

Book Review: Patrick Hermansson, David Lawrence, Joe Mulhall, and Simond Burdoc, *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?*. London: Routledge: Fascism and Far Right Series, 2020. ISBN-13: 978-1138363861 (paperback). 276 Pages. \$25.95.

Reviewed by Shane Burley

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When the term Alt Right arrived into the popular lexicon in 2015, it sent journalists and pundits into a scramble to define it, partially because of the undo electoral influence that was ascribed to it. “What I’m trying to do is explain this weird Internet movement that no one has heard of but now may be poised to sway a presidential election,” one reporter told me in an early interview I did on the Alt Right, and we spent four hours on the phone talking through the ins and outs of the movement. The Alt Right had actually become a nearly dead term by early 2015, and the originators of the movement, people like Richard Spencer, had moved on from Alternative Right as a nomenclature to “identitarian.” This is what fascist anti-immigrant youth activists call themselves in Europe, France in particular, in a movement inspired by the European New Right (ENR), which is what had inspired the Alternative Right to form in the U.S.

First, Cuckservative, a racially loaded term for conservative politicians who the far-right say work “against their own interest” on immigration, became popular. This gave the far-right the energy to push the term Alt Right back into popular usage because of the clever promotional work of a series of vulgar white nationalist blogs and message boards. This second generation network of white nationalists had started using the term, shortened Alternative to Alt, as a broad catch all, just the way Spencer had in 2010. Spencer decided to let the fates decide, returned to using the term, and the second hashtag to hit Twitter “trending” status from their movement was #AltRight. This was before Donald Trump’s elevator speech.

So in this corridor of time a series of books were planned to explain a movement that was so confusing, that was the main focus of a Hilary Clinton speech and was seemingly everywhere. The “what” was actually less important, this was just white nationalism rebranded, but the why, how, and who, actually was what was important to understand. How did a large white nationalist mass movement form in the U.S. seemingly all at once with almost no one watching?

There is a cottage industry of books, monographs, and lengthy signature articles explaining what the Alt Right is, some better than others, and many missing a lot of context and detail. One of the difficulties of these books is simply the material realities of the publishing industry: you have to get your books out quickly to stay timely. Some people were well advantaged to do this because they had already been heavily soaked in research on the movement from earlier projects. George Hawley’s *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, and the following *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Need to Know*, had this advantage, since he had just spent years researching his 2016 opus *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*. Other books did well to focus on particular aspects of the movement, such as Thomas J. Main’s *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, which highlighted the paleoconservative roots of the Alt Right (it is only one of their roots) and go deep into the work of James Burnham and, subsequently, Sam Francis. *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate* by Alexandra Minna Stern came much later, and focused heavily on the ideologies themselves with the kind of clarity that only comes when you slow down and don’t mind that you are coming late in the pack.

This was the advantage of the new book by Patrick Hermansson, David Klawrence, Joe Mulhall and Simon Murdoch, researchers with the London based antifascist non-profit Hope Not Hate. Their book, *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?*, released by the groundbreaking Fascism and Far-Right series from Routledge, follows in this line, being released years after some of the other titles looking to explain the Alt Right, and it gained its edge from doing so. The authors have spent years working on the Alt Right at this point, writing articles, books, and releasing film projects, all meant to cut to the heart of the movement. This is not for vague intellectualism, but for a purpose: their organization is dedicated to ending the influence of hate groups and fighting for a more equal world.

The International Alt-Right is, to a degree, the culmination of their work, drawing together all of their research and publishing into one large tome that addresses all aspects of the Alt Right. This is, to date, the most complete book that has ever been written about the Alt Right, going deep

into their world and highlighting the international nature of their connections and growth. The volume is certainly more dense than other books on the subject, and this is the advantage of an academic publisher since they know their audience will be more forgiving of incredibly detailed writing that highlights dependable research over biting narrative prose.

One of the interesting starting points for the book is that it shares its definition of the Alt Right with *Alt-Right: From 4Chan to the White House*, a volume I am less inclined to agree with.

We define the International “Alternative Right” as an international set of groups and individuals, operating primarily online though with offline outlets, whose core belief is that “white identity” is under attack from pro-multicultural and liberal elites and co-called “social justice warriors” (SJWs) who allegedly use “political correctness” to undermine Western civilisation and the rights of white males. Put simply, the “Alternative Right” is a far right, anti-globalist grouping that offers a radical “alternative” to traditional/establishment conservatism. (Pg. 2)

This is not how I would define the Alt Right, primarily because when I began researching the Alt Right closer to the foundation of AlternativeRight.com, that is not how the movement was defined. Instead it was defined as a dissident movement that was united by the essential role of identity and human inequality (from which I subsequently developed a definition of generic fascism), and this particular narrative was only a piece of it. The “anti-globalist” piece was particularly recent in its application since globalism is a pseudo-intellectual term used by the blogosphere to describe the behavior of “elites” rather than a proper ideological construct. The early Alt Right was quite “globalist” in its use of international relationships to develop a broad based racial nationalism as opposed to regional ethnic or civic nationalisms. Even the term SJW came later, not until the “Alt Right 2.0” of 2015.

But there is something well placed about this definition as you go through the book because it is a reminder that a movement is not defined just by what its leaders originally intended for it to be, but by what it evolves into from a mass of people participating. So many books and authors have focused on what I define as “Alt Right 2.0,” the second wave of the Alt Right that emerged from the podcasts, blogs, and message boards in 2015. They took the original academic tone of the Alternative Right, shortened it to memes and mean jokes, and fired it back as Alt

Right. In this way they were more mission driven, less focused on developing an intellectual meta-politic and more focused on influencing behaviors, so how we define the movement also had to evolve. My particular definitions had not evolved in that time, and maybe they should have since the Alt Right had changed handily in five years.

The International Alt-Right does not have to sacrifice lengthy discussions of ideology for research on tech or for details on international relationships in its discussion since it has room for all of it. It is a hefty book that is tightly written with a heavy focus on research, especially on Alt Right primary sources, so you will find a lot here. All aspects of the Alt Right are covered, from the pseudo-scientific race research to anti-Semitism to several chapters both on the online features of the movement and its relationship to the manosphere. This is not just rehashing what we know, there is a lot of unique and less discussed research here, particularly in the manosphere, international corollaries to the movement in places like Japan, and one of the best histories of the Dark Enlightenment ever published. There are parts that feel a bit short, such as the discussions of Human Biological Diversity, but that is only because they are just one piece of the entire book (it is a reminder that there still needs to be more published on that wing of the movement). All of it was a pleasure to read, none of it felt unnecessarily obtuse or dripping in academic jargon. The authors clearly wanted to make the book of use to the reader.

This is actually the hallmark of the Fascism and Far Right series, books written with the density of research expected in academic literature, but with quality writing that might come from popular publishers. Series editors Graham Macklin, Nigel Copsey, and Craig Fowler have sought to make the series incredibly vibrant during the explosive return of the far-right to the world stage, and have been unmistakably partisan in doing so: they see the threat that fascist movements offer and know why they should be stopped. This is the same mission that the authors of *The International Alt-Right* come from, an organization that is internationally renowned for taking a stand against the violence of nationalism.

The book takes its time to really unpack all the seemingly disparate parts of a movement that evolved quickly, sometimes faster than its leadership could respond to, and has left a mark on the American political spectrum. One interesting thing about the book is the framing of the Alt Right as “international” despite the vast majority of the text focusing on the U.S. This may be simply a shift in terms since the Alt Right is part of a larger identitarian wave in politics, and can be considered the American corollary of European and Eurasian movements. The section on international movements is quite impressive, particularly in what is accomplished in the

chapter on mysticism and Indian Hindutva connections, but there could likely have been more chapters on the international connections. This is especially true of Bloc identitaire and other French anti-immigrant movements, but it could simply have been that so much has been written on that subject at this point that there is little reason to rehash secondary sources.

The International Alt-Right should be the go-to source for researchers and writers looking to have a foundational resource on the movement, and is among the best books ever written on the movement (the other highest recommendation goes to *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate*). This is a reminder that it is often best to turn to people who have been doing the work on these movements for years, such as organizations like Hope Not Hate, rather than just researchers or journalists who are covering it just for the moment. There is a particular depth and reliability that comes when a group of researchers have made it their life's work to understand a subject, and, in this case, to oppose the right. There is an added advantage of refusing to rush out a book (this came out in 2020) and building on years of previous research. You end up with a volume that will outlast its release, that people will go to for years, and would be useful to expand in later editions as the movement heads into 3.0, 4.0, and 5.0 phases.