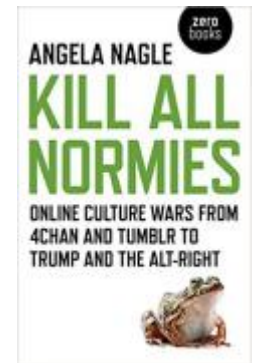


Who Are These Anime Nazis, Anyway?

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On the very off chance you haven't heard, Angela Nagle has come out with her first book: *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right*. Best known for her essays, often on the alt-right, in outlets like *Jacobin* and *The Baffler*, the socialist left has been anxious to dive into what appears to be the first book on the alt-right written by one of us — myself included. Ms. Nagle first caught my attention last year with her incredibly insightful essay "The New Man of 4chan," and I've been reading her regularly, and eagerly awaiting this book, ever since.

The question the book best answers is, "Who the fuck are these people?" If that's what you want to know, but you just can't read "Fap, Don't Fornicate" on the Alternative Right Blogspot, this book is an excellent investment. It clocks in at just over one hundred pages, and is a whirlwind tour of the fever swamps of the alt-right. Some of us know a bit about a few of these factions, but only Ms. Nagle knows most everything about all of them, and how they overlap. From male separatists to white supremacists, from austere Pat Buchanan to flamboyant Milo, from enraged mass-shooter Elliot Rodger to pensive French philosopher Alain de Benoist, this book is a surreal but digestible tour of it all. You even pay a visit to the genderfluid otherkin of Tumblr. Readers get a safari of nearly all of it with the confidence and nuance of an anthropologist. By the end the book, you'll be so immersed you'll even stop raising your eyebrows when she quotes people talking about "cock-carousels." Maybe more importantly, the author manages to never fall into the leftist cliché of using unnecessary academic jargon at every turn. Unlike the lesser academics of our time, it's always clear this writer wants you to know what she's talking about.

Another question the book addresses is, "Why now?" Why not the paleoconservatives or the Christian Coalition in the mid-1990s? How come Tom Tancredo, the vehemently anti-immigrant Colorado Congressman, got no traction whatsoever in his 2008 bid for the presidency? Where was Pepe when Rick Santorum needed him in 2012? The consensus now seems to be that it was a mix of the way "online culture" evolved, the intensification of identity politics across the left, and a quarter century of economic stagnation (at best) for huge swaths of America. In addressing this question, *Kill All Normies* is enlightening, but incomplete. Ms. Nagle tackles the story of how the internet arrived at where it is today better than anyone else who's written on the topic. She addresses the rise of the *identitarian* left well, albeit too quickly.

But the economics behind it all receives only a sentence or two. This is unfortunate given the constant back-and-forth between neoliberals and socialists since late 2015 over how much of support for Donald Trump's was animated by racism or by economic anxiety. While Nazis on 4chan are certainly more racist, and less sympathetic, than the Obama-Trump voters of Cambria County, the question is still there. Is the alt-right more poor kids who found a scapegoat and went nuts, or more

nihilistic rich kids? How much of what we're dealing with is a particularly demonic false-consciousness, and how much is it a late-capitalist elite going fully vampiric on its way to history's dustbin? The answer matters, and I know I am not the only one looking for data on how much of "frog Twitter" is populated by guys raised by single mothers working in the service industry, and how many are as filthy-rich as Richard Spencer. Unfortunately, Ms. Nagle doesn't go there.

The final question the book tackles is, of course, "What is to be done?" On the one hand, she righteously criticizes the aggressive new wave of leftist *identitarianism* — what she calls "Tumblr-liberalism." She condemns what we all see on Twitter every day: folks hoping to get offended, eager to attack other leftists . . . and not doing much else. Carrying the torch of the late Mark Fisher's work, especially his essay, "Exiting the Vampire Castle," she writes with erudition on this destructive purity spiraling:

"[t]he key driving force behind it is about creating scarcity in an environment in which virtue is the currency that can make or break the career or social success of an online user in this milieu a culture of purging had to take place, largely targeting those in competition for this precious currency. Thus, the attacks increasingly focused on other liberals and leftists often with seemingly pristine progressive credentials, instead of those who engaged in any actual racism, sexism, or homophobia. (76-77)

It fills me with hope that a well-reviewed book by a respected leftist is taking this head-on and with such earnestness and clarity.

Curiously, on the subject of what to do with a problem like the alt-right, Ms. Nagle is less forward. She does say that less *identitarianism* on the left will mean less of it on the right, but she does not actually, as detractors are sure to claim, suggest that if we just get rid of Tumblr then Richard Spencer will disappear too. There are moments in the book that suggest she believes the solution is stepping above it all with a broad, class-based political movement that eschews the pigeon-holes of posturing about gender and racial identity while seeking material improvements for all. Ms. Nagle's writing online certainly more openly show she thinks on these terms. But strangely, the book's very short conclusion does not drive that point home fully. I suspect she hoped muting that perspective would help the book be better received by moderates interested in the alt-right, but I am sure she'll be derided as a "Bernie Bro" all the same. Furthermore, a more emboldened conclusion, envisioning a better politics that could get us all out of this mess and build a better world would tie it off nicely. The book can be depressing in its romp across the most demented corners of the web, and as-is, leaves the reader a bit adrift.

A final point is that the book is lamentably under-edited. Readers will have to forgive an annoying number of typos, including the misspelling of "Barack Obama" in the first sentence and the misspelling of "Pat Buchanan" throughout — including in a chapter with his name in it. No doubt that anyone who has read a zine or an eccentric blog has seen worse. But in a book published professionally, with such well-polished and well-researched ideas and analysis, stupid errors like "right-wig" and "Trumblr" really jump out at you. It deserved a much better copy-editor, and I fear folks who have never heard of Ms. Nagle will think less of her intellect, or dismiss her entirely because of these errors. The alt-right has already noticed.

Having said that, you should still read the book if you're curious about how we collectively got to 2016. Not only is it the best of its kind, it is the only of its kind. Whitepapers from anti-racist think-tanks and elitist condemnation from MSNBC are not a good way of truly understanding anything — and finally we have a more useful guide. Furthermore, if there was ever a time to do more than point and scream, "racist," it is now. Let's hope it proves so popular there is another, more widely distributed, typo-free printing.

