished, but this disappointing outcome hardly proves that political equality is nearly unachievable in a multiracial democracy. Nor does the relatively small impact of affirmative action, whatever one thinks of it, substantially change the picture. In the end, Derbyshire was willing to grant that "we have in fact obtained the desideratum of absolute equality under the law." But if the desideratum is equality before the law, then our acknowledged inequalities in height, speed, intelligence, and so forth are clearly not germane; in which case, why brand Jefferson's foundational idea "obviously absurd"?

Brimelow and Derbyshire at least show themselves to be finally more comfortable with political equality than other Alt-Right thinkers. Perhaps we should be grateful for small favors. Overall, *VDARE* contributors, with their many objections, stipulations and quibbles that are often not to the point, end up undermining and discrediting Jeffersonian egalitarianism almost as much as the more radical Alt-Rightists.

"The Consent of the Governed": Electoral Democracy

The Alt-Right's rejection of Jeffersonian democracy is thoroughgoing. Once egalitarianism of rights is denied, the next step is a denial that the protector of those rights, government, derives its just powers from "the consent of the governed." The Declaration does not specify how that consent is to be obtained, but in the modern world the main way of so doing is electoral democracy: periodic, contested elections with a universal or nearly universal adult franchise to determine the leadership of the government. It is therefore unsurprising that the Alt-Right is consistent in its radicalism and rejects electoral democracy. Richard Spencer put the matter this way:

> RS: I'm not in favor of electoral democracy. I don't believe . . . tallying up votes is the best way to make a decision. I don't believe in that.
>
> TM: What's a better way to make a decision than electoral democracy?
>
> RS: Wise people who care, who have a long-term view and care about the future of their people.
>
> TM: And where do they come from? And how do you recognize them?
>
> RS: That's the trick. That's the trick. . . . I am not going to lie to you and . . . [say] that we can just poll every human being with a pulse and that is going to lead us to the right or sound answer.[52]

At the most, then, only "wise people who care" should be allowed to participate in politics, according to Spencer, and certainly not "every human being with a pulse," which would be to practice, as a writer for the *Occidental Observer* put it, "one idiot, one vote."[53] Writers for *The Right Stuff* agree:

> The solution to all of these problems is to destroy the concept of voting as a right. By limiting suffrage, we increase the value of votes and voters. By limiting suffrage to those who represent virtues beneficial to society, we promote those virtues bilaterally and at the same time. Expecting people who have done nothing to improve their lot in life to vote in any way other than destructively or in a manner consistent with their free willing [free-wheeling] life style is tantamount to societal suicide.[54]

And again:

> If we must be a democratic society, the franchise should be limited. Universal democracy is a bad system. It gives power to the worst and shackles the fittest. It is a degenerative institution in which the weak and unproductive collaborate against the strong and sustainable.[55]

But then, there still remains the trick of identifying the wise who will be allowed to vote. Another writer for *The Right Stuff* has a simple answer; limit suffrage to the rich:

> This approach of test passing to qualify should be used in selecting the voting population. A base example of how the test could be done is that the person must earn over $100,000 gross in that year. The reasoning is that someone who achieves high-percentile market value has demonstrated a longer time horizon coupled with understanding—well enough—the intricacies needed for making policy decisions.[56]

But will income really turn out to be a good test of wisdom, virtue, fitness, and strength? Isn't whatever test that is established likely to be abused? Won't there be a great struggle over what the test should be, with the potential losers driven to civil war? Bring it on, says yet another writer for *The Right Stuff*:

> Drastic measures are required. We're too far gone now. A small elite always rules over the herd, and this elite has the power to mold public opinion. We must become the elite, by any means necessary. Martial law is probably required, and that means the imposition of a fascist leader's arbitrary will. . . . Our democratic constitutions are tantamount to a suicide pact for the Western world. The general public is overwhelmingly in support of Democracy, and it will be the death of us.[57]

Thus the Alt-Right critique of Jeffersonian democracy leads to acceptance of "imposition of a fascist leader's arbitrary will," which provides an answer to the question of just how radical this new movement is.

The Alt-Right on the *Federalist Papers*

The Alt-Right treats the *Federalist Papers* no better than it does the Declaration of Independence. The movement's account of the *Federalist Papers* generally singles out for attention John Jay's *Federalist* No. 2. Over the years *American Renaissance* and other Alt-Right outlets have cited this essay often, always as evidence for the founders' alleged white consciousness and preference for racial homogeneity. For example, in 1997 Jared Taylor wrote:

> For most of its history the United States was self-consciously homogeneous. In 1787, in the second of *The Federalist Papers*, John Jay gave thanks that "Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people, a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs. . . ."
>
> This is not exactly a celebration of diversity. . . . It was only in the 1950s and 60s that the country turned its back on nearly 200 years of traditional thinking about race and began its long march down the road to nowhere.[58]

A year later, *American Renaissance* would publish an article by Sam Francis that would give Jay's words an explicitly racialist interpretation: "The racial unity of the nation is clear in Jay's phrase about 'the same ancestors.'"[59] Fifteen years later Taylor would again cite *Federalist* No. 2 to this effect in his mongraph, *What the Founders Really Thought about Race*.[60] *VDARE* contributors Peter Brimelow, Steve Sailer, and Tom Tancredo have also cited Jay's essay as evidence that "the Founders . . . were highly conscious of America`s specific ethnic and cultural heritage, i.e. national identity . . . [which was] the reason, Jay said in *The Federalist Papers*, why the experiment of federal government could be made to work at all."[61]

But *Federalist* No. 2 is a weak reed on which to rest that claim that white racial consciousness is central to the argument of the *Federalist Papers.* For the importance of Jay's contribution to that volume is doubtful. Jay wrote only five of the papers, compared with twenty-nine written by Madison and fifty-one by Hamilton. In a standard textbook on the history of political philosophy, Martin Diamond's chapter on the *Federalist Papers* remarks that "Jay's small contribution may be disregarded here."[62]

Further, the major themes of the volume—Union, republican principles, federalism, separation of powers—are dealt with by both Hamilton and Madison in several papers; Jay's invocation of "one united people" is not taken up elsewhere. Unlike Madison's *Federalist* No. 10 and *Federalist* No. 51 and Hamilton's papers on the presidency and the judiciary, *Federalist* No. 2 is not given much weight by interpreters outside the Alt-Right.

Further, *Federalist* No. 2 says nothing about what the Alt-Right claims is its main topic—race. Francis is just wrong when he claims that "Jay's phrase about 'the same ancestors' " implies the "racial unity of the nation." Strictly speaking, ancestors need not be of the same race as the present generation if there has been intermarriage. More important, if the key point is race, why not mention race explicitly rather than—at most—obliquely?

But for obvious reasons Jay could not possibly invoke race as a source of national unity. For if racial unity is a foundation of national identity, would not that imply that black slaves are a distinct nation? Jay certainly does not want to suggest any such thing, which would imply the legitimacy of an independent black republic or, alternatively, the necessity of slavery forever to prevent that outcome. The first option would have horrified the South and undermined the cause of national unity that Jay was supporting. The second option would have undermined support for the Constitution in the Federalists' New York audience, among whom opponents of slavery were an important constituency. So *Federalist* No. 2 cannot and does not bring up the matter of race, which would have been hard to deal with without taking an explicit stand on the thorny issue of slavery. This obvious awkwardness in Jay's argument is likely the reason Madison and Hamilton do not pursue the theme of "one united people" in their papers on national unity.

Again, Jay does not explicitly mention race in *Federalist* No. 2, but as one of the founders of the New York State Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, Jay did have occasion to address the issue directly. In a 1785 letter to Benjamin Rush, Jay wrote: "I wish to see all unjust and all unnecessary discriminations everywhere abolished, and that the time may soon come when all our inhabitants of every colour and denomination shall be free and equal partakers of our political liberty."[63]

That is, when Jay does explicitly take up race, his commitment to political egalitarianism is absolutely clear. His wish that "all our inhabitants of every colour . . . shall be free and equal partakers of our political liberty" flatly contradicts a putative "racial unity of the nation" for it acknowledges that Americans are of various races. Not once in their many appeals to *Federalist* No. 2 do Alt-Rightists acknowledge Jay's well-documented repudiation of white consciousness.

It is important to note that a reasonable interpretation of *Federalist* No. 2 as a nationalist document is entirely possible. Sanford Levinson usefully points out that Jay is responding to the anti-Federalist argument that the states are too diverse to be governed under a strong central government. Jay's point, Levinson convincingly claims, is that the heterogeneity of the states has been overstated. Levinson sees in Jay's argument an underlying assumption that democratic government requires "a common heritage and a vision of a collective future and that genuine multiculturalism is dangerous," which assumption Levinson rejects but also thinks deserves serious consideration.[64] Thus stated, the nationalist assumption has been and continues to be a matter of legitimate debate. But it is also entirely different from the frank racialism of the Alt-Right, which insists America must be white-dominated in order to be decent and suppresses or distorts arguments by the founders that inconveniently suggest otherwise. Whatever may be said about moderate nationalist concerns, the radicalism, crudity, and distortions of the Alt-Right discourage rational consideration of them.

Race comes up explicitly twice in the *Federalist Papers*: once in *Federalist* No. 42, during a discussion of the slave trade, and again in the treatment of the three-fifths clause in *Federalist* No. 54. The Alt-Right ignores both passages.

In *Federalist* No. 42, Madison wishes the Constitution did not postpone Congress's ability to ban the slave trade until 1808 and hopes that soon after that date this "barbarism of modern policy" will be "totally abolished," much to the happiness of the "unfortunate African."[65] But it is *Federalist* No. 54 that fundamentally undermines the Alt-Right's claims about the white consciousness of the founders.

Federalist No. 54 gives a more detailed and highly illuminating account of what Madison thought about race. This paper makes a backhanded defense of the three-fifths clause, that is, the provision that each slave ought to count as three-fifths of a person in determining the states' populations for purposes of taxation and representation. This widely discussed provision is an obviously brutal solution to the sad question of how to take account of slaves. Of interest here, however, is the case for racial egalitarianism that Madison makes in his qualified defense of that clause.

All of the *Federalist Papers* were written for a New York—that is, a northern—audience. Madison's main rhetorical strategy in No. 54 is to create a character—"one of our Southern brethren"—who makes the defense of the three-fifths clause. In so doing, Madison avoids the embarrassment of arguing for the problematic provision in his own voice. Further, Madison thus makes national unity, the fact that the South wants the clause whatever its substantive merits, the main point of his argument. The Southerner's case for the three-fifths clause is striking. He admits that the clause considers the slaves as being "in the mixed character of persons and of property." But why are slaves to be considered partly property? Madison's answer, given in the voice of the Southerner, is that slaves are to be considered partly property only because the law, not nature, has so made them:

> It is only under the pretext that the laws have transformed the Negroes into subjects of property, that a place is disputed them in the computation of numbers; and it is admitted, that if the laws were to restore the rights which have been taken away, the Negroes could no longer be refused an equal share of representation with the other inhabitants.[66]

Hence, change the laws, end slavery, and blacks deserve "an equal share of representation with the other inhabitants"; that is, blacks are then the political equals of whites. Later, in *Federalist* No. 54, Madison says it is "unnatural" to consider "this unfortunate race" in the "light of property." In other words, blacks were in Madison's time unequal, because they were enslaved, by law only, not by nature. The law thus violated blacks' rights. Change the laws, restore the rights, and blacks are the natural equal of whites. That is to say, Madison's argument clearly implies the political equality of the races and condemns slavery as a violation of the rights of blacks.

Although *Federalist* No. 54 puts a certain distance between these sentiments and its author by employing the character of "an advocate for the Southern interests," Madison endorses the Southerner's reasoning, saying that "although it may appear to be a little strained in some points, yet on the whole, I must confess that it fully reconciles me to the scale of representation which the convention have established." So although Madison approaches the whole delicate matter of slavery a bit gingerly, he makes the fundamental point without ruffling any more feathers than he has to: blacks and whites are political equals and the laws should treat them as such.

The third contributor to the *Federalist Papers*, Hamilton, does not discuss race in that work. But Hamilton's commitment to racial equality is documented. Hamilton's letter to Jay, written during the American Revolution and calling for the enlistment of black soldiers and eventual general emancipation, is famous:

> I have not the least doubt, that the negroes will make very excellent soldiers, with proper management. . . . I frequently hear it objected to the scheme of embodying negroes that they are too stupid to make soldiers. This is so far from appearing to me a valid objection that I think their want of cultivation (for their natural faculties are probably as good as ours) joined to that habit of subordination which they acquire from a life of servitude, will make them sooner bec[o]me soldiers than our White inhabitants. . . .
>
> The contempt we have been taught to entertain for the blacks, makes us fancy many things that are founded neither in reason nor experience. . . . An essential part of the plan is to give them their freedom with their muskets. This will secure their fidelity, animate their courage, and I believe will have a good influence upon those who remain, by opening a door to their emancipation. . . . The dictates of humanity and true policy equally interest me in favour of this unfortunate class of men.[67]

Three founders, three contributors to the *Federalist Papers*, three explicit and easily available commitments to racial egalitarianism: all three are ignored by the Alt-Right, which dwells repeatedly on one off-point observation and on that weak basis insists on the white consciousness of the entire American founding. This is mere misrepresentation, intellectual malpractice, and further evidence of the weakness of Alt-Right reasoning.

The Alt-Right on the Constitution

The Alt-Right attacks the Constitution as bombastically as it does the Declaration. A 2016 article in *Radix Journal* titled "Paper Worship" proposes how to engage "cuckservatives," that is, benighted mainstream rightists who continue to respect the Constitution:

> I am talking about the Constitution. . . . This primitive article of antiquity will not solve the problems we face in the 21st century. . . . We must do everything possible to discourage our people from elevating the zombie Constitution to the level of an unalterable sacred scripture. . . . Nothing they love will exist if we do not rid ourselves of such a pernicious and constricting piece of paper.
>
> My proposal: Any cuckservative witnessed making mindless hosannas to "defending the Constitution" will immediately be tarred and feathered with the label of Paper Worshipper. . . .
>
> Leave no space safe for Paper Cucks. No quarter for Parchment Fetishists. No mercy for Vellum Supremacists. Their pantywaisted reign of procedural suicide ends now.[68]

Hunter Wallace decries "the Constitution Cargo Cult" thus:

> As for the charge of Constitution skepticism on the Alt-Right, I would say we would have to plead guilty as charged. There are many reasons why the Alt-Right is dismissive of the US Constitution. . . . I dislike the Constitution because I believe the Union should have never been created in the first place. Instead, the United States would have been better off evolving as several regionally based nation-states. . . .
>
> Considering the present state of the Western world, there isn't much that is positive that I can say about the liberal order which is enshrined in the Constitution. Indeed, it is a cause of many of our problems and blocks any solution to them.[69]

VDARE has run a series of articles by one Joe Fallon attacking the Constitution in extravagant terms, such as the following:

> The Constitutional Convention of 1787 was not a lawful assembly that produced an extraordinary political document, but an illegal cabal that staged a coup d'etat. . . .
>
> The justification for this treason was the conviction shared by many politicians—including George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison—that the first republic was too weak to be effective. . . .
>
> By its actions, the Constitutional Convention proved itself to be a conclave of conspirators who betrayed their sacred oaths to the constitution of the first republic and usurped power. The subsequent adoption of the U.S. Constitution, and the establishment of the second republic, was achieved by extraconstitutional means. It was a bloodless coup d'etat. It was, in fact, a very civil coup d'etat. But it was a coup d'etat, nonetheless.[70]

An apparent exception to this contempt for America's Magna Carta is an anonymous article titled "An Alt-Right Defense of the U.S. Constitution," published by an Alt-Right organization with a board of directors that includes Richard Spencer and Mike Enoch. The defense offered turns out to be an exception that proves the rule and, in a way, is highly revealing:

> An unfortunately common disparagement of Alt-Right activists is that the United States Constitution has failed our people and that "cuckservatives" are hopelessly moronic for worshipping the "failed document."
>
> I disagree, for it is not the Constitution which has let down "ourselves and our Posterity," but rather, our politicians and the (((special interests))) they support. . . .
>
> Despite what liberals would have us believe, the Constitution is not a color-blind suicide pact; the United States government acts in accordance with the Constitution when it protects its citizens from foreign elements.[71]

Several points here deserve note. First, the phrase "(((special interests)))" is a reference to the Jews. The practice of putting triple parentheses around the names of Jewish people or organizations is a well-documented Alt-Right meme, one that apparently began at *The Right Stuff* under Enoch and that the movement does not deny.[72] So the "defense" of the Constitution offered here turns out to be that the Constitution was fine until it was corrupted by the Jews and the politicians who curry favor with them.

Second, the author *defends* the Constitution because, supposedly, it is *not* "color-blind." In other words, we are being told that the Constitution is not racially neutral, as the document's defenders used to argue, but rather is pro-white, an expression of white consciousness, *which is the best thing about the Constitution.*

This extraordinary claim raises many issues that cannot be pursued at length here. It has been known at least since the publication in 1836 of Madison's notes on the debates of the Constitutional Convention that the Constitution included several features favorable to slave-holding interests in order to secure southern support and national unity. Since then, debate has continued over whether these compromises were necessary, whether they represented the best that could have been achieved, and whether they have been expunged by later developments. Defenders of the Constitution argue that, under the circumstances, the document represented a workable departure point for its time and has been improved since then. Other observers are very critical, and some even argue that the Constitution was pro-slavery and continues to disadvantage minorities.

But fringe groups and die-hard segregationists aside, since the defeat of the Confederacy no serious constitutional observer has *defended* the Constitution as being pro-white. Yet now the Alt-Right openly embraces white consciousness as a constitutional principle. The debate in the movement is between those who think the Constitution's framers did a fine job of incorporating racialism into the document, only to have their good work undone by the Jews, and those who think Washington, Hamilton, Madison, and the rest were race traitors and coupists and the Constitution betrayed "ourselves and our Posterity" from the start. The sheer radicalism of this school of thought is apparent. Also notable is the weakness of its argument. The Alt-Right account of the Constitution rests almost entirely on a labored interpretation of the phrase "to ourselves and our Posterity" from the Preamble and exemplifies many of the movement's intellectual failings.

The Preamble to the Constitution reads in full:

> We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.[73]

Alt-Rightists claim that the apparently anodyne reference to "ourselves and our Posterity" represents a commitment to white consciousness as a constitutional principle. *Counter-Currents Publishing* offers several expressions of this claim. According to the site's editor, Greg Johnson, "The Preamble makes it clear that the Constitution was created and ratified by white men to provide good government for themselves and their posterity, not all of mankind."[74] Another article on the site, "White American Identity Politics," describes the Preamble as an "explicit dedication to the interests of the White founding stock" and concludes that this "explicit mandate of the Constitution demands the protection of liberty for the posterity of the White race."[75] Another contributor, Gregory Hood, writes:

> There exists no simpler, shorter, or more poetic expression of nationalism than five words from the Constitution of the United States—"For Ourselves and Our Posterity." For all the flaws of the Founding, no White Nationalist can dispute the beauty of that phrase, nor its relevance to our cause. . . .
>
> The Founding Fathers may have talked a lot about equality—but they assumed that America would be a white country of primarily Northern European stock. . . .
>
> Our nation and our people are one and the same—and it belongs to Ourselves and Our Posterity, alone.[76]

Contributors to *VDARE* rely on the Preamble's brief phrase to rebut the notion they detest, that the United States is a "propositional nation." That idea is false, former anti-immigration congressman Tom Tancredo writes, because

> the founders explicitly said, in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, that their purpose was "to secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our posterity"—their posterity, not the people of the world but the posterity of a specific, essentially British, community that—in the case of New England, for example—had grown rapidly through natural increase with essentially no immigration for nearly 200 years.[77]

VDARE contributor Steve Sailer also rebuts "the Propositionists" by appealing to "the Preamble to the Constitution, which puts forward a carefully considered explanation of what the United States exists *for*, one that is hard to reconcile with the current assumption that it exists primarily to take in immigrants." Sailer then quotes with approval an online poster who writes: "America is not a propositional nation, America is a prepositional nation: "*to* ourselves and our posterity." Here then is Sailer's point: the Preamble uses the words "for" and "to," which are prepositions and not propositions at all. Therefore the Propositionists, if there are any, who believe the United States "exists primarily to take in immigrants" are confuted by the clear words—two of them—of the Constitution itself.[78]

None of the Alt-Right's arguments about the Preamble are any better than Sailer's. First, the Preamble says nothing clear or explicit about the Constitution or Union being white, or British, or northern European. None of these terms or any racial, ethnic, or gender characterizations come up in the Preamble or anywhere else in the Constitution. Hood acknowledges that "whatever certain racial laws existed within the country, it was never *explicitly* stated that the United States was to be a country for a particular people,"[79] but in so doing he refutes himself, for how can the Preamble be an expression of white nationalism if it makes no mention of race?

The convention's Committee on Style was responsible for the Preamble, which was written from scratch by the committee's dominant member, Gouverneur Morris.[80] Throughout his career Morris was a passionate opponent of slavery and an advocate of political equality for blacks. During the American Revolution, Morris participated in drafting a constitution for New York State which he proposed should encourage future legislatures to abolish slavery "so that in future ages, every human being who breathes the air of this state, shall enjoy the privileges of a freeman. . . . The rights of human nature and the principles of our holy religion loudly call upon us to dispense the blessings of freedom to all mankind."[81] At the Constitutional Convention Morris, who spoke more often than any other member, famously fulminated against slavery, which he called "the curse of heaven on the states where it prevailed" and a "defiance of the most sacred laws of humanity . . . in a government instituted for the protection of the rights of mankind."[82]

Alt-Rightists would have us believe that after having delivered this philippic against slavery and defense of human freedom, Morris then served up in the Preamble a beautifully poetic expression of white nationalism.

If that overnight conversion happened, no one at the convention or in the ratification debates noticed. Nothing in the sketchy legislative history of the Preamble suggests race was considered at all.[83] In *Federalist* No. 84 Hamilton, also a member of the Committee of Style, makes mention of the phrase "to ourselves and our Posterity" and argues that the Preamble "is a better recognition of popular rights" than a Bill of Rights would be, but says nothing about race.

Alt-Rightists sometimes respond to this total absence of textual support for their position by reading a racialist element into the word "posterity." According to Peter Brimelow:

> The Founding Fathers were all white (and overwhelmingly Protestant). Their preamble to the U.S. Constitution said specifically that its purpose was "to form a more perfect union . . . [for] ourselves and our posterity"—by which they literally meant their physical descendants. . . . In other words, the U.S. was to be a nation-state, the political expression of a particular (white, British) people, as in Europe.[84]

By "posterity," Brimelow takes the founding fathers to have "literally meant their physical descendants."[85] However, neither Brimelow nor any other major Alt-Right figure has claimed to be a literal physical descendant of any of the founding fathers. Brimelow's account of posterity would disenfranchise the immense majority of present-day Americans of every race, ethnicity, and condition.

But what the Preamble literally says is that the Constitution of the United States was ordained and established by "We the People of the United States," not "We the Founding Fathers of the United States." So the posterity being referred to is that of the people of the United States, not that of the founding fathers only, and one hopes that despite what he wrote, Brimelow understands that. The question then is, whom does the Preamble mean by "the People of the United States"?

One *VDARE* contributor suggests that only the citizens of the United States were meant,[86] but the Preamble simply does not say "citizens," as it easily might have, but rather "people," so noncitizens were being included. Certainly one notable commentator has held that the Preamble and the Constitution overall considered "the negro race as a separate class of persons, and . . . *they were not regarded as a portion of the people or citizens* *of the Government then formed*."[87] This was the opinion of Chief Justice Taney in *Dred Scott*, a decision so flagrantly ill decided that it provoked the universal opposition of the Free States, precipitated the Civil War, and resulted in the Fourteenth Amendment, which expunged its logic from legal reasoning. Alt-Right constitutional interpretation amounts to nothing less than a call to revive *Dred Scott* and embrace its dis-Unionist consequences.

Commentators since *Dred Scott* have given the Preamble's phrase a broad interpretation. Justice Harlan argued that "all under the sovereign jurisdiction and authority of the United States" were being referred to.[88] Justice Story suggests the Preamble is "for the sake of all mankind."[89] So a quite universalistic construction of the Preamble is appropriate, and there is certainly no reason to think that only whites were meant. Frederick Douglass was entirely correct in saying of the Preamble, "Its language is 'we the people;' . . . not we the high, not we the low, but we the people; . . . we the human inhabitants; and, if Negroes are people, they are included in the benefits for which the Constitution of America was ordained and established."[90]

Who, then, are the posterity of the people of the United States, broadly understood? Samuel Johnson's dictionary of 1755 defines posterity first as "succeeding generations" and second as "descendants," but says nothing about "literal physical" descendants.[91] Eighteenth-century legal dictionaries available online do not define posterity, but the term comes up in the discussions of inheritance. Modern dictionaries define the term as "the people who will exist in the future" (*Cambridge English Dictionary)* and "all future generations of people" or "the descendants of a person" (*English Oxford Living Dictionaries*). Posterity therefore does not necessarily mean the physical descendants of particular people, although it might. Equally plausible is the conclusion that "strictly biological descent will not do. The posterity of the 1787 'people of the United States' are 'the people of the United States' after 1787.' "[92] The record of the debate over the Preamble is too thin to support a construction so strong that it disenfranchises the majority of today's Americans. Nothing about the Preamble's text or history suggests the Constitution was ordained and established for the benefit of whites only.

Of course, if it could be absolutely demonstrated that the founders intended the Constitution to be racially exclusive, then it should simply be said that the founders were wrong, we now intend to give the document a politically egalitarian interpretation, and we will root out all provisions inconsistent with that determination. Fortunately, Americans do not have to make such a radical break with their past. All key developments in American history since the founders' day indicate that only a race-neutral constitution can be consistent with liberal democratic principles and serve as a workable governing document for present-day America.[93]

In short, the Alt-Right account of the Constitution is racialist and antidemocratic. But that is just the tip of the iceberg. Perhaps one might argue that a certain amount of iconoclasm, even wrongheaded iconoclasm, is useful. Or perhaps not. But Alt-Right constitutionalism is also bombastic, inaccurate, poorly reasoned, dishonest, and moot. Here again, it is the intellectual deficiencies of Alt-Right thought that are the true hell of the situation.

The Alt-Right on Lincoln

Of course, Lincoln, who emancipated the slaves and put down the southern secessionists, is despised by the Alt-Right. *VDARE* and *Counter-Currents Publishing* have published many articles in which Lincoln is condemned as a "dictator who[se] . . . administration was characterized by paranoia, a lust for power, and rampant corruption,"[94] an "American Pol Pot, except worse,"[95] and similar outrageous hyperbole. The nadir of such calumny is reached by Hunter Wallace, editor of *Occidental Dissent*, in his article "Happy John Wilkes Booth Day!," where he writes, "I propose a toast: to the memory of the great John Wilkes Booth, slayer of tyrants, martyr for liberty, avenger of the South!"[96] (A notable exception to this malice is *VDARE*'s John Derbyshire, who writes, "I count myself pro-Lincoln."[97])

But for the purposes of this discussion, which is concerned with Lincoln as an expositor of foundational political principles, the main issue is his position on the Declaration's iconic phrase and how the Alt-Right presents and interprets his position. The account of Lincoln given by Jared Taylor in *What the Founders Really Thought about Race* goes to the heart of this issue. There we find the following passage, in which Taylor first presents what he thinks and then quotes Lincoln:

Americans believe it was "the Great Emancipator" who finally brought the egalitarian vision of Jefferson's generation to fruition. Again, they are mistaken. . . . During the Lincoln-Douglas debates he stated:

> "I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the black and white races which I believe will for ever forbid the two races living together on terms of social or political equality."[98]

The bluntly racist *Daily Stormer* also presents this Lincoln quotation and concludes, "They tell you he was a hero. Was he really a hero? It doesn't seem so. Like everything else, we have been completely lied to. . . . Abe didn't even want to free the slaves, it was just a political move."[99]

Lincoln did indeed speak these words at the fourth Lincoln-Douglas debate of September 18, 1858. But he also spoke other, more consequential words that Taylor fails to cite. At the first debate, on August 21, Lincoln had already taken a firm position on whether Jefferson's egalitarian vision embraced blacks:

> I hold that, notwithstanding all this, there is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence,—the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I hold that he is as much entitled to these as the white man. I agree with Judge Douglas, he is not my equal in many respects,—certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowments. But in the right to eat the bread, without leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, he is my equal, and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man.[100]

Thus, before he made the disparaging remarks cited by Taylor, and among the first words out of his mouth at the debates' beginning, Lincoln asserted that considerations of color, physical differences, and intellectual endowments are *utterly irrelevant* to the essential question of whether people of all races are politically equal in the sense meant by the Declaration.

But why did Lincoln slight the abilities of blacks as he did? Certainly these remarks are at odds with the popular image of Lincoln, and it is better to acknowledge his limitations than to cover them up. But the historical context in which Lincoln operated also has to be acknowledged.

In 1858 blacks were denied citizenship in Illinois and so could not vote. Senator Douglas had supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which was a scheme to create a new slave state that involved repealing the limitations on slavery's expansion imposed by the Missouri Compromise. Douglas also supported the disastrous *Dred Scott* decision that further enabled the spread of slavery.

Lincoln, an ardent and lifelong opponent of slavery, decided not to let this proponent of neutrality toward that peculiar institution run for reelection unchallenged. In so doing, Lincoln broke with the abolitionists, who refused to participate in the electoral political process, which they saw as too compromised with the Slave Power. In contrast, Lincoln felt that no front in the struggle with slavery should be left uncontested, and therefore ran for office. Taylor notes that Lincoln was not an abolitionist,[101] but apparently does not understand this was so because Lincoln was pursuing an antislavery strategy complementary to abolitionism and not because Lincoln was any less against slavery than were the abolitionists.

But one who runs for office must take the voters as he finds them and identify some area of agreement with them as a point of departure. Lincoln took the electorate's devotion to Jefferson's words as that point of commonality, thus putting Douglas in the awkward position of having to criticize his party's founder. Partly because he knew he was speaking before a rough, all-white crowd that was extremely suspicious of blacks, but also because he realized the complete irrelevancy of factual equality to political equality, Lincoln accepted his audience's prejudices but insisted that the principles of the Declaration nonetheless extended to blacks, which was the crucial point.

Of course, had circumstances permitted, Lincoln would have done well to repudiate the race prejudice of his day. Further, today it is understood that full political equality requires that all adults be entitled to vote, hold office, serve as jurors, marry without government discrimination, and so on. But Lincoln perspicaciously saw that on granting that people of all races have political equality, the legitimacy of slavery becomes refuted; eventual emancipation is then put on the political agenda, and full political equality becomes purely a matter of when and how. That strategy had its limitations but was an enormous improvement over Douglas's position of coexisting with slavery forever and was well worth fighting for even if it involved making certain concessions to public prejudice.

What, then, can be said of Taylor's failure to note Lincoln's explicit acknowledgment that Jeffersonian political egalitarianism extends to blacks? The Great Emancipator would have been indulgent. His immediate response to Douglas's demagoguery was, "When a man hears himself somewhat misrepresented, it provokes him—at least, I find it so with myself; but when misrepresentation becomes very gross and palpable, it is more apt to amuse him."[102] Less saintly responses are possible. The bibliography to *What the Founders Really Thought about Race* cites volumes that provide the full text of the debates, so it is inexcusable that Lincoln's defense of blacks' rights under the Declaration is omitted from Taylor's monograph. Taylor's treatment of Lincoln's legacy is another illustration of a main thesis of this book: The Alt-Right's radicalism and prejudice are not its only offenses against healthy democratic discourse. The true hell of the situation is the movement's poverty of thought.

Conclusion

Alt-Right ideology involves a root-and-branch rejection of all the central propositions of American political philosophy and of liberal democracy in general. Rights, political equality, the rule of law, electoral democracy, and constitutionalism are all discarded, sometimes with certain caveats, often with disgust. The Alt-Right is not merely a more right-wing and politically incorrect version of conventional American conservatism; rather, it is a radical and intemperate break with the country's entire political tradition and order.

Further, the quality of Alt-Right thought is abysmal. The movement's thinkers show little familiarity with relevant facts, no effort at research, no ability to entertain criticism, and a willingness to distort or suppress inconvenient evidence. In particular, Jared Taylor's *What the Founders Really Thought about Race* stands out as strikingly disingenuous. Most Alt-Right thought is no better.

Certainly a rational exposition of American nationalism is possible and would be a contribution to our democratic discourse whatever one might finally decide about nationalism. But a rational exposition of American nationalism or anything else is not what the Alt-Right is offering. The shake-up in the production system of public ideas that occurred in the early twenty-first century gave the extremists who had been exiled from mainstream conservatism a chance to show the world what they had to say. It turns out they did not have much, yet they have found a broad audience.