SEEING BLACK LIVES MATTER AND THE ALT-RIGHT THROUGH AN EXISTENTIAL LENS: FROM RESPONSES TO DEATH TO REBELLION AND REVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the potential existential roots of contemporary American social movements. I extract an existential social movement theory from Albert Camus's philosophy that can elucidate surprising similarities and tactical differences across ongoing movements. I then apply the theory to Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right which helps demonstrate that both movements express existential anxiety related to collective, racialized death. The social movement theory also clarifies the movements' divergent political tactics as Black Lives Matter responds to existential anxiety by collectively acting to relieve immediate Black suffering and death which I argue is a Camusian rebellion. The Alt-Right conversely responds to existential anxiety by directing their energies towards achieving a teleological goal of racial homogeneity which I argue is a Camusian revolution. I use a variety of first-person sources including memoirs, interviews, and undercover exposés to support my thesis that Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right are both responding to feelings of racialized existential anxiety, although they traverse disparate pathways.

While the dissertation is primarily focused on racially motivated social movements, I argue that American environmental activists can learn from, and emulate Black Lives Matter's tactics. Environmental activists argue that climate change is an existential crisis, and the anxiety of the death and devastation of climate catastrophe underlies much of today's climate activism. Black Lives Matter has successfully transformed existential anxiety over state sanctioned Black death into meaningful and immediate reforms, without sacrificing its radical critiques of racial capitalism, mass incarceration, and white

supremacy. I argue that environmental activists can likewise energize their existential anxieties into reforms that slow climate change, while continuing to challenge systemic degradation of the global environment. I conclude the dissertation by examining the 2020 Black Lives Matter activism in response to the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. Ongoing and recent Black Lives Matter protests are rooted in the same collectively anxious response to Black death and have achieved even greater sociopolitical and cultural changes than the protests of years prior, providing further evidence for my thesis.

Dedicated to the family I lost along this journey from starting college through obtaining a doctorate. "Absurdity is king, but love saves us from it." – Albert Camus.

Max Must (1924-2011)

Benjamin Geigerman (1989-2011)

June Must (1929-2013)

Annette Stein (1932-2017)

Arnold Stein (1930-2017)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER #1

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I extract a political theory from the works of Albert Camus and argue that Camus's works help us to better understand some contemporary social movements in the United States as rooted in a response to death and existential anxiety. I then apply the Camusian social movement theory I extract to two ongoing movements: Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right. I utilize the Camusian theory to both highlight the role of death and existential anxiety in the respective movements, and to show how the movements proceed along divergent pathways to political change. Social movements have been studied by many political theorists, but few if any have highlighted the important roles that death and existential anxiety can play in the inspiration of social movement formation and their ensuing growth. Before proceeding, I want to first define existentialism and existential anxiety.

Historian George Cotkin begins his book *Existential America* by stating that "Nearly everyone, it seemed, coming of age in 1950s and 1960s America danced to the song of French existentialism" (2003, p. 1). Cotkin explains that "The meaning, excitement, and fashion of existentialism transformed the lives of many people" (ibid). While Jean-Paul Sartre was dismissive of the United States as a locus of existential discourse, "No less than Europeans, Americans participated in the conversation of existentialism. In fact, existential modes of thinking had long before sunk deep roots in American thought and culture. The very notion of America as bereft of anguish is

absurd" (Cotkin 2003, p. 2). Yet Cotkin, who is quite sympathetic to the intellectual history of existentialism, locates existentialism's heyday in the mid-20th century.

Existentialism, as a publicly prominent concept, has reclaimed its glory in the early-21st century due partly to ongoing political concerns. Leanne Italie (2019) of the *Associated Press* reports, "Climate change, gun violence, the very nature of democracy and an angsty little movie star called Forky helped propel 'existential' to Dictionary.com's [2019] word of the year." The word "existential" and the related concept "existentialism" have returned from a half-century public slumber and are now front-and-center in America's political discourse.[i] "Existential" was a term used to refer to Australian wildfires, Hurricane Dorian, mass shootings around the world from New Zealand to Texas, and United States President Donald Trump (ibid). Dictionary.com – although an unscientific source – analyzes data for what words have defined a year based on spikes in user interest. It is clear that existentialism and contemporary politics share a connection. However, while many people were turning to Dictionary.com to help define "existential" in light of its usage by Presidential hopefuls Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden, defining the term is not a simple matter.

[i] I do not mean to insinuate that people who use the term "existential" do so in a way that is entirely informed by existential philosophy. However, both the mainstream (or colloquial) use of "existential" and the philosophy of "existentialism" relate to similar themes of the underlying nature or purpose of human existence, especially given the reality of human finitude.

Defining the Bounds of Existentialism

Walter Kaufmann, one of the preeminent scholars of twentieth century existentialism, opens his well-known anthology *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*[ii] by refusing to define the term. In his introduction, Kaufmann explains his understanding of existentialism.

> Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy. Most of the living 'existentialists' have repudiated this label, and a bewildered outsider might well conclude that the only thing they have in common is a marked aversion for each other. To add to the confusion, many writers of the past have frequently been hailed as members of this movement, and it is extremely doubtful whether they would have appreciated the company to which they are consigned. In view of this, it might be argued that the label 'existentialism' ought to be abandoned altogether.
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> Certainly, existentialism is not a school of thought nor reducible to any set of tenets. The three writers who appear inevitably on every list of 'existentialists' Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre are not in agreement on essentials. Such alleged precursors as Pascal and Kierkegaard differed from all three men by being dedicated Christians; and Pascal was a Catholic of sorts while Kierkegaard was a Protestant's Protestant. If, as is often done, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky are included in the fold, we must make room for an impassioned anti-Christian and an even more fanatical Greek-Orthodox Russian imperialist. By the time we consider adding Rilke, Kafka, and Camus, it becomes plain that one essential feature shared by all these men is their perfervid individualism. (Kaufmann 1960, p. 11)

Despite Kaufmann's insistence that defining existentialism is nearly impossible, he collects works by most of the aforementioned authors (all except Pascal) for his anthology of existentialism. Yet this vague approach to defining existentialism can leave the field open to an overly broad interpretation.

[ii] Cotkin states, "Hardly a college student in the 1960s could be found without a dog-eared copy of Walter Kaufmann's collection" (2003, p. 1). Cotkin uses this example to highlight just how prevalent existential thinking was in mid-20th century America.

While Kaufmann's effort to be inclusive is admirable, his refusal to define existentialism leaves one unable to discern what ought to be included or excluded in an examination of existentialism. It is not clear in Kauffman's account why Edmund Husserl (who influenced Heidegger) or Arthur Schopenhauer (who was influenced by Nietzsche) were not included in the anthology. Conversely, if we are to assume that any tangential thinker ought to be included as an existentialist, we may find it difficult to exclude thinkers who wrote works that are not essentially existential; we could, by Kaufmann's account, consider John Stuart Mill, Isaiah Berlin, and Murray Rothbard existentialists since they addressed human freedom in their respective works.[iii] If this all-inclusive non-definition of existentialism may be too vague to be useful, there is also the potential to define existentialism too narrowly.

Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and for some time, Maurice Merleau-Ponty accepted the moniker of "existentialist" with Sartre most explicitly endorsing the label. Others such as Camus, Eugène Ionesco (1964) and Martin Heidegger (1993) rejected the claim that their work should be considered in the existentialist cannon. Camus, in a 1945 interview stated "No, I am not an existentialist. Sartre and I are always surprised to see our names linked. We have even thought of publishing a short statement in which the

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[iii] I am not suggesting that liberalism overlooks death as there are questions about death that liberals consider such as the question of one's right to suicide, and the right of self-defense and how it varies from murder. Liberalism often considers questions of life and death within the realms of freedom or liberty, and rights. Existentialism conversely contains a normative aspect (sometimes implicitly) and questions the normative value of life. Existentialists also address issues surrounding freedom (see Sartre and Fanon), but not necessarily within the same liberal confines.

undersigned declare that they have nothing in common with each other and refuse to be held responsible for the debts that they might respectively incur" (1970b, p. 345). For Camus, Ionesco, and Heidegger, rejecting existentialism was tantamount to distancing their own philosophies from those of Sartre. Yet if we accept only Sartre's philosophy to be "existentialism," then we would not only dismiss Camus, Ionesco and Heidegger on their own terms, but we could not logically include those who wrote prior to Sartre, including Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche who wrote seminal existentialist works prior to Sartre's birth.[iv]

Instead of using either Kaufmann's vague understanding of existentialism which renders it entirely open, or a narrow definition that excludes thinkers who are commonly considered within the existentialist canon, I propose thinking about existentialism as a philosophical worldview that emphasizes the meaning and purpose of human existence, especially when considering the inevitability of death. By thinking about existentialism from this perspective, I need not dismiss Camus, Ionesco and Heidegger on their own terms, nor those who wrote prior to Sartre, including Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.[v] My approach, which includes these thinkers, aligns with studies of existentialism by scholars

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[iv] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Edmund Husserl, and Herman Melville fall into this category as well.

[v] This approach may include statements or even works by thinkers not often considered within existential discussions. For example Socrates, in Plato's Apology, famously claims that "the unexamined life is not worth living" (ca. 375 B.C.E./2005). I comfortably accept that this claim is existential and that there may be other elements within the text that are likewise existential in nature if they consider the value of life, and the normative question of whether one ought to live. This does not mean that Socrates nor Plato are existentialists, but only that this statement is an existential statement.

including Kaufmann, Cotkin, and Sarah Blakewell (2016). It is logical to include Camus in this group of intellectuals since his work focuses on how the inevitability of death impacts the meaning and purpose of human life.[vi] Existential thinking – considerations about the purpose of human life and death – can lead to feel a sense of angst or anxiety which can motivate political action.[vii]

Linguistic scholar Alex Ostmann defines existentialism as necessarily containing angst or anxiety related to one's recognition of human mortality. He defines "existentialist thinking as a school of thought that is concerned with the problem of 'angst' (anxiety), 'existenzangst' (the fear of the threat to one's existence) to be precise, and the way the individual copes with it. It centres around the total loneliness of the 'anxiety-ridden' individual who is faced with an inherently hostile world and, above all, with death" (1992, p. 234). My aforementioned definition of existentialism does not include anxiety as a necessary condition. Instead, I slightly detach the two notions as existential thinking or considerations can *often* lead to a feeling of anxiety, but there may be cases where existential thinking does not necessarily cause anxious feelings.[viii]

[vi] In the next chapter, I will address the related question of why I am specially using Camus's works by contrasting his existential approach with some of his existential peers and contemporaries.

[vii] I will refer to this as "existential anxiety" throughout this dissertation. This term is synonymous with "existential angst" and even "existential dread." Different existentialists have deployed different terms, all related to primarily the same concerns.

[viii] Stoic philosopher Epictetus is an example of a thinker engaged with existential questions about the meaning and purpose of human life and death. Yet Epictetus does not find anxiety to be a necessary part of the human existential experience as he asks rhetorically, "I must die. But must I die bawling?" (ca 108 C.E./2008, p. 7). He states

Despite this slight protest, anxiety is prevalent in much existential discourse, ranging from philosophical doctrines, to literary works, to individual experiences.

Ostmann's article is focused on Heidegger's philosophical usage of "existenzangst." Kierkegaard, however, published *The Concept of Anxiety* (1980) in 1844; 45 years before Heidegger's birth. Anxiety is a persistent theme in many of Kierkegaard's works, and in works by existentialists whom Heidegger preceded.[ix] Feelings of existential anxiety are found in many works of existential fiction such as Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* (2007) wherein the protagonist, Antoine Roquentin, becomes progressively sicker as he increasingly doubts his existence. Likewise, Romanian playwright Eugène Ionesco[x] explains that existential anxiety did not just permeate his writing, but also preoccupied his life. His incessant asking the question "why?" leads to his ultimate questioning as he states that "It's to Death, above all, that I say 'Why?' with such terror" (1990, p. 27). Ionesco struggled to confront his existential anxiety, or the "universal anguish" (1990, p. 28) he individually experienced. Existentialism and existential anxiety are prominent themes in philosophy, literature, and experiential

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similarly "No, I cannot escape death, but at least I can escape the fear of it" (Epictetus ca 108 C.E/2008, p. 64). Stoic philosophy teaches one to live "in accordance with nature" (ca 108 C.E./2008, p. 62) and since death is the natural conclusion of human life, Epictetus argues that death is not something to fear, but it is merely the surrendering of the body. While existential, this argument is not tied directly to any feeling of anxiety and Epictetus rejects such feelings as unnatural.

[ix] See, for example, *Either/Or,* and *Fear and Trembling* for more of Kierkegaard's discussions on anxiety.

[x] Ionesco is one of the playwrights dubbed as part of the "Theatre of the Absurd" (Esslin 2004) based on Camus's definition of the concept which will be discussed in the next chapter.

journalistic writing. Despite their prevalence in a wide array of relevant work, these themes are rarely considered within political theory generally, and specifically within theoretical studies of social movements. Philosophical considerations of the meaning and purpose of human life, given the inevitability of death, can lead to feelings of anxiety. In turn these feelings, I will argue, can motivate participation in social movements.[xi]

Political Theoretical Treatments of Social Movements

Social movements have an extensive and important history in the United States, and in some regards, "social movements have made the world we live in" (Cox 2018, p. 17). Since the turn of the 20th century, social movements in the United States have fought against racism, sexism and misogyny, homophobia and transphobia, and have contributed to obtaining voting rights protections, the legalization of no-fault divorce, guarantees of same-sex marriage, and protections against discrimination against people with disabilities. Laws that are now standard practice such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Clean Air Act may not have materialized without the efforts of social movements.[xii]

Social movement scholars Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly define a social movement as "a sustained challenge to power holders in the name of a population living

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[xi] Not all social movements are responses to existential anxiety, but the feeling of existential anxiety can spur a collective, social action.

[xii] See a *New York Times* Op-Ed by philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (2019) for one alternative take on the successes (or for Appiah, the overstatement thereof) of social movements.

under the jurisdiction of those power holders by means of public displays of that population's worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment" (2007, p. 443). Similarly, sociologists Hadi Khoshneviss and Robert Benford define social movements as "organized and sustained collective attempts to promote or resist social change. Typically they seek to affect the course of change by employing extra-institutional means" and challenge "extant authority" (2018, p. 828). Social movements may fight for solely cultural, social or symbolic change, yet "the status of the modern state as the institutional embodiment of elite interests often puts state authorities in the position of having to defend those interests against competing claims of challenging groups. This, coupled with the state's historic monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, often makes it the key actor" (McAdam et al.1988, p. 719). To modify a phrase used to describe war, a social movement is a form of politics by another means. Social movements may actually be the only means, or minimally the most effective means of political engagement by those who have limited power in formal institutions.

Theoretical Analyses of Social Movements: Situating the Context

Political and social theorists and philosophers from a wide array of intellectual and ideological backgrounds have studied social movements as political phenomena, and this dissertation exists in conversation with the scholars who have taken up similar tasks.[xiii] The following examples highlight that social movements have been studied by

[xiiixiii] Of course there are also many empirical studies of social movements. This theoretical contribution does not seek to displace any empirical work, but rather

an array of political theorists and philosophers who vary in intellectual approaches and traditions, and who have analyzed many different social movements since the beginning of the 20th century. Political philosopher and critical theorist Jürgen Habermas (1970) analyzed the German student protest movement of the late-1960s as a unique case since it had previously been believed that students did not play a vital political role in industrialized societies. Habermas (1981) later coined the term "new social movements" to differentiate older, materialistically driven movements from the immaterial goals of social movements (such as environmental movements, anti-war movements, and human rights movements) that have arisen since the mid-1960s.

Political and social theorists Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward study the structures and institutions that often limit social movement formation and activity to exceptional circumstances. The thesis of *Poor People's Movements* is stated simply, "The occasions when protest is possible among the poor, the forms that it must take, and the impact it can have are all delimited by the social structure in ways which usually diminish its extent and diminish its force" (Piven and Cloward 1979, p. 3). Piven and Cloward apply their institutional approach to understanding social movements to two movements of the 1930s (the unemployed workers' and industrial workers' movements), and two movements of the 1960s (the Civil Rights Movement, and welfare rights movement). The authors argue that on occasion, massive social or economic changes can upset daily life to a large extent. In these cases, some people protest against the extant

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contribute to a humanistic understanding of social movements and their relation to existential concerns.

system which does not otherwise address their concerns through traditional, electoral means. In these moments, mass disruption through riots or similar forms of resistance may lead to vulnerable elites granting concessions in order to maintain stability. Piven and Cloward acknowledge that these concessions may be revocable, but without greater organization resources, poor people will not be able to otherwise achieve desired gains.

Political theorist Iris Marion Young dedicates a chapter of *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (2011) to social movements and focuses on movement efforts of women, Latinos, and American Indians. Young argues that social movements often demand a positive recognition of social group differences.[xiv] This appreciation for group difference Young contrasts with Enlightenment-era thinking about equality and inclusion which mutes the uniqueness of group identities by demanding undesirable assimilation. Some social movements, Young argues, "have seen self-organization and the assertion of a positive group cultural identity as a better strategy [than assimilation] for achieving power and participation in dominant institutions" (2011, p. 159). It is this "politics of difference" that the movements Young studied prefer to assimilationist alternatives.[xv]

In the 1980s, two classic collected volumes, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* and *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are*

[xiv] Women, for example, have sought maternity leave as a positive policy embracing the socially necessary labor of childbearing.

[xv] Philosopher Charles Taylor echoes some of Young's argument in stating that indigenous populations of Canada ought to be entitled "certain rights and powers not enjoyed by other Canadians, if the demands for native self-government are finally agreed on" (2004, p. 276). This would be a recognition of social group difference that is demanded by indigenous movements.

Men, But Some of Us are Brave, featured theoretical critiques of ongoing (and earlier) iterations of the feminist movement in the United States and calls for movement activism that benefits marginalized women. In both collections, the movement is critiqued for ignoring the grievances of women of color, of working-class women, and of lesbians. Audre Lorde, for instance, in "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" explains that this speech was being presented at a conference on feminist theory that lacked the input of "black feminists and lesbians" and of "third world women" (1979, p. 98). Gloria Anzaldúa likewise stated "My dear *hermanas,* the dangers we face as women writers of color are not the same as those of white women though we have many in common" (1980, p. 163). Similar critiques by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) would follow and led her to develop of the framework of intersectionality; the idea that Black women suffer unique forms of discrimination that cannot be explained solely by reference to either race or gender.

More recently bell hooks, in her 2000 book *Feminism is for Everybody,* explains her concerns with prior waves of feminism. Early in the work, she states that "Even though individual black women were active in contemporary feminist movement [*sic*] from its inception, they were not the individuals who became the 'stars' of the movement, who attracted the attention of mass media. … Even before race became a talked about issue in feminist circles it was clear to black women (and to their revolutionary allies in struggle) that they were never going to have equality within the existing white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks 2000, pp. 3-4). The feminist movement unfortunately frequently overlooked the needs and demands of many women, and in

doing so, reproduced extant oppression faced by women of color, working class women, and women identifying on the LGBTQ+ spectrum.

The spontaneous emergence of Occupy Wall Street in 2011 led to a flurry of publications from political theorists and philosophers. Occupy Wall Street began in New York's Zuccotti Park in September 2011, and the physical occupation of the park lasted for approximately two months. Political and social theorists and philosophers analyzed the movement's horizontal power structure (Lowndes and Warren 2011; Aronowitz 2011; Dean 2012; Prentoulis and Thomassen 2013), its relationship with and challenges to institutional politics (Hardt and Negri 2011; Brown 2011; Bronner 2012; Walzer 2012; Prentoulis and Thomassen 2013), and its economic populist messaging and demands (Barber 2011; Žižek 2012; Dean 2014). In most cases, Occupy's rejection of hierarchical organization was tied to the movement's skepticism of representative politics which itself was born from frustrations with socioeconomic conditions and perceived political inaction during the "Great Recession." Detailing the extensive theoretical and philosophical contributions to the literature on Occupy Wall Street lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, but the sheer mass of relevant scholarship highlights the recent efforts of theorists to engage with an ongoing social movement.

Social movements at least as far back as the 1930s have been analyzed by political and social theorists and philosophers. The above literature review highlighted that theoretical scholars from a wide array of intellectual backgrounds focused on then-ongoing social movements. The next two sections address two of today's important social movements. First, I will analyze some of the theoretical contributions to

understandings of Black Lives Matter. Then, I will analyze the few theoretical works that analyze the Alt-Right. This dissertation argues that both movements can be understood as rooted in a response to death and existential anxiety. In the following analyses, I will note both the lack of existential concern of most theoretical works on the respective movements, and the few instances in which this existential content is hinted at, but either not explored in detail, or from a widely varied perspective.

Theoretical Analyses of Black Lives Matter

Many political theorists have addressed Black Lives Matter and while their contributions are important, they do not necessarily address the existential elements of the movement that my dissertation highlights. Juliet Hooker analyzes extant hostilities towards Black Lives Matter protesters and their actions. She focuses "particularly [on] the demonization of those who have taken to the streets to protest the routine killing of black persons with impunity across the United States for minor, if not imagined, offenses by representatives of the state" (Hooker 2016, p. 449). Hooker argues for an understanding of Black activism – including so-called "riots" – as a form of justified defiance wherein Black Americans publicize their political concerns which have otherwise been overlooked by their fellow Americans and ignored by politicians.

Hooker focuses primarily on Black Lives Matter's protest tactics and the negative responses they have received from some political detractors. I will discuss Black Lives Matter's tactics as essentially nonviolent, which contributes to my understanding of the movement; Black Lives Matter can be understood as a response to death and existential

anxiety, and since the movement opposes death and suffering, it does not contribute to, or perpetuate violent acts.[xvi] While Black Lives Matter's tactics are Hooker's primary concern, they are only one focus within my larger argument concerning the existential anxiety that spurred the movement.

Courtenay Daum (2017) argues that rights-based approaches to rectifying injustice fail to end the subjugation of marginalized and intersectionally-subjected populations within contemporary nationalist and neoliberal regimes. Daum utilizes Nancy Fraser's and Michael Warner's concept of "counterpublics" and focuses on Black Lives Matter as an example of a counterpublic arena wherein subjugated people can promote counterdiscourses, and oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs, while cultivating their collective power. Black Lives Matter, Daum argues, has rejected rights-based approaches as "marginalized populations are not going to be liberated from hegemony by seeking the recognition and protections of rights from the very institutions used to oppress them" (2017, p. 526). Instead, Black Lives Matter embraces their outsider status, rejects dominant discourses[xvii] and established norms and procedures, in order to fight for an end to Black American oppression.

Daum argues that Black Lives Matter rejects reformist approaches to rectifying injustice because they are insufficient. She argues that the movement has created a

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[xvi] See the section on Black Lives Matter as a Camusian rebellion in chapter four for more detail.

[xvii] For example, highlighting the state as having an institutional role in Black death, rather than focusing on individual police officers, or the typical slogan of "a few bad apples." This will be addressed in more detail in chapters three and four.

counterpublic that exists outside of traditional institutions which serves to both articulate concerns and develop movement power. I agree with Daum's latter point as Black Lives Matter has intentionally existed outside of formalized, institutional politics.[xviii] In chapter two, I compare Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right on three dimensions including both movements' respective rejections of extant institutional politics as the primary pathway to political change. In that sense, I agree with Daum's argument. However, I argue in chapter four and again in chapter six that Black Lives Matter has not rejected political reforms, but rather has embraced both immediate reforms and larger systemic changes. The movement has not rejected reformist politics wholesale, and instead embraces immediate reforms that can help alleviate immediate suffering while still acknowledging that these reforms are ultimately insufficient in addressing the causes of Black suffering and death.

Deva Woodly (2018a) considers Black Lives Matter (and the larger Movement for Black Lives) as a response to the current American "politics of despair" which involves unbridled economic inequality, declining interpersonal and institutional trust, a lack of civic knowledge and political participation, and decreasing political efficacy. Woodly (2019) also argues that Black Lives Matter has, through its praxis, created a political philosophy, organizational practice and mobilization strategy aimed towards a form of "healing justice" that arises from lived experiences and which confronts the

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[xviii] Black Lives Matter activist Cori Bush is currently the Democratic Representative-elect for Missouri's 1st congressional district. This one example does not, however, conflict with my argument that Black Lives Matter, as a movement, exists outside of institutional politics.

political institutions and practices that dominate and oppress marginalized peoples; in this case, Black women.

Woodly's interpretation of Black Lives Matter as a response to the "politics of despair" does not include any mention of death.[xix] In chapter four, on Black Lives Matter, I will show that the founders of the movement have framed it, from its inception, as a response to death and existential anxiety. I am not arguing that Black Lives Matter has ignored (intentionally or otherwise) the issues Woodly highlights; the movement has addressed some of these concerns by endorsing platforms that speak to socioeconomic and political injustices. However, I will present an alternative approach to interpreting Black Lives Matter's catalyst as rooted in concerns with death and the existential anxiety death can produce. One cannot fight political battles such as reducing economic inequality or opposing a lack of political efficacy and a lack of civic knowledge if one is dead. For this reason Black Lives Matter's founders and key contributors were inspired by feelings of existential anxiety to fight against state sanctioned death of Black Americans, and it remains at the root of its movement.

[xix] Woodly uses sociologist Deborah Gould's definition of political despair which is a "feeling of inefficacy and hopelessness, the sense that nothing will ever change, no matter what some imagined collective 'we' does to try to bring change." Woodly adds that in the United States, six intensifying trends are evidence of an American politics of despair: "(a) rising inequality, (b) declining political trust, (c) declining interpersonal trust, (d) declining civic knowledge, (e) declining and stratified political participation, and (f) declining political efficacy." While Woodly references the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Rekia Boyd, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, and Mike Brown, her definition of the politics of despair does not necessarily include death (Woodly 2018a, pp. 204-6). What Woodly is addressing is the cynicism of people who believe that their government is unresponsive and that their communities are neglected by political elites. This may include the realm of unjust death, but it is not a necessary variable.

Political philosopher Christopher Lebron (2017) uncovers a multitude of intellectual predecessors and philosophical influences on Black Lives Matter including preeminent thinkers such as Frederick Douglass, Anna Julia Cooper, Martin Luther King Jr., Ida B. Wells, and Audre Lorde, among others. I do not utilize Lebron's approach as I am not arguing that Albert Camus's works were influential for Black Lives Matter; there is no reason to believe Camus directly influenced the movement.[xx] Instead, I am extracting a political theory from Camus's works that helps us to explain the movement's response to death and the trajectory it has taken. Lebron, while he focuses on Black Lives Matter's intellectual influences, does hint at the existential anxieties that may motivate movement activities. He proclaims that African Americans had been "a class of persons whose humanity was constantly questioned, threatened, and denied" (Lebron 2017, p. 20). Lebron is correct, as Cotkin likewise rhetorically asks readers, "How could anyone ignore the existential anguish at the heart of the African-American experience?" (2003, p. 2). Yet Lebron does not place significant emphasis upon this existential component of life throughout African American history. While Lebron may accurately highlight some of the crucial intellectual influences on Black Lives Matter, I am presenting a more thorough examination of the existential anxiety present within the movement. My argument and Lebron's do not exist in tension, but my existential focus can complement Lebron's more historical understanding of Black Lives Matter, and elucidate the role of death which he acknowledges, but which is not central in his work.

[xx] Cotkin (2003) argues that Camus was influential to many who participated in the 1960s generation of American social movements.

Unlike the previous examples, some works on Black Lives Matter address existential concerns within the movement. Shatema Threadcraft (2017) notes that Black Lives Matter focuses on the dead Black body, which can overshadow other elements of racial justice and gender-specific forms of (often racialized) violence, such as femicide. Threadcraft fears that prioritizing the dead Black body prioritizes "how cis men die, how young men die, how able-bodied blacks die, over all other black dead" (2017, p. 554). Black Lives Matter, by focusing on the dead, Black body as the site of its movement, may be overlooking contributions to Black death such as racial and economic segregation, non-lethal interactions between the police and Black Americans, and environmental racism's contribution to a degradation in Black health. While Threadcraft champions Black Lives Matter for changing the conversation about the "proper" interaction between police and citizens, she is skeptical that the movement's focus is best serving the Black community.

I largely agree with Threadcraft's analysis of Black Lives Matter as focusing on the dead, Black body. In chapter four I, like Threadcraft, address the "necropolitics" of the movement or Black Lives Matter's focus on the political distribution of death among Black Americans. Where Threadcraft and I diverge is while she expresses concerns with this focus, I analyze the role of death as the key motivator from a more normatively neutral perspective. My existential interpretation challenges Threadcraft's skepticism of the movement's focus on death. I am sympathetic to Threadcraft's concerns that other forms of Black suffering and death are important, and that the movement must not

overlook forms of oppression that may be uniquely faced by Black women. Yet her skepticism may be unnecessarily strong.

In the next chapter, I will show that Black Lives Matter has highlighted the deaths of Black women and has not focused solely on the lives and deaths of cis men, specifically through the movement's connection to the #SayHerName campaign. Furthermore, I will highlight the movement's intersectionality which is part of its founding principles and includes Black women, Black people with disabilities, and Black people with criminal records. Threadcraft may be correct in noting that there are many additional means by which Black lives are harmed or taken beyond state violence. However, other crucial political issues such as environmental racism, continued neighborhood and school segregation, health disparities across races, and intrusive policing on racial lines cannot be addressed by the deceased. Unfortunately, ensuring the mere continuation of Black life must be at the forefront of Black Lives Matter's political agenda so that other socioeconomic and political concerns can likewise be addressed.

Shayla Nunnally's work is in American political development but is informed by political theory and is itself theoretically rich. Nunnally traces the development of the idea of the "black body" and argues that Black Lives Matter is fighting to "reinscribe the value of the 'black body' as equal to that of the 'white body'" but in an historically unique way that refuses to denigrate Black people "who were felt to be detrimental to the *positive* portrayal of blackness" (2018, p. 146). Nunnally is referring to the inclusivity of

Black Lives Matter; a movement which has proudly fought for and included all Black lives, and not just those who are considered "respectable" in mainstream society.[xxi]

Black Lives Matter is certainly highlighting the inherent value of the Black body – of all Black bodies – regardless of gender, sexuality, nationality, disability, age, or incarceration status. I argue that Black Lives Matter can be understood as a response to death and existential anxiety and, in line with Nunnally's argument, the movement fights to preserve and improve the lives of *all* Black people. Nunnally does not forge her argument using existential terminology, but our arguments are compatible. As I will show in chapter four, Black death and existential anxiety may lead to Black Lives Matter's fierce defense of Black lives and the movement's struggle against Black suffering and death. Black Lives Matter is not fighting to protect some Black bodies, but instead as Nunnally highlights, the movement is working for the betterment of all Black lives.

Theoretical Analyses of the Alt-Right

There is far less theoretical scholarship aimed at interpreting the Alt-Right than Black Lives Matter. Political theorist Ronald Beiner's (2018) book, *Dangerous Minds,* is the preeminent theoretical work which looks at the Alt-Right and far-right politics around the world. Beiner's objective is similar to Lebron's in that Beiner seeks to uncover the intellectual influences on the Alt-Right, and he argues that the contemporary, global far-

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[xxi] A longer discussion of Black Lives Matter's rejection of respectability politics is found in chapter four.

right has been influenced by two existentialists, namely Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. Both philosophers traffic in an existential response to a situation akin to what Émile Durkheim (2005) calls anomie; modernity's rejection or destruction of once cherished socioethical standards and objectives. For Nietzsche, the aimlessness, or "horizonlessness" of modernity caused life to become purposeless. In turn, Nietzsche rejected the emptiness of modernity and embraced a pre-modern culture, including a hierarchical sociopolitics rooted in "rank order, slavery and oppression" (Beiner 2018, p. 45). Rejecting Christian egalitarianism and returning to a caste-based aristocracy was, for Nietzsche, the solution to the banality of modern life.

Heidegger is similarly responding to the existential homelessness, or the "limitless alienation" of modernity (Beiner 2018, p. 100). He presents a standard for judging human civilizations which amounts to determining "to what extent those cultures or civilizations measure up to the question of Being, the question of what it means to be– not 'what does it mean for you or me to be?' but 'what does it mean for *beings or entities in general* to be?'" (Beiner 2018, p. 71). Heidegger preferences the culture and civilization that he believes was closest to recapturing the pre-modern fascination with being, which was Nazi Germany. For Heidegger, modernity's vapid egalitarianism could only be replaced by a non-nationalistic form of the *Volk* that could serve as an adequate

replacement for *Dasein*.[xxii] In all, Beiner argues that "Nietzsche, no less than Heidegger, hates modernity and wants to see it disappear" (2018, p. 115).

Beiner's work on the Alt-Right, unlike Lebron's on Black Lives Matter, focuses explicitly on the existential influences on the movement. Beiner's argument reinforces a central point I will highlight in chapter five on the Alt-Right as I argue that the movement's concerns are explicitly rooted in existential anxieties. My focus is not, however, on the philosophers who influenced the Alt-Right. As with Black Lives Matter, I am not arguing that Albert Camus influenced the Alt-Right.[xxiii] Instead, the Camusian theory I extract in chapter two will provide a means to better understanding both the existential anxiety of the Alt-Right, and the movement's political trajectory and tactics.

Political theorist Phillip Gray presents an analysis of the Alt-Right as a movement which is engaged with American identity politics; a point with which the movement agrees. Gray uses his concept "category-based epistemology" to highlight similarities in how the Alt-Right and "intersectional Left" understand and embrace identity. Within "category-based epistemology" a privileged category (an identity group) claims unique access to knowledge of the "*actual* dynamics that influence, shape, and (in a manner) determine the direction of History and human development" (P Gray 2014, pp. 527-528).

[xxii] Non-nationalistic because Beiner interprets Heidegger's Volk as being "more heroic" if it expands beyond the bounds of Germany, or of any singular nation for that matter (2018, p. 96).

[xxiii] In *The Rebel* (1991) Camus is actually very critical of Nietzsche in a manner that resembles Beiner's argument. Nietzsche, however, was an influence on Camus's thinking (Illing 2017).

The Alt-Right's privileged category is primarily white people (and white males secondarily) who need to have their consciousness raised to become aware of the "real" historical and current events threatening the racial population. Gray argues that the philosophical underpinnings of the Alt-Right and "intersectional Left" are similar in privileging a particular group and treating that group's experience as a form of knowledge that outgroup members cannot fully understand, participate in, or question. The privileged group crafts the relevant notion of oppression and identifies an "Enemy population/structure" responsible for said oppression (P Gray 2018, p. 144). Gray argues that based on his description, intersectional thinking has no *necessary* progressive content. The difference, Gray argues, is between the "intersectional Left's" understanding of marginalization and the Alt-Right's understanding of racial science and demographic displacement, or between "biologism vs social constructivism" (2018, p. 145).[xxiv]

Gray turns intersectional theorists against themselves to argue that intersectionality – a typically "left" frame of understanding – can be utilized by the Alt-Right or can serve to explain the movement's ideology and grievances.[xxv] I agree with

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[xxiv] The role of both race science and demographic displacement will be addressed in depth in chapter six.

[xxv] Gray uses the words of Ange-Marie Hancock as he states that Alt-Right's key thinkers "share the logic that multiple marginalizations of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation at the individual and institutional levels create social and political stratification, requiring policy solutions that are attuned to the interactions of these categories" (2007, p. 65). Hancock is not speaking about white nationalist movements, but Gray argues that Hancock's logic applies to the Alt-Right as well as it does to actually marginalized identity groups.

Gray that the Alt-Right is an identity-based movement that is primarily focused on race (whiteness), and secondarily on gender (male). Many of Gray's factual notes about the Alt-Right are important and will be addressed in detail in chapters three and six.[xxvi] Gray focuses on highlighting what he sees as the inherent flaws and dangers in identitarianism within American politics and political theory. His explanation of intersectionality is, however, little more than a strawman and briefly deconstructing his argument renders it less convincing.

Gray's argument that a certain group is given the "privilege" to determine the definitional content of truth, and to define the enemy groups or structures is unsound. Kimberlé Crenshaw, in conceiving of the notion of intersectionality, did not place Black women in a privileged epistemological position. Crenshaw speaks about intersectionality as a framework for interpreting discriminatory phenomena. In Crenshaw's initial article, intersectionality is a conceptual framework that allows for a better understanding of the unique form of discrimination that Black women faced in three court cases where neither sole reference to race, nor to gender could explain the discrimination (Crenshaw 1989). Emma DeGraffenreid's discrimination as a Black woman could not be explained as racial discrimination since *Black* men were hired by General Motors, nor could it be explained as gender discrimination as white *women* were also hired. An intersectional framework helps readers understand that the five Black women serving as plaintiffs in the court case

[xxvi] For example, Gray notes the Alt-Right's solution to racial discord is the promulgation of "homogeneous ethno-nations – with a unity of identity within a state while accepting a plurality of racially/ethnically different states" (2018, p. 148).

faced a unique form of discrimination. Nowhere, however, does this explanatory framework rely upon privileged, experiential epistemologies. It is, since Crenshaw is a legal scholar, a legal argument that a private corporation utilized discriminatory hiring and firing practices (Crenshaw 1989). It also is not the case that there is a clearly defined "enemy" in the court cases as an enemy could logically be the respective defendants, judges, or even the legal scholars who have not seen Black women's discrimination *as* discrimination.

Likewise, Ange-Marie Hancock, who Gray references, similarly argues that Trayvon Martin was killed by George Zimmerman because of a tripartite intersectional identity as Martin was a young, Black, male. Hancock's (2012) argument shows a trend of young, Black, men (between their late-teens and mid-20s) being treated in violent and deadly manners by police officers and vigilantes. Hancock mirrors Crenshaw by arguing that these examples are best understood as a form of intersectional discrimination since comparable violence was not being directed towards individuals who did not fit the tripartite identity of young *and* Black *and* male. Hancock is clear that intersectionality serves as "an analytical framework for questions of social justice" (2012) which does not fit Gray's epistemological interpretation of the concept.

Gray is right to note that Black Lives Matter is rooted in an intersectional framework. However, Gray's understanding of intersectionality is a misinterpretation of what this might mean for the movement. Black Lives Matter, I will argue in the chapter three, prioritizes intersectionality partly because Black women have often been ignored or overlooked in civil rights efforts. Gray is correct to note that intersectionality does not

necessarily imply a progressive politics. Yet without Gray's epistemological preferencing, someone within or outside of the Alt-Right's core constituency – white men – can critique their basic foundations and claims of oppression. One need not be a white man to argue that white men are not oppressed in the United States. Nor would one need to be a Black woman to analyze whether Crenshaw's example of Emma DeGraffenreid's case was one of discrimination by General Motors against Black women.

The Alt-Right may be utilizing an intersectional framework to argue that white men are suffering in the United States. This argument is, however, open to interpretation and critique based on empirical realities that contradict said argument. In chapter five, I will argue that the Alt-Right's existential anxieties are not based in empirical realities, but rather are based on a feeling of fear. The Alt-Right may portray white men as in existential danger, but this intersectional frame does not portray a clear or accurate depiction of life and death for white men in the United States. Challenging the Alt-Right's claims need not require dismissing intersectionality as a concept since, in the Alt-Right's case, it is simply being inappropriately applied. The Alt-Right's feeling of existential anxiety, and not any actual oppression towards white men, I will argue, can help explain the movement's formation and can contribute to an understanding of its violent political actions, and revolutionary political goals.

Conclusion

This introduction served to situate the rest of the dissertation. First, I defined existentialism as a philosophical worldview that emphasizes the meaning and purpose of

human existence, especially when considering the inevitability of death. This definition is important to keep in mind, since I will be arguing that contemporary American social movements – specifically Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right – can be understood in an existential context. I then situated this dissertation widely within the context of extant theoretical understandings of social movements. While social movements and other forms of collective action are often studied empirically, there is a history of theoretical interpretations of social movements that includes many theorists from an assortment of intellectual traditions who studied a variety of movements across the 20th century. I then analyzed some of the extant theoretical contributions to the literature on the two main social movements of interest, Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right. In both cases, existential concerns are infrequently addressed, and when they are noted, existentialism is not at the forefront of the theoretical analysis. Only Ronald Beiner's analysis of the Alt-Right overtly addresses existentialism, but his work is targeting the intellectual influences on the movement, while this dissertation seeks an existential analysis *of* the Alt-Right.

In the next chapter, I will extract my Camusian social movement theory from an array of his fictional and non-fiction works. I argue that Camus is uniquely situated among his peers and contemporaries, and by parsing out a theory from his fictional and non-fictional works, we can have a better understanding of the existential content of both Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right. In chapter three, before I apply the theory, I will argue that the two movements are fit for comparison. I analyze two institutional components of Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right, and one ideational component of the movement. Only after explaining why the two movements, which appear

dichotomous, are appropriately comparable will I then apply the Camusian existential theory to Black Lives Matter in chapter four, and the Alt-Right in chapter five. Before concluding, I turn to American environmental activism and argue that there are ways to learn from the approaches taken by Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right. I conclude the dissertation with some considerations for 2020 and beyond as Black Lives Matter, and existentialism have both taken center stage once again.

CHAPTER #2

EXTRACTING THE CAMUSIAN THEORY

In this chapter I will uncover a political theory from some of Albert Camus's works which can help elucidate humanistic[xxvii] elements of social movements. While Camus's works lack a cohesive political project, they present an approach to understanding contemporary American social movements as being rooted in a response to the existential anxiety associated with death. Camus argues that individuals or collectives can follow divergent paths in response to feelings of existential anxiety. I will show that Camus's understanding of how collectives respond to feelings of existential anxiety can help us understand the specific actions undertaken by social movements including Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right; the former can be considered through his notion of rebellion and the latter through his notion of revolution. In brief, the Camusian theory I am extracting from his works contextualizes the existential motivation of the seemingly disparate social movements (both responding to feelings of existential anxiety related to death) and helps us to better understand the movements' respective trajectories (towards either rebellion or revolution). Before explicating the Camusian theory, I will situate Camus within his intellectual context by considering his work in light of some of his existential contemporaries.

A potential detractor may correctly note that while Camus directly influenced social movements of the 1960s including anti-Vietnam War activists and the New Left generally (Cotkin 2003), there is no evidence that members of Black Lives Matter or the Alt-Right have been influenced by his philosophy (or even read Camus's works). One question that reasonably may arise is, given his relative lack of direct influence on

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[xxvii] As opposed to strictly social scientific.

contemporary American social movements, "why Camus?" While Christopher Lebron (2017) and Ronald Beiner (2018) respectively trace the intellectual and philosophical influences of Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right, I am not suggesting that Camus was influential to either movement. Instead, over the course of this dissertation I will show that a Camusian analysis of these movements can help us appreciate them as both responding to feelings of existential anxiety and as traversing similar and yet importantly divergent trajectories respectively towards rebellion and revolution.

Camus is a thinker on the periphery of political theory and philosophy. Political theorist Fred Willhoite Jr. begins his work on Camus by stating "Albert Camus is not generally thought of as a political theorist. He was not a professional or academic political philosopher, and his worldwide literary reputation was achieved mainly on the strength of his novels" (1968, p. vii). While this may be true, Camus is often studied by political theorists and Jeffrey Isaac sees Camus as a theorist following "in a long tradition of political inquiry" (1992, p. 22). Isaac asks and answers a rhetorical question that summarizes political theorists' interest in Camus:

> Why should political theorists be interested in Camus as a dramatist? First, because Camus was clearly a *political* writer, who as a journalist and essayist took up some of the most pressing problems of mid-twentieth century politics – the demands and limits of political engagement, the role of violence in politics, the need cautiously to equilibrate means and ends in radical politics, the dangers of a faith in historical progress, and the provisional and partial character of human judgment. (2006, p. 71)

Camus may not have been a political theorist by trait, but his works which span nearly all written genres – novels, short stories, plays, essays, journalistic contributions, and personal diaries – had political content and approached contentious theoretical questions. His works were theoretically and philosophically rich enough to be addressed by political theorists including Stephen Bronner (1999, 2002, 2010), Joshua Foa Dienstag (2006),

Patrick Hayden (2013, 2016), Jeffrey Isaac (1989, 1992, 1993, 2002, 2006), John Randolph LeBlanc (2004), Michael Walzer (1988) and postcolonial theorist Edward Said (1993). Invoking Camus's works helps us to approach some of the difficult questions that both he and social movements consider including the acceptable limits of violence, and the appropriate response to a collective sense of existential anxiety.

One may note that there are many existential philosophers; from this assortment of well-known philosophers, the question of "why Camus?" arises for a second time. Or, to expand upon the question, why Camus and why not Sartre, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, or Arendt? This question of why I am specifically using Camus's works and not works by other existentialists will be addressed over the course of this chapter.

In extracting a theory from Camus's works which elucidates the responses to death and the deviating paths of rebellion and revolution, I will contrast elements of Camus's works with approaches taken by some of his intellectual peers.[xxviii] This method serves to more concretely draw out a theory from Camus's corpus, and to answer the "why Camus?" challenge; alternative existential theories may be possible but the Camusian theory allows for a cohesive understanding of contemporary American social movements as responding to the existential anxiety associated with death, and the divergent pathways that movements can forge. Analyzing Camus's philosophy in light of

[xxviii] The scope of this dissertation allows for some, comparison between Camus and others, but it is admittedly beyond the scope of this work to delve deeply into such efforts. Camus has been frequently discussed in comparison to other existentialists including Hannah Arendt (Isaac 1992), Simone Weil (Leblanc 2004), Friedrich Nietzsche and Fyodor Dostoevsky (Illing 2017), Miguel de Unamuno and Emil Cioran (Dienstag 2006), Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, and Harold Pinter (Sutherland 2013). There are also countless works on Camus and his one-time friend and eventual intellectual enemy Jean Paul Sartre.

alternative existential arguments will ensure that the theory, which will later be applied to Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right, is as robust as possible.

Over the course of this chapter, I will draw out the following theme that runs through Camus's works: (a) humans are primarily existentially concerned with death and the meaning of life in a meaningless universe; (b) people respond to the feelings of anxiety that this existential crises causes by revolting against their inevitable finitude and passionately promoting the value of their lives; (c) this revolt requires an outward turn towards the political world through; (d) rebellious social movements. At each step in the development of the theory, alternatives are offered that Camus ultimately rejects. Although elements of various existential philosophies might be found in Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right, Camus allows for one clear way to appreciate the movements as rooted in responses to existential anxiety produced by death, and as respectively a rebellion and revolution.

In the two chapters that follow, I will interpret Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right by utilizing the Camusian theory to show that Black Lives Matter follows Camus's theoretical pathway and that the Alt-Right ultimately fails to reach Camus's rebellious conclusion and thus becomes a revolution. Before turning to the two contemporary cases, the Camusian theory must be extracted, and the "why Camus?" question must be more clearly answered.

Phase One: Death and Existential Anxiety as the Primary Existential Concern

While one may assume that existentialism – the philosophy that is concerned with the meaning and purpose of life – is focused on death, there are some existential thinkers

who prioritize other, related concerns. Hannah Arendt,[xxix] in *The Human Condition* explicates her existential focus on natality (birth), as opposed to mortality (death). Arendt's existentialism is concerned with the potential that life, from birth, imparts upon all people. Natality is Arendt's focus because "the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting" which is crucial "since action is the political activity par excellence" (1998, p. 9).

Thomas Nagel (1979) similarly argues that the absurdity of human existence is not related to death. But in contrast to Arendt, Nagel states that the absurdity of human life is an internal contradiction "between the seriousness with which we take our lives and the perpetual possibility of regarding everything about which we are serious as arbitrary, or open to doubt" (1979, p. 13). More recently, philosophers including Irving Singer (1992), Susan Wolf (2010) and Thaddeus Metz (2013) focus not on the meaning of human life given the certainty of death, but on the human capacity to create meaning within life. Singer, for example, argues that while the human fear of death may be rational, the search for meaning in life – rather than the meaning of life – is the central existential concern (1992, p. xii). While Arendt, Nagel and Singer are among those who do not focus on death, human mortality is a chief concern of Albert Camus.

The central question found in Camus's writings – fiction and non-fiction – is given that all humans die, what is the meaning and purpose of living in a seemingly meaningless and purposeless universe? This question is predicated on the notion that humans are inherently meaning-seeking beings. The distance between human beings

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[xxix] Arendt was interested in existentialism even if her work is only occasionally associated with existentialism. See, for example, Arendt's essay (2015) "French Existentialism" originally published in *The Nation* in 1946 in which she addresses early works by Sartre and Camus, as well as Franz Kafka.

who seek meaning, and an existence that lacks any permanent meaning is understood as the "absurd" condition of human life (Camus 2004b).[xxx] Colloquially we use the word "absurd" to describe a condition that is wildly preposterous or ludicrous. Camus utilizes the term to similarly describe the condition of human life; what is preposterous for Camus is that human beings live contradictory lives since human minds desire reason and clarity while living in a universe that lacks meaning, purpose and order.

The absurd condition is a uniquely human, paradoxical experience. Neither a meaningless universe, nor a human mind seeking meaning are, in and of themselves, absurd; "But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational [world] and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. For the moment it is all that links them together" (Camus 2004b, p. 509). It is the meeting of these two facets of existence which leads to the absurd conundrum as the reason-seeking being would not live absurdly if the world contained meaning, and the purposeless universe is not itself absurd should there be no beings seeking meaning. The conflict arises between the human mind seeking transcendence, and a finite and purposeless existence. It is from the realization of the absurdity of human existence that Camus's works proceed.

The absurd condition is dependent upon human finitude. If an afterlife were guaranteed, the absurd condition would not exist since we would transcend the basic human experience; some otherworldly or spiritual meaning of human life might be attainable. Camus is skeptical of anything beyond our material existence. Death, as the permanent and foregone conclusion of human life, is therefore central to understanding Camus's views on the absurd. Philip Thody does not acknowledge human finitude in

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[xxx] Nagel (1979), as mentioned, has a very different take on the absurd and disputes Camus's argument.

Camus's notion of the absurd in his stating that "[t]he absurd can occur only when two elements are present – the desire of the human mind that the world should be explicable in human terms, and the fact that the world is not thus explicable" (1959, p. 4). Rachel Bespaloff conversely explains that Camus's central concern can be reduced to the question "[w]hat value abides in the eyes of the man condemned to death who refused the consolation of the supernatural?" (1962, p. 92). Bespaloff's understanding of the absurd highlights Camus's concern with human finitude – the fact that all humans die.[xxxi]

Camus's fictional works present the inevitability of human death as a central focus. In the play "Caligula," the titular character states that he has discovered "A childishly simply, obvious, almost silly truth, but one that's hard to come by and heavy to endure" which is that "Men die; and they are not happy" (Camus 1958a, p. 9). In the novel *The Stranger*[xxxii] the protagonist, Meursault, is sentenced to death after committing a murder. Faced with his imminent demise, Meursault is approached by a chaplain who asks, "And do you really live with the thought that when you die, you die, and nothing remains?" to which he defiantly replies, "Yes" (Camus 1989, p. 117). Death is omnipresent in *The Plague* which is centered upon the random distribution of death – and the responses to death by the living – as the citizens of Oran succumb to the bubonic plague. One patient philosophizes about the condition as he asks rhetorically, "what does that mean – 'plague?' Just life, no more than that" (Camus 2004c, p. 272). Without

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[xxxi] The question of how to deal with this fact will be addressed in the next section. In brief, Camus argues for a passionate revolt against death which involves living despite our mortality. He contrasts this with committing suicide, religious leaps of faith, and attachments to hope (that something else might be possible).

[xxxii] *L'Étranger* in French. Both *The Stranger* and *The Outsider* have been used as English titles for the work. I use *The Stranger* as it is the more common translation and it is utilized by Matthew Ward who translated my copy of the work.

exaggeration, it is impossible to find a work of fiction by Camus that lacks at least some discussion about death. Camus's non-fiction also focuses on death such that one cannot ignore death as a central component to Camus's understanding of the absurd condition of humanity.

Camus's essays, philosophical pieces, notebooks, and journalism all include musings on death. *The Myth of Sisyphus* begins with the profound statement, "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide" (2004b, p. 495). In *The Rebel*[xxxiii] (1991), Camus asks whether murder – even for seemingly just causes – can ever be defensible. His concern in *The Rebel* follows earlier discussions on violence and killing as a form of self-defense or resistance in the "Letters to a German Friend" (1988a). In the "Letters," Camus argues for the legitimacy of the violent French resistance to Nazi occupation. Camus conversely discusses the illegitimacy of state-sponsored killings (i.e. capital punishment) in his "Reflections on the Guillotine" (2004d). As in his fiction, Camus's non-fictional works are ripe with discussions about death, what it means for human beings, and how we ought to respond to death.

Over the next two chapters, I will argue that both Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right exist, in part, as responses to their respective concerns about human mortality. Neither movement is primarily driven by Arendt's prioritization of natality, Nagel's views concerning the irrational seriousness with which we take our lives, or Singer's desire to find meaning within human life. Camus, unlike Arendt, Nagel, and Singer, focuses on the human experience of facing one's inevitable death within the confines of a meaningless universe.

[xxxiii] *L'Homme révolté* in French. It translates to "the revolted man" which is an intentional play on words.

Camus's discussions of death, both in his fiction and non-fiction, are central to his thinking about the absurd condition of human life. Patrick Hayden (2013) notes that the absurd informs Camus's politics as his political arguments are responses to the existential anxiety produced when one considers the absurdity of human life and death. From this initial understanding of human mortality, Camus turns to answer the question of how one can and ultimately should respond to one's mortal fate.

Phase Two: Existential Anxiety and the Revolt Against the Absurdity of Human Existence

Upon recognizing the absurdity of human existence, Camus states that there are three[xxxiv] primary recourses: taking one's own life (suicide), taking a leap of faith (religion) or revolting against the absurd. In his play, "Caligula," and in his novel, *The Stranger*, Camus details different experiences of individuals recognizing the absurd. However, the two early works of fiction do not provide any useful approaches for how humans ought to act in the face of the absurdity of human experience. As López-Santiago notes in his work on Camus, "Caligula and *The Stranger* are works primarily concentrating on putting forth existential and epistemological questions, not clear answers" (2014, p. 56). The question that proceeds from Camus's notion of the absurd is how one ought to respond to the anxiety induced by death? In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus begins to explain how one should respond to the feeling of existential anxiety produced by the absurd, and this response is revolt.

[xxxiv] There are three primary responses, but Camus does insinuate that one can also "hope." It is not perfectly clear that "hope" and the religious leap of faith are entirely separate options, and it is of no great consequence to conflate the two.

Camus's Rejection of Suicide

Philosophical discourse on suicide frequently centers on whether individuals have the right to take their own lives, and not whether suicide is or is not an acceptable response to existential anxiety.[xxxv] One philosopher who did view suicide as an appropriate ethical response to the human condition is Philipp Mainländer. While Mainländer was influenced by German philosopher and noted pessimist Arthur Schopenhauer (who denied suicide as an appropriate response to existential anxiety) Mainländer would deviate from Schopenhauer. American philosopher Frederick Beiser explains that Mainländer advocated suicide as a solution to one's suffering. Beiser states that for Mainländer "Whoever cannot bear the burden of life … should 'throw it off'" (2016). Mainländer, however, is an exception to the rule; most existentialists do not advocate for suicide as a solution to existential anguish.

Romanian-born existentialist Emil Cioran may be the philosopher who is most sympathetic to pro-suicide arguments without endorsing suicide as an appropriate response to existential anxiety. Cioran romanticized suicide and those who successfully took their own lives, yet he maintained that the human desire to live was instinctual. While Cioran did not commit suicide, he was personally and professionally obsessed with the prospect of killing himself. Cioran, however, does not advocate suicide and states that "It's not worth the bother of killing yourself, since you always kill yourself too late" (1976, p. 32). Camus rejects suicide as an appropriate response to the existential

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[xxxv] Hume (1789) and Schopenhauer (2004) both argue that one has the right to take his or her own life but neither promote suicide as a solution to human suffering. Kant conversely argues that suicide is inherently unethical and a "violation of one's duty to other human beings" (1991, p. 218). Additionally, sociologist Émile Durkheim (2005) conducted the first significant academic case study of suicide in 1897 but his work classified four typologies of suicidal reasoning, rather than considering suicide in a normative sense.

anxieties one encounters due to the presence of death – opposing Mainländer – and his rejection extends beyond Cioran's mild dismissal.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus exclaims that suicide is a confession that "life is too much for you" or simply that life "is not worth the trouble" (2004b, p. 497). Camus determines that suicide is not a solution to the absurd conundrum. The world itself is not absurd, but it is unreasonable. What is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational world and the human desire for reason, purpose, and clarity. The absurd therefore depends upon the existence of both the purposeless world, and the meaning-seeking human beings inhabiting this world.

Suicide is not a solution to the absurd conundrum, but instead it upsets the absurd's equilibrium like weighing down one side of the scales. Suicide destroys the delicate balance of the human condition by destroying one of the two necessary conditions that produce the absurd; the human being. Suicide evades answering the challenge of how to live in an ultimately meaningless universe. Camus explains:

> To destroy one of its [the absurd's] terms is to destroy the whole. There can be no absurd outside the human mind. Thus, like everything else, the absurd ends with death. But there can be no absurd outside this world either. And it is by this elementary criterion that I judge the notion of the absurd to be essential and consider that it can stand as the first of my truths. The rule of method alluded to above appears here. If I judge that a thing is true, I must preserve it. If I attempt to solve a problem, at least I must not by that very solution conjure away one of the terms of the problem. (Camus 2004b, p. 517)

Suicide negates the human aspect of the absurd dilemma and negating one of the two elements of the absurd is not a solution to the conundrum. Rather than succumb to suicidal intuitions due to existential anxiety, Camus determines that revolt, as stated, is how to answer the challenge of the absurd. For Camus, revolt – living well despite a mandatory death sentence – is a more appropriate response to the absurd than suicide.

In the chapters that follow, I will briefly highlight how neither Black Lives Matter nor the Alt-Right advocate for suicide as an appropriate response to the existential anxiety associated with death. While self-immolation has been used as a form of political protest, neither social movement utilizes suicide as a political tactic. Even though some individuals who supported the movements have taken their own lives, suicide has not been supported as a tactic by either social movement. Finding suicide to be an insufficient response to the absurd, Camus considers but also rejects the religious leap of faith.

Camus's Rejection of Religion

Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard is likely the best-known existentialist who argued for an embrace of religion as a response to the existential anxiety associated with human mortality. While Kierkegaard was, not unlike Camus, focused on the human concern with death, Kierkegaard's Christianity led to his rejection of human finitude and he instead embraced a religious notion of transcendence. As Kierkegaard states in *The Sickness Unto Death*, "Christianly understood death is by no means the last thing of all" (2013, p. 264). This Christian denial of death as the end of human life is not based on logic or reason but is based on faith and belief as Kierkegaard says, "to believe is precisely to lose one's understanding in order to win God" (2013, p. 310). For Kierkegaard, the response to living in a world that appears purposeless is to take the now famous leap of faith; to abandon logic and reason and faithfully embrace the divine. Kierkegaard is not alone in espousing religion and God as a solution to the existential anxiety humans experience due to their mortality.

Lutheran theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich[xxxvi] wrote in *The Courage to Be* that humans have an anxiety which "is the existential awareness of nonbeing … Anxiety is finitude, experienced as one's own finitude" (2000, p. 35). Tillich later states that "the anxiety of death overshadows all concrete anxieties and gives them their ultimate seriousness" (2000, p. 43). Tillich's solution to addressing the anxieties produced by human mortality is to embrace a notion of "the God Above God" which is an explication of God as beyond human interpretation. The concept of the God Above God, Tillich argues, provides the source of courage for humans to live and to find meaning and purpose in their lives despite existential anxiety. Tillich, like Kierkegaard before him, embraces some notion of God as the means of curtailing the existential anxieties produced by death. Camus ultimately rejects religion and the leap of faith taken by Kierkegaard and Tillich as a solution to the absurdity of life for a similar reason as he rejects suicide; religious leaps of faith upset the balance of the absurd as people deny the meaninglessness of human life and death and posit meaning onto a meaninglessness universe.

In *Sisyphus*, Camus refutes physical suicide as a solution to the absurd before refuting "philosophical suicide" – religion– on similar grounds. Like suicide, religious adherence is an attempt to circumvent the absurd by destroying the one of its two conditions. If suicide destroys the human who is seeking meaning, religion posits meaning upon a meaningless existence without justification. Religion falsely credits the

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[xxxvi] While Tillich may be a seemingly unusual choice for analysis, his work was highly influential to Martin Luther King Jr. who wrote his dissertation on Tillich (1955), wrote an article on existentialism and specifically addressed Tillich (1960) and referenced Tillich in his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963). King and Tillich met while King was obtaining his dissertation and it is clear that Tillich's theological existentialism motivated King's work during another famous American social movement, the Civil Rights Movement.

meaningless and purposeless universe with being purposive. This, Camus argues, is largely due to an illogical leap of faith based on a lack of empirical evidence. In a passage from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus exclaims,

> I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms. What I touch, what resists me – that is what I understand. And these two certainties – my appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle – I also know that I cannot reconcile them. What other truth can I admit without lying, without bringing in a hope I lack and which means nothing within the limits of my condition? (Camus 2004b, pp. 533-534)

Religious solutions to the absurd cannot satisfy Camus because they are without justification. Camus refuses to take a leap of faith and argues that we ought to live solely with the existential truths we can confirm – our human desire for meaning and a universe that lacks purpose.

Only by living honestly within the bounds of the absurdity of life can one truly resist the potentially overwhelming anxieties of human mortality. Suicide eliminates the human aspect of the absurd and religion denies the meaninglessness of the universe. Camus, after dismissing suicide and religion as potential solutions to the absurd conundrum, argues that revolt is the best response to the absurd.

Camus's Revolt Against the Absurd

Camus argues that one must passionately and freely revolt against the human condition because of (rather than despite) the hopelessness of our existential circumstance: finitude and meaninglessness. Revolt is an action of living freely and passionately in the present moment rather than hoping that one's existential future might be anything but absurd. This form of hopelessness, in that it encourages revolt can be a

motivation for action generally and in the context of social movements, revolt can motivate collective action.

In *Sisyphus*, Camus explains that upon recognizing the absurdity of existence, "One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt" which he defines as "the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it" (2004b, p. 536). One revolts by insisting on living even though all humans are condemned to death. It is a confrontation with the absurd as one revolts against the conclusion that one will die and one's life will ultimately lack eternal meaning. Camus finds two additional philosophical conclusions that arise from confrontation with the absurd – freedom and passion – both of which can be understood in light of revolt.

For Camus, freedom is one's acceptance of one's limited time on earth; a perspective that Camus shares with many of his existentially concerned peers. It is a recognition that one need not adhere to preconceived roles or titles but instead, one can live in the moment without titular attachments. It is a freedom that entails an acceptance of the finitude and a refusal to hope for eternity. One is free to live a life without illusory consolation that the absurdity of the human experience can be otherwise; death is inevitable, but life may be lived well and without artificial restraints. Passion is explained by Camus as an enthralled consciousness. What matters for Camus is not the "best living" but the "most living." By most living, Camus means the highest quantity of conscious experiences. He explains that two people who live the same number of years will have the same number of experiences. The one of them who is most conscious of his or her revolt and freedom has lived to the maximum extent and has done the most living. Recognition of the absurd may appear daunting, but Camus explains that one's revolt – a life lived freely and passionately despite the anxiety produced by one's impeding death –

is the most appropriate response to the absurd. Revolt, for Camus, is personified by Sisyphus.

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus defies the gods and enchains Death so that humans would cease to die but Death is eventually freed from bondage. In lieu of death, Sisyphus is punished for attempting to eradicate mortality and is sentenced to push a rock up a mountain for all eternity. Upon reaching the summit, the rock rolls down the mountain and Sisyphus is required to repeat this task of ascending the mountain with the rock. For Camus, Sisyphus embodies the absurd hero since he despises the idea of death, passionately embraces life and yet his life is consumed by a pointless and repetitive task.

Sisyphus does not fall victim to one of the insufficient responses to the absurdity of his condition: he cannot turn to the gods who have punished him (religious leap of faith) nor can he or would he take his own life. Instead, Camus envisions Sisyphus as acknowledging his reality ("He too concludes that all is well") and smiling in the face of his endless task as "One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (2004b, p. 593). Smiling in the face of his fate, and yet continuing to push the rock, Sisyphus is the embodiment of Camus's revolt against death; he recognizes his fate but he is not emotionally crushed under its daunting weight. It is this Sisyphean task that divides Camus from some of his existential peers who embrace either suicide or the religious leap of faith. While Camus details some examples of how one may pursue revolt, it is his turn to "conquest" or towards political revolt which helps shed further light on American social movements.

Phase Three: Camus's Conqueror – Turning Outwards Towards the Political

While Camus did not write an explicit work of political theory until *The Rebel*, he begins to sow the seeds of political theorizing in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. One may recognize the absurdity of life given the imminence of death and may passionately and

freely revolt by living despite one's initial feelings of existential anxiety. In *Sisyphus*, Camus sketches out three archetypes for how one might accomplish an existential revolt: Don Juanism, the artist, and the conqueror. Camus's third example, the conqueror, is his first call for a turn towards political action as a form of revolt. Camus does not refer to conquest or the conqueror in the manner that one might expect as it is not a forceful subjugation of some place and its inhabitants. Instead, Camus uses the idea of conquest to explain that one may revolt against the absurdity of life through participation in collective, political action. One's outward turn towards the political – as a revolt against death – again places Camus in opposition to some other existentialists who instead argue in favor of an individualistic response to existential anxiety produced by death.

German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer may be the best example of an existential thinker who supported an internal, rather than outward, response to existential anxiety. Schopenhauer viewed the human condition as one of incessant suffering; he expressed that having not been born would have been preferable to existence and he stated that "the much-lamented brevity of life might be the best thing about it" (2010, p. 351). While Schopenhauer was perhaps the dreariest of pessimists, he did not advocate suicide, but instead he argued for an internal retreat from the cause of life's suffering which he identified as desire or will. In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer argues that humans are driven by an insatiable will. It is the will's desirous nature which causes endless human suffering and obtaining what the will desires is not a release from suffering as fulfilment leads instead to boredom (Schopenhauer 2004). Whether one lacks or obtains what the will desires, Schopenhauer sees the individual as existentially burdened.

In turn, Schopenhauer proposes ascetic denial of the will. He explains that the denial of the will to live – the grandest denial of the will – "does not in any way imply the

annihilation of a substance; it means merely the act of non-volition: that which previously *willed, wills* no more" (Schopenhauer 2004, p. 61). This denial is a solitary act as opposed to a collective or a political act. While Schopenhauer sees the denial of will as the denial of illusory individuality (or of the "self"), the act of denying is itself not a collective or political action.[xxxvii] Instead, the denial of the will to live is an individual revolt against death as it is a denial of the human instinct which desires life. Schopenhauer does not desire death but instead refuses desire altogether and in doing so revolts against the human will that causes suffering. While Schopenhauer's individualistic revolt involves a rejection of the world – a pessimistic "no" – Nietzsche's revolt is an enthusiastic "yes."

While Nietzsche was greatly interested and influenced by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche's existential revolt involves an individual's embrace of the world rather than a shedding of the will. Nietzsche's existentialism is a response to his classic phrase "God is dead" which is an acknowledgement of the historical moment wherein religious justifications for existence and action had been intellectually eroded (1974). Nietzsche considers how one ought to respond to "the repudiation of worth, purpose, desirability" (Nietzsche 2006, p. 3) and the loss of value in European society. In short, Nietzsche raises the question that Camus will later address of how one ought to act in a world lacking transcendent meaning or purpose and wherein all people are inevitably sentenced to death.

Nietzsche's revolt is individualistic as he praises and encourages superior individuals to achieve self-affirmation or self-determination; Nietzsche's notion of the

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[xxxvii] That is not to suggest that Schopenhauer did not have a political theory in his works. See Schopenhauer's short piece "On Law and Politics" in his *Essays and Aphorisms* (2004) and Matthew Slaboch's (2018) chapter on Schopenhauer's political theory in *A Road to Nowhere*.

Übermensch (1985). Rather than turn towards false transcendence and outdated religious values, Nietzsche (through his character Zarathustra) praises the Übermensch – the "overman" or "superman" – as the creator of new, earthly values. The Übermensch is considered a goal for humanity[xxxviii] and presents us with a manner of how to respond to the absurdity of life, through individual creation and fulfilment and not through any notions of collectivity. Nietzsche bemoans collectives as encouraging "herd" mentality. A focus on the herd of humanity, Nietzsche argues, may be instinctual but the herd animal is profoundly mediocre, timid, and bored (1974).

For Nietzsche, thinking and acting collectively is counterproductive to the Übermensch who could achieve greatness as an individual acting against the limitations posed by the mediocrity of the herd. Contrarily, the herd helps to create what Nietzsche terms the "last man" who is risk averse, comfort-seeking and focused on security. The last man is the antithesis of the Übermensch and while the Übermensch has the potential for self-affirmative greatness, the last man is focused on egalitarianism and modest aspirations. Nietzsche states that the race of last men "is as ineradicable as the flea-beetle" which affirms his claim that last men may gain safety, comfort, and security and generally avoid risk taking and other difficult tasks (1985, p. 17) while he uses an animalistic metaphor to highlight the limited thinking and low levels of desirability associated with the herd. Nietzsche's rejection of collectivity does not imply a rejection of politics.[xxxix] However, his response to the challenge of a lack of transcendence in a human life that is promised death remains focused on the individual level. Camus, while enamored with Nietzsche (Illing 2017), offers a collective and political, rather than a

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[xxxviii] Men could become the Übermensch, while women could, at best, hope to birth one who becomes an Übermensch.

[xxxix] I largely agree with Beiner's (2018) interpretation of Nietzsche's aristocratic politics.

solely individual response to the existential anxieties associated with human death in a meaningless universe.

Camus's works do not begin with a strong call for collective action as Caligula, Meursault and Sisyphus are all individuals who are faced with the existential anxiety upon recognizing the absurdity of the human condition. Yet in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus begins formulating what would become his political, rather than his individual, response to the absurd through his articulation of conquest and his example of the conqueror. If Caligula, Meursault, and Sisyphus fail to provide enlightening approaches to revolting against the existential anxiety one has because of death, the conqueror provides a more concrete and political approach.

Camus explains that "Conquerors know that action is in itself useless" in that all actions will eventually be lost unto the infinite void of the universe, but he continues by stating that "There is but one useful action, that of remaking man and the earth" (2004b, p. 563). The task of "remaking man and the earth" remains out of the reach for the conqueror since success would require world and human control. Yet the conqueror – the political actor – fights for political progress. Camus explains that the conqueror is free of any delusions of eternal victory, but this awareness of contingency does not lead to a political quietism as he states, "If I choose action, don't think that contemplation is like an unknown country to me. But it cannot give me everything, and, deprived of the eternal, I want to ally myself with time" (Camus 2004b, p. 562).

The conqueror's focus on political struggle is an authentic concern with humanity's needs. Political conquerors acknowledge the limitations of human life and yet resist the nihilistic temptation to give up because political victories are, at most, temporary. Conquest is an act of revolt as Camus explains the idea in *Sisyphus*; it is a revolt literally against some form of political oppression, and it is also an existential

revolt as one acts despite the reality that eternal victory is impossible. However, Camus does not consider all political acts to be equally justifiable. In *The Rebel*, Camus differentiates rebellion and revolution and argues in favor of the former as the appropriate collective political tactic.

Phase Four: Camus's Support of Rebellion and Retort of Revolution

The Myth of Sisyphus presents readers with the absurdity of the human condition – the fact that humans seek meaning in a meaningless world that promises only death – and begins to offer responses to the absurd. In Camus's subsequent "Letters to a German Friend" (1988a) (written during the Nazi occupation of France) he defines injustice as human contributions to suffering and death. For Camus, the human condition is itself unjust, as Martin Crowley explains, Camus is "motivated by his sense of the fundamental injustice of the human condition (put simply: that we suffer and die in the midst of a meaningless universe)" (2007, p. 94). If the absurd is the unjust condition of human existence, human injustice is the intensification of the absurd by contributing to human suffering and death. Camus, in the "Letters," begins to articulate his argument that what is crucial in political action is to remain faithful to rectifying or minimizing political injustices; to struggle against politically imposed suffering and death.

In the context of an absurd existence, where transcendent meaning is lacking and only death is promised, Camus questions whether all political actions against injustice are equal, or whether there are limitations of acceptability. Camus's goal in *The Rebel* is to reject the nihilism that the absurdity of life and death might imply by articulating the bounds of acceptable human actions. Although it may appear that a lack of transcendent meaning to life implies that all courses of action are permitted, Camus articulates that

there are limits to acceptable political actions through his distinction between rebellion and revolution.

Sociologist Vincenzo Ruggiero referred to "new" social movements – those that Jürgen Habermas (1981) identified as defined by immaterial motives – as movements which "do not rely on a precisely identifiable set of ideologies" (2001 p. 48). Ruggiero differentiates these new movements from older, *teleological* movements which "are inspired by the pursuit of a final stage in society, characterized by definitive harmony" (ibid). Camus argues in favor of rebellions which definitionally fight for systemic socioeconomic and political overhauls without sacrificing immediate reforms and improvements that will help actual, suffering people. Camus's rebellions are juxtaposed with his rejection of revolutions which are *teleologically* motivated and aim towards a conclusive, and permanent social change.

A rebel, Camus explains, is responding to some injustice and in doing so, is articulating the limitation of acceptability. Camus states that a rebel simultaneously says "no" and "yes." The "no" is a renunciation of injustice; it is an individual statement that I, as a human being, do not deserve the injustices that I am facing. It is a "no" to further injustice or a statement "against the suffering of life and death" (Camus 1991, p. 24). The implication of such a rebellion is that no human beings deserve the injustices that the rebel is opposing.[xl] The "yes," is therefore an affirmation of the common value of humanity. Since one rebels or revolts in the name of something, the positive affirmation is the rebel's support for humanity as the individual conqueror now expresses collective

[xl] The notion is not only do I, as an individual, not deserve to suffer from injustice, but it extends this individual proposition to a collective understanding that human beings in general do not deserve to suffer from injustice.

political concerns.[xli] The "yes" is the assertion of the value of human life and the implication that the rebel will likewise not exceed the bounds of acceptable behavior. Rebellion must, if it is to remain true, not exceed the limits of acceptability; it must remain committed to fighting (and must avoid contributing to) injustice, defined as human suffering and death in a meaningless universe.

Rebellion is limited as it begins from the experience of suffering from injustice and seeks to remedy whatever injustices are beyond the limits of acceptability. Beginning from a politics of experience implies a rejection of transcendent moral principles – including those to which one may contemporarily subscribe such as universal human nature or dignity – as a preconceived justification for political action. Rebellion instead refuses "the tendency to subordinate the embodied presence of others to a tool in a war of abstractions, it always strives to see them as concretely situated, living individuals" (Mrovlje 2017, p. 7). The theoretical content of Camus's rebellions is "not based on psychological identification, community of interest or definite cause that presses others into agreement and instructs on the course of rebellious action. It is grounded in revealing the individual experiences of the absurd, suffering, injustice, or exile as (human) situations common to all" (Mrovlje 2017, p. 8). As rebellions are inspired by an amelioration of human suffering, they are endowed with limits; a rebellion must address suffering and not contribute to or further suffering.

The primary limitation that a rebel accepts is the limit on killing another person. Stephen Bronner explains that in *The Rebel,* Camus makes it clear that "the killing of

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[xli] Camus's reformulation of Descartes's cogito, "I rebel – therefore we exist" (1991, p. 22). While Camus sees this move as one that acknowledges the collective of humanity, it can, I will argue, be understood as a smaller collective or subgroup. For both Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right, the movements understand the collective through their respective racial prisms.

another person is always wrong unless the murderer is himself or herself prepared to die as well. The murder of the other must be considered from the standpoint of one's own death" (1999, p. 161).[xlii] Killing another person must remain a tactic of absolutely last resort, as it can never be entirely justified. Camus explains in the "Letters to a German Friend" (1988a) that the French had to weigh the philosophical implications of resisting Nazi occupation since it would inevitably involve violence and death. Camus's "Letters" consider "the moral cost to the victim of using violence to counter violence" (Bronner 2002, p. 40) even in the most drastic case of anti-fascism.[xliii]

Unfortunately, Camus argues, political rebels can forget the initial impulse against injustice that motivated the rebellion's existence. Revolutions, while they originate in rebellion against injustice, do not continuously fight against injustice, but instead become *teleological* movements which pursue an "end of history" or (in Ruggiero's previously quoted words) a "final stage in society." Conversely, Fred Willhoite Jr. explains that in a Camusian rebellion "All abstract and futurized ideals must be subordinated to a concern for concrete and immediate human needs, to the struggle against present injustice and oppression" (1961, p. 409). Revolutions abandon the concern for immediate justice – for alleviating ongoing suffering and death facing a population – and focus instead on a *teleological* project of remaking the world.

[xlii] Camus's limit on violence may appear to excuse or justify, for example, suicide bombers. However, Camus's general commitment to nonviolence, and especially his requirement that violence must be used only as a tactic of absolute last resort likely overrides the requirement that one who kills must also be prepared to die. Other considerations, such as a suicide bomber's indiscriminate killing of civilian non-combatants would render the tactic unacceptable.

[xliii] Camus considers the same concern in his play "The Just Assassins" (1958b) (*Le Justes* in French, literally translated as "The Just."). The play tells the story of Russian revolutionaries who ponder the ethics of assassinating the Grand Duke.

In forgetting their initial desire to oppose injustice, revolutions have the potential to become unjust. Camus details the difference in approach between rebellion and revolution:

> Rebellion is, by nature, limited in scope. It is no more than an incoherent pronouncement. Revolution, on the contrary, originates in the realm of ideas. Specifically, it is the injection of ideas into historical experience, while rebellion is only the movement that leads from individual experience into the realm of ideas. While even the collective history of a movement of rebellion is always that of a fruitless struggle with facts, of an obscure protest which involves neither methods nor reasons, a revolution is an attempt to shape actions to ideas, to fit the world into a theoretic frame. That is why rebellion kills men while revolution destroys both men and principles. (1991, p. 106)

Here Camus overstates the potentially deadly nature of rebellions and one need not interpret Camus's rebels as inherently or necessarily murderous or violent. Rebellions can kill or may be violent, but "Violence can be justified, if at all, only as an unwelcome necessity, to be adopted in full awareness of its unacceptability, and not excused by an external, supposedly infallible, historical law" (Crowley 2007, pp. 99-100). When a rebellion kills, it recognizes that its violence can never be fully philosophically justified or condoned.

Camus, however, is not a pacifist as he recognizes violence and murder as potentially necessary within liberatory rebellions. A rebel does not begin with violent intentions, and the decision to use violence as a tool or tactic must be deeply debated and considered only as a last resort (Bronner 1999, 2002). Killing a human being "must remain the greatest exception to the ordinary human experience" (Foley 2008b).[xliv] To

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[xliv] Foley (2008b) details elements of the scholarly article debating exactly the limit that Camus sets on violence. While I will not restate the debate here, there is at least consensus that Camus does set significant limitations on what is considered to be acceptable political violence.

absolutely reject murder as a rebellious tactic is akin to silently accepting the murders of the rebel's opposition, or as George Kateb states, Camus rejects pacifism "because it is acquiescent in the various injustices and inhumanities that men inflect on one another" (1976, p. 39). Since absolute pacifism could negate rebellion, Camus (1991) neither condones murder, nor denies it as a plausibly necessity. Murder for Camus is, as Isaac states, "both right and wrong, just and unjust" (2006, p. 84).

Revolutions, while they may have once been rebellions, no longer concern themselves with those suffering from actual injustices, and extended beyond the previously mentioned limits of acceptable action. Revolutions are *teleological* movements which desire a final, end goal – a conclusive stage of history that could theoretically end all injustice – and act violently to achieve this goal.

For *teleological* revolutions, the idealized ends justify the means. This implies, however, that the limits of acceptable political acts are no longer respected; any means are deemed acceptable in the name of the end.[xlv] For Camus, revolutions, in order to achieve some end goal, may act unjustly by contributing to suffering and death. In doing so, revolutions not only may kill human beings but they also abandon the very principle – the fight against injustice – that initially sparked the movement. While rebellion implies limitations, revolution discards these limits for the idealized future as Camus explains "The golden age, postponed until the end of history and coincident … justifies everything" (1991, pp. 207-208).

[xlv] Camus speaks of this as "an absolute end, as in nihilistic ideologies (anything goes, success is the only thing worth talking about) or in those philosophies which make History an absolute end (Hegel, followed by Marx: the end being a classless society, everything is good that leads to it)" (2007, p. 34). These "absolute ends" are why I argue Camus is specifically opposing *teleological* pursuits.

Camus argued that Soviet oppression of the proletariat was a form of state terror that postponed justice and morality until the achievement of full communism. Friedrich Engels, in *Anti-Dühring* (1978), argues that morality is contingent upon social relations and there are no universal moral principles or standards. For Engels, debating the morality of Marxism was to suggest that bourgeois morality should dictate the actions of a communist revolution and transition. Engels aimed towards proletarian morality in a hypothetical communist future. Camus understood Engels's approach as sacrificing both theoretical morality and justice in the present, and as destroying, in practice, the very proletariat who Engels supported. Revolutions aim towards a *telos*, and in doing so, neglect or may contribute to injustice defined as the actual suffering and death of actual people.

Political theorist Matthew Bowker explains, "The rebel begins by seeking to defy the forces that excuse injustice, but if he ends badly, it is because in so doing he abandons the difficult integration of tensions that motivated his revolt, yielding to the temptation to idealize his own force and his own excuses in their place" (2013, p. 137). The revolutionary seeks to remake the world and force it towards a final, historical goal. The once debased rebel is no longer concerned with alleviating the injustice of suffering and death but is focused instead on domination; "The slave begins by demanding justice and ends by wanting to wear a crown" (Camus 1991, p. 25). While Camus is arguing against *teleological* revolution in theory, he found an intellectual and political enemy in his once friend, Jean-Paul Sartre.

When *The Rebel* was published, Sartre was the director of the editorial board of *Les Temps Modernes*. Sartre selected Francis Jeanson to review *The Rebel* and Jeanson's review was scathing. Camus believed that Jeanson's review was the work of Sartre and Camus responded to Jeanson's review by addressing Sartre (as editor, not by name),

rather than by addressing Jeanson. While Camus lacked evidence to his claim, there was nothing in Sartre's response to Camus that suggests that he disagreed with Jeanson's review (Foley 2008a). Camus, in critiquing *teleologically* motivated revolutions, indirectly critiqued Sartre, who persisted in his attachment to Marx's dialectical materialism. Marxism, Camus argued in *The Rebel*, supports a *telos* – communism as the historical end of all class conflict – that could endorse injustices committed against even the proletariat. Camus therefore rejected Marxism for its *telos* which, in practice, he argues legitimated the Stalinist regime and its actions.[xlvi]

At the time, Sartre retained support for the Soviet Union.[xlvii] Camus saw Sartre as a rebel who lost sight of the suffering proletariat and endorsed state terror through his support of the Soviet Union. Much of Sartre's work deals with the existential concerns for human freedom and Sartre would attempt to negotiate a philosophical paradox between the free individual and the historical determinism implied by Marx's dialectical materialism. Sartre would eventually turn from Soviet support, but his work continued to focus on reconciling Marxism and existentialism. Sartre's *Search for a Method* (1963), for example, argues that Marxism was corrupted by Soviets and was abused for Soviet political gains. While Sartre becomes less enamored with orthodox Marxism and the Soviet Union, he does not abandon the Marxist pursuit of communism and his expansive

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[xlvi] Camus states in his response to Jeanson, addressed to Sartre, that "everything proceeds in your article as if you are defending Marxism as an implicit dogma without being able to affirm it as an explicit policy" (2004a, p. 118). Camus accuses Jeanson and Sartre of excusing the policies of Stalin's Soviet Union in the name of one day achieving an idealized Marxist and communist *telos*. This excusing of injustice in the name of one day achieving justice is one of Camus's chief concerns with revolution in *The Rebel*.

[xlvii] Although Sartre was not blind to, for example, Soviet work camps which he denounced in an editorial co-authored with another of Sartre's friends turned intellectual enemies, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Forsdick 2007).

Critique of Dialectical Reason (2004) is an expanded defense of Marxism as the pathway to achieving existential freedom.

Camus's position in *The Rebel* is that *teleological* movements can abandon the pursuit of alleviating human suffering and instead pursue a theoretical end to all human suffering in some hypothesized future. These theoretical ends can, at their worst, justify and contribute to the injustice of sorrow and death and may treat "the individual as a means rather than an end" (Bronner 1999, p. 158). Sartre's continued focus on Marxism and on achieving communism, despite his mounting critiques of the Soviet Union's domestic (work camps) and international (imperialism) policies, underlies Camus's concerns. For Camus, Sartre's endorsement of communism led to his quietism on Soviet atrocities.[xlviii] While Sartre may have been personally and politically concerned with human suffering, his commitment to communism embodies Camusian revolution since human suffering in practice was overlooked in the name of theoretically eliminating all suffering in the hypothesized future.

Camus presents an analogy of his view on the acceptable limitations of violence and death in speaking about his home of Algeria, and the tactics undertaken by National Liberation Front (FLN) revolutionaries. In the preface to his Algerian reports, Camus states "if anyone … still thinks heroically that one's brother must die rather than one's principles, I shall go no farther than to admire him from a distance. I am not of his stamp" (1988b, p. 113). The FLN's violent tactics were aimed at achieving liberation from colonization, and the FLN's approach was deadly. Michael Walzer explains that Camus could never side with the FLN because of its revolutionary approach: "Camus was committed to a particular people, the FLN intellectuals to a cause" (1988, p. 146).

[xlviii] Bronner (1999) attributes this to Sartre's nostalgia for the "heroic years" of the Soviet Union (1918-1923).

The death of human beings must be the last resort and Camus supported the efforts of the French resistance to the Nazis during World War II for said reason. Conversely, Camus saw Sartre as embracing revolutionary political approaches that abandoned and harmed actual people in the name of achieving a hypothetical end to all suffering for humanity in the future. The present moment, and the people inhabiting it could be sacrificed for the *telos,* and Camus would never endorse this revolutionary proposition.

Camus published a series of essays in the newspaper *Combat* entitled "Neither Victims nor Executioners" and this statement exemplifies his "anti-absolutist" rebellion (Walzer 1988, p. 148). The rebel is not a victim, for in saying "no," the rebel fights against the injustice of suffering and death. The rebel is not an executioner as the rebel, in saying "yes" that humanity has value, refuses to act unjustly by harming or killing in the name of an ideal. A rebel cannot excuse today's injustices in the name of theoretically ending injustice in the future. Rebellion persists as a refusal to accept injustice and as a persistent struggle against injustices committed upon the suffering. As neither victim nor executioner, the rebel engages with politics in a Sisyphean manner, and fights for an end to human suffering and death, while acknowledging that no victory is eternally guaranteed. While Sisyphus persisted in solitude, rebellion is a corporate effort that affirms human value.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have extracted a political theory from several of Camus's works. Camus argues that human life and death is inherently absurd since humans desire meaning but ultimately will die in a meaningless universe. Recognizing the absurdity of human existence can cause an individual to succumb to existential anxiety. Instead,

Camus argues that one can participate in collective, political rebellion to contest human contributions to suffering and death.

In the next chapter, I analyze institutional and ideational components of both Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right. The chapter does not apply the Camusian theory to the cases, but instead situates the two movements in some historical context and provides a justification for why these two movements are appropriate for a theoretical comparison. In short, the movements have structural similarities, and are both ideationally focused on collective identity. Only after detailing why these two movements are appropriate for a comparison will I then apply the Camusian theory to the respective movements.

In chapter four, I argue that Black Lives Matter collectively responds to the anxieties produced by state sanctioned death through a political revolt that is not *teleologically* motivated but is continually concerned with improving the lives of suffering (or potentially suffering) Black Americans. Black Lives Matter can therefore be understood as an example of a Camusian rebellion. In chapter five, I turn to the Alt-Right to elucidate a key difference from Black Lives Matter. The Alt-Right is similarly responding to the anxieties produced by fears of death – albeit social rather than physical death – and the Alt-Right turns towards a passionate revolt. However, the Alt-Right abandons its own principles in its pursuit of a *telos* and in doing so commits injustices by committing acts of violence and murder against the white Americans the movement claims to support. The Alt-Right, because it abandons suffering white people in the name of an ideal political *telos*, can be viewed as a Camusian revolution.

CHAPTER #3

ON THE TWO CASES: WHY BLACK LIVES MATTER AND THE ALT-RIGHT ARE FIT FOR COMPARISON

In the previous chapter, I extracted a theoretical approach to understanding social movements from the works and philosophy of Albert Camus. Over the next two chapters, I will apply the Camusian social movement theory to highlight the movements' respective pathways from responding to the existential anxiety associated with death, to the divergent forms of collective action that the movements have pursued; Black Lives Matter as a Camusian rebellion, and the Alt-Right as a Camusian revolution. However, before proceeding to apply the Camusian theory to the cases, I will explain why these two cases are fit for comparison and contrast.

Although Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right appear to be dichotomous movements with very little in common, the two movements have surprising similarities. In this chapter, I will analyze three aspects of the movements – two institutional components and one ideational – in order to show that the movements are fit for comparison. First, both Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right are decentralized and non-hierarchical. The movements' rejections of hierarchy offer a structural locus of comparation between the two movements while they exist in stark contrast to some of their respective intellectual predecessors. Second, both Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right operate outside of the formal political sphere, and challenge institutional norms and procedures, unlike some of their important predecessors. Finally, I will focus on the

ideational importance of race that underlies both movements, and the divergence of the movements' respective views on group identity. I additionally will address gender and sexuality which are collective identities that the movements consider in divergent manners. Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right are most dissonant with respect to their views on race (and on collective identity generally), and their understandings of collective identity are ideational components that allow for both comparison and contrast. For the three aforementioned reasons – decentralized organizational structures, outsider approaches to political action, and focuses on group identity – Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right will be shown to be appropriate for the comparative case study that follows this chapter.

Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right as Anti-Hierarchical Movements

Both Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right reject hierarchical leadership models. Black Lives Matter intentionally has avoided the hierarchical tradition of the Civil Rights movement which relied upon charismatic and well-known individual leaders who "tended to be male, straight, and Christian" (Spence 2019). The founders of Black Lives Matter – Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi – do not refer to themselves as the movement's sole leaders and use the term "leaderful" to positively describe localized leadership of the movement's affiliate organizations. The Alt-Right's lack of hierarchical leadership is perhaps less intentional and more circumstantial due to the grassroots development of the movement and its inherently decentralized, online presence. The Alt-Right does have highly influential and well-known public faces such as its founder,

Richard Spencer. However, Spencer and other public figures within the Alt-Right are not the movement's leaders in the traditional notion. While I will argue that Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right are different in many regards, the two movements' lack of respective hierarchical structures render them more similar to one another than to their intellectual and political predecessors.

Black Lives Matter operates without hierarchical leadership (Hoffman et al. 2016; Hooker 2016). While Garza, Cullors and Tometi are credited with beginning the movement (Updegrove et al. 2018) some mistakenly refer to the three founders of Black Lives Matter as the movement's leaders (Eidelson, 2016; Rickford 2016; Jones-Eversley et al. 2017). Black Lives Matter is a decentralized global network and is comprised of over 40 chapters in the United States and in other countries (Black Lives Matter, Herstory). Black politics in the United States during the latter twentieth century was dominated by the "charismatic leadership model" personified by Martin Luther King Jr., Jesse Jackson, and Al Sharpton (Harris 2015). The leadership roles were hierarchically structured and disproportionately dominated by men. Conversely, Black Lives Matter has prioritized a "bottom-up insurgency led by ordinary people" rather than the "top-down approach of old guard civil rights organizations" (ibid). Despite the clear shift from the older leadership model, Black Lives Matter rejects the claim that the movement is "leaderless."

In an interview with Kaavya Asoka for *Dissent,* historian Marcia Chatelain states "I hate it when I hear people call Black Lives Matter leaderless" before asking rhetorically, "If there are no leaders, then who is getting the word out? Who is getting the

young people on buses and cars to appear before state houses and to lie down in train stations? Who is sending out the calls for protests? Who is managing the social media presence?" (2015, pp. 59-60). Chatelain's concern stems from the historical trend of rendering Black women, and their contributions to activism invisible. Chatelain is not alone in expressing this concern as Alicia Garza (2014) has explicitly addressed "The Theft of Black Queer Women's Work" and has focused on the important contributions of Black Lives Matter's co-founders, supporters, and globalized network.

Alicia Garza states, "#BLM, both as a network and as a movement, does not see itself as without leaders, but as a leaderful network and a leaderful movement" (2015a, pp. 24-25). Garza does, however, note that there is a structural difference between Black Lives Matter's "leaderful" approach which has a decentralized network of local leaders, and the traditional "great leader" hierarchy. Garza's co-founder, Patrisse Cullors, in an interview with Kandia Johnson (2018) of *Black Enterprise*, likewise echoes Chatelain in stating "We believe BLM is leaderful and all movements have many leaders, our movement doesn't believe in a single charismatic leader." The more equitable arrangement of power and authority which is dispersed throughout Black Lives Matter's global network does not reflect the centralized and hierarchical leadership of prior movements such as the Civil Rights Movement. Black Lives Matter has intentionally avoided the tendencies of hierarchy and patriarchy by focusing on the contributions and concerns of the multitude of its local organizers, and by prioritizing the empowerment of all, rather than by focusing on singular figures. The Alt-Right mirrors the lack of hierarchical leadership of Black Lives Matter, albeit for quite different reasons.

While Black Lives Matter has dedicated local chapters and many local voices in organizational roles, the Alt-Right is a movement that is largely – although not entirely – contained on the internet. Both movements, however, have been misrepresented in the media as having hierarchical leadership. While Richard Spencer originally invented the term "alternative right," the movement is formally leaderless, although some of its supporters such as Spencer, Jared Taylor, Greg Johnson and Andrew Anglin are rather well-known and prevalent.[xlix] Books (Main 2018; Wendling 2018), periodicals (Carroll 2016; Weigel 2016), mainstream cable news networks (Bradner 2016) and scholarly journal articles (Atkinson 2018) have all mistakenly stated that the Alt-Right has "leaders."[l] The Alt-Right, like Black Lives Matter, functions without hierarchical leadership although both movements pay homage to their founders (Spencer for the Alt-Right; Garza, Cullors and Tometi for Black Lives Matter) and their intellectual contributors (Hawley 2017).

Prominent members of the Alt-Right have confirmed that the movement does not utilize hierarchical leadership. Andrew Anglin, editor of the *Daily Stormer*, one of the most prominent American neo-Nazi websites and message boards, explains in "A

[xlix] Jared Taylor is the founder and editor of *American Renaissance* (an online white supremacist publication), Greg Johnson is the co-founder, and editor-in-chief of Counter-Currents Publishing (a white nationalist imprint), and Andrew Anglin is the founder and editor of the neo-Nazi website and forum *Daily Stormer*.

[l] *HuffPost* (Sweet 2016) not only mistakenly stated that the Alt-Right has leaders within its ranks, but also named Milo Yiannopoulos – a target of the Alt-Right's Andrew Anglin (2016b) – as one of the leaders.

Normie's Guide to the Alt-Right"[li] that the Alt-Right "is, at this point, entirely leaderless" and notes that "The mob is the movement" (2016a). A well-known Alt-Right poster who goes by "Vincent Law" explains that the movement "cannot rely on pyramid structures of authority" before citing a passage written by Aryan Nations member Louis Beam titled "Leaderless Resistance" (2017b). Even Richard spencer, who initially coined the term "Alt-Right," acknowledges that he has not been the leader of the movement as he states "The Alt-Right is what it is today not because of me; it is what it is today because I let it go. I didn't possess it, and it was taken up by all these people" (as cited in Hawley 2017, p. 68). Political scientist George Hawley explains the lack of formal leadership within the Alt-Right:

> although journalists understandably seek out, again and again, a small number of prominent figures on the Alt-Right when writing stories about the movement, the truth is that the Alt-Right is without leaders in the usual sense. It is a disorganized mob that broadly shares a number of goals and beliefs. Pepe did not become the unofficial mascot of the Alt-Right because there was a central figure telling his supporters to make Pepe their Twitter avatars but because someone decided Pepe was funny and others eventually agreed. (Hawley 2017, p. 70)

While the Alt-Right has prominent intellectual influencers and publicly known spokesmen, its lack of formal institutions and leadership structure differentiates the Alt-Right from white nationalist movements and organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan as the Alt-Right lacks anything comparable to the Klan's hierarchical structure; there is no Alt-Right equivalent to the Klan's Grand Wizard or Imperial Wizard.

[li] Normies are defined as those who are not Alt-Right members and who are "programmed" to not accept the supposed truth claims of white nationalism.

The Alt-Right is an authentically grassroots movement and, in this respect, is more similar to Black Lives Matter than the most recent example of a successful right-wing social movement in the United States, the Tea Party. While many supporters of the Tea Party were genuinely energized by the movement and its message, much of the movement was "astroturfed." Sectors of the Tea Party did not "naturally" spring about as grassroots efforts, but there existed an artifice of support thanks in part to the funding the movement received from organizations such as FreedomWorks (which was financed by the billionaire Koch brothers) (Fetner and King 2014). The Alt-Right and Black Lives Matter are grassroots efforts which parallel one another in their committed opposition to hierarchical leadership despite staunch ideological disagreements (which will be addressed).

The term "Alt-Right" was created by Richard Spencer much as the term "Black Lives Matter" was created by Alicia Garza and spread by Patrisse Cullors yet neither movement acknowledges their respective founders as the sole leaders of their movements. This rejection of hierarchy by the Alt-Right and Black Lives Matter stands in contrast with each movement's intellectual or ideological ancestors such as the Ku Klux Klan (the Alt-Right) and the Civil Rights Movement (Black Lives Matter). While Black Lives Matter has a more sophisticated network of local organizations (and belongs to the larger umbrella group Movement for Black Lives), the Alt-Right remains primarily an online phenomenon and is largely relegated to internet chatrooms, forums, blogs and

social media networks (Hawley 2017).[lii] As I will discuss in more depth in chapter four, Black Lives Matter has organized thousands of rallies and protests which required the presence of its members and supporters. The Alt-Right has been active in organizing some in-person events and the most famous of these events – the Unite the Right rally – will be addressed in chapter five.

The Alt-Right shares a lack of hierarchical leadership with Black Lives Matter, and both movements are driven by grassroots support. While the movements vary in the reasons and specific functions of these institutional features, the general similarity is important to note since a rejection of hierarchy leads Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right to be more similar to one another than to some of their predecessors. Decentralization is not the only institutional similarity between Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right as both movements have functioned as political outsiders and have not attempted to directly enter government.

Black Lives Matter, the Alt-Right and the Rejection of Formal Politics

Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right have functioned outside of formal political spheres and have challenged individual politicians and political institutions. Neither movement has prioritized an individual candidate (or candidates) who have run for office,

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[lii] Journalist Mike Wendling does cite some "proto-institutions" that feed into the Alt-Right such as "the /pol/ section of 4chan, numerous accounts on Twitter, popular Reddit forums and YouTube accounts, and niche websites and message boards devoted to conservative news topics such as men's rights" (2018, pp. 9-10). These outlets allow for anonymous posting and commenting which may help spread the Alt-Right's messages but limits the movement to primarily – but not exclusively – a digital platform.

nor has either movement spent significant energy attempting to alter the existing platforms of the Democratic or Republican parties.[liii] While the two movements vary as to their respective reasons for rejecting formal political pathway, the similarity in rejecting institutional politics lends further credence to comparing Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right.

Although Black Lives Matter has functioned outside of institutional American politics, the movement has engaged with elected officials and candidates for office. In July 2015, Black Lives Matter members including Patrisse Cullors interrupted a town hall featuring Presidential hopefuls former Maryland Governor Marin O'Malley and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders (Resnikoff 2015). Members of the Seattle Chapter of Black Lives Matter later interrupted a rally for Senator Sanders (Bruner 2015). Fellow 2016 Democratic Presidential hopeful and eventual nominee, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, was likewise interrupted by Black Lives Matter members during a rally in Atlanta (Merica 2015) and later during a fundraising event in Charleston, South Carolina (Bixby 2016).

Democratic candidates and the Democratic National Committee (DNC) have largely been supportive of Black Lives Matter. Sanders and O'Malley both utilized the movement's terminology and uttered "Black lives matter" during the 2016 Democratic primary debates. Sanders – who has been actively involved in civil rights work since his

[liii] Black Lives Matter has engaged in voter registration efforts in 2020, but the movement has not – as a movement – endorsed candidates. See the movement's statement on the 2020 election for their voter registration efforts (Black Lives Matter, What Matters 2020).

college days in the 1960s (Frizell 2015) – released a racial justice platform which was followed by O'Malley's own platform (Ollstein 2015). Clinton likewise released a racial justice platform which was (along with Sanders's platform) praised by Black Lives Matter activist and 2016 Baltimore Mayoral hopeful DeRay Mckesson (Mckesson 2016). The DNC also passed a resolution in support of Black Lives Matter in 2015 (Seitz-Wald 2015). Although significant plans have been proposed by presidential hopefuls, and the DNC has publicly supported the movement, there has been little accomplished at the national level. In chapter four and again in chapter six, I will discuss some of the successes of Black Lives Matter at the local and state levels. Despite the public support by O'Malley, Sanders, Clinton and the DNC, little progress has been made to support Black Lives Matter at the federal level and these endorsements have unfortunately been little more than lip service.[liv]

Republican politicians have, on aggregate, not supported Black Lives Matter. Ben Carson, 2016 Republican Presidential hopeful, called the movement "silly" (Lerner 2015). Former New Jersey Governor and fellow 2016 Republican Presidential hopeful Chris Christie falsely accused Black Lives Matter of calling for the murder of police officers (Miller 2015). Former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani called Black Lives Matter "inherently racist" and "anti-American" (Twohey 2016). Then-Presidential

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[liv] That is not to suggest that the individuals or the DNC does not want to do more to support Black Lives Matter. It is entirely possible that, given a more politically favorable climate, Democrats would have proposed and passed legislation endorsed by Black Lives Matter. Congressional gridlock is not the only cause of legislative impotence, but I do not want to misspeak or suggest that O'Malley, Sanders, Clinton, and the DNC were being inauthentic in their public support of the movement.

candidate Donald Trump also had a rally cancelled In Chicago after Black Lives Matter organized a protest (Linthicum and Lee 2016). The protest came about four months after a Black Lives Matter protester was physically assaulted by a Trump supporter at a rally in Birmingham, Alabama (Diamond 2015). Trump openly supported the violence against the supporter and had previously threatened to fight Black Lives Matter supporters should they interrupt his events (Legum 2015).

While Black Lives Matter has protested elected officials and has refused to formally endorse any candidates or politicians, there are questions about the ties between the movement and government. On the one hand, Black Lives Matter repudiated the previously mentioned endorsement DNC endorsement (Rickford 2015). Concurrently, Mass Action for Black Liberation, formerly Black Lives Matter: Cincinnati, has distanced itself from the Black Lives Matter global network because the chapter fears that the movement has become too embedded in institutional politics. In the former chapter's (2018) statement, "Why Black Lives Matter: Cincinnati Is Changing Its Name," they state that Black Lives Matter has shifted "towards electoral and liberal Democratic Party politics and away from revolutionary ideas." Mass Action for Black Liberation argues that Black Lives Matter has been moving towards a reformist agenda with their sights set on electoral support and provide evidence such as Black Lives Matter's efforts to register voters.

Alicia Garza, when pressed for her thoughts on the chapter's defection stated, "I think the beautiful thing about a movement is that there are many different paths identified to accomplish a common goal" (Garza 2018). Garza's reply leaves questions

about the existing and future relationships between Black Lives Matter and formal, political institutions unclear. Although she was not speaking about the issues raised by Mass Action for Black Liberation, Patrisse Cullors presents a more explicit repudiation of institutional politics in her memoir *When They Call You a Terrorist*. Cullors states that "We actually don't give a fuck about shiny, polished candidates. We care about justice" (Kahn-Cullors & bandele 2018, pp. 248-249). This approach is echoed in historian Barbara Ransby's *Making All Black Lives Matter* wherein she states that the movement has "rejected representative politics as a stand-in for substantive change in the condition of Black people's lives" (2018, p. 2). Ransby is not suggesting that electoral politics are being entirely dismissed by the movement. Instead, Black Lives Matter sees institutional politics as ultimately insufficient in accomplishing the movement's goals, and the movement persists unaffiliated with formal politics and politicians.

Political scientist Deva Woodly explains that the Movement for Black Lives – a coalition of organizations which includes Black Lives Matter – is fighting "not only to raise awareness or change policies, but more fundamentally, to change *politics"* (2018b, p. 32). To accomplish these goals, Woodly states that there are efforts underway to organize Black voters, recruit progressive Black candidates, and to raise funds independent of any extant political party. Even these efforts, though they accept some institutional norms, occur outside of the Democratic party which has largely captured the Black vote in the United States. Thus even when Black Lives Matter participates in the most institutional manners of fighting for political change, the movement does so beyond the bounds of longstanding political party institutions.

Black Lives Matter's relationship to institutional politics may be too tightly knit for some supporters, but the movement remains sufficiently autonomous for others. I will further address Black Lives Matter's approach to both reforms, and radical systemic changes in chapters four (when discussing the movement as a Camusian rebellion) and six (when considering the implications of this approach for other movements). In short, the Black Lives Matter movement has supported immediate reforms while still pursuing more radical and systemic social, economic, and political changes. Black Lives Matter has rejected venerable elements of institutional politics and has worked to forge alternative pathways to political change. The Alt-Right, like Black Lives Matter, has primarily existed outside of formal political institutions, and while the Alt-Right has purportedly had ties to American federal politics, the movement is fundamentally countercultural.

The Alt-Right gained mainstream notoriety thanks to media coverage of the movement during the 2016 United States Presidential campaigns of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Clinton brought attention to the Alt-Right during a speech in Reno, Nevada where she connected Donald Trump, his campaign CEO Steve Bannon[lv], and the Alt-Right (Ohlheiser and Dewey 2016). While Trump's unbridled braggadocio, Bannon's (and *Breitbart's*) racism[lvi], and the Alt-Right are all intertwined, the connections between the three are more complicated than Clinton suggested.

[lv] Former executive chairman of right-wing outlet *Breitbart News.*

[lvi] Daniel HoSang and Joseph Lowndes (2019) provide examples of Bannon's speeches which emphasize the struggles of people of color. However, they note that Bannon used

The Alt-Right did not endorse Donald Trump and Trump has not, in turn, publicly stated support for the Alt-Right. However, prominent Alt-Right members have been clear about their support for Trump and his political agenda and scholars have noted that the Alt-Right's support contributed to Trump's victory (Love 2017). For example, Richard Spencer, at the 2016 National Policy Institute (NPI) conference following Trump's electoral victory boisterously asserted, "Hail Trump, hail our people, hail victory!" (Lombroso and Appelbaum 2016). Spencer's speech garnered publicity and Trump, following intense public pressure upon the video's circulation, formally denounced the Alt-Right (Goldstein 2016; Hawley 2017). Furthermore, some members (and former members) of Trump's administration have been tied to the Alt-Right including Stephen Miller, Julia Hahn, Michael Flynn, Sebastian Gorka, and Steve Bannon. Again, however, these connections are not always clear and direct, and the relationship between the Trump administration and the Alt-Right movement is complicated.

While members of the Alt-Right placed their hopes in Trump and saw his 2016 victory as a success, Trump's victory was viewed as a stepping stone to greater movement organizing; Richard Spencer and Greg Johnson have both championed Trump as being an "icebreaker" who can lead plausibly sympathetic supporters to the movement (Hawley 2017).[lvii] The Alt-Right also is supportive of some of Trump's policy positions

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racially inclusive language and examples to promote civic nationalism which is a cover for racist ethnonationalism.

[lvii] Some supporters in London have cited Trump's election and the mainstream acceptance of far-right ideas as a motivating factor for their newfound activism. Trump's

such as his proposed immigration ban from primarily "Muslim" countries.[lviii] Trump's racist dog whistles, such as his Twitter post of Hillary Clinton with a large pile of money, and a six-pointed Star of David, are also ties that bind the Alt-Right to Trump as the meme was created and promoted by a white nationalist Twitter account (Wendling 2018). Trump has also retweeted several far-right Twitter accounts including "@WhiteGenocideTM." The term "white genocide" is a prominent one for Alt-Right supporters and will be discussed in more depth in chapter five. While it is important to again state that the Alt-Right did not endorse Trump, and Trump eventually denounced the movement, there are linkages between the two.

Steve Bannon served as the executive chairman of *Breitbart News*, before serving as White House Chief Strategist for Trump. *Breitbart*, while a far-right website, has had a tenuous relationship with the Alt-Right. A group that was claiming to speak for *Daily Stormer* handed out flyers to those in line waiting to see controversial, far-right blogger and former *Breitbart* editor Milo Yiannopoulos speak at the University of Alabama. While Yiannopoulos is on the far-right of the political spectrum, *Daily Stormer* protested Yiannopoulos for not sufficiently supporting the Alt-Right's racio-political cause. Despite these tensions, Bannon had referred to *Breitbart* as "the platform of the Alt-

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2016 victory inspired Alt-Right activism in the United States, the United Kingdom, and in continental Europe (Holland, Lucas, Sveriges Television, & Silverfish Media 2018, 17:20).

[lviii] The Alt-Right's support for the "Muslim" ban was not championed for necessarily banning Muslims, but rather because it was limiting entry to the United States to people of color (Hawley 2017). The Alt-Right is not concerned with religion, *per se*; for more on the Alt-Right's relationship with religion, see chapter five.

Right" (Posner 2016) and Alt-Right Corporation co-founder Jason Jorjani claimed to have direct connections to the Trump administration through Steve Bannon (Holland et al. 2018).

When Clinton attempted to triangulate Trump, the Alt-Right, and *Breitbart News*, these connections between Trump, Bannon and Jorjani were the strongest evidence in her favor. However, these connections between the Alt-Right and formal political institutions have since been severed; Bannon is no longer with the Trump administration nor with *Breitbart News* and Jorjani has distanced himself from the Alt-Right, and supported Tulsi Gabbard in the 2020 United States Presidential Election (Jorjani 2019).[lix]

Journalist Mike Wendling explains that the Alt-Right understands itself as a countercultural movement that exists outside of the mainstream. He notes

> activists have compared their movement to punk rock or the hippies of the 1960s. The comparison stems not from shared political values but from the alt-right's claim to 'outsider' status. Like the hippies and the punks, alt-righters rail against what they see as an oppressive establishment. The difference is that their establishment is made up of academia, the Washington 'swamp,' and influential leftists in the media, rather than the corporate world and free-market politicians. (Wendling 2018, pp. 8-9)

Wendling's claim – that the Alt-Right views itself as countercultural – is supported by Jason Jorjani. Swedish graduate student Patrik Hermansson infiltrated the Alt-Right (and other white supremacist, white nationalist, and neo-Nazi groups) on behalf of *Hope Not Hate,* and recorded an undercover interview with Jorjani, who stated that the "movement has mass appeal, because it is the counter-culture now. It is the underdog" (Holland et al.

[lix] This despite continued Islamophobic statements and sentiments (Schaeffer 2018).

2018, 38:55). The outsider approach to politics leads to a contrast between the Alt-Right and previous right-wing social movements.

George Hawley (2017) identifies the paleoconservative movement of the 1980s and 1990s as one which has influenced the Alt-Right.[lx] Unlike the Alt-Right, paleoconservatives attempted to gain formal political power through institutional norms. In both 1992 and 1996, Patrick J. Buchanan ran in the Republican presidential primaries on platforms that supported economic protectionism, rigid immigration restrictions, international nonintervention, and cultural traditionalism. While paleoconservatives were frustrated with the growing neoconservatism of the Republican party, "they sought to change conservatism, not destroy it" (Hawley 2017, p. 31). The paleoconservative desire for reform is why the movement worked within institutional norms and sought power through accepted, formal means.

Like paleoconservatism, the Tea Party sought political power through established political pathways. Unlike paleoconservatism, the Tea Party is not often considered an intellectual influence on the Alt-Right (Hawley 2017) and some members of the Alt-Right have openly distanced themselves from the Tea Party because of the movements' divergent views (P Gray 2018). Although the Tea Party movement utilized the Internet

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[lx] Paleoconservatism is a political philosophy, and a branch of American conservatism that gained supporters in the United States during the mid-to-late 20th century. The philosophy and movement posed itself as traditionalist and rejected the more interventionist approach of the growing neoconservative sector of the American political right. The movement prioritized staunch immigration restrictions, political decentralization, and economic nationalism and protectionism. While some paleoconservative principles have been adopted by recent and current conservatives, paleoconservatism lost most of its prior momentum (Hawley 2017).

to organize and mobilize its support base, the movement gained political power through mainstream political support, and electoral successes. Like the Alt-Right, Tea Party supporters often challenged and undercut "establishment" Republicans (Skocpol and Williamson 2016). Yet self-proclaimed Tea Party candidates ran as Republicans, were backed by the Republican party, and worked within established Congressional procedures to pass favorable policies and thwart Democratic preferences. At the state level, Tea Party-aligned governors followed suit and cut taxes, reduced, or eliminated business regulations, and reduced benefits for public employees such as teachers (ibid). While some existing institutional norms and procedures were challenged[lxi] by Tea Party aligned Republicans, the movement functioned within most of the confines of the American electoral system, supported candidates for office at the state and federal level, and garnered power through these victories and the establishment of the House congressional Tea Party Caucus. The Tea Party represents the most recent successful right-wing social movement in the United States. The Alt-Right diverges strongly from the Tea Party because of its ideological and intellectual commitments, and even more strongly due to the variation in their respective tactics. Unlike the paleoconservatives of the late 20th century and the Tea Party of the early 21st century, the Alt-Right has fought against established institutional norms and has functioned as a movement outside of formal government.

[lxi] Skocpol and Williamson identify budget legislation as one area where the Tea Party challenged norms; "budgets have been occasions for legislators to compromise, but Tea Party Republicans do not look at them in this light" (2016, p. 184).

The Alt-Right lacks formal political power and lacks direct connections to institutional politics.[lxii] The Alt-Right has not run its own candidates nor has the movement expressed enthusiasm for other candidates the way it did in 2016 for Donald Trump. The movement has not fought to reform the Republican party through electoral means as was the tactic of the paleoconservatives and Tea Party. Instead, the Alt-Right exists as a force to challenge and oppose both mainstream conservatism and liberalism. In this respect, the Alt-Right and Black Lives Matter are institutionally similar. The rejection of hierarchical leadership, and the outsider status of Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right are two institutional similarities that make the movements fit for comparison. An ideational component – the movements' respective focuses on race and collective identity – is a third reason that the two movements are appropriate for the case study that follows.

The Role of Identity in Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right

Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right are both social movements that primarily frame their respective causes in terms of race and additionally consider the role of gender. Both movements agree that race is the identity which defines people and through which people perceive the world. Despite this parallel, the two movements agree on little else; Black Lives Matter has created an inclusive and intersectional approach to social

[lxii] I will briefly discuss other far-right movements, including the boogaloo boys and QAnon which have supplanted the Alt-Right in mainstream discourse, in the final chapter. QAnon does, unlike the Alt-Right, work within existing political institutions.

change which opposes the oppression that occurs on (primarily) racial lines while the Alt-Right's belief in race science and biological determinism has led to their fight for racially homogeneous ethnostates. Both movements' respective views on race are central to their understandings of death and existential anxiety.

The two movements' focuses on identity are a third means for comparison. While the anti-hierarchical structures, and outsider statuses of the movements are institutional similarities, the movements' focuses on race and gender are ideational similarities. Both the similarities and staunch differences between Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right with respect to race and gender are crucial to understanding the movements.

How Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right Conceive of Race

The primary concern for the Alt-Right is preservation of white people.[lxiii] While contemporary biological and physiological scientists have denounced race as a folk concept, the Alt-Right is opposed to scientific consensus (Smedley & Smedley 2005; Omi & Winant 2015; Hawley 2017). Instead, the Alt-Right maintains an arcane belief that race is rooted in evolutionary biology and Alt-Right supporters of racial science often refer to it with the euphemistic term "human biodiversity" (HBD) (Hawley 2017; Wendling 2018). HBD is the pseudoscientific belief that different groups of people have different traits, and these traits are attached to genes which sort people into well-defined

[lxiii] I will focus more on the issue of preserving white people in the chapter on the Alt-Right. What is important at this stage is that if white people need protection, then the category of "white," and who is fit for inclusion in that category is going to be defined by the Alt-Right.

racial and ethnic groups. HBD proponents argue that these traits include, for example, one's intellectual capabilities as the biological capability for intelligence is genetically attached to one's racial makeup.

Because the Alt-Right argues that race is a biological reality, the movement views different races as distinct and mutually exclusive; one cannot simultaneously be both white and Black.[lxiv] Members of the movement conclude that because different races evolved to be unique, they must not live amongst one another and should instead maintain rigid borders of separation. Politics, from this perspective, is a battle over racial group interests and the Alt-Right has argued against heterogeneity so that different races of people would not come into conflict (Singal 2017). The Alt-Right's beliefs in deterministic racial differences have led to the movement prioritizing race its primary political concern.

Race is also a central concern for Black Lives Matter, although the movement does not conceive of race in a manner that mirrors the Alt-Right. Black Lives Matter does not attempt to define race, or to police the bounds of Blackness. Political scientist Shayla Nunnally explains, "While different black activists introduced their contributions

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[lxiv] Sociologists Aaron Panofsky and Joan Donovan (2017) found that members of the white nationalist forum *Stormfront,* when presented with genetic ancestry tests that indicated that they had genetic markers from "non-white" areas of the world either rationalize the results, offering a pseudoscientific explanation for the variation, or would reject the genetic tests' results based on family history or outward appearance. While *Stormfront* and the Alt-Right are not synonymous, this work hints at how white nationalists such as Alt-Right supporters cope with, and attempt to overcome the cognitive dissonance between a lack of their own racial purity, and their white nationalist ideologies.

to expand the definition of blackness and those protected by an agenda of racial justice, the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement emphasizes acknowledging all aggrieved blacks at the outset, no matter their sociodemographic backgrounds" (2018, p. 149). However, while Nunnally states that Black Lives Matter works to be inclusive of all Black lives, it is not clear from her explanation who is considered Black. Although Black Lives Matter does not explicitly define race or Blackness – setting the movement apart from the Alt-Right which has focused on defining and policing whiteness – there is an implicit understanding of Blackness as lived experience with a sense of linked fate.

Black Lives Matter seems to recognize that racial definitions are socially constructed and vary across time and space but the movement does not deny the social importance of race. Being Black in the United States is rooted in a collective understanding of "lived experience" which can be explained as a combination of three factors: skin color, ascribed race, and discrimination experiences (Garcia et al. 2015). Based on these individual lived experiences, Black Americans can envisage themselves as a collective racial group due to "linked fate" which is the notion that one's individual or self-interest is inherently tied to the interests of the group as a whole (Frasure-Yokley et al. 2019). When one's racialized lived experiences aligns with the racialized lived experiences of other individuals, a collective sense of linked fate can bond the racial group. For Black Lives Matter, the lived experience of Black American oppression by police, and possibly the experience of having lost someone to police or vigilante violence can bond the group. However, even if an individual has not had one of these experiences, the notion of linked fate may attach an individual to the racial group, since one may see

racial subjugation as plausibly impacting them in the future. This combination of lived experience of racial subjugation and linked fate of Black Americans differs widely from the Alt-Right's biological conception of race.

The "Jewish question" (often shortened to "JQ") is a point of contention within the movement that highlights both the Alt-Right's attempt at policing the boundaries of whiteness, and the difficulty in doing so due to the dynamic nature of racial categories. Political scientist Phillip Gray notes this internal disagreement in his study of the Alt-Right by stating that the movement is unclear on if "Jews are viewed as an intentional, collective racial enemy" (2018, p. 144). As such, the Alt-Right is divided on whether Jews can assimilate into white societies or whether Jews ought to face expulsion or even execution.

Jared Taylor is less overtly anti-Semitic than many of his Alt-Right peers, and he believes that European Jews can possibly assimilate into white, American society (P Gray 2018). Conversely, Greg Johnson has expressed blatantly anti-Semitic views. Patrick Hermansson, in an undercover meeting with Greg Johnson, filmed Johnson explaining his belief that Jews ought to be expelled from the United States and sent to Israel (Holland et al. 2018, 31:20). Richard Spencer[lxv] voiced similar views to Greg Johnson in declaring his support for Israel as a Jewish ethnostate (Sommer 2017). Andrew Anglin's "A Normie's Guide to the Alt-Right" defines Jews as "a separate race, with biological drives and behavior patterns which come into direct conflict with the goals and values of

[lxv] While Johnson and Spencer largely detest one another, they agree on the "JQ."

the White race" (Anglin 2016a). For Anglin, Jews "must be confronted and ultimately removed from White societies completely" by physical means (ibid). As the three aforementioned perspectives on the Jewish Question highlights, the Alt-Right is internally divided on exactly where the boundaries of whiteness ought to be drawn. Despite internal disagreements, the movement is united in the goal of defining the bounds of whiteness, and in enforcing white, racial purity.

Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant identify race as a master category which they define as "a fundamental concept that has profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the history, polity, economic structure, and culture of the United States" (2015, p. 106). Richard Spencer ironically echoes Omi and Winant in stating that "Race isn't just some issue. It isn't just some little thing that we might want to pursue here and there. It's this core idea that really informs everything" (as cited in Main 2018, p. 170). Omi and Winant, call race a way of "making people up" because the notion of race lacks any scientific basis. The Alt-Right, while it sees race as a master category, denies the biological and physiological sciences that repudiate race realism. The Alt-Right sees race as a biologically determined master category and thus, where heterogeneity exists, politics is understood as racial competition. Spencer, in a speech to reporters in Washington, D.C. publicized this position by stating "Race is real, race matters, and race is the foundation of identity" (as cited in Harkinson 2016). For the Alt-Right, interracial conflict must be avoided, which requires racial separation.

The Alt-Right's solution to the problem of tenuous racial cohabitation is the creation of racially pure ethnostates wherein each state's polity is comprised entirely of

members of a single race (Hawley 2017, Main 2018, Wendling 2018, Hosang and Lowndes 2019). For prominent Alt-Right members, this implies that the United States of America ought to be a country wherein the entirety of the populace is racially codified as purely white. This desire for racial homogeneity is why the Alt-Right is best understood as a white nationalist movement[lxvi] and why it has dedicated significant effort to defining and policing the bounds of whiteness. While Black Lives Matter may have members who support Black nationalism, the movement is not explicitly or exclusively about Black nationalism nor Black separatism. For the Alt-Right, racial heterogeneity is to be avoided if political harmony is to be achieved.

The Role of Gender in Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right

Black Lives Matter was founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi following the death of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his killer, George Zimmerman. The three founders of the movement have prioritized inclusivity, both in the movement's membership and in the movement's strategies and goals. While women were crucial to the Civil Rights movement some women, not limited to Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hammer, Dorothy Height, Diane Nash and Rosa Parks, were "relegated to

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[lxvi] It is not necessarily appropriate to classify all Alt-Right supporters (nor the movement) as white supremacist although the two terms may be conflated. While white nationalism is clear within the movement, the idea of "supremacy" is contested (Hawley 2017). Jared Taylor even argues that the East Asian "race" is superior to the white "race" (Sussman 2014). There are certainly white supremacists within the movement including unapologetic neo-Nazis, but the movement's goals are more clearly white nationalist than white supremacist. I agree with Phillip Gray who states that "this current form of nationalist identity is separatist rather than imperial" (2018, p. 141).

secondary roles at the March on Washington in 1963, and were not allowed to speak or march with the male leaders" (Clayton 2018, p. 460). Black Lives Matter has fought this tradition of male-domination as can be seen in the movement's official website entry, "Herstory" which notes,

> Black liberation movements in this country have created room, space, and leadership mostly for Black heterosexual, cisgender men—leaving women, queer and transgender people, and others either out of the movement or in the background to move the work forward with little or no recognition. As a network, we have always recognized the need to center the leadership of women and queer and trans people. To maximize our movement muscle, and to be intentional about not replicating harmful practices that excluded so many in past movements for liberation, we made a commitment to placing those at the margins closer to the center. (Black Lives Matter, Herstory)

To reverse the tradition of male domination in Black politics, Black Lives Matter focuses on inclusivity. The movement affirms "the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum" (Black Lives Matter, About). Black Lives Matter creates space for, and fights on behalf of all Black lives.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) explanation of intersectionality highlights the multidimensionality of Black women's experience and articulates that discrimination against Black women is not simply a summation of racial discrimination plus gender discrimination. Instead, Crenshaw shows that Black women face unique discrimination as Black women in manners that cannot be explained by single-axis analyses of identity-based discrimination; either race or gender. Similarly, Black Lives Matter has focused on highlighting the multidimensionality of lived experiences of Black Americans and has emphasized the unique lived experiences of Black women, Black queer and trans people,

"and all Black lives" (Black Lives Matter, About). This inclusion of "all" Black lives in the movement is an intentional focus on the multiplicity of Black experiences which "does not preclude studying and acknowledging the particular historical and lived experiences of Black men and boys … it offers an expansive lens that renders visible Black women and girls and trans*, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, and queer people as victims and survivors of anti-Black racial terror" (Lindsey 2015, p. 234).

The movement has made explicit attempts to focus on intersectional discrimination though its association with the #SayHerName campaign which highlights the often-overlooked Black women who have been victims of police violence. Crenshaw, unsurprisingly, has been instrumental in highlighting the lack of public awareness of the Black women such as Sandra Bland, Tanisha Anderson, Megan Hockaday, and Michelle Cusseaux. Crenshaw, in her 2016 TED Talk, "The urgency of intersectionality" tells her audience the stories of many women who have died as a result of their encounters with the police. She states,

> Police violence against Black women is very real. The level of violence that Black women face is such that it's not surprising that some of them do not survive their encounters with police. Black girls as young as seven, great grandmothers as old as 95, have been killed by the police. They've been killed in their living rooms, in their bedrooms, they've been killed in their cars, they've been killed on the street, they've been killed in front of their parents, and they've been killed in front of their children. They have been shot to death, they have been stomped to death, they have been suffocated to death, they have been manhandled to death, they have been tasered to death. They've been killed when they've called for help, they've been killed when they were alone and they've been killed when they were with others. They have been killed shopping while Black, driving while Black, having a mental disability while black, having a domestic disturbance while black, they've even been killed being homeless while Black. They've been killed talking on a cell phone, laughing with friends, sitting in a car reported as stolen, and making a U-turn in front of the White House with an infant strapped in the backseat of the car. (Crenshaw 2016, 11:43)

Black men and boys are frequently the public face of racist police brutality.[lxvii] While the fight against state-sanctioned violence against Black males is central to Black Lives Matter, the movement is committed to publicizing the numerous Black women who have faced the same, yet less frequently discussed fates.

In 2020, Breonna Taylor was killed by three members of the Louisville Metro Police Department (LMPD) while she was asleep in her home.[lxviii] The officers fired over twenty shots in Taylor's apartment; she was hit by eight bullets and died. Taylor, a 26-year-old emergency medical technician, would be one of the names front-and-center when Black Lives Matter protests were prevalent across the United States during early-to-mid 2020. None of the officers would be indicted by a grand jury in Taylor's death, and only one of the three was indicted for recklessly firing his gun, as bullets entered Taylor's neighbor's apartment. The *New York Times* reported that since 2015, 48 Black women have been killed by police, but only two charges have been filed (Gupta 2020). Crenshaw, in response to the grand jury's decision not to indict the officers in Taylor's death stated, "You can attach that hope to some of the factual distinctions of this case: The police can't even claim she was doing anything. But realism tells you that the likelihood of something different was pretty slim" (ibid). Breonna Taylor's death highlights the continuous violence and potential death that Black women face, and the

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[lxvii] Political scientist and gender studies scholar Ange-Marie Hancock (2012) notes an intersectional trifecta of age (young), race (Black) and gender (male). While age may not be a factor in all cases of Black death at the hands of police, Hancock reminds us to think about the specific racial demonization of Black youth.

[lxviii] Breonna Taylor's case will be discussed in more depth in the final chapter.

similarly continuous lack of justice that these victims receive. Yet concurrently, Black Lives Matter's push to bring Breonna Taylor's name to the forefront of their activism shows the movement's commitment not just to the (frequently more publicly known) male victims of police brutality, but also to the Black women whose lives have been taken by police.

While Black Lives Matter highlights the unique intersections of race, gender and sexuality, challenges have arisen. Historian Russell Rickford (2015) argues that some supporters of the movement have framed the struggle in stereotypically masculine terms such as the need for self-defense. Additionally, transgender and gender nonconforming activists from within Black Lives Matter critiqued the movement during a major convention in Cleveland due to the transphobia and heterosexism of fellow activists (Rickford 2015; Garza 2015a). Despite some internal fissures, Black Lives Matter maintains committed to intersectionality and the movement works to rectify its past indiscretions. Black Lives Matter's gender inclusivity is at odds with the Alt-Right which "is defined in party by its misogyny and its anti-feminist, anti-woman language" (Kelly 2018).

The Alt-Right is a movement of white men, with few white women (Holland et al. 2018). George Hawley, in an interview with Max Ehrenfreund of the *Washington Post*, explained that "the modal alt-right person is a male, white millennial; probably has a college degree or is in college; is secular and perhaps atheist" and he described women as "hugely underrepresented in terms of the people who are really driving the movement forward" (Ehrenfreund 2016). Phillip Gray (2018) and Hawley (2017) note that gender

is, at most, a secondary concern for the Alt-Right. Misogyny is, however, rampant in the movement (Atkinson 2018, Holland et al. 2018); Richard Spencer said that women should be denied the right to vote (M Hayden 2017a) and former, female Alt-Right member, Katie McHugh detailed examples of women's subordinate status within the movement (R Gray 2019). Alt-Right misogyny is likely due to the movement's traditional notions of masculinity which supplement their views on race (Kelly 2017).[lxix]

Undercover exposés on the Alt-Right also note the disproportionate male presence within the Alt-Right and the misogyny within the movement. Journalist Donna Minkowitz went undercover at a rally sponsored by Jared Taylor's *American Renaissance* organization and detailed that around 90 percent of the rally's attendees were male (Bader 2018). At the event, Sam Dickson – a lawyer who has represented Ku Klux Klan members and who participates in the Neo Nazi forum, *Stormfront* – gave a speech detailing how, in the proposed all-white ethnostate, only men would be able to vote and hold office. Dickson also argued for a "Handmaid's Tale-ish" plan for white women which involved financial incentives for white procreation, and a limitation on women's clothing styles (ibid).

Patrick Hermansson's undercover interview with Greg Johnson produced similarly misogynistic revelations as Johnson argued against voluntary birth control as he

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[lxix] Political scientists Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph Lowndes likewise state that "Gender and sexuality are always fundamental to the production of far-right politics, working as a fulcrum for these racially trans-positive politics. Performed as patriarchal traditionalism, online ultra-misogyny, or street-brawling bravado, masculinity bridges racial difference for populist, fascist, and even white-nationalist politics" (2019, p. 104).

claimed that it is "dysgenic." Johnson stated his normative desire for white women to procreate and argued that only after raising children should they obtain college degrees (Singal 2017).[lxx] Reporter David Lewis snuck into the Northwest Forum in Seattle, which is sponsored by Johnson and features numerous, well-known Alt-Right supporters.[lxxi] After catching Jared Taylor using the women's restroom, Lewis states in his report "to be fair, having a ladies' room at an event like this is superfluous anyway" (2017) which humorously denotes the lack of women in attendance. Lewis more plainly states, "Of the 70 to 80 people in the lodge, only about four were female. By far the one who creeped me out the most was a five-year-old girl in white dress clomping around in pink boots with her blond hair in a pink ribbon who played Beethoven on the piano" (ibid). The unique undercover work from Minkowitz, Hermansson and Lewis all point towards women lacking a significant presence within the Alt-Right and misogyny being commonplace.

[lxx] Hermansson also recorded Scottish Alt-Right personality Colin Robertson, better known by Millennial Woes, who is famed for his misogyny and supports an end to equal rights for women (Holland et al. 2018, 20:52). Hermansson pressed Robertson and asked where most of his viewers are located and he said that "it's about 60-70% Americans" (Holland et al. 2018, 22:16). It is worth addressing non-American Alt-Right influencers since their reach includes the United States. Robertson was one of the key speakers at the 2017 London Forum.

[lxxi] The Northwest Forum in Seattle is one of three "Forums" with others in New York and London. The London Forum precedes the two, and Greg Johnson copied the concept and spread it to the United States. The Forums are held in singular locations but serve as international networking opportunities for far-right sympathizers generally (Holland et al. 2018).

While Black Lives Matter was created by three Black women and focuses on intersectionality and inclusivity, the Alt-Right has worked towards exclusivity and rigidly defined and policed borders. The Alt-Right is primarily concerned with racial purity and homogeneity, but the movement also envisions women's subjugation as part of its larger political project. Both Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right are concerned with identity politics and specifically with the importance of race, and to a lesser extent, gender, which again lends credibility to a comparison of the two seemingly disparate movements.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained why two social movements, Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right, are fit for comparison. I provided three justifications for the comparative analysis that will follow as I included two institutional similarities, and one ideational similarity. Both movements reject hierarchical forms of leadership and in that regard the movements are closer in institutional structure to one another, than to their respective predecessors. Similarly, both movements exist outside of formal political institutions, and have not embedded themselves in any extant political party. A recent *Politico* article on Black Lives Matter notes the ties between the two institutional aspects of the movement as "There is no chairperson or candidate calling the shots in private or serving as a public rallying point" (Barrón-López 2020) and the same statement applies to the Alt-Right. Finally, both movements focus on the importance of race and gender, although in this ideational aspect, the movements have staunch divergence; Black Lives Matter is an intersectional movement that seeks racial justice, while the Alt-Right is a

white nationalist movement that is rooted in a desire for racial purity and traditionalist notions of masculinity.

Over the next two chapters, I will apply the Camusian social movement theory to the cases of Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right. I will trace the movements' respective trajectories as the Camusian theory helps us understand their origins in existential anxiety and the courses that they have pursued. At each stage in the applied Camusian theory, I will highlight that each movement has rejected the alternatives that Camus likewise rejects. However, where the movements diverge is in regards to their respective conclusions; Black Lives Matter forges a rebellious pathway that focuses on alleviating suffering and reversing trends of state-sanctioned death of Black Americans, while the Alt-Right is focused on an end-goal – a *telos* – of rearranging the world into racially homogenous ethnostates.

CHAPTER #4

BLACK LIVES MATTER: FROM NECROPOLITICS TO CAMUSIAN REBELLION

Black Lives Matter began as a hashtag on July 13th, 2013. Community organizer Alicia Garza was "disappointed" and "enraged" when a jury acquitted George Zimmerman in the murder of Trayvon Martin; an unarmed, 17-year-old, African American male. Garza penned a message on Facebook which ended with the now famous words, "Black Lives Matter." Garza's friend and fellow community organizer, Patrisse Cullors, was inspired by the message and spread it with the hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter. Opal Tometi, who was friends with Garza, voiced her support for the hashtag and the message therein. The hashtag has since become more than an Internet slogan and sparked a movement (Guynn 2015).

In this chapter I will use my Camusian social movement theory to help elucidate important elements of the Black Lives Matter movement. I will argue that Black Lives Matter is responding to the existential anxiety supporters have experienced due to state-sanctioned Black death. Specifically, the form of death that Black Lives Matter is responding to is necropolitics; the political power to determine who may live, who must die, and who should be exposed to death and dying. When I am referring to "state-sanctioned" death I do not just mean formally state-sanctioned capital punishment (e.g. Troy Davis's death in 2011). I am also referring to cases in which the state has chosen not to charge police officers in the killing of a Black civilian (e.g. Freddie Gray's death in

2015), when a grand jury has chosen not to indict a police officer in a similar circumstance (e.g. the respective deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown in 2014), and cases in which a police officer was found not guilty of the murder a Black civilian (e.g. Anthony Hill's death in 2017). I am also considering instances in which a non-Black civilian was either not charged for killing a Black civilian or found not guilty in the murder of an unarmed Black civilian (e.g. Trayvon Martin's death in 2012).

I will then argue that Black Lives Matter rejects the responses to the imminence of death that Camus warns against; the movement does not advocate for suicide or self-immolation as a form of protest nor does the movement utilize religion to purport transcendent meaning onto their movement or lives. Instead, Black Lives Matter revolts against the necropolitical realities that Black Americans experience. Rather than succumbing to the persistence of Black death at the hands of the state or vigilantism, Black Lives Matter passionately fights to reduce Black deaths and promotes the vivaciousness of Black lives. Next, I will argue that Black Lives Matter's revolt occurs through an outward turn towards political change. I will contrast this approach with the turn inwards which would focus on demanding individual change through forms of respectability politics. Black Lives Matter has focused on the political world and seeks to rectify the conditions that have given rise to existential anxiety. Finally, I will argue that Black Lives Matter is focused on improving the dire conditions of actual Black people in the United States which makes the movement a Camusian rebellion.

Black Lives Matter's Response to Necropolitical Death

In July 2013, Alicia Garza was at a bar when she heard the news that George Zimmerman was acquitted of the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. In response to the acquittal, she posted a Facebook message that became the inspiration for Black Lives Matter. Garza was outraged and saddened by the trial's result and the lack of safety and justice it represented for the Black community. Additionally, she expressed a personal attachment to Trayvon Martin as she stated in an interview, "My brother is six feet tall and has a huge afro" and her brother could have been in Trayvon's shoes; "That could have been my family" (Meyerson 2016a). As for why Garza penned her message, she explains "I wrote a post saying that we deserve to live … I ended that post by saying that our lives matter" (as cited in Fessler 2018). Trayvon Martin's death sparked Alicia Garza's recognition of the imminence of death that could befall her loved ones.

Patrisse Cullors was in a motel room in California when she received the disheartening updates that Trayvon Martin's killer was found not guilty of all charges. In her memoir, Cullors explains her initial reaction to hearing about Trayvon's death as she states, "I have loved so many young men who look just like this boy" (Kahn-Cullors & bandele 2018, p. 166). She connects Trayvon's death to the lives of young, Black males who she has known over the course of her life. Zimmerman's acquittal forces Cullors, like Garza, to consider potential parallel cases that could hypothetically occur to her own family. Cullors describes her reaction to Zimmerman's acquittal, "I think of Emmett Till and his family and also my nephew, Chase, Monte's son, who is 14 the year Trayvon is killed. Will he be shot down and killed for walking while Black, and will his murder

matter so little it doesn't even make the news, and no one will be held accountable?" (Kahn-Cullors & bandele 2018, p. 175). Patrisse Cullors cries in a motel room and then sees the Facebook post by her friend Alicia Garza as Cullors responds, "#BlackLivesMatter."

Albert Camus argues, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, that all people die. Reminders of the absurdity of human existence – the guarantee of death in a seemingly meaningless universe – can occur at any given moment. Camus explains that one's realization of human mortality can occur amid an otherwise routine and benign work week;

> Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm – this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. (2004b, pp. 502-503)

There may also be catalysts that can remind someone of the absurdity of human existence as a finite person. Camus notes that there are "absurd marriages, challenges, rancours, silences, wars, and even peace treaties" (2004b, p. 516). For Garza and Cullors, Trayvon Martin's death and George Zimmerman's acquittal on all charges was this catalyst.

For Black Lives Matter, race is the prism through which reminders of existential anxieties are experienced. Two of the founders of Black Lives Matter expressed themselves existentially in response to Trayvon Martin's murder and George Zimmerman's acquittal. While Camus states that there can be catalysts that spark existential awareness or anxiety, these catalysts may not be evenly distributed. Although Camus sees these moments as being potentially random, Naomi Zack expands this logic and highlights how reminders of death can be unevenly distributed along racial lines.

Zack argues that "the catastrophe of death occurs more frequently for racialized people because demographically their lives are shorter, and they are more likely to be murdered than nonracialized people. So race is relevant to death. Yes. But everyone dies" (Zack 1997, p. 101). Camus would agree with the final declaration that everyone dies as this is an unquestionable fact as Zack repeats later that "[d]eath comes to us all, regardless of race" (1997, p. 102). What Zack argues is that some people experience different degrees of "catastrophic" death, and she notes that different degrees of oppression can impact how much freedom different people can express while alive. This supports Camus's notion that people can experience reminders of death but also expands upon it to highlight that race is one category through which reminders of human mortality are unevenly distributed; Black Americans are faced with more frequent and more gruesome reminders of death than white Americans.

African-American Studies scholar Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor states, "Every movement needs a catalyst, an event that captures people's experiences and draws them out from their isolation into a collective force with the power to transform social conditions" (K Taylor 2016, p. 153). The activism of Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi was catalyzed by Trayvon Martin's death and the subsequent acquittal of his killer. Many others Black Lives Matter supporters had their activism awakened by the death of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Taylor states that it may be impossible to explain why any specific instance is the catalyst for action, "just as it's impossible ever to accurately calculate when 'enough is enough'" (2016, p. 154). Movement catalysts –

moments which spark existential anxiety that can inspire activism – are commonplace within Black American communities.

Philosopher George Yancy writes on Black Lives Matter and retells a story of his childhood which highlights both Camus's argument that existential anxiety can occur at any given moment and Zack's notion that these moments are unevenly distributed on racial lines. As a child, Yancy lived in public housing in North Philadelphia, was fascinated with astronomy, and was walking in his building's stairwell while carrying his telescope. He ran into a white police officer who stated that he almost shot the young boy since the officer mistook the telescope for a weapon. Yancy recalls that the officer's words "made [him] tremble and pause. In retrospect, this was something more than an existential death shudder that is due to our finitude; this was an experience of potential (and in so many cases, actual) existential limitation punctuated by being Black within an anti-Black world" (2016, p. 2). Yancy's story is one of existential anxiety in the midst of a seemingly routine evening of stargazing, and this existential anxiety arose due to a conflict with police, sparked by Yancy's race. While Yancy's story occurred in the 1970s, the existential anxiety plaguing Black Americans persists.

Empirical scholarship on Black Lives Matter also points towards an existential element in the movement's actions. In a 2018 study of the locations and purpose of Black Lives Matter protests, Williamson, Trump, and Einstein find that "Black Lives Matter protests were more common in localities where police had more frequently killed Black people" (2018, p. 409). Black Lives Matter protests occurred at the location where a police officer killed a Black person, and parallel protests occurred in solidarity with the

on-site protests in cities with prior instances of police killings of Black people. The authors conclude, in line with my argument, that death plays an important role in Black Lives Matter's activism as they note that their findings are "consistent with the interpretation that while individuals may respond to direct carceral contact by withdrawing from public life, those proximate to police violence can and do respond with coordinated political action" (Williamson et al. 2018, p. 409).

Black Lives Matter acts collectively when existential anxiety may be at its highest; when Black people are extrajudicially killed by police officers. There is, as Williamson et al. discover, an "association between the deaths of Black people at the hands of police officers and protest action about that grievance" (Williamson et al. 2018, p. 401). It is, as Naomi Zack highlights, a reminder of the human mortality that we all possess, but a reminder that occurs in greater frequency and that takes on increased political significance for Black Americans. Combining Camus's general sentiment about death with Zack's focus death's racially uneven distribution helps clarify one reason that Black Lives Matter mobilizes; unjust, state-sanctioned mortality is present in Black communities in greater frequency.

Responding to Black death makes Black Lives Matter a type of necropolitical social movement. Necropolitics is a term coined by Achille Mbembe who locates "the ultimate expression of sovereignty … in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (2003, p. 11). Necropolitics expands beyond Foucauldian biopolitics to include a sovereign's right to choose who ought to be exposed to death, and the sovereign's right to impose social death (denying full humanity of some people such

as through slavery and apartheid) or civil death (the loss of civil rights such as the collateral consequences faced by former felons in the United States). While Black Lives Matter is infrequently discussed as a movement responding to necropolitical stimuli, the previously noted empirical evidence and quotes from the movement's founders (explaining their motivations) highlight that the movement's response to state-sanctioned Black death is a central tenet.

Shatema Threadcraft (2017) is correct; for Black Lives Matter, the death of Black people and the exposure of Black communities to these state-sanctioned deaths is the necropolitics that helps us to understand the existential anxiety expressed by Garza and Cullors after Zimmerman's not guilty verdict. It is this existential anxiety that led to the formation of Black Lives Matter. The persistent reminder of state-sanctioned Black death – such as the deaths of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Meagan Hockaday, Sandra Bland, Alton Sterling and Philando Castle –Williamson et al. cite as motivating Black Lives Matter protests. While Threadcraft importantly highlights the roles that social, economic, and political discrimination play on diminishing the quality and length of Black lives, the impact of a dead Black body and the experience of seeing that slain body in one's community may be more immediately impactful experiences. An analysis of the contemporary politics and economics of segregation and the ways that it leads to poor quality of life simply may not affect people's emotional and political responses the same way as seeing Michael Brown's dead body which was left in the Canfield Drive for over four hours after he was killed by Officer Darren Wilson (Bosman and Goldstein 2014). Housing politics and policies have not been a central part of a

global social movement in recent memory whereas state-sanctioned killing of Black people has, maybe due to its grotesque presence, become the major focus of Black Lives Matter.

Black Lives Matter does not overlook other, important issues that plague Black American communities. Opal Tometi states "when we started Black Lives Matter, it wasn't solely about police brutality and extrajudicial killing" (Chotiner 2020). Yet while Tometi discusses housing, education, health care, and utilities, Black death at the hands of the state, and the existential anxiety this causes remain the impetus for the movement's activism as she notes "We have been fighting and advocating to stop a war on black lives. And that is how we see it–this is a war on black life" (ibid).[lxxii]

From a Camusian perspective, Black Lives Matter's focus on state-sanctioned Black death is not surprising. Camus opens *The Myth of Sisyphus* by proclaiming that the most important philosophical question relates to suicide and whether life is worth living. All other philosophical questions, "whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories – comes afterwards" (2004b, p. 495). Camus's statement finds a parallel in Black Lives Matter's prioritization of maintaining Black life by fighting against state-sanctioned killing of Black Americans. All other political questions, including those which Threadcraft correctly denotes as being important to flourishing Black life and wellbeing, come after ensuring the mere continuation of Black life. Dead Black Americans cannot fight the political battles that

[lxxii] I mention some of the movement's immediate and long-term desires in the final section of this chapter, including some which are not directly tied to death.

Threadcraft highlights as important. If Black Lives Matter is responding to the death and existential anxiety that are disproportionately present in Black communities because of state-sanctioned killing of Black Americans, other important elements of contemporary Black politics are understandably playing a secondary role.

Black Lives Matter's response to death is particularly challenging to more contemporary existential thinkers who argue that the crucial existential matter is not the meaning of human life despite the promise of death but is the search for meaning within life. Irving Singer, for example, argues that there is a distinction between the meaning of life and the creation of meaning within one's life. His aim is "to show how the latter enables us to have a life worth living" (Singer 1992, p. xii). It seems impossible to apply Singer's approach to Black Lives Matter as the movement is focused on preserving Black life in the United States. The movement is not solely focused on working with Black people to create a meaningful existence when Black people are being killed at the hands of the state. To echo my prior concerns with Threadcraft's argument, dead Black Americans cannot create meaningful lives in the way that Singer advocates. Since Black Lives Matter is responding to the existential anxiety that is disproportionately present in the Black community because of state-sanctioned killing of Black Americans, focusing on how to create meaningful lives for the living is not the highest priority for the movement.

Poet Claudia Rankine summarizes the role that death and existential anxiety plays for Black Lives Matter in *New York Times Magazine.*

> The Black Lives Matter movement can be read as an attempt to keep mourning an open dynamic in our culture because black lives exist in a state of precariousness.

> Mourning then bears both the vulnerability inherent in black lives and the instability regarding a future for those lives … Black Lives Matter aligns with the dead, continues the mourning and refuses the forgetting in front of all of us. (Rankine 2015)

Black Lives Matter responds to the existential anxieties that their founders express by revolting against the prevalence of state-sanctioned death of Black people.

Black Lives Matter's Revolt Against the Absurdity of Human Existence

Since Black Lives Matter is responding to the feeling of existential anxiety produced by the deaths of Black people, what is important is how Black Lives Matter responds to these existential realities. As I previously detailed, Camus argues that when one recognizes the absurdity of human existence, there are three primary approaches that one can take: taking one's own life (suicide), taking a leap of faith (religion) or revolting against the absurd. I will argue that Black Lives Matter has revolted against the realities of the absurdity of the human condition. I will explain this in contrast with the other responses that Camus rejects by arguing that Black Lives Matter has not endorsed suicide, nor has the movement adhered to what Camus calls "philosophical suicide" by rejecting religion. Revolt – not to be confused with Camusian revolution – is how Black Lives Matter has responded to existential anxiety. First, I will address the rejected responses to existential anxiety before detailing Black Lives Matter's life affirming revolt.

Black Lives Matter's Rejection of Suicide

While Camus carefully argues against suicide as a logical response to existential anxiety, it is less of a concern to social movements. Although self-immolation has been used as a form of political protest by other individuals and movements[lxxiii] Black Lives Matter has not endorsed such drastic measures and doing so would counter the movement's focus on promoting the value of Black lives.

Black Lives Matter passionately affirms the value of life despite the guarantee of death and the apparent lack of transcendent meaning of human life. Black Lives Matter co-founder Alicia Garza explains that the first assumption agreed to by the founders of Black Lives Matter was that "Black people deserved to live with dignity. That we were (and still are) sick and tired of being gunned down in the streets by police and vigilantes" (Garza 2015a, p. 21). Black Lives Matter has focused on inclusivity and has attempted to highlight the value of all Black lives regardless of age, class, gender, sexuality, or imprisonment. Since the movement is life affirming, it is not surprising that Black Lives Matter does not support suicide as a way to protest state-sponsored killings of Black people.

[lxxiii] Two famous cases of self-immolation come to mind. First, Thích Quảng Đức who in 1963 set himself a blaze in Saigon to protest the persecution of Buddhists by the South Vietnamese government. Second and more recently, Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in 2010 in Tunisia. Bouazizi's act was the catalyst for the Tunisian Revolution and the Arab Spring in 2011.

Sadly, there have been cases of Black Lives Matter activists taking their own lives. Edward Crawford[lxxiv] – who gained notoriety for a picture of his firing a tear gas canister back at police officers in Ferguson – took his life with a self-inflicted gunshot and fellow Ferguson protester MarShawn McCarrel[lxxv] took his life via gunshot on the door to the Ohio Statehouse (Salter 2019).[lxxvi] While Crawford and McCarrel should be remembered as dedicated supporters of Black Lives Matter, their suicides do not represent the movement's response to existential anxiety.

I will highlight some of the policy and procedural reforms Black Lives Matter endorsed in the final section of this chapter, none of which support suicide. Black Lives Matter is a social movement that promotes the value and continuation of Black lives, and it would be logically incoherent for a life affirming and life preserving movement to endorse suicide. Like Camus, Black Lives Matter does not endorse self-harm or suicide as a response to addressing state-sponsored existential anxieties. Camus and Black Lives Matter reject suicide and they also both reject religious leaps of faith.

[lxxiv] Crawford shot himself in the backseat of a car which was being driven at the time. The two witnesses in the front seat said Crawford had been expressing some distress over his personal life before pulling out a gun and shooting himself in the head (O'Hara 2017).

[lxxv] McCarrel posted on social media, on the day of his death, "My demons won today, I'm sorry" (as cited in Helsel 2016).

[lxxvi] The death of Danye Jones was also ruled a suicide. His mother, Melissa McKinnies was active in the Ferguson protests and does not believe that the determination of suicide was correct. McKinnies believes that her son – who was found hanging from a tree in the family's yard – was lynched (Salter 2019).

Black Lives Matter's Rejection of Religion as a Framing Device

Given the seeming purposelessness of human life due to the guarantee of death, many people adopt religion as a source of comfort or as a means of purporting purpose onto human life. While theological variations of existentialism have influenced other social movements, Black Lives Matter remains irreligious. This does not imply that individual members of Black Lives Matter chapters are themselves without religious attachments[lxxvii] nor does it imply that individual clergy members cannot participate (or have refused to participate) in movement efforts.[lxxviii] Furthermore, this does not mean that some have not attempted to explain the actions and claims of Black Lives Matter in religious terms. For example, *Do All Lives Matter?* by Wayne Gordon and John M. Perkins (2017) puts forth arguments from Biblical scripture in support of, and responding to Black Lives Matter. Yet as a movement, Black Lives Matter has not attached itself to religion in the manner of other similar liberatory movements such as the Civil Rights Movement. Black Lives Matter's refusal to utilize religion as a movement frame is in line with the previously noted desire for inclusivity as the movement's agnosticism can help to open the tent of the movement to people of all religious faiths and to those who are atheists or religious skeptics.

[lxxvii] Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors has, for example, earned a degree in religion from UCLA (Kahn-Cullors & bandele2018).

[lxxviii] In fact, there are examples of clergy members being invited to Black Lives Matter events and participating in prayer. See, for example, Pastor Mark Whitlock's story of his attendance at a Black Lives Matter protest in Los Angeles (Whitlock 2018).

In Ferguson, protesters prioritized movement efforts over religious leaders and interests. Alicia Garza explains that when Reverend Jesse Jackson came to Ferguson, he spoke with community members and activists. Although Jackson came to allegedly work with community members and demonstrators, "Jackson made the grave mistake of asking for donations for 'the church,' and was promptly booed" (Garza 2015b, p. 67). Clergy in St. Louis likewise were repudiated for only half-heartedly supporting protesters based on their tactics. Rather than kowtow to clergy, who were integral in the Civil Rights Movement, members of the clergy in St. Louis had to change their approach and reevaluate their stance in order for their participation to be accepted. These examples in Missouri highlight the lack of attachment Black Lives Matter has to organized religion as the movement has prioritized its efforts over specific religious attachments.

I will argue later in this chapter that Black Lives Matter's goals, motivations, and demands have been explicated and they have been detailed in secular terminology. Black Lives Matter, as a movement, does not have its genesis in religion or theological existentialism. Instead, the guiding principles of Black Lives Matter are secular, intentionally inclusive and challenge patriarchy and heteronormativity (Kahn-Cullors & bandele 2018, pp. 202-203). Similarly, "Vision for Black Lives," a list of policy demands crafted by the Movement for Black Lives and endorsed by Black Lives Matter makes socioeconomic and political demands which are not framed in religious language (Movement for Black Lives, Vision for Black Lives). The secular nature of Black Lives Matter is in line with Camus's refusal to endorse a turn towards religion as a solution to existential anxiety. It is not religion that calls Black Lives Matter to act, and yet the

movement is active. Camus, having rejected both suicide and religion as solutions to the anxiety produced by human mortality, advocates for a revolt that is likewise found in Black Lives Matter.

Black Lives Matter's Life Affirming Revolt

Black Lives Matter is acting against the state-sponsored death of Black Americans and is motivated by the resulting racialized existential anxiety. In response to the problem of existential anxiety, Black Lives Matter is a life-affirming social movement. Alicia Garza explains that one of the foundational assumptions of Black Lives Matter is that "all Black people deserve dignity, not just some" (Garza 2015a, p. 21). The claim "Black Lives Matter" is both affirmational – that the lives of Black people do, in fact, matter – and aspirational – that the lives of Black people ought to, in practice, matter. It is a claim that denotes the gap between the universal and theoretical position that all human lives are equal and have value, and the particular reality of the Black American experience in which Black lives are denigrated and destroyed by the state (or in a manner accepted or sanctioned by state authority) (Burgos 2017).[lxxix] Camus argues against suicide and religion as solutions to the existential anxiety that can affect humanity. What Camus argues for instead is a passionate revolt against the

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[lxxix] As Rankine (2015) states, "if black men and women, black boys and girls, mattered, if we were seen as living, we would not be dying simply because whites don't like us." Or, as Mumia Abu-Jamal states, "The Black Lives Matter movement was called into existence, and has so much work to do, because, well, Black lives still don't matter" (2017, p. 178).

imminence of human death. The passionate affirmation of the value of Black lives despite the inevitably, and oftentimes injustice surrounding Black death, can be interpreted through the lens of Camus's call for revolt.

When one recognizes the absurdity of the human condition, Camus explains that revolt is "One of the only coherent philosophical positions." As previously noted, Camus defines revolt as "the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it" (2004b, p. 536). Black Lives Matter is not resigned to passively accepting the inevitability of death, but rather passionately asserts the value of Black life despite this inevitability. While Black Lives Matter could have accepted death, the founders, and eventual supporters of the movement revolt in accordance with Sisyphus and live passionate lives dedicated to securing Black survival.

Black Lives Matter has persisted as a movement despite its lack of significant achievements. In one of the first quantitative studies of Black Lives Matter protests, Vanessa Williamson, Kris-Stella Trump, and Katherine Levine Einstein (2018) found that there were at least 780 Black Lives Matter protests in 44 states and 223 localities between August 2014 and August 2015. In spite of the movement's consistent activity, there have been few victories that are of note. Although the movement lacks many achievements, Political scientist Dewey Clayton positively assesses the movement in stating that Black Lives matter "has placed the topic of police brutality and criminal justice reform at the top of the national agenda" (2018, p. 475). While scholars, think tanks and government officials debate these pressing issues, police violence in general, and towards African-

Americans specifically has not decreased.[lxxx] Rickford, writing prior to Clayton, remains correct in stating that Black Lives Matter activism "has by no means stopped or even slowed the crescendo of violence" (2016, p. 36). Alicia Garza noted in an interview with *Bloomberg Businessweek* that there had been approximately 40 laws passed which dealt with criminal justice reform within a one-year span. However, Garza also notes that while some of the laws were positive, "some of them were actually pretty crappy" (Eidelson 2016).

Additionally, the national debate that Clayton celebrates has shifted away from issues of police violence due, in part, to the chaos of the Trump regime (Lowery 2018). The news media's focus has turned towards White House scandals, official turnover, staffing uncertainty and continual executive branch disarray. Patrisse Cullors, in response to the police killing of Pamela Turner in Baytown, Texas, noted on Instagram that "Although @blklivesmatter is no longer national headlines we keep dying at the hands of the police" (Cullors-Brignac 2019). These difficulties and setbacks have not led to political renunciation from Black Lives Matter as Alicia Garza notes in 2019, despite a

[lxxx] *Washington Post's* Police Shootings Database lists the number of fatal police shootings of citizens at 992 for 2018, which is in line with the 986 for 2017, 962 for 2016 and 994 for 2015 (Washington Post, Police shootings database). The website and organization Mapping Police Violence lists 1,165 people killed by the police in 2018, which is in line with their total of 1,147 for 2017. Mapping Police Violence includes shootings which account for 92% of deaths, as well as police use of tasers, physical force and police vehicles.

lack of press coverage, "There is all kinds of organizing that is still happening" around police accountability and reform (Hayes 2019).[lxxxi]

Like the mythological Sisyphus, Black Lives Matter passionately revolts against the human, existential condition despite a lack of significant change. Alicia Garza (2014) states "Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression." Garza's statement highlights the movement's response to existential anxieties through its positive affirmation of Black people. The revolt inherent in Black Lives Matter is an acknowledgement of the inevitability of Black death and the refusal to accept anything less than full and flourishing lives for Black people in the United States (Lopez Bunyasi and Watts Smith 2019). Deva Woodly calls this flourishing "Black joy" and defines it as "the defiant affirmation of blackness in spite of the material and psychic deprivation that often marks members of the group. Importantly, this kind of joy is experienced by both the individual and those participating in the group" (2019, p. 230). There is no resignation or qualification in this passionate revolt against death; Black Lives Matter explicitly rejects notions of relativity with regard to some Black lives having value over others. For the movement, the lives of Black inmates, Black queer folks and Black youth all have the same inherent value as those who

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[lxxxi][lxxxi] Much would change in 2020 and Black Lives Matter would be thrust back into mainstream discussions. See chapter seven for more discussion on Black Lives Matter's activism in 2020.

are Black and not incarcerated, Black and cisgender, Black and gainfully employed, or Black and aged.

Black Lives Matter affirms the value of *all* Black lives. As a life-affirming social movement, Black Lives Matter rejects the same alternative approaches to life that Camus rejects: suicide and religion. For Black people to flourish, however, there must be substantial political changes. While Camus details some examples of how one may revolt against death, it is his turn to "conquest" or towards explicitly political revolt which helps shed further light on Black Lives Matter's collective action.

Black Lives Matter's Turn Outwards Towards Political Action

It may be obvious that Black Lives Matter has not focused on individual level revolt since it is a social movement that requires collective action. What is unique about Black Lives Matter is the movement's rejection of respectability politics which can be defined as a group's policing of an individual's stereotypically deviant behaviors as a means to improvement. With regards to the African American community, respectability politics can be more specifically defined as "the idea that Blacks can minimize or evade the injustices associated with discriminatory attitudes by behaving in a so-called respectable manner, i.e., dressing, acting, speaking, and even protesting in certain acceptable ways" (Obasogie and Newman 2016, p. 541). Black Lives Matter has refused to focus on individual actions or responses to existential anxiety – the approach favored by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche – as can be seen through the movement's rejection of respectability politics.

Alicia Garza (2015a) explains that Black Lives Matter has rejected a respectability politics that demands a focus on "black-on-black crime" as a prerequisite to

claims against state-sanctioned violence. Respectability politics focuses on altering an individual's actions, and Garza argues that this approach distracts from efforts to fight systems of oppression such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism. Black Lives Matter's rejection of respectability politics is aligned with its acceptance and inclusion of all Black lives regardless of one's "respectability." Furthermore, while one may bemoan Mike Brown for breaking the law by selling loose cigarettes, seven-year-old Aiyana Jones was killed by Detroit Police officers when they accidently raided the wrong apartment and no form of "respectability politics" could explain why the young girl was murdered in her home.[lxxxii]

Shayla Nunnally traces the development of the idea of the "black body" and argues that Black Lives Matter is fighting to "reinscribe the value of the 'black body' as equal to that of the 'white body'" but in an historically unique way that refuses to denigrate Black people "who were felt to be detrimental to the positive portrayal of blackness" (2018, p. 146). The movement's rejection of respectability politics puts Black Lives Matter at odds with an older generation of Black organizations and social movements and at odds with some notable contemporaries. The woman's club movement and some famously involved advocates such as Mary Church Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells (Threadcraft 2016), the national Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) which boasts Martin Luther King Jr. as its first president (Clayton 2018) all advocated for forms of respectability politics. Nunnally highlights the inclusivity of Black Lives Matter as a movement which has proudly fought for and included all Black lives, and not just those who are deemed "respectable" by mainstream society.

[lxxxii] Unfortunately, and perhaps obviously, Aiyana Jones is not the only example to whom this applies.

There are many examples of the Civil Rights Movement utilizing tactics of respectability politics. Political scientist Dewey Clayton states "For example, when college students sat at lunch counters throughout the South during the sit-ins, they were dressed in their Sunday best. They sat quietly with their school textbooks and did their homework. They were courteous at all times, they sat up straight, always facing the counter, and they did not strike back or curse when abused" (2018, p. 460). Clayton continues that the Freedom Riders, who traveled from Washington D.C. to New Orleans, were again well dressed, well behaved, and spent their time reading and sitting quietly. Proponents of respectability politics view a lack of respect as the root of anti-Black racism in the United States. From the respectability politics position, the movement approach would be to dress, and behave in manners that white Americans found respectable, so that white attitudes towards Black people would change, and subsequently this could lead to sociopolitical changes (Rasaki 2016). The underlying premise behind respectability politics is that white respect for Black people must be earned before policy changes could occur. Unlike in the Civil Rights Era, respectability politics is not supported by Black Lives Matter, nor by the generation comprising the movement. For example, one recent study on respectability politics found that younger Black Americans see respect and autonomy as rights that must be protected, rather than as privileges that must be earned (Kerrison et al. 2018).

Black Lives Matter refuses to police individual African American lives or behaviors, and the movement also applies this logic to the state. Black Lives Matter has held protests and demonstrations which have demanded accountability for the actions of individual police officers who have undertaken violent and murderous actions against Black people. However, the movement also recognizes the need to address

sociohistorical conditions that make these killings possible (Davis 2016).[lxxxiii] This historical shift from the Civil Rights Era – where encouraging individuals to act "respectfully" was prevalent – to Black Lives Matter's inclusivity is paralleled by Camus's shift from individual revolt to a collective response to existential anxiety.

A social movement that collectively responds to the existential anxiety associated with state-sponsored killing of Black Americans by responding to political, economic, and sociohistorical conditions is acting in the vision of Camus's rebel. An individual or group must continue to live in the material world after refusing to endorse suicide, or religion as a solution to existential anxiety. Camus's early works, including *The Myth of Sisyphus,* do not provide a detailed approach to dealing with existential realities. However, Camus does hint at one approach to dealing with the world in Sisyphus that he explicates in detail in his latter works: turning outwards towards improving political conditions. This approach – which is first hinted at in the section in Sisyphus on the "conqueror" – is expanded upon most thoroughly in *The Rebel*. Turning outward towards the political world can be contrasted with notions of turning inwards either towards improvement of the self or of the group (through means such as respectability politics), which are endorsed by some existential thinkers such as Arthur Schopenhauer and Emil Cioran, but are rejected by Camus and Black Lives Matter.

In the final section of the chapter, I will argue that Black Lives Matter fits Camus's understanding of rebellion thanks, in part, to Black Lives Matter's reflexive political demands and goals. While Black Lives Matter has refused respectability politics as an inward response to existential anxiety, the outward turn towards political solutions will be detailed in the following section.

[lxxxiii] Some of these efforts will be seen in the concluding section which interprets Black Lives Matter as a Camusian rebellion.

Black Lives Matter as a Camusian Rebellion

The death of Trayvon Martin, and the subsequent acquittal of his killer were turning points for Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi. Of course, there have been Black people in the United States who have faced tremendous violence or death at the hands of the police prior to Black Lives Matter's formation in 2013. Growing up in New York City, I remember news coverage of the brutal beating suffered by Abner Louima by members of the New York City Police Department (NYPD) in 1997, the death of Amadou Diallo who was killed by four NYPD officers in the Bronx in 1999, and the death of Sean Bell at the hands of NYPD officers in my home borough of Queens in 2006. Trayvon Martin was not the first Black person killed by the state and his killer was not the first to be acquitted of charges. For Garza, Cullors and Tometi, Trayvon Martin's death signaled a turning point in their own politics and Black Lives Matter signaled a change in Black politics in the United States. The Camusian theory provides a tool for understanding of the existential anxiety which motivated the founders of Black Lives Matter to transform political quietism to political rebellion.

Camus opens *The Rebel* by asserting that a rebel is one who sets limits of acceptability. He asks rhetorically, "What is a rebel?" to which he immediately responds, "A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion" (Camus 1991, p. 13). The negation implies an intolerance of further transgressions or a sense of "I do not deserve this." Camus describes this rebellion as one's refusal to be a pawn in the course of history. The positive aspect of rebellion is an assertion of one's value and it is the positive capacity to alter the course of history to some, limited extent. Rebellion begins from a negative which is supported by an affirmative. The beginning of a Camusian rebellion occurred in July 2013 with the formation of Black Lives Matter.

When Alicia Garza posted her Facebook comment following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder of Trayvon Martin, Garza became a rebel. She said "no" to further state-sanctioned killing of Black Americans and "yes" to the value of Black lives. As Jeffrey Isaac explains, "To rebel is to assert something in oneself that is of value, and to refuse that about the world which denies this value" (1992, p. 121). The statement "Black lives matter" is an assertion of the value of Black lives, and a refusal of the state-sanctioned killing of Black people in the United States. Judith Butler, in a *New York Times* interview with George Yancy explains the purpose of the phrase "Black lives matter"

> Perhaps we can think about the phrase "black lives matter." What is implied by this statement, a statement that should be obviously true, but apparently is not? If black lives do not matter, then they are not really regarded as lives, since a life is supposed to matter. So what we see is that some lives matter more than others, that some lives matter so much that they need to be protected at all costs, and that other lives matter less, or not at all. And when that becomes the situation, then the lives that do not matter so much, or do not matter at all, can be killed or lost, can be exposed to conditions of destitution, and there is no concern, or even worse, that is regarded as the way it is supposed to be. The callous killing of Tamir Rice and the abandonment of his body on the street is an astonishing example of the police murdering someone considered disposable and fundamentally ungrievable. (Yancy and Butler 2015)

Butler's explanation of Black Lives Matter complements Isaac's description of what it means to rebel in a Camusian sense since the movement asserts the value of Black life that is being denied through state-sanctioned extrajudicial killings of Black people and resists this dehumanizing condition.

While Garza's suffering (following Zimmerman's acquittal) may have been an individual experience, Camus understands rebellion as a communal experience. Garza's moment of rebellion attracted Cullors and Tometi and this would not surprise Camus as he explains that "from the moment when a movement of rebellion begins, suffering is seen as a collective experience" (1991, p. 22). Although Camus's earliest works

supported the individual's capacity to revolt, he admitted that his thinking shifted "from an attitude of solitary revolt to the recognition of a community whose struggles must be shared … in the direction of solidarity and participation" (1970a, p. 339). While Camus argues that not all collective experiences are rebellions, I argue that Black Lives Matter can be rightfully understood as a Camusian rebellion.

Black Lives Matter began with individual experiences of political suffering and injustice such as Garza's and Cullors's feelings and the experiences of state-sanctioned death in the Black community. Revolutions, which (as rebellions) once desired to alleviate suffering, cease being concerned with the experiences of struggling peoples. Instead, revolutions are focused on some political *telos* – some final political goal – the achievement of which may come at the expense of those who are suffering. As Patrick Hayden explains, Camus opposes revolutions in the name of "abstract ideals posited as determinate ends" since a focus on ideals can "justify the subordination of people to those ends as a matter of 'necessity'" (2013, p. 201). Black Lives Matter has focused on the lives and livelihoods of Black Americans who have been or who may be victims of state-sanctioned violence. The movement has opposed the actual conditions that Black Americans have faced by protesting the police killings Black people, and through their lists of goals and demands. This focus on the actual suffering of Black people in the United States has prevented Black Lives Matter from becoming a Camusian revolution as the movement steadily remembers its purpose.

Camus sees the absurdity of the human condition – that humans desire meaning for their lives and yet will live and die without transcendent meaning – as inherently unjust. What a rebellion must fight against is human injustice which Camus defines as the human contribution to purposeless suffering and death. In his "Letters to a German Friend," Camus (1988a) explains that the absurdity of the human condition is unjust, but

the Nazis, by killing innocent people, are increasing the injustice of the world. Like the French, who had to rebel against Nazi occupation and the injustice they inflicted upon the world, Black Lives Matter became a rebellion against the human injustice of state-sanctioned killing of Black people in the United States. Fred Willhoite Jr. explains that Camus sees rebellion as necessarily fighting against such political oppression "for such oppression is on the side of death and misery in negating men's freedom and happiness" (1961, p. 404). Similarly, Martin Crowley explains that, from a Camusian perspective, "the drive for social justice may be motivated by the desire to institute at least the justice that is humanly possible, against a fundamentally unjust existential condition" (2007, pp. 102). Black Lives Matter arose from experiences of suffering – of existential anxiety – and the movement has fought against human injustice which multiplies the injustice of the human condition. Black Lives Matter has supported principles and goals based on the experiences of existential suffering, rather than arguing for some political ideology and in doing so has forged intelligible limits and political expectations on their desired instantiation of justice.

There are three sources of political goals or demands endorsed by Black Lives Matter which can help us to understand it as a Camusian rebellion: (1) the Guiding Principles affirmed by Black Lives Matter; (2) Campaign Zero, which is a police reform campaign proposed by prominent activists within Black Lives Matter and; (3) the Movement for Black Lives' organizational platform "Vision for Black Lives" which was endorsed by Black Lives Matter. All three of these platforms list goals or demands which are practical and reflexive, and none of the three adhere to a political *telos* or a specific political ideology or platform.

Black Lives Matter's Guiding Principles are open-ended and include terms and ideas such as "diversity," "restorative justice," "empathy," "intergenerational" and

"Black villages" (Black Lives Matter, What We Believe). While the Guiding Principles can appear vague, details of the principles are laid out on Black Lives Matter's official website. For example, while "transgender affirming" is listed as a general principle, the webpage explains the principle by stating "We make space for transgender brothers and sisters to participate and lead. We are self-reflexive and do the work required to dismantle cisgender privilege and uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women who continue to be disproportionately impacted by trans-antagonistic violence" (ibid). The statement does not detail a platform of transinclusivity. Instead, the principle is reflexive and exemplifies the rebellious aspect of Black Lives Matter; the movement has created space for trans men and trans women to participate in the movement, to become leaders within the movement, and to seek immediate restitution to sociopolitical issues specifically affecting the Black trans community.

Campaign Zero similarly offers ten open-ended goals including "end broken windows policing," "community representation," and "demilitarization." Like Black Lives Matter's guiding principles, Campaign Zero offers details of their approaches to limiting police intervention, improving community interaction, and ensuring accountability. For example, "training" is listed as one form of improving community interactions and includes detailed policy solutions for investing in "rigorous and sustained training" and for requiring police officers to undergo implicit racial bias testing (Campaign Zero, We Can End Police Violence). These approaches, goals, and policy positions are limited in scope and generalizable. Campaign Zero does not provide a political *telos* towards which the campaign is directed. While Campaign Zero's positions may imply certain approaches to policing, they originate from the negative experiences that Black people have had with police officers and are attempts to improve upon the suffering and death that result from such experiences.

Finally, the Movement for Black Lives, which encompasses Black Lives Matter and other similarly focused organizations, compiled a list of six demands including "end the war on black people," "economic justice," and "community control." Like the Guiding Principles and Campaign Zero, the Movement for Black Lives' organizational platform, "Vision for Black Lives" includes details on all six demands. For example, the demand for "political power" is not a demand for a change in political structure from the American system of federalism, but includes details such as putting an "End to the criminalization of Black political activity" and "Termination of super PACs and the implementation of 'public financing of elections'" (Movement for Black Lives, Vision for Black Lives).

In all three examples, Black Lives Matter has avoided *teleological* thinking and has prioritized the needs of actual human beings. Black Lives Matter has, concurrently, thought about larger notions of "political power" which require more radical changes and long-term social, economic, and political shifts. Camus offers an important example in *The Rebel* of the potential for success when political movements focus on limited – rather than *teleological* – goals. He explains that "revolutionary trade-unionism," while it has never accomplished anything as lofty as the goals of dialectical Marxism, successfully achieved improvements in working conditions for laborers. Camus states that "it is this movement alone that, in one century, is responsible for the enormously improved condition of the workers from the sixteen-hour day to the forty-hour week" (1991, p. 297).

Similarly, while Black Lives Matter does not make *teleological* demands as lofty as Fred Hampton's demand for socialism, nor Garveyism, Black Lives Matter's goals remain large and yet also remain achievable. Black Lives Matter is not focused on some *teleological* ends – regardless of whether they are liberal, Marxist or Black nationalist –

but rather is focused on programs, policies, reforms and other approaches that would improve the lives of suffering, and existentially anxious, Black people in the United States. As Isaac explains of Camusian political movements, they are, like Black Lives Matter, "present-oriented, intended not to realize a grand historical objective but to afford proximate forms of mutual solidarity and empowerment" (Isaac 1993, p. 359). Yet Black Lives Matter does not desire only a singular policy outcome and the movement has distinguished itself from more narrowly focused elements of the Civil Rights Movement which prioritized securing the Voting Rights Act of 1965. For a rebellion to remain true to its cause of alleviating human suffering, "abstract and futurized ideals must be subordinated to a concern for concrete and immediate human needs, to the struggle against present injustice and oppression" (Willhoite Jr. 1961, p.409) and it is fair to suggest that Black Lives Matter has embodied this requirement.

A Camusian rebellion can become a revolution if it is left unchecked. That is, a rebellion must remain faithful to alleviating immediate suffering rather than to some *teleological* idea or ideal which can theoretically eliminate all suffering in the future. Black Lives Matter has no stated *telos*; no stated final political goal. The movement works in a Sisyphean manner; Sisyphus was condemned for all eternity to push a boulder up a mountain which would inevitably roll down to the mountain's base. For Sisyphus, there could be no hope, no release of death and no denying his condition. Black Lives Matter persists politically without the certainty that they will achieve any successes, and without conceding to death or denying the necessity of their political actions. Instead, Black Lives Matter revolts passionately against the injustice of state-sanctioned killing of Black people in the United States with the goal of alleviating some of these worldly injustices.

Conclusion

In 2016, at the Broadway for Black Lives Matter event, scholar-activist Frank Roberts – who gained fame for teaching one of the first courses on the movement at New York University – was given the opportunity to speak on the movement. Roberts stated that Black Lives Matter was not a civil rights movement but rather a movement for human rights. Civil rights movements, he explained, are often centered around the struggle for legislative gains such as the right to marry, or the right to vote. Conversely, Roberts explains that "human rights movements cut to a deeper, *existential* question, which is the question of who gets to be counted as human" (Listing, 2016, 3:40).[lxxxiv] Roberts presents one way to think about the movement, in existential terms, and this helps us to analyze Black Lives Matter as a response to dehumanization and death at the hands of the state or as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, African American Studies scholar states simply, "The brilliance of the slogan 'Black Lives Matter' is its ability to articulate the dehumanizing aspects of anti-Black racism in the United States" (2016, p. 182).

Black Lives Matter is a social movement that has followed along the Camusian pathway. The movement's founders have expressed their motives in existential terminology and their efforts have been a response to the necropolitical situation of Black people in the United States. Rather than succumbing to existential anxiety, Black Lives Matter has turned outwards towards addressing systemic injustice. In order to rectify the injustices brought upon Black Americans, Black Lives Matter acts as a Camusian rebellion which has been motivated by alleviating the actual suffering of Black people in the United States. The movement, while it is fighting against injustice, is not focused on a *telos* – a previously conceived end goal – but is politically reflexive and focused on

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[lxxxiv] Italics added for emphasis.

both immediately workable solutions and longer term socioeconomic and political changes.

CHAPTER #5

THE ALT-RIGHT: FROM FEAR OF WHITE GENOCIDE TO CAMUSIAN REVOLUTION

The Alt-Right was first conceptualized in 2009 by Richard Spencer when he founded a website titled "Alternative Right." The website featured "highbrow white-nationalist content" and attempted to "maintain an intellectually serious tone" while promoting racial anti-egalitarianism (Hawley 2017, p. 67). The Alt-Right gained mainstream notoriety in 2016 thanks to media coverage of the movement and criticisms by Democratic Presidential candidate Hilary Clinton (Hawley 2017). While Spencer's Alt-Right website, and the movement that has borne its namesake, has waned, and waxed in popularity (Spencer even abandoned the project at one point) the Alt-Right has maintained its core goal of achieving racially homogenous ethnostates.

In this chapter, I will interpret the case of the Alt-Right using the Camusian social movement theory. Applying the Camusian theory to both the Alt-Right and Black Lives Matter will allow for greater comparison across the two seemingly disparate movements. Importantly, both movements are responding to the existential anxieties that have been aroused by death, albeit death in different forms.[lxxxv] While the Camusian theory helps us envisage the two movements as following similar trajectories, it also help to explain the

[lxxxv] The Alt-Right's response to "social death" will be addressed in the following section of the chapter.

divergence between Black Lives Matter as a Camusian rebellion and the Alt-Right as a violent and deadly Camusian revolution.

The Alt-Right's Response to Social Death

I argued in the previous chapter that Black Lives Matter's existential anxiety is related to the deaths of Black Americans whose lives have been taken by members of the police, or by vigilantes who have been exonerated by the courts. This anxiety, I argued, is experienced through the prism of race and the aggregate experience of being Black in the United States. While the Alt-Right similarly expresses existential anxieties in racialized terms, the movement is not existentially anxious over actual deaths of white Americans. Instead, the Alt-Right is also responding to the existential anxiety produced by social death. The Alt-Right understands social death through a white racial context and the movement discusses social death using the term "white genocide."[lxxxvi] Understanding the Alt-Right's use of "social death" and "white genocide" is paramount to understanding the existential anxiety that underlies the movement's purpose.

The Alt-Right is not responding to the deaths of white Americans, but instead focuses primarily on social death which, in its contemporary usage, includes "loss of social identity, loss of social connectedness and losses associated with the disintegration of the body" (Králová 2015, p. 246). Social death – the manner in which a person (or people) is treated as dead or nonexistent – has been the bane of the Alt-Right's existential

[lxxxvi] And synonymous existential terms such as "white replacement" and "white erasure."

anxiety. The feeling of existential anxiety, rather than empirical observations, can motivate human actions including participation in the Alt-Right. In this chapter I will focus on white Americans' expressions of the feeling of existential anxiety – which is real – rather than the empirical realities often ignored or denied by the Alt-Right (and by many white Americans in general) that counter their claims.[lxxxvii]

The Camusian theory helps us understand how the Alt-Right's feeling of existential anxiety can motivate the movement's actions. In the *Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus states that one may not be awoken to existential anxiety through rational considerations, but rather through an irksome feeling. Matthew Bowker, in his work on Camus's understanding of the absurd, explains that for Camus, the absurd "is more akin to a conflicted or ambivalent experience" and "not a single 'fact' that can be deduced from proposition or postulate" (2013, p. 33). Since one may feel or experience – rather than logically reason – the absurdity of human existence, the feeling of the Alt-Right's existential anxiety can help us to appreciate the movement's response to shifting racial demographics in the United States. This feeling is expressed by some white Americans and manifests as the existential anxiety that motivates the Alt-Right.

The Alt-Right's fear that white lives are in danger of facing social death is not unique as similar feelings have existed for some white Americans as far back as the Reconstruction era. Historian Carol Anderson's concept of "white rage" explains a similar feeling of some white Americans who have fought against Black advancement.

[lxxxvii] Notably, that demographic displacement and social death are either not occurring, or that white Americans have no empirically based reasons to be concerned in either regard.

Anderson explains that "White rage is not about visible violence, but rather it works its way through the courts, the legislatures, and a range of government bureaucracies … The trigger for white rage, inevitably, is black advancement" (2017, p. 3). Anderson finds white rage as a force employed to annul Black social, political, and economic achievements from reconstruction through the Obama administration. Juliet Hooker similarly explains that "victories in the struggle for racial equality have been followed by eras of deep and sustained backlash in which blacks and other minorities have borne the brunt of racial terror, violence, and xenophobia" (2016, p. 455). The fear of social death has been explicated by some white Americans, although the specific terminology "social death" was not directly utilized.

Scholars Matthew Fowler, Vladimir Medenica, and Cathy Cohen (2017) argue that "white vulnerability, the perception that whites, through no fault of their own, are losing ground to other groups" drove millennial Trump voters to the polls in 2016.[lxxxviii] White vulnerability is a fair approximator for white fear of social death and young, white Americans (the primary demographic of the Alt-Right) expressed this feeling which is not supported by empirical realities. Education scholar Nolan Cabrera similarly found that while anti-white, or "reverse" racism has become popular in rhetoric, it remains "primarily a myth as opposed to a tangible reality … it is predicated on a *feeling*[lxxxix] by many White people that racism against Black people is largely over but racism against

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[lxxxviii] Trump's relationship with the Alt-Right is complicated and I do not mean to insinuate that there is more of a connection between the two than actually exists.

[lxxxix] Italics added for emphasis.

White people is on the rise" (2014, p. 781).[xc] The racial victimization expressed by white students in Cabrera's study again highlights that some white people are feeling anxious about white social death although the empirical realities do not match these feelings.

Members and supporters of the Alt-Right have even more clearly expressed a fear of white social death than the previously noted examples of the white general public in the United States. Patrik Hermansson, following his undercover exposé on the Alt-Right, conducted an "Ask Me Anything" question and answer session on the popular news aggregator and discussion platform Reddit. Hermansson was asked by participants what thought was driving people towards far-right political groups and he responded,

> The real question is what makes white men, many of whom are middle class and/or relatively well educated, decide that they - not ethnic minorities - are in fact the real victims in society. The whole movement is consumed with a sense of victimhood. They genuinely believe that white men are the most oppressed people in society. (2017)

Hermansson uses the word "believe" to express the same argument as I have made above regarding "feelings." What matters to Alt-Right supporters is not empirical reality but rather the feeling that white people have become targeted victims of a plot to eliminate the white race either literally or through social means.

Political theorist Corey Robin articulates white fears of social death without using the term to describe the feeling:

[xc] For example, one student that Cabrera interviewed, "Jonathan," was not initially accepted into Western University (WU) and blamed affirmative action policies, "despite the fact that WU had not practiced race-conscious admissions for nearly a decade" (Cabrera 2014, p. 778).

> a combination of stagnating wages, rising personal and household debt, and increasing precarity–coupled with the tormenting symbolism of a black president and the greater visibility of black and brown faces in the culture industries–has made the traditional conservative offering seem scant to its white constituents. The future of the United States as a minority-majority nation exacerbates this anxiety. Racial dog whistles no longer suffice; a more brazen sound is required. (2017, p. 243)

While Robin attributes this new "more brazen sound" to Donald Trump, the same can be said of the Alt-Right.[xci] In fact, the Alt-Right's white nationalism is more openly pronounced, and it often unapologetically embraces racism while Trump's brand of racism – as clear as it is – often lacks the candor of the Alt-Right. The previous evidence suggests that some white Americans certainly do fear social death, whether or not they use the term to describe this feeling.

Scholar Thomas Main correctly notes that the Alt-Right "is under the delusion that whites have been entirely disposed of power" (2018, p. 167). Despite these claims to the contrary, there is no reason to believe that white Americans are in danger of suffering a social death. Sociologist Orlando Patterson (1982) explains that social death involves, minimally, the absence or revocation of basic civil rights which is a problem that white Americans are not facing.[xcii] However, the feeling of fear expressed by some white

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[xci] Robin argues that conservatism's reactionary tendencies are present in American conservatism throughout its history. What is new is the base's aching for (and receiving) a bolder expression of reaction that is explicitly racially focused.

[xcii] Patterson, in *Slavery and Social Death,* explores the relationship between the two titular concepts. He finds the roots of social death in enslavement which involves an unqualified lack of basic human and civil rights. Social death was a disempowering and alienating condition in which a slave was stripped of his or her former identity, subsumed under the control of a master and "ceased to belong independently to any formally

Americans is very real. The Alt-Right has, within the scope of contemporary American politics, uniquely captured this feeling of fear of social death in their use of the existential term "white genocide."

White genocide is "the belief that whites are in imminent danger of cultural, political, economic, and even physical annihilation by some combination of Jews, immigrants, Muslims, African Americans, white liberals, feminists and communists" (Atkinson 2018, p. 310-311). It is "the notion that the 'white race' is directly endangered by the increasing diversity of society" (J.M. Berger as cited in Greene 2019, p. 51).[xciii] White genocide is an explicitly existential fear about the value of white lives, their imminent mortality, and the disempowerment – the social death – of white people. The notion of white genocide has profoundly influenced the Alt-Right as noted by some of its most prominent members.

Greg Johnson has stated that "white extinction is the *intended* result of the policies we oppose" (as cited in P Gray 2018, p. 144). Johnson has framed white genocide as a policy or set of policies responsible for the racial demographic shifts in the United States since the 1960s.[xciv] Johnson's quote expresses the Alt-Right's anxiety that has arisen from this new American reality as the movement's "ultimate goal" is to reverse

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recognized community" (Patterson 1982, p. 6). This does not describe the current scenario for white Americans.

[xciii] To be clear, white genocide is the idea that whites are facing a genocide, not that whites ought to conduct genocide.

[xciv] Which have increased people of color as a proportion of the population in the United States.

the demographic shift and secure an all-white ethnostate. Johnson does not believe that white genocide is inevitable, but he insists that it is already occurring and has been occurring since desegregation as he states, "When tens of thousands of whites fled American cities and lost tens of millions in property because of desegregation, that was ethnic cleansing" (Johnson 2010). Johnson has likewise stated "Whenever we talk about diversity, increasing diversity. That is always a euphemism for having fewer white people" (Holland et al. 2018, 26:00). Johnson's followers have expressed similar fears of white genocide.

"Quintilian" (2017) who posts to Greg Johnson's *Counter Currents* website explains in his review of the film *Interstellar* that "It is the white race that is the indispensable race." Quintilian's review is similarly titled "The Future Is White" and the author argues that *Interstellar's* use of a white male as the earth-saving protagonist is consistent with the Alt-Right's understanding of race realism. One commenter on Quintilian's review who uses the pseudonym "Collition" (2017), juxtaposes this notion of white indispensability and heroism with a strawman argument wherein the poster notes that "the leftists will always say that the White race is the cancer of humanity and that the world would be better off w/o us." Greg Johnson has directly referenced fears of white genocide and this idea is present in posts by some followers who contribute to his website. Johnson is not the only prominent member of the Alt-Right who expresses fears of white genocide and who promotes these ideas to sympathetic followers.

Richard Spencer expressed similar existential fears of white genocide during his during his speech at the National Policy Institute (NPI) conference following the 2016

election.[xcv] In his speech, Spencer states "As Europeans … No one mourns the great crimes committed against us. For us, it is conquer or die. This is a unique burden for the white man" (Spencer 2016).[xcvi] Similarly, Andrew Anglin expresses fears of white genocide in "A Normie's Guide to the Alt-Right." Among the terms that Anglin defines or explains are "white genocide" and the related notion of "white countries for white people." Anglin explains that white genocide involves "flooding White nations with non-Whites" and this process "amounts to a form of calculated genocide against a racial group" (Anglin 2016a). Anglin, like Johnson and Spencer, expresses a concern that "non-White immigration into White countries will lead to a destruction of White culture, the White social order and ultimately an extermination of the White race" (ibid). Spencer, Johnson, and Anglin all express existential fears of racialized social death and all believe that the best means to avoid this seeming inevitability is to secure racial purity within defined state borders.

Stead Steadman, a highly influential Alt-Right supporter in the United Kingdom and organizer of the London Forum was filmed by Hermansson for his undercover exposé stating that the Alt-Right was facing "an unparalleled existential threat" (Holland et al. 2018, 12:52). Steadman's statement echoes prominent American Alt-Right members and these key influences are among the many Alt-Right supporters publicly

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[xcv] NPI, despite its innocuous name, is a white nationalist organization that made Spencer its president in 2011.

[xcvi] This dichotomy of "conquer or die" also hints towards the Alt-Right as a Camusian revolution.

expressing fears of white genocide. This instantiation of existential anxiety is central to understanding the Alt-Right's motives and actions.[xcvii]

The Alt-Right as Revolting Against the Absurdity of Human Existence

The Alt-Right has framed its actions as a response to the existential anxiety caused by white genocide. The movement has revolted against their alleged racialized social death by championing the lives of white people through a celebration of "white culture." For Alt-Right, "the preservation of the white race is a prerequisite for preserving Western culture and Western societies" (Esposito 2019, p. 94). The response to feelings of existential anxiety has thus been a form of "white advocacy" (Esposito 2019) which promotes and celebrates the Alt-Right's vision of a vibrant and exuberant white population which is not only alive but contributing to cultural creation. White advocacy attempts to revolt against the supposed social death of white people by passionately championing white people and white culture. The Alt-Right's revolt can be explained using the Camusian theory since the movement, like Camus, rejects suicide and

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[xcvii] There are many examples of less prominent Alt-Right supporters or even anonymous posts that express similar feelings. George Hawley interviewed members of a group claiming to speak for *Daily Stormer* who explained that "The core concept of the [Alt-Right], upon which all else is based, is that Whites are undergoing an extermination, via mass immigration into White countries" (2017, p. 141). Vox Day (2016) similarly wrote that "The Alt-Right believes we must secure the existence of the white people and a future for white children." Vox Day is quoting the "14 Words" which are popular white supremacist and white nationalist slogan. Another Counter Currents poster, Spencer J. Quinn (2016) supported Trump's presidency but remained fearful of white "demographic demise" leading to "white irrelevance" which is similar to, if not synonymous with, white genocide.

religion as alternative responses to the existential anxiety associated with death. I will first address the rejected approaches before explaining the Alt-Right's life affirming stance towards white people and white culture which is a revolt against the purported inevitability of white genocide.

The Alt-Right's Rejection of Suicide

The Alt-Right has focused on promoting the value of white lives, and its members have promoted a desire for a generational continuation of white families. Like Black Lives Matter, the Alt-Right has not argued for suicide as an appropriate means of responding to social death and existential anxiety. The Alt-Right's political goal of a racially pure, all white ethnostate requires the continuity of white lives and the movement's fight for the continuation of white bloodlines would be logically inconsistent with a hypothetical support for suicide since the dead cannot reproduce and create racially pure children.

While in the prior chapter I noted a few cases of Black Lives Matter supporters taking their own lives, my research has not led to any examples of Alt-Right supporters doing the same. While the Alt-Right is a white nationalist movement that is majority male, there is no evidence suggesting that its supporters are subject to the high suicide rates of white men in the United States. [xcviii] It is also worth reiterating the previous

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[xcviii] I do not mean to insinuate that the Alt-Right has done anything to fight against white people taking their own lives, and more will be said about the Alt-Right's general silence on confronting white suicide, and white male suicide in the next chapter. In short, white people and specifically white males account for a disproportionately high rate of suicides

example of the poster Collition (2017) who claims that "the leftists will always say that the White race is the cancer of humanity and that the world would be better off w/o us." While one could succumb to this feeling of racially understood existential threat, Collition, the previously mentioned Quintilian (who claimed that the white race is "indispensable"), and the mass of Alt-Right supporters have not turned to suicide. Instead, as I previously stated, the Alt-Right has often promoted white lives as possessing value that ought to be celebrated while, in the Alt-Right narrative, these very lives are under assault.

The Alt-Right's Rejection of Religion as a Framing Device

The Alt-Right is a unique right-wing, American social movement in its aggregate rejection of and even hostility towards religion. Existential anxiety about death can lead some people to seek religious sources of meaning; an approach which Camus rejects. Black Lives Matter was shown to be unique in the recent history of African American social movements and the Alt-Right similarly is unique among right-wing social movements in the United States as both movements have rejected religiosity as a framing device. The Alt-Right is ideologically secular with many atheists, anti-theists, and religious skeptics among its ranks (Hawley 2017; Wendling 2018) and this irreligiosity places the movement in opposition to previous (and concurrent) right-wing movements in the United States.

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in the United States and yet the Alt-Right is not focused on addressing this seemingly significant social concern.

While it is easy to conflate right-wing movements in the United States with the "religious right," the Alt-Right opposes and often ridicules the religious right. Richard Spencer has, for example, cited Nietzsche's critique of Christianity as being particularly important in developing his belief system (Hawley 2017). For Spencer, Nietzsche's critique of Christian slave morality and Christianity's universalism (if not egalitarianism) exist in contrast to the Alt-Right's racially exclusionary beliefs. Spencer explained that his understanding of racial identity is opposed to both liberalism and "Abrahamic monotheism" for its egalitarian portrayal of all people as "all one" (Gee 2017).[xcix] Spencer's reading of Nietzsche led to Hawley (2017) explaining that members of the Alt-Right will more likely mock than defend evangelical Christians.

Ronald Beiner, in his analysis of the philosophical influences on the contemporary radical right, argues that Nietzsche is the most important thinker "associated with the tradition of resolute repudiation of liberal modernity in all its moral, political, and cultural dimensions" (2018, p. 18). It is not surprising that Spencer and others in the Alt-Right have latched on to a pseudo-Nietzschean, anti-religious position that stands in contrast to Christianity and to the moorings of liberal democracy (e.g.

[xcix] Jared Taylor likewise stated that "No phrase in history has done more harm than 'all men are created equal'" and Vox Day stated that "[T]here is no such thing as equality, the grand rhetorical flights of Thomas Jefferson notwithstanding…. The assertation is not a self-evident truth, it is nothing more than a logical and empirical falsehood, and easily proven to be so by every possible standard" (as cited in Kelman 2020).

egalitarianism, basic human equality, *etc*.).[c] The Alt-Right's explicit anti-religiosity places it in a unique position in contrast with other influential and recent right-wing American social and political movements.

Hawley cites paleoconservatism[ci] as being an influence on the early founding of the Alt-Right, but the anti-religious leanings of the Alt-Right have led to a noted distance between the movement and what remains of the paleoconservatives (Hawley 2017). Unlike paleoconservatism, the Tea Party was not a major influence on the Alt-Right. The Tea Party is, however, a recent and relatively successful right-wing social movement in the United States. Like the paleoconservatives of prior decades, the Tea Party was a far more religiously inclined movement than the Alt-Right (Arceneaux & Nicholson 2012). While the Alt-Right is unique among recent American right-wing movements as it is not religiously inclined, individual Alt-Right members and supporters may not be as anti-religious as the previously noted intellectual contributors.

Despite the general anti-Christian sentiments of the Alt-Right, there are some less religiously hostile segments of the movement. There is, for example, an Alt-Right Christian podcast called "The Godcast" and Hawley (2017) notes that there are several bloggers who identify as both Alt-Right and Christian. One element defining Alt-Right Christianity is its rejection of the left-leaning politics of leaders such as Pope Francis, and

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[c] Greg Johnson (2018), in a decidedly positive review of Beiner's work on the far right, states that Beiner's book is valuable to anyone who "wants to understand why Nietzsche and Heidegger are so useful to the New Right."

[ci] See chapter three for a longer discussion of paleoconservatism's political philosophy, and some differences between the earlier paleoconservative movement and the Alt-Right.

other Christians who have endorsed social justice causes. Still others in the Alt-Right embrace a secular or cultural Christianity as they "prefer cathedrals and incense to church communities and prayer" (Wendling 2018, p. 7). The presence, however, of religiously minded members of the Alt-Right should not distract from the overall irreligiosity of the movement; the Alt-Right remains in staunch opposition to recent right-wing movements as, unlike prior right-wing social movements, it has neither appealed to religion for justification of its politics, nor has it framed its cause in religious terms.

The Alt-Right's goals, motivations and demands are all centered around racialized existential anxiety and exist in opposition to what supporters see as false universalism promoted by Christianity. Like Black Lives Matter, the Alt-Right has acknowledged feelings of existential anxiety produced by death and has, by and large, refused to turn towards religion as a potential solution to these feelings. Of course, the differences between Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right are stark, yet the secular nature of both movements places them in a degree of opposition not to each other, but to their respective intellectual and chronological predecessors.

The Alt-Right's (White) Life Affirming Revolt

The Alt-Right has revolted against white genocide by promoting white lives and white culture. While these terms are somewhat ill-defined within the Alt-Right, members of the movement have attempted to revolt against (their perception) of the seeming

certainty of white genocide by affirming the value of white people and white cultural contributions.[cii]

Richard Spencer seemingly agrees with Karl Marx in stating that the globalized free market flattens the world and devalues culture. Spencer wants to counter the market because he feels that it does not sufficiently promote and value white contributions to culture (Esposito 2019). Many existing, contemporary cultural artifacts are, for example, portrayed by members of the Alt-Right as antithetical to their cause as the Alt-Right charges that its racial enemies (mostly Jews) influence these forms of culture (Kelly 2017). Rather than reforming existing forms of culture, members of the Alt-Right, such as Spencer and Jared Taylor, promote a form of cultural/racial self-preservation that champions the notion of white culture as distinct from other cultures. As Philp Grey explains, for the Alt-Right, "Race and culture are not separate but connected" which means that the Alt-Right's attempts to oppose perceived white genocide are also an attempt to preserve and promote white culture and reverse the perceived trend of white social death (P Gray 2018, p. 149).

Alt-Right supporters have, for example, defended the place of white people in popular culture. A well-known Alt-Right essayist who writes under the pseudonym

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[cii] To be clear, the Alt-Right does not see race and culture as synonymous, but rather intertwined. Only white people can produce white culture, but not all white people will contribute to white culture, and some may even reject white culture (or support other races' cultures, *etc.*).

"Henry Olson" explained that what motivated his or her[ciii] contributions to the Alt-Right was the idea of white culture being "under attack" (Hawley 2017, p. 84). Another Alt-Right supporter and Twitter user @genophilia called for a boycott of the movie *The Force Awakens*, a recent sequel in the *Star Wars* saga, due to the trailer featuring Black actor John Boyega. The post stated, "#BoycottStarWarsVII because it is anti-white propaganda promoting #whitegenocide" (as cited in Greene 2019, p. 50).

By highlighting the value of white lives as contributing to culture, and by noting cultural creations that they feel are contributing to white social death, the Alt-Right is revolting against its existential fear of white genocide. In this manner, it is a life affirming movement although one that affirms only the value of the lives of white people. Alt-Right sympathizer Roosh V – a self-proclaimed pick-up artist who turned to writing about politics – juxtaposes the two positions of existential anxiety and white affirmation in a post entitled "The White European Culture Is Dead" (2017). Roosh V first exhibits a fear of Muslims invading the West, adopting technology and customs, and eventually reproducing at higher rates than Westerners (before Africans eventually do the same to Muslims). Yet Roosh V turns to promote a "re-focus on family and tradition" in order to avoid this form of racial or ethnic replacement. By focusing not just on the existential anxiety of white replacement (by Muslims and Africans), but by also proposing a semi-solution that champions white virility, Roosh V highlights the positive promotion of

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[ciii] It is overwhelmingly likely that the anonymous posters identify as male since, as discussed earlier, the Alt-Right is disproportionately comprised of men. I use both male and female pronouns for anonymous posters, but I expect that the posters are men. I spoke in more depth about the Alt-Right and gender in chapter three.

whiteness that the Alt-Right has used as its form of revolt. Some Alt-Right supporters extend their revolt beyond cultural considerations as they focus on white progeny and express a desire to carry on white bloodlines.

There are examples of women within the Alt-Right who prioritize their role as traditional wives ("tradwives") and mothers and see their role as carrying on a white lineage. One such advocate, known as a "Wife With a Purpose" put forth a video titled "the white baby challenge" in which she encouraged white women to procreate to reverse the trend of declining white birthrates in the global West (Kelly 2018). The Alt-Right's core constituency, men, have also been explicit about the need to continue white bloodlines.

Donna Minkowitz, in her previously noted exposé, states that Sam Dickson spoke about the "need to get white women to have more babies" and Dickson "suggested incentives to make this happen." Minkowitz continues,

> For example, he mentioned financial incentives for men to get them to each father 'legitimate' white babies. For women, he suggested that they be allowed to wear certain clothing styles—my guess is that he was referring to stylish, pretty items although he was not explicit—only after they have given birth to several legitimate white children. (as cited in Bader 2018)

Like Dickson, Greg Johnson also discussed the need for white women to have children and prioritize motherhood over education (Singal 2017). The Alt-Right's focus on continuing white bloodlines, alongside its emphasis on white culture are evidence of the movement's (white) life affirming tendencies.

In promoting the value of white lives through a positive portrayal of both the lives of white people and of so-called white culture, the Alt-Right is revolting against the

existential anxiety associated with white genocide.[civ] The Alt-Right's revolt is one that, as Camus explains, is not resigned to accept the inevitability of the perceived fate of white genocide. The Alt-Right affirms the value of white lives and rejects calls for open borders and multiculturalism as being existentially threatening and debasing to white culture. Both Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right have rejected the same alternative approaches to existential anxiety that Camus rejects: neither movement supports suicide, nor religion as sufficient responses to the anxiety produced by death. Like Black Lives Matter, the Alt-Right feels a sense of existential anxiety and reaffirms the value of the racial group before turning to Camusian conquest; political action.

The Alt-Right's Turn Outwards Towards Political Action

While Black Lives Matter turned outward and away from the history of African American respectability politics, the Alt-Right refused an inward reevaluation in a different manner. Politicians and other elites have long asked Black Americans to consider how the Black community can improve itself and Black Lives Matter has rejected such naïve considerations. Historically, white Americans have not faced similar demands as white people have not been asked to turn inwards and consider why white

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[civ] The Alt-Right does not, however, define what actually comprises "white culture" in any meaningful depth. Later, I will note that white culture includes, at most, a vague understanding of "good manners" and "creativity." A more thorough definition appears impossible for two reasons: the inability to define the bounds of whiteness as discussed earlier, and the question of which white cultural productions ought to be included as appropriately "white culture."

people may be suffering in the United States.[cv] White Americans have not faced pressure to police white communities, and have been able to turn to Camusian political conquest through political action and critique.

While the proper role of government and views of market economics differentiate the Alt-Right from mainstream conservatives, it is the role of race that primarily places the Republican party in opposition to the Alt-Right. Matthew Flisfeder (2018) explains that it is "Culture, rather than the political economy of capitalism" that is the principal concern for the Alt-Right. The Alt-Right may disagree with mainstream Republicans on economic or national security matters, but the Alt-Right's most contentious difference lies in the movement's view of "racialism" which understands race as a fundamental biological category that necessarily implies that unlike peoples can and ought to be identified and forcibly separated due to immutable scientific differences among the races (Main 2018). Without racial purity, the Alt-Right feels that white culture is being dispossessed, denigrated, and destroyed and that white lives are being socially – if not physically – eradicated. The Alt-Right's solution is a political turn as it attacks opponents who the movement believes have contributed to white genocide in the United States. The Alt-Right thus views the Republican party as its opposition because the party

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[cv] Terence McCoy (2017) of the *Washington Post* conducted interviews with Alt-Right supporters who turned their blame outward towards the state, liberals, anti-racists, corporations and most clearly, people of color. One interviewee, for example, blamed his unemployment on McDonalds and Walmart because both corporations hired Black employees instead of him.

has ceded to non-whites and has not taken a strong enough political stance against the mere existence people of color in the United States.

Although the Democrats and their liberal and progressive supporters are the most obvious opponents of the Alt-Right's anti-egalitarianism, the Alt-Right has expressed strong opposition to mainstream members of the Republican party such as Jeb Bush, John McCain, Mitch McConnell, and Paul Ryan. Previous right-wing movements such as the Tea Party (Condon 2010) and paleoconservatism (Hawley 2017) have stood outside of the Republican party but have worked to infiltrate and alter the course of the Republican party. The Alt-Right, however, exists outside of the Republican party and has not sought to reform the party through electoral politics.[cvi]

The Alt-Right appreciates Donald Trump's brand of politics because he, like members of the movement, does not wish to reform the Republican party. Instead, Trump and the Alt-Right both offer a new and alternative message and approach to politics in the United States that seeks to displace classic liberalism and conservatism with a politics that is rooted in their understanding of race. As previously noted, Trump has been called an "icebreaker" by Johnson and Spencer for creating a fissure in American politics that challenges egalitarianism which the Alt-Right hopes to exploit (Hawley 2017).

[cvi] I am not aware of any elected official at the federal level having declared outward support of the Alt-Right. While there are over 80,000 local governments in the United States, and an elected official may support the movement, there are no well-known examples.

It is chiefly the conciliating of racial egalitarianism that has divided the Alt-Right from mainstream political parties in the United States. The most explicit divide between the Alt-Right and mainstream conservatism can be found in the movement's use of the term "cuckservative" which is a portmanteau of the words cuckold[cvii] and conservative. Cuckservatives are, for the Alt-Right, white conservatives who are not advancing the interests of themselves as a racial group but are instead advancing the interests of other racial groups, likely at the expense of their own group interest (Hawley 2017). "Cuckservative" is infused with racist connotations and is closely related to the idea of someone being a "race traitor." Jeb Bush and John McCain were both labeled cuckservatives for supporting looser immigration restrictions, and Bush specifically, for being married to a woman of color (Heer 2016). Republicans who have staunchly supported their party such as Mitch McConnell and Paul Ryan have been labeled cuckservatives for not being more closely aligned with the Alt-Right's political goals of racial purity (M Hayden 2017b). As the Alt-Right can be understood as responding to the perceived existential threat of white genocide, therefore political actors who oppose the Alt-Right are best understood (from their perspective) as either complicit in or actively contributing to white genocide.

The Alt-Right's perception of racial abandonment by the political establishment has led to the movement turning outward and seeking political redress through protests

[cvii] A man who has been cheated on by his spouse and knowingly raises the offspring of his wife and another man. Cuckoldry, as an insult, often has racial connotations whereby the father of the child is Black, while the husband and his adulterous wife are white.

and rallies. Racially motivated feelings of existential anxiety have not led the Alt-Right to a critical reevaluation of whiteness in American society, nor to actively policing individual white Americans. Instead, the Alt-Right has turned towards the public sphere to broadcast their concerns and to seek political redress. While some mainstream Republicans have offered dog-whistle racism and others have gone further towards more open racist imagery and statements, many in the Alt-Right preferred the bombastic, and unapologetically politically incorrect style of Donald Trump as political outsider during his 2016 presidential campaign. Despite this appreciation for Trump, the Alt-Right's ethnocratic politics remain at odds with the administration's publicly stated goals.[cviii] Rather than waiting for Trump and the Republican party to move towards the Alt-Right's racio-political position, the Alt-Right moved from the internet into the streets and has acted as a violent Camusian revolution.

The Alt-Right as Camusian Revolution

A Camusian revolutionary begins from the same starting point as a Camusian rebel and in this way, we can see the Alt-Right and Black Lives Matter as similar. Both

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[cviii] As noted in the chapter three, *Alt-Right Corporation* co-founder Jason Jorjani claimed to have a direct connection to Steven Bannon while Bannon was in the Trump administration (Singal 2017) and Bannon described *Breitbart News* as "the platform of the Alt-Right" (Posner 2016). While *Breitbart News* and the Alt-Right have had, as previously noted, a very tenuous relationship, Bannon's presence as the White House Chief Strategist and Senior Counselor to the President represented at least some potential pathway to influencing national politics. Bannon, however, only served in his governmental roles until August 2017 and he has fallen out of favor with Trump (Graham 2018), *Breitbart* (Gonzales 2018), and the Alt-Right (Owen 2018a). Jorjani has also since distanced himself from the Alt-Right and from Richard Spencer (Jorjani 2019).

movements began due to some individual (or individuals) rejecting pain and anguish and refusing to accept further degradation. What differentiates rebellion from revolution is, most fundamentally, the limits (or the lack of limits) that the actors accept. The rebel accepts the world as it is but acts politically to change some fundamentally problematic aspects of existence which cause pain and suffering. The rebel acts in a Sisyphean manner and consistently pursues immediate political goals to help alleviate suffering and death. The Sisyphean rebel wants to improve the lives of the suffering and this may take a (seemingly) endless effort. The revolutionary, rather than accepting the world as it is and fighting for some meaningful change, begins with an end goal in mind and acts to pursue this goal. A revolution is therefore *teleological*; it has predefined end goals and prioritizes these goals over alleviating the actual suffering of real people. This approach may lead not only to abandoning suffering people, but for Camus, revolutions may harm actual, suffering people in the name of achieving some later *teleological* goal.

The Alt-Right's *teleological* goal is to obtain racially pure ethnostates wherein racial homogeneity would exist within defined state borders. The Alt-Right opposes those who do not agree with its ethnocratic *telos* and while this approach has led to the Alt-Right's opposition towards mainstream Republicans, it has also led to violent and even deadly results for its white opposition. Camus feared revolutions because they were willing to kill those who opposed their *teleological* ends; even those who the revolutionaries claimed to want to help. In the Alt-Right, Camus's fears have come to fruition as movement supporters have committed violence against and even killed white people who have resisted the Alt-Right's *teleological* goal of obtaining a white

ethnostate. Heather Heyer – a white woman – was killed by an Alt-Right supporter in Charlottesville, Virginia during the infamous Unite the Right Rally. I will return to Heather Heyer's murder at this chapter's conclusion as I argue that the Alt-Right can be understood in Camusian terms as a violent revolutionary movement which is willing to sacrifice actual white lives in the name of attaining some idealized, future, white ethnostate.

For Camus, a revolutionary attempts to reshape the world. He differentiates it from rebellion by explaining that "a revolution is an attempt to shape actions to ideas, to fit the world into a theoretic frame. That is why rebellion kills men while revolution destroys both men and principles" (Camus 1991, p. 106). Rebellions can be deadly; Black Lives Matter has been peaceful, but Camus does not deny that even a genuine rebellion may need to act violently to pursue political and social change. Rebellious violence is limited to what is absolutely necessary as a last resort to achieve political change and for Camus, this violence can never be entirely philosophically justified. Revolutionaries, however, may be willing to kill not for the purpose of helping the suffering, but in the name of an ideal.[cix] In committing violence against their fellow human beings, revolutionaries destroy both human beings and the very idea that they initially put forth (e.g. freedom, justice, labor, *etc*.). For the Alt-Right, this has meant killing the very white people that the movement supposedly wishes to help. The

[cix] The Alt-Right genuinely believes that their *teleological* goal of racially homogeneous ethnostates will end white suffering. The movement, however, has done little or nothing to help purportedly suffering white people in the intermediate time period.

revolutionary, in order to reshape the world, is willing to destroy anything that is opposed to such reconstruction as Camus explains, "Total revolution ends by demanding – we shall see why – the control of the world" (Camus 1991, p. 107). Total control of the world, for the Alt-Right, would be a world of racially pure ethnostates. Those who stand in the way of this global reshaping are, for the revolutionary, expendable.

The Unite the Right rally occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 11th and 12th, 2017. The stated purpose of the rally was to protest the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee from what was then known as Lee Park in Charlottesville. On August 12th, James Alex Fields Jr. weaponized his 2010 Dodge Challenger by driving through a crowd of counter-protesters, injuring 35 people, and killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer. While the Unite the Right rally was depicted as a fight to preserve southern heritage by protecting a confederate monument, it was, in reality, the Alt-Right's most public display of its revolutionary intentions and its desire to eliminate its ideological opposition.

Unite the Right was primarily organized by Jason Kessler who has spent time writing on *VDARE,* an anti-immigration website which often publishes articles by white nationalists and white supremacists. The rally was attended by numerous individuals and organizations associated with the Alt-Right including but not limited to Richard Spencer and Mike Enoch (both of whom were scheduled as speakers), and members of the *Daily Stormer*.[cx] Although the rally extended beyond the Alt-Right, prominent and associated Alt-Right supporters were involved and invested in the rally (Sunshine 2017).

[cx] Other speakers included Alt-Right supporters Augustus Invictus and Christopher Cantwell. Attendees included (but were not limited to) Alt-Right supporter Brad Griffin

Vincent Law's post on the Alt-Right's website clarified that the intention of the Unite the Right rally was to guard against white genocide. Before the rally, Law asked readers, "will you stand up for your history, your race and your way of life?" (Law 2017a). Law wanted Alt-Right supporters to assemble in Charlottesville to "defend White heritage" as the movement left the internet and took to the streets (ibid). The Unite the Right rally was supported and attended by the Alt-Right and was portrayed as defending against white genocide and promoting white people and white culture. Unite the Right, far from being a protest about a statue, personified the Alt-Right's fears of white genocide, promotion of whiteness, and eventually, its revolutionary tendencies.

The pre-rally feelings of existential anxiety, and the need to protect white people and white culture manifested in Charlottesville. Joe Phillips and Joseph Yi explain that what united the right in Charlottesville was an overarching narrative that I have argued is attached to ideas of social death and white genocide. Supporters were connected by the belief that "'Non-privileged' whites are victims of unfair governmental policies such as affirmative action, sanctuary for illegal migrants, and the cultural cleansing of 'white history' (e.g., Columbus to Confederacy)" (Phillips & Yi 2018, p. 222). This fear, that "whites are in imminent danger of cultural, political, economic, and even physical annihilation" (Atkinson 2018, p. 311) was explicated by those at the rally who chanted "you will not replace us" and similarly "Jews will not replace us" (Shaohua 2017).

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of *Occidental Dissent*, a coalition of neo-Nazi, neo-fascist, neo-Confederate and white nationalist organizations known as Nationalist Front, neo-Nazi organization Vanguard America which sprung from the Alt-Right and supporters from many affiliated and unaffiliated groups.

These slogans express the very fears of social death that I articulated earlier in the chapter and that were stated by Vincent Law in his pre-rally post on the Alt-Right's website. This existential anxiety is juxtaposed with the Alt-Right's revolt; its defense of white people and white culture.

Rather than question the justification for the feelings of existential anxiety expressed in Charlottesville, supporters argued that they were "dedicated to the preservation of white heritage and identity" and highlighted that the "best of the White race" includes "good manners, being polite, creative and having the qualities of leadership" (as cited in Phillips & Yi 2018, p. 223). These sentiments were expressed by one poster on the Alt-Right's website as "White pride." The Alt-Right's revolt against existential anxiety can be seen in its appropriation of Black Lives Matter's namesake as protesters in Charlottesville chanted "White lives matter" (Shaohua 2017). Like Black Lives Matter, the Alt-Right's use of the idea "white lives matter" is a public assertion that the lives of white people have value and should be treated appropriately. These two ideas – racially understood existential anxiety over death and a passionate assertion of the value of white lives – could lead the Alt-Right towards Camusian rebellion. The Alt-Right is not a revolution solely because it expresses fears of social death and revolts against them through a reaffirmation of "white values" and "white culture." The Alt-Right's violence, and particularly the violence that occurred against white people, the supposed beneficiaries of the Alt-Right's ethnopolitics, transforms the movement from rebellion to revolution. Unite the Right marked the moment that the Alt-Right transformed form a possible rebellion to a Camusian revolution.

The murder of Heather Heyer contributes to an understanding of the Alt-Right as a Camusian revolution for two interacting reasons: first, Heather Heyer was a white woman; and secondly, some significant Alt-Right supporters justified (or at least refused to condemn) her murder. The Alt-Right claims to be a movement for the protection and promotion of white lives and white culture and yet members of the movement found the death of a white person to be acceptable because she was ideologically opposed to the Alt-Right. Heyer was described as standing up against racial discrimination, being moved to tears by maltreatment of her fellow human beings, and actively supporting Black Lives Matter (Silverman & Laris 2017). She attended Unite the Right as a counter-protester and was dedicated to opposing the hatred that occurred.

In the wake of Heather Heyer's murder, Richard Spencer classified the Alt-Right as non-violent but refused to condemn James Alex Fields Jr. in Heyer's murder (R Gray 2017).[cxi] Unite the Right, Spencer said was "really beautiful" and he blamed Charlottesville's mayor, and the governor of Virginia for not appropriately policing the rally (ibid). Greg Johnson was similarly dismissive and said, "I think what's happened at Charlottesville is more of an opportunity than a crisis" (Holland et al. 2018, 48:27). Even more harshly, posts on the *Daily Stormer* championed the death of Heyer as one poster stated that "Most people … are glad she is dead, as she is the definition of uselessness. A

[cxi] Greg Johnson is, at a minimum, aware of the violent desires of the Alt-Right's followers as Patrik Hermansson noted his presence at a barbecue the night before the Northwest Forum where supporters were heavily armed, preparing for a violent conflict, and fantasizing about hanging "anti-fascists from the lamp posts" (Holland et al. 2018, 34:38). There was no concern expressed for whether those "hanging" were white or not.

32-year-old woman without children is a burden on society and has no value" (as cited in Duff 2018, p. 318). Jason Kessler, Unite the Right's primary organizer, posted on Twitter that "Heather Heyer was a fat, disgusting Communist. Communists have killed 94 million. Looks like it was payback time" (as cited in Pearce 2017).[cxii] While some within the Alt-Right have since condemned the attack, there were clearly Alt-Right supporters who felt that the death of the opposition – even when the opposition was white – was acceptable for the advancement of their political *telos*.

The fact that the Alt-Right was willing to ignore or even support the killing of a white woman is a unique juncture in the history of the movement. At one point, the Alt-Right was described as primarily a non-violent movement (Hawley 2017). The Alt-Right has, however, insinuated that violence might be necessary dating back to before Unite the Right. Jason Jorjani, for example, was filmed by Patrick Hermansson suggesting that for the Alt-Right to fulfill its goals of creating an all-white ethnostate, forcible expulsion and plausibly concentration camps would be necessary (Singal 2017). Greg Johnson has suggested that deportation would be one way to encourage nonwhites to leave the United States, but "more draconian measures" would plausibly be necessary (Hawley 2017). Johnson has even used the language of "cleansing" America and has suggested a "bounty" be placed on non-whites who attempted to remain in the United States. As

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[cxii] Kessler has since deleted said Tweet. The Tweet (and Kessler) was publicly denounced by many on the right, including Spencer. Based on some comments that followed, denouncing Kessler and the Tweet likely occurred because they gave the rally bad press coverage rather than due to some genuine disagreement with Kessler or his sentiment.

Johnson states, "'But there would be violence! There would be a race war!' the defeatists will bleat. Of course there would be" (Johnson 2010). While Johnson (ibid) admits that "there would be white casualties" in a violent effort to achieve an all-white United States, the violence is framed as "us" versus "them" (white versus nonwhite).

Heather Heyer's death is unique because it does not fit this existing narrative wherein the violence which might occur would be due to racial clash between whites and nonwhites. Heyer's death was the death of a white woman, at the hands of a white, Alt-Right supporter, and it was excused by the Alt-Right because she was opposed to the Alt-Right's *telos*. Camus notes that if a rebellion justifies murdering the very people they claim to be helping, the rebellion has become a revolution. If a member of an oppressed group (white people in this case) opposes the movement (the Alt-Right) or its goals (racially pure ethnostates) a revolutionary group may be willing to kill the person in the name of the end goal. As Stephen Bronner explains, "The revolutionary is willing to murder all who stand in the way of constructing a just world. The end is seen as justifying the means, and therein, for Camus, lies the 'pathology' of modern totalitarianism" (1999, p. 162).

An Alt-Right supporter may explain Heather Heyer's death as necessary because she opposed the Alt-Right, or more pejoratively, she could be described as a "race traitor." This explanation does not, however, combat my argument that the Alt-Right is a Camusian revolution. From a Camusian perspective, Heather Heyer's murder remains a revolutionary murder of a white woman, in the name of purportedly improving white lives. The *telos* of an all-white ethnostate in which white suffering could be theoretically

permanently eliminated was prioritized by both her killer, and by prominent Alt-Right supporters. The actual life of an actual white person was deemed less important than the pursuit of a *teleological* goal.[cxiii]

For Camus, revolutions fail to exhibit genuine concern for the suffering members of the group that they claim to represent. In *The Rebel,* Camus was chiefly reproaching the Soviet Union's revolutionary oppression ("state terror") of dissenting proletariats in the name of achieving full communism. The logic of his argument can easily be extended to the Alt-Right; revolutions destroy their ideals (the Alt-Right's claim to support white people) by destroying human beings who are members of the suffering group (Heather Heyer, a white woman). The Alt-Right claims to be acting to benefit white lives which are existentially threatened. The murder of Heather Heyer, and the Alt-Right's acceptance of the action, indicates that the movement is not actually concerned with real white lives. The Alt-Right's acceptance of Heyer's murder means that the movement, because of its willingness to kill white people, has sacrificed its supposed principles which were to alleviate white suffering and death. In the place of these principles, the Alt-Right has sought power and control so that they may reshape the world into racially homogenous ethnostates that they argue will end all white suffering in the future.

[cxiii] The Alt-Right also does not frequently target white people who do not support their causes. Instead, the movement prioritizes converting white outsiders to Alt-Right supporters. Bringing potentially sympathetic white people on board is the idea behind the phrase "redpilling normies." Killing white people is a tactic that is counterproductive to the Alt-Right which wishes to expand its movement.

Conclusion

The *telos* has replaced the façade of genuine concern for white people and the mask of the Alt-Right has been removed. The Alt-Right could have been a force that fought against high suicide rates, or against the opioid crisis which both disproportionately plague white Americans.[cxiv] Instead, the Alt-Right's supposed concern for white people has morphed into a Camusian revolution which wishes to manipulate the world to achieve its *telos*. Those who stand in the way of the *telos*, even those who are white, are expendable members of the political opposition. The Alt-Right is a political revolution that has nihilistically dismissed even its own principles – alleviating the suffering white race – for the more expedient purpose of acquiring absolute political control.

[cxiv] Both issues will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER #6

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM: LESSONS FROM BLACK LIVES MATTER AND THE ALT-RIGHT

In chapter three, I argued that Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right are appropriately comparable based on a tripartite analysis of their respective horizontal or anti-hierarchical organizational structures, their outsider relationships with formal political institutions, and their ideational prioritizations of identity with a specific focus on race. I then applied my Camusian theory to Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right and analyzed the movements from their inceptions as responses to necropolitics and social death respectively, through their divergence as a Camusian rebellion (Black Lives Matter) and revolution (Alt-Right). In this chapter, I will address how the Camusian theory can help to inform environmental activists whose efforts are substantively different than either aforementioned movement. I will first explain the purpose of extending the Camusian theory to this dissimilar movement before considering today's environmental activism in some historical context, and addressing some ways in which environmental activists can learn from both the successes of Black Lives Matter, and the shortcomings of the Alt-Right.

Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right interpret the world through racial lenses. American environmental activism, however, has often overlooked the importance of race as environmental organizations and activists are disproportionately white. In 2014, Dorceta Taylor authored the report, "The State of Diversity in Environmental

Organizations" for Green 2.0, an advocacy campaign working to increase racial diversity among environmental organizations. Taylor found that despite improvements over time, "the current state of racial diversity in environmental organizations is troubling" (2014, p. 4). Taylor notes that while ethnic minority populations have proportionately increased in the United States,

> the percentage of minorities on the boards or general staff of environmental organizations does not exceed 16%. … ethnic minorities occupy less than 12% of leadership positions … They rarely occupy the most powerful positions (such as president or chair of the board) in environmental organizations. The diversity manager's position is the only position that minorities are more likely to hold than Whites in environmental organizations. However, relatively few of the organizations had such a position. … Very few minorities are members or volunteers of the organizations studied. … Few of the organizations studied collaborate with ethnic minority or low-income institutions or groups. (2014, pp. 4-5)

Historically, environmental organizations were both founded and populated by wealthy, white men, and the organizations frequently excluded anyone beyond white elites. People of color have been essential in contributing to the creation and maintenance of national parks and forests, yet "people of color were excluded from the membership and workforce of most environmental organizations throughout the nineteenth century and for most of the twentieth century" (Taylor et al. 2019, pp. 2). These trends have, based on Taylor's data, not been adequately reversed, despite the many ways in which environmental decay negatively affects communities of color in the United States.

Scholar Danielle Purifoy (2018). explains that "Environmentalism is white not because it is irrelevant to nonwhites. It is white because its primary considerations reflect the interests of mostly white and wealthier people – to the literal exclusion of nonwhites." Due to the overwhelming whiteness of environmental organizations, environmental

racism, the forms of environmental injustice that occur to racialized populations, may be unaddressed or under addressed. Communities of color face unique examples of environmental injustices that harms local populations. Perhaps the most well-known ongoing example is the water crisis in Flint, Michigan – a majority Black city with around 100,000 residents and one of the highest poverty rates in the state – wherein the city has been sourcing its water from the Flint River which is so polluted that it eroded the city's plumbing infrastructure and caused lead to leak into the city's drinking water. The lead levels were so high in Flint's drinking water that they exceeded the EPA's standard of toxic waste, as lead was found to be 880 times higher than the maximum acceptable federal level (Benz 2019). There are many additional examples one could note such as the devastation of Hurricane Katrina which disproportionately affected working class Black Americans in Louisiana and Mississippi (Adeola and Steven 2017), and the geography of toxic pollution and waste treatment facilities in communities of color (Johnson, Raine, and Johnson 2008). These cases serve to underscore the previously noted point that environmental activism may be disproportionately white, but both environmental catastrophes, and everyday environmental racism affect communities of color in the United States.

I will apply my Camusian theory to environmental activism despite the disconnect between the whiteness of environmental activism generally, and the realities of environmental racism. It is certainly important to note environmental activism's historic and continuing racial blind spots. Applying the Camusian theory and encouraging cross-movement learning serves to illustrate that the theory can travel beyond the two racially-

motivated movements analyzed in the prior chapters, and can even apply to a movement that while often progressive, has historically been racially blind, racially insensitive, and racist.

A Brief History of American Environmental Activism

Despite environmental activism's aforementioned racial blindness, environmental advocacy in the United States has a long and rich history, and environmental destruction has frequently been framed as an existential threat to humanity. The following is not a comprehensive study of green activism as a more complete analysis of existentially depicted environmental activism is beyond the scope of this work. Before considering today's environmental activism, I trace a thread of existentially described environmentalism running from Henry David Thoreau in the early-to-mid nineteenth century, to Teddy Roosevelt in the early twentieth century, to Rachel Carson in the mid-twentieth century, and finally to Al Gore in the late twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries. This section serves to situate ongoing green activism in the United States in some of its historical context as it is the current manifestation of a long history of existentially motivated activism.

In a journal entry from September 1843, Henry David Thoreau states, "Perhaps I may say that I have never had a deeper and more memorable experience of life–its great serenity, than when listening to the trill of a tree-sparrow among the huckleberry bushes after a shower" (1981, p. 469). Thoreau often described his experiences in the wilderness, and he attached great importance to the connection between the human being

and the natural world. Near the end of *Walden*, Thoreau depicts his seemingly innate attachment to nature, stating "We need the tonic of wildness … We can never have enough of Nature" (1966, pp. 209-210). This connection between human beings and nature occurs out of existential necessity; part of what it is to be a human being, for Thoreau, is to be immersed in nature.

Thoreau was a transcendentalist and the movement precedes Sartre's existentialism by a century. Yet his desire for a simple life in nature, free of social obligations and full of leisure time exemplifies one philosophy of the purpose of human existence. For Thoreau, a natural existence could bring humans the utmost happiness, and modern conveniences were unnecessary if not burdensome. Thoreau's existential naturalism would inspire his environmental politics.

While secluded in Concord, Massachusetts (when he wrote his famous work, *Walden*), Thoreau already expressed sorrow at the destruction of nature as trains were becoming prevalent. Thoreau is additionally critical of over farming and capitalist consumption as he states "All the Indian huckleberry hills are stripped, all the cranberry meadows are raked into the city. Up comes the cotton, down goes the woven cloth; up comes the silk, down goes the woolen; up come the books, but down goes the wit that writes them" (1966, p. 78). In the previously mentioned journal entry, Thoreau described his attachment to the huckleberry bushes, which now had been plucked bare. As Thoreau saw consumer culture expanding, he viewed it as an existential threat to the natural world he wished to inhabit.

In response to the growing existential threat to nature, Thoreau proposed a public common space. He states, in a journal entry from 1859

> Each town should have a park, or rather a primitive forest, of five hundred or a thousand acres, where a stick should never be cut for fuel, a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation. We hear of cow-commons and ministerial lots, but we want men-commons and lay lots, inalienable forever. Let us keep the New World new, preserve all the advantages of living in the country. (1962, p. 387)

What Thoreau proposes is a political solution (a public common space) to what he saw as an existential concern (the growing degradation of nature). Thoreau's approach – framing environmental activism as a response to an existential concern – would be repeated by activists over the next century.

President Theodore Roosevelt was a keen conservationist who framed environmentalism in existential terminology. Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States, was a leader in the burgeoning American conservation movement even prior to his presidency. As president, Roosevelt's efforts to preserve the natural wonders of the United States – such as the Grand Canyon and Mount Olympus – were rooted in his concern with the nation's growing exploitation of natural resources due to excessive logging, hunting, and mining. Roosevelt's love of game hunting was not borne out of a desire to eradicate animal species, but conversely was intertwined in his understanding of the "fundamental existential relationship" that humans have with natural elements (Redekop 2012, p. 95).

Roosevelt attached environmental conservation to the survival of the American people. In his 1908 speech "Conservation as a National Duty," Roosevelt called the issue of conservation "the weightiest problem" facing the United States (Sheffield 2010, p.

101). Economic growth and increased consumption, he feared, had led to a forgetfulness of human "dependence upon nature" (Sheffield 2010, p. 99). Two years later Roosevelt, in his well-known 1910 "New Nationalism" speech, stated that "the health and vitality of our people are at least as well worth conserving as their forests, waters, lands, and minerals" (Slack 2011). Roosevelt continuously attached environmental preservation to the survival of the human being, and to the survival of the American people.

During his presidency, Roosevelt established "150 national forests, 51 federal bird reserves, four national game preserves, five national parks and 18 monuments on over 230 million acres of public land" (U.S. Department of the Interior 2020). Conservation efforts were prioritized due to Roosevelt's perception that human survival was innately connected with the survival of nature. Roosevelt's existential fear – that abuse of natural resources would lead to irrevocable harm for humanity – informed conservationist policies. Despite Roosevelt's efforts, environmental degradation continued throughout the 20th century, leading other key American environmentalists to likewise frame the cause using similar existential terminology.

Rachel Carson begins her classic 1962 work, *Silent Spring*, with a fable of the destruction of nature. Where plant-life once thrived, and animals once flourished, silence had crept in and destroyed this natural harmony. In her work, Carson identifies numerous manners in which human beings have irreparably damaged the air, soil and waters of the planet which could turn her fable into a reality. She notes that the history of life on earth was, until relatively recently, a history of interaction and adaptation. However a seismic shift occurred from benign interactions between life, to the human domination of the rest

of the natural world. Carson states, "Given time – time not in years but in millennia – life adjusts, and a balance has been reached. For time is the essential ingredient; but in the modern world there is no time" (1994, p. 6). The human domination of the planet led to Carson's existential concern; as people utilize chemicals to control the planet's plant and animal populations, she fears not only for their survival, but for human survival. Speaking on the development and usage of hundreds of pesticides that were developed over the span of the twenty years prior to her work, Carson asks rhetorically, "Can anyone believe it is possible to lay down such a barrage of poisons on the surface of the earth without making it unfit for all life? They should not be called 'insecticides,' but 'biocides'" (1994, pp. 7-8).

In *Silent Spring*, Carson addresses humanity's frail existential condition. While writing during the Cold War, Carson notes that environmental destruction – second only to nuclear annihilation – was the biggest threat to the human species. Beyond humanity, Carson considers how pesticides were existentially jeopardizing the entirety of the planet's life. Traces of synthetic chemicals which had only recently begun being used at the time of Carson's writing had already been found across the animal kingdom;

> They have entered and lodged in the bodies of fish, birds, reptiles, and domestic and wild animals so universally that scientists carrying on animal experiments find it almost impossible to locate subjects free from such contamination. They have been found in fish in remote mountain lakes, in earthworms burrowing in soil, in the eggs of birds – and in man himself. For these chemicals are now stored in the bodies of the vast majority of human beings, regardless of age. They occur in the mother's milk, and probably in the tissues of the unborn child. (Carson 1994, pp. 15-16)

These "elixirs of death" were able to alter the very function of cells in "sinister and often deadly ways" (Carson 1994, p. 16).[cxv]

Arsenic, a highly toxic poison, can kill many species[cxvi] and has carcinogenic effects in humans. Yet at the time of Carson's writing, arsenic was employed as a chemical pesticide. Other chemical compounds such as dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) can affect human reproductive capacity and may negatively affect embryos or fetuses exposed to the compound. Compounds similar to DDT such as dieldrin, aldrin, and endrin build up in food chains, are all toxic, and can have potentially deadly impacts such as degenerative changes to vital organs including the liver and kidneys. Endrin specifically was "15 times as poisonous as DDT to mammals, 30 times as poisonous to fish, and about 300 times as poisonous to some birds" (Carson 1994, p. 27). Carson tells an anecdote of a child and dog playing on a surface recently sprayed with endrin. As a result of seemingly innocuous play, the dog convulsed and died only an hour or so later, and the child slipped into a permanently vegetative state. Carson's work is full of stories and statistics like the aforementioned examples which serve to support her existential fear of human domination of the environment.

Silent Spring warns readers of the powerful and destructive effects that humans can have on nature. In turn, human destruction of the environment through the use of

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[cxv] The term "elixirs of death" would be supplemented later in the work with Carson's depiction of "rivers of death." Carson was not shy in highlighting the presence of death and the existential emergency that chemical compounds had on all living beings.

[cxvi] Carson notes extant sickness and death among exposed cows, goats, pigs, deer, fish, and bees (1994, p. 17).

chemical pesticides served as an existential threat to the species itself. While corporations such as the chemical company DuPont, and the agricultural company Monsanto contested Carson's environmental efforts, Carson's public appearances and testimonies helped usher in the first significant era of environmental activism and environmental regulation in the United States. Chemically induced existential threats served as a warning to some legislators in the United States and led to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the passage of the 1972 Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act which created pesticide regulations and protections. While *Silent Spring* was immediately impactful to some elected officials, it also had long-lasting impacts on future elected official Al Gore.

At least as far back as 1989, when Al Gore was a United States Senator, he told the *New York Times* that reading Carson's *Silent Spring* during his early teens at his mother's behest was a foundational moment in his environmental awakening (Dionne 1989).[cxvii] That same year, Gore published an editorial in the *Washington Post* in which he framed environmental destruction in existential terms. Gore states that "Humankind has suddenly entered into a brand new relationship with the planet Earth. The world's forests are being destroyed; an enormous hole is opening in the ozone layer. Living species are dying at an unprecedented rate" (1989). Gore's editorial echoed Carson's concerns as he described global environmental decay as an existential issue since it could

[cxvii] Gore repeats this story about his mother's insistence that he read *Silent Spring* in his book *Earth in the Balance* (1992), his introduction to *Silent Spring* (1994), and again in his later work *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) where he mentions it twice.

"perhaps even supplant, our concern with preventing nuclear war" (ibid). With the Cold War concluding, Gore noted that U2 spy planes were being repurposed as they no longer monitored Soviet missile silos but helped to track ozone depletion which indicates that the latter had become a more immediate existential threat than the former. Caron's *Silent Spring* encouraged change in American environmental policy, but Gore highlights how over 25 years later, the environmental crisis was continuing.

In his final year as a Senator, Gore published his first book on environmentalism, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (1992). The book was incredibly popular and successful, as it reached the New York Times bestseller list and received the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights 1993 Book award. In the introduction, Gore begins by noting the severed attachment between human beings and nature which he, like Carson, finds deeply troubling. He worries that human domination over nature threatens world's progeny as Gore states that "many people have lost faith in the future, because in virtually every facet of our civilization we are beginning to act as if our future is now so much more in doubt" (1992, p. 2). Human actions, Gore warns, have put the planet's life, including humanity, in great jeopardy.

Like Carson, Gore focuses on the existential devastation that humanity has had on various species across the globe. He states that "living species of animals and plants are now vanishing around the world one hundred times faster than at any time in the past 65 million years" (Gore 1992, p. 24). Gore supplements his fears of ongoing and recent existential destruction with warnings about a future in peril as, for example, increases in atmospheric chlorine can lead to radiation increases that threaten "all animal and plant

life" (1992, p. 29). *Earth in the Balance* serves as a warning that there is a feedback loop wherein human being and our actions are a threat to the global environment and in turn the environment alters and has become a threat to human civilization.

As Vice President, Gore would lead attempts to intervene in altering the human side of the feedback loop that threatened all life on earth. Unfortunately, major efforts such as signing onto the Kyoto Protocol were opposed by the Senate. While Gore signed the Kyoto Protocol, it was never ratified by Congress. The Clinton-Gore administration did allow the Vice President to launch the Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) Program in 1994 which utilized the fledgling Internet to educate students on environmental issues. Unfortunately, despite Gore's environmental efforts as a Senator and as Vice President, the existentially destructive potential of climate change strengthened.

Gore's latter work, *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It* (2006), was an even larger phenomenon than *Earth in the Balance*. The book was published alongside the film of the same name and presents many images used in Gore's environmental lectures. The film version of *An Inconvenient Truth* won two Academy Awards including for Best Documentary, and it became the eleventh highest grossing documentary film in the United States, earning $24 million domestically, and an additional $26 million internationally (Box Office Mojo, An Inconvenient Truth). Gore, in the film and book, continued to warn audiences of climate change's increasing existential threat to humanity and presented powerful imagery to support his concerns.

Gore calls climate change a "planetary emergency" and acknowledges that despite his decades of advocacy, "The pace of destruction has worsened and the urgent need for a response has grown more acute" (2006, p. 8). The efforts of the Clinton-Gore administration would immediately be reversed by the incoming Bush-Cheney administration which rolled back or eliminated existing environmental regulations and Bush reneged on his campaign promise to address carbon dioxide emissions. Gore refers to continuing climate change as a "a true planetary emergency" which, if left unaddressed, will lead to a "string of terrible catastrophes" (2006, p. 10). Among the devastation is existential destruction as Gore notes that climate change has caused "the loss of living species at a level comparable to the extinction event that wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago" (ibid). The existential threat is not just aimed at the world's various animal species, but Gore recognizes that climate change presents "the worst potential catastrophe in the history of human civilization" (ibid).

Significant environmental existential threats were realized in the years between Gore serving as a Senator from Tennessee and the release of *An Inconvenient Truth.* Gore presents readers (and viewers of his film) with a cacophony of imagery showing the devastating effects of climate change: the massive reduction in snow and ice on Mount Kilimanjaro; melted glaciers in Argentina, Switzerland, Italy, and Tibet; charts highlighting the increase in ocean temperatures over 65 years; and the massive hurricanes and typhoons that hit disparate parts of the world in the early twentieth century. Punctuating Gore's points are images from Hurricane Katrina which landed in the southeastern United States in 2005, killed between one-and-two thousand people, and

caused $125 billion in damages.[cxviii] Katrina was but one of the 27 hurricanes and tropical storms that occurred in 2005.[cxix]

Yet conversely, Gore notes that climate change has also caused some of the most intense droughts in recorded history and has led massive reductions of reliable water sources such as Lake Chad. A lack of soil moisture in places such as the American southwest leads to less arable land, less productive agriculture, and an increased potential for wildfires. Hurricanes, droughts, wildfires, and underproduction of crops are all potential threats to animal life including human beings. Gore makes it clear, "what we do to nature we do to ourselves. The magnitude of environmental destruction is now on a scale few ever foresaw; the wounds no longer simply heal themselves. We have to act affirmatively to stop the harm" (2006, p. 161). While *An Inconvenient Truth* made public waves, climate destruction has not ceased and Gore released a sequel to both the book and film of *An Inconvenient Truth* in 2017.

Environmental degradation has been portrayed as an existential concern in the United States at least since Thoreau's writings in the 19th century. Framing

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[cxviii] In 2005 USD amounts. Approximately $165 billion in 2020 USD.

[cxix] As previously noted, Hurricane Katrina is also a key example of how climate change has a racial component as the population that was impacted was disproportionately Black. Further discussion of environmental racism lies largely beyond the scope of this project, but examples ranging from money diverted from improving Louisiana's levy system, to waste treatment plants in areas with high percentages of Black residents such as Chester, Pennsylvania, to the ongoing water crisis in Flint, Michigan are all issues that must be addressed. Environmental racism is also a global problem as much of the existential burden of climate change lies on non-white populations across the global south. Again, these issues should not be decoupled from environmental activism but are much too large to address in depth in this chapter.

environmental concerns in existential terminology is not just a useful political tactic, but a staunch reality; “The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tells us that we need to roughly halve global carbon emissions by 2030 to have a decent chance at keeping warming below 1.5° Celsius–the limit that scientists agree we should aim for to prevent catastrophe” (Aronoff et al. 2019, p. 3). Existential anxiety due to environmental destruction has inspired conservationist and environmental action among some of the most well-known advocates such as Roosevelt, Carson, and Gore. Unfortunately, these efforts have not been sufficient and the earth’s environment continues to suffer from human made destruction. Climate change is one of the most substantial concerns facing humanity today. If left unchecked, the potentially deadly results of climate change will affect the global population and these deadly consequences have been highlighted by today’s environmental activists.

Environmental Activism and Environmental Existential Anxiety Today

As I have shown in the prior section American environmental activists have framed their causes in existential terms in a manner that is similar to Black Lives Matter and the Alt-Right. What may differentiate today’s existentially motivated environmental activism from centuries prior is the imminence of the existential concern. While Thoreau was concerned with the manufacturing and shipping of mid-nineteenth-century goods and resources, the degree of environmental collapse today is far greater and impacts the global community in existentially devastating manners. Thoreau, Roosevelt, Carson, and Gore all were concerned about both the immediate and long-term impacts of

environmental degradation. In the twenty-first century, the once long-term concerns of earlier generations are actualized in ongoing global environmental devastation. A large-scale social movement which responds to the immediacy of environmental collapse may be the best hope for pushing for environmentally friendly socioeconomic and political change.

As previously noted, Tarrow and Tilly (2007) define social movements as collective and sustained challenges to power holding elites which utilize public displays. In the United States, it is not clear that today's environmental activism could be considered a social movement. I do not mean to undermine environmental activists or activism, nor am I suggesting that organizations and advocacy groups are not working towards environmental transformation. Groups including, but extending far beyond the Sierra Club, People's Climate Movement, and the National Audubon Society have all worked to address environmental destruction. However, while the respective 2014 and 2017 People's Climate Marches were widely attended across the United States (organized by People's Climate Movement), individual instances of protest are not the same as a social movement. While the Sunrise Movement, for example, has the potential to grow into a sustained social movement, I am skeptical about including it as a social movement as this moment. Again, this does not mean that the Sunrise Movement has not invested in environmental activism as it has already worked to elect sympathetic officials and has protested Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi for climate inaction (Roberts 2019a). Until the Sunrise Movement (or another organization) proves to be a sustained and public

effort, it is difficult to consider them a social movement and for the purposes of this work, I will address both international organizations and activists.

One young environmental activist, Greta Thunberg, a Swedish teenager whose name has become synonymous with youth-led environmental activism has highlighted and fought against insufficient political responses to climate change. While Greta Thunberg may not be nearly as well-known as former Presidents and Vice Presidents, world leaders including Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Russian President Vladimir Putin, French President Emmanuel Macron, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, and United States President Donald Trump have all acknowledged Thunberg and her efforts.[cxx] Thunberg has faced criticism from across the world, and yet she continues to be a global spokesperson in the ongoing fight against climate change. Following nearly 200 years of precedent, in her public statements and speeches, Greta Thunberg has addressed climate change as an existential concern.

On September 23rd, 2019, Thunberg spoke at the United Nations' Climate Action Summit and publicly proclaimed climate change an existential crisis. She stated, "People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth" (NPR Staff 2019). While Thunberg focused on death and extinction at the U.N. Climate Action Summit, it is not the first time that she has described the crisis in existential terms. In April 2019, Thunberg spoke with *Politico* and stated plainly, "We

[cxx] Not all in positive manners as some, like Trump, have mocked Thunberg.

have not treated this crisis as a crisis; we see it as another problem that needs to be fixed. But it is so much more than that. It's an existential crisis, more important than anything else" (Oroschakoff 2019). She similarly stated in an interview with BBC "This is an emergency. This is an existential crisis and we must do everything we can to stop it" (BBC News 2019a). In 2018, at a TEDx event in Stockholm, Thunberg stated "everyone keeps saying that climate change is an existential threat and the most important issue of all and yet they just carry on like before" (2018). While Thunberg is one of the most well-known climate change activists portraying the crisis in existential terms today, she is not alone as some environmental organizations have undertaken similar existentially motivated approaches.

Extinction Rebellion is a global environmental movement which was established in the United Kingdom[cxxi] in 2018. The name "Extinction Rebellion" is itself an existential term; it is a movement portraying itself as resisting global death. Protests in London have included several symbols and statements associated with death which highlight the existential anxiety produced by climate change. For example, one protester locked himself in a hearse which contained a coffin with a plaque that stated, "Our Future." A nine-year-old, accompanied by her sister and mother stated, "We're here because we want the world to still be alive when we die" (BBC News 2019b).

[cxxi] Extinction Rebellion is global and has acted in American cities such as New York, Denver, and Portland, as well as internationally in Calgary, Paris, Vienna, Amsterdam, and across Australia. The organization, however, is disproportionately active in the United Kingdom where it receives the bulk of its media coverage (Townsend 2019).

BirthStrike is an environmental group which is both unique and affiliated with Extinction Rebellion. BirthStrike, as its name suggests, is a group that has united in an anti-natalist campaign that promotes an inclusive, childfree approach to resisting climate change. The group's Tumblr page description refers to life as being in immediate danger and movement supporters protested in London with a flag that stated, "Article 2: Right to Life" which references the U.K.'s Human Rights Act 1998 and protesters placed oil drums in strollers having spray-painted the containers with phrases including "Where's Our Future?" (@_birthstrike 2019). BirthStrike is just one group within the larger environmental activism universe that exemplifies a response to the anxiety produced by climate change induced death. The environmental existentialism of activist organizations such as Extinction Rebellion and BirthStrike are also found in mainstream political circles as existential language has been used by current elected officials to describe ongoing environmental decay.

Jonathan Bartley, Co-Leader of the Green Party of England, and Wales, in an interview with *GQ* (which coincided with the release of the Green Party's Manifesto), twice referred to climate change as an "existential crisis" (Chesterton 2019). Similarly, United States Senator and two-time Presidential candidate, Bernie Sanders, took to Twitter following Hurricane Dorian's devastation of the Bahamas as he stated, "Let us be clear: Hurricane Dorian has everything to do with climate change, which is the existential crisis of our time" (Sanders 2019). Washington Governor Jay Inslee likewise referred to climate change as an "existential crisis" as he urged the Democratic National Committee and its chair, Tom Perez, to hold Democratic primary debates specifically on the topic

(Democracy Now 2019). Minnesota Representative Ilhan Omar stated on Twitter that "Our next President should declare a #NationalEmergency on day 1 to address the existential threat to all life on the planet posed by Climate Change" (Omar 2019). Left-leaning politicians have, like the previously noted activists and organizations, recently utilized existential language to draw attention to the imminence of death that will occur if climate change inaction continues.

Framing environmental activism in existential terms has been a tactic used by protesters, activists, and elected officials for nearly two centuries. The notion that global climate change will, if not immediately addressed, lead to death and mass extinction cannot be ignored in studying climate change politics. Should a sustained environmental social movement develop, the movement should emulate the rebellious approach of Black Lives Matter so that both immediate reforms, and long-term systemic changes can be simultaneously addressed.

Learning from Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter's activism has not stopped police killings of Black Americans; Atatiana Jefferson's 2019 death at the hands of the Fort Worth Police Department, Breonna Taylor's 2020 death at the hands of the Louisville Metro Police Department, and George Floyd's 2020 death at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department are evidence of this ongoing trend. Neither has the movement stopped racist, anti-Black vigilantism as Ahmaud Arbery's 2020 murder in Georgia illustrates. Despite continued violence and death perpetrated against Black Americans, Black Lives Matter

has been informative for how future social movements ought to operate. Specifically, movements that are rooted in existential anxieties about death should follow the rebellious path of Black Lives Matter rather than the revolutionary violence of the Alt-Right. While it is not clear that today's environmental activism will blossom into a sustained social movement, environmental activists – who likely would be involved in forging a green social movement – already frame the cause in existential terms. Should a sustained environmental social movement develop based on responses to existential anxieties, then Black Lives Matter is the social movement to emulate.

Black Lives Matter's Rebelliousness: Immediate Reforms and Long-Term Approaches

Black Lives Matter pursues immediate and relative goals but does not sacrifice more radical and systemic challenges and solutions. Yet the movement also does not contemplate grand, *teleological* pursuits that aim towards a "final stage of society." Rather than a *teleological* approach, Black Lives Matter represents "the end of *teleology*" (Ruggiero 2001, p. 48-49) as it works in a Sisyphean manner without a clearly defined final solution to systemic racism in America. Black Lives Matter is a rebellion which pursues both immediate and long-term goals without sacrificing either; it is a push not for a *telos*, but for both realist and radical political changes. This approach – a radical realist rebellion – is what a burgeoning environmental social movement ought to pursue.

While Camus is critical of *teleological* efforts aimed towards achieving pre-defined political ends, what he supports is a rebellious politics that aims towards, what I am calling, "radical realism." The radical realist approach to political action refuses to

sacrifice immediacy or long-term systemic change. The language of radical realism helps us to understand how Black Lives Matter can reject *teleology* without forgoing the fight for significant social, economic, and political changes. Concurrently, radical realism helps us understand that Black Lives Matter has also refused to focus solely on systemic overhauls and has embraced immediate political reforms as improvements over the existing status quo. While Black Lives Matter may find many reforms to be largely insufficient, they are still celebrated as advancing the movement's cause, even if only in smaller increments.

The term radical realism helps to bridge the gap between a realist approach to political change that focuses on immediate contexts and achievable goals, and more radical demands for systemic overhauls. In *The Rebel*, Camus explains that a rebellion which is focused on alleviating actual suffering and death "only aspires to the relative and can only promise an assured dignity coupled with relative justice" (1991, p. 290). He is comfortable with accepting qualified successes as he warns "Absolute freedom mocks at justice. Absolute justice denies freedom. To be fruitful, the two ideas must find their limits in each other. No man considers that his condition is free if it is not at the same time just, nor just unless it is free" (1991, p. 291). Those who pursue absolute and unfettered freedom, for Camus, cannot logically condemn murder. Those who pursue absolute justice (which Camus argues was the goal of the Soviet Union) may logically suspend liberty in justice's name. Avoiding temptations towards either absolutism requires a persistent memory of the initial source of rebellion; a "no" and a "yes" which recognize limits to injustice and freedom and includes a promise not to exceed such

limits. Black Lives Matter has refused to go beyond acceptable limits while also endorsing relative aims, and this approach has led to some immediate and impactful changes.

While Black lives are still being lost to police and vigilante violence, Black Lives Matter and its supporters have achieved some notable and immediate successes.[cxxii] Jonathan Butler, who participated in Black Lives Matter activism in Ferguson, fought alongside activists at the University of Missouri to pressure the Missouri University System President Tim Wolfe to resign. Wolfe, protesters argued, did not take racism on campus seriously as the Missouri Students Association president faced racial discrimination, and a swastika was drawn on the Gateway residential hall in feces (Ford 2015). Additionally, following Alton Sterling's death at the hands of police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Black Lives Matter protesters filed a lawsuit against the city alleging that the police used unconstitutional tactics to quell protests. Baton Rouge settled with the 92 plaintiffs for $100,000 (Meyerson 2016b). While a victorious lawsuit may appear to be a small triumph, it is an accomplishment for the movement's efforts (especially given their protest tactics) and it is vital to the movement's sustainability.

Black Lives Matter's push for an increase in the use of body cameras on police officers – spurred by the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson – indirectly led to a major increase in camera purchases by various law enforcement agencies (Reilly 2015). Body

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[cxxii] These sections were written prior to many of the social and political changes that occurred in response to the 2020 protests surrounding the murder of George Floyd. Please see the final chapter for some thoughts on further achievements of Black Lives Matter.

camera footage was an important piece of evidence in the death of Walter Scott, as former officer Michael Slager pleaded guilty to using excessive force in Scott's death (Ross and Lowery 2017). Similarly, 15-year-old Jordan Edwards was shot in the back of the head while in a passenger seat of a car in 2017. Police officer Roy Oliver was fired from the department and arrested about a week after the shooting. Oliver was found guilty of murdering Edwards and was sentenced to 15 years in prison. Oliver's body camera footage was crucial evidence which led to his conviction (ibid). Without Black Lives Matter's efforts, and subsequent public pressure the respective police departments may never have voluntarily purchased and mandated body cameras on their officers.

Political theorist Courtenay Daum argues that transformation (dismantling of an entire system) – as opposed to reformation – is the means to redistribute power and end the police state that continues to take Black lives. Yet Black Lives Matter activists, including Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors have not taken as staunch of a stance as Daum. As previously noted, Garza acknowledged in a 2016 interview that, "In one year, there were 40 laws passed around criminal justice reform around the country" (Eidelson 2016). These reforms are pragmatic achievements that Garza celebrated as meaningful accomplishments by or inspired by Black Lives Matter's activism. Garza also continues to fight for increased turnout by Black voters as she states "I'm hoping that what we're able to accomplish is a more nuanced way of engaging black communities for the sake of cementing turnout and increasing turnout in black communities" (Hayes 2019). Cullors, in an interview with American studies scholar Christina Heatherton, echoes elements of Garza's realism. Cullors states that she believes in police reform and supports efforts to

"reclaim the idea of public safety as access to jobs, healthy food, and shelter – in other words, having a framework that is about the community's response to social ills instead of a police response to social ills" (Heatherton 2016, p. 36). Realist reforms, however, may insufficiently change the political landscape as Daum highlights, and more radical pursuits may be necessary.

If Camus can accept a realist approach to relative success, his philosophy retains a radical critique; there remains a systematic challenge to political and economic norms that aspires to great change rather than exclusively to reform. In "Neither Victims nor Executioners" (2007) and in more depth in *The Rebel* (1991), Camus critiques both dialectical communism and western capitalism for being utopian and absolutist. His rejection of both ruling ideologies implies that reforming either system would be insufficient, as he sees both Marxism and capitalism as inherently, or systematically flawed.[cxxiii] Thus, Camus's rejection of both capitalism and Marxism is a radical rejection.

Patrisse Cullors stresses her commitment to radical, systemic changes. Although I noted that Cullors supports movement efforts for police reform, her long-term goal is abolition. In the same interview with Christina Heatherton, Cullors states "I believe we should abolish the police. I think they are extremely dangerous and will continue to be. That doesn't mean I don't believe in police reform" (Heatherton 2016, p. 36). Later in the interview, Cullors offers more radical statements focused on systemic economic and

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[cxxiii] The notion of the inevitability of progress, Camus argues, is present in both economic and governing theories and this utopianism is noted as each theory's fatal flaw.

political changes; “An abolitionist society is not based on capital. … It’s a society that has no borders, literally” (Heatherton 2016, p. 40). Cullors supports meaningful reforms while recognizing that they are insufficient. While Black Lives Matter has enjoyed some reformist successes, the movement has signed on to statements which support Cullors’s vision of radical, systemic changes.

Radical, systemic concerns are found in the Movement for Black Lives’ organizational platform, “Vision for Black Lives.” The platform includes calls for “divestment from exploitative forces including prisons, fossil fuels, police, surveillance and exploitative corporations” and “a reconstruction of the economy to ensure Black communities have collective ownership, not merely access.” The platform does not solely demand reforms but includes both reforms and these aforementioned calls for radical changes to the extant criminal justice and economic systems in the United States. Historian Michael Kazin notes that Black Lives Matter “has its radical aspects and its more reformist aspects” (Illing 2020a). While successful implementation of relative reforms has been (and should be) celebrated, Black Lives Matter has refused to abandon its commitment to radical critiques of systematic injustice.

Environmental Activism and Radical Realism

Environmental activists should be cognizant that embracing political reforms – even ones that are insufficient in entirely reversing climate change – can still be productive and may be immediately necessary. For example, activists ought to celebrate the over 400 mayors from across the United States who agreed to adopt and honor the

commitments enshrined in the 2016 Paris Climate Agreement despite President Trump's withdrawal from the pact (Climate Mayors 2017). These Mayors represent over 70 million Americans and include the Mayors of the ten largest cities by population. At the state level, New York is one example of a state which is pursuing an aspirational set of environmental targets that strive for carbon-free electricity by 2040 and a net-zero carbon economy by 2050. As reporter David Roberts of Vox explains, "Advocates didn't get everything they wanted, but in the big picture, the CLCPA [Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act] is a huge, huge win. The country's third-biggest economy has passed its most ambitious economy-wide climate targets — some of the most ambitious climate targets in the world" (Roberts 2019b). State and local government should be applauded when attempting to fill the gaps that federal and international political agreements have created. While these laws and agreements are immediate measures that are likely to have positive impacts, they exist within a context of federal legislative impotence. Alicia Garza celebrated the previously noted pieces of state and local level criminal justice legislation, even when she still stated the laws were ultimately insufficient. Likewise, state, and local efforts to curb climate change will likely remain inadequate in staving off climate induced death and radical, systemic critiques are necessary.

Environmental non-profit The CDP[cxxiv] published its 2017 Carbon Majors Report which compiled data from publicly available emissions figures. The report concludes

[cxxiv] Formerly known as Carbon Disclosure Project, the organization is now "The CDP."

that more than half of global industrial emissions since 1988 can be traced back to 25 corporate and state-owned entities. Furthermore, the report found that since 1988, 100 companies are responsible for over 70% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions (Riley 2017). Environmental transformation will require a substantial shift in the means by which energy is generated and consumed, and plausibly a systemic change in the global economic system.

State and local level reforms in the United States are unlikely to offset the greenhouse gas contributions of large state-controlled entities and multinational corporations. Countries and state-owned businesses from locations including, but not limited to China, Iran, India, Mexico, Russia, United Arab Emirates, Poland, Kuwait, Nigeria, Iraq, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Libya, and Turkmenistan all feature prominently on the list of the top 100 greenhouse gas emitters. Publicly traded, multinational corporations including ExxonMobil, BP, Chevron, Shell, Total S.A., ConocoPhillips, Lukoil, and Canadian Natural Resources also appear on the list. Environmental change will require a shift in the way that energy is produced and consumed as the aforementioned nations and corporations all actively participate in the gas and coal industries.

Extinction Rebellion has promoted systematic changes as necessary to curbing environmental catastrophe. The United Kingdom's Extinction Rebellion chapter presents three demands, the second of which is a reduction of "greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025" (Extinction Rebellion, Our Demands). This is a radical demand that would require an immediate response and restructuring of the economy of the United Kingdom including its participation in international trade with high-polluting nations and

corporations. The third demand is that "Government must create and be led by the decisions of a Citizens' Assembly on climate and ecological justice" (ibid).[cxxv] Again, this is a radical demand that would require systematic changes in the structure and behavior of government.[cxxvi] Radical, systemic critiques may be necessary to adequately fight the impending death and destruction of unfettered climate change.

Canadian social scientist Kevin MacKay (2018) finds that oligarchic interests in developed nations including Canada, Australia, Eurozone members, and the United States have contributed to climate degradation. Like Extinction Rebellion, MacKay argues for radical economic and political shifts from oligarchic industrial capitalism to "a democratic, eco-socialist society" (ibid). This, MacKay argues, will require greater economic justice, a commitment to human rights, and dedication to ecological sustainability. MacKay presents a systemic critique which challenges capitalistic interests and government acquiescence to demands from the wealthy. His solution is likewise one which would require vast systemic change in governance and economics.

Black Lives Matter has endorsed radical challenges to capitalist economics and statist systems of mass incarceration, and some environmental activists have similarly supported systemic critiques of capitalism and oligarchic pseudo-democracy. While

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[cxxv] The first demand is titled "Tell the Truth" and states "Government must tell the truth by declaring a climate and ecological emergency, working with other institutions to communicate the urgency for change." While this is not a systemic demand *per se*, it does reinforce the notion that climate change is an immediate and existential emergency.

[cxxvi] Ireland recently experimented with a Citizens Assembly which was vital in its recent policy shifts on same-sex marriage and abortion rights.

goals such as ending mass incarceration and reaching carbon neutrality are long-term and radical solutions, they remain important pursuits. Black Lives Matter's radical politics do not prohibit the movement from supporting immediate changes that benefit suffering Black Americans. A sustained environmental social movement, if one develops in the United States, should likewise celebrate, and support immediate changes while – like Sisyphus endlessly pushing his boulder up his hill – ceaselessly pursuing more radical and systemic demands.

Radical Realism and the End of Teleology: Avoiding the Pitfalls of the Alt-Right

I have intentionally avoided critiquing the politics of the Alt-Right; analyzing and criticizing the white nationalist movement (as white nationalist) is best saved for another work. Instead, I argued that the Alt-Right fails on its own terms because it is a *teleological* social movement with supporters who have committed harm against white people, and with prominent members of the movement who have excused the murder of white opposition by appealing to the notion of being a race traitor – a claim which does not, by the movement's own apparent standards, excuse the murder.

The Alt-Right is not a movement that is serious about alleviating the suffering of white Americans. The movement does not pursue any immediate changes such as expanding Medicaid or raising the federal minimum wage that could ease economic burdens of white Americans, many of whom are financially suffering. Nor does the Alt-Right fight against social plagues which disproportionately affect white Americans such as the ongoing opioid epidemic and high levels of mental illness and suicide rates. The

opioid epidemic, for example, has contributed to a decrease in the life expectancy of white Americans, leading some scholars to refer to the ongoing crisis as a uniquely "white problem" (Hansen and Netherland 2016). While there has been a surge in the number of opioid overdose deaths among suburban and rural whites, there are similar increases in more urban settings such as in Staten Island, which has the largest percentage of white residents among New York City's five boroughs (Mendoza et al. 2018). Similarly, suicide has been noted to be particularly high among white American males. As noted in the previous chapter, The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention found that in the United States, white people are the racial subgroup which is most susceptible to suicide and white males – the primary intersectional group within the Alt-Right – accounted for 69.67% of suicide deaths in 2017.[cxxvii] When considering age, the rate of suicide is highest in middle age white men (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Suicide Statistics). Despite harsh social realities, the Alt-Right has not fought for policies or reforms that could alleviate the actual death and suffering of white Americans.

The Alt-Right does not pursue realist changes and instead solely pursues a *telos* – a "new Jerusalem" (Ruggiero 2001) –wherein all the problems of white people will be theoretically solved when racially homogeneous ethnostates are achieved. Until then, the Alt-Right fails to show concern for the ongoing suffering of actual white people and even contributes to this suffering through violence and murder. The Alt-Right, even on its own terms, is a Camusian revolution that sacrifices actual white lives in the name of

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[cxxvii] This statistic is particularly noteworthy as white men make up approximately 31% of the population of the United States.

pursuing a pro-white *telos*. While it seems unlikely that an environmental movement would pursue such a self-destructive path, a final warning is necessary to restate why a revolutionary approach would be devastating.

There is no doubt that existing state and local efforts to fight climate change are, at best, relative successes that are ultimately insufficient at solving grandiose problems. However, potential movements fighting climate change should support, and not oppose, these and other future interventions. It is not unfathomable to imagine critiques from environmental activists which would challenge the value of local energy policies when there are nationally controlled oil and coal industries around the world. A refusal to support sympathetic and impactful, yet ultimately insufficient legislation, will not further environmental causes. Yes, environmental activists should acknowledge the limitations of policies that exist or that may exist in the future. At the same time, movements should be supportive of policies that will save lives and reverse or stall climate trends. In Greta Thunberg's aforementioned TEDx Event, she stated "if the emissions have to stop then we must stop the emissions. To me, that is black or white" (Thunberg 2018). Unfortunately, the "black or white" approach to climate change may ignore the many "gray" reforms that are immediately beneficial, yet ultimately inadequate. "Gray" reforms – those which can help thwart climate change without completely reversing carbon emission trends – may delay or prevent global catastrophe. Yes, Thunberg is correct that systemic overhauls remain necessary to truly alleviating the existential

anxiety associated with climate induced death. However, even inadequate reforms are certainly better than inaction.[cxxviii]

The most significant environmental reform proposed in the United States is the Green New Deal, championed by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey (Aronoff et al. 2019). The Green New Deal aims for the United States economy to reach net zero carbon in the 2030s and connects the fight against climate change to economic reforms as it calls for a federal jobs guarantee. Furthermore, it prioritizes clean energy investments in working class communities and communities of color, while also expanding access to social services such as free college tuition and a "Medicare for All" style system of socialized medicine. The Green New Deal is a realist set of reforms rooted in "the world's best climate science" which is responding to "an existential threat to human civilization" (Aronoff et al. 2019, p. 16). Yet even the scholar-authors of *A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal* note that the reforms, while immediate and impactful, will not replace the more radical need to replace capitalism in order to stave off environmental destruction.

Refusing to acknowledge the benefit of reforms, and working only towards radical change, can lead to a sacrifice of actual lives in the name of a *telos*. An environmental social movement, should one develop and sustain, can certainly be critical of insufficient legislation and can fight for radical, systematic changes. In the end,

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[cxxviii] Unfortunately, responses can be used by government as a means to shut down a movement or stifle discourse. A government can pass inadequate reforms, ignore larger systemic changes, and use these reforms as "evidence" that they have achieved the necessary goals to stymie climate change, and to force the movement to retreat.

movements must never lose sight of their initial call to action; to reduce the actual suffering and death that is brought upon actual human beings. Or, in Camus's terms, fight against injustice.

Conclusion

An environmental social movement can situate its cause as rooted in existential anxiety as activists ranging from Thoreau to Thunberg have already embraced existential language in highlighting the need for humanity to alter its domination of the environment; failing to do so will ultimately lead to humanity's demise. However, an all-or-nothing, *teleological* approach that repudiates immediate, albeit insufficient, reforms will do nothing to alleviate the burden of environmental catastrophe. Radical realism requires that movements think both towards the immediately achievable and towards long-term systemic changes without sacrificing either. Abandoning the former could lead to a *teleological* approach that does not address the concerns of the suffering, while abandoning the latter will be inadequate in bringing about the environmental changes that are necessary. Camus's words could easily apply to a theoretical environmental social movement in the 21st century as he states, "They would be preparing the future and at the same time knocking down a few of the walls which imprison us today. If realism is to be the art of taking into account both the present and the future, of gaining the most while sacrificing the least, then who could fail to see the positively dazzling realism of such behavior?" (2007, p. 51).

Aronoff et al. make this point clear in *A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal*. The authors conclude

> The age of climate gradualism is over. If we act too slowly, it will just be a matter of years before concatenating crises turn into an unimaginable nightmare. To stop that from happening, we need to go all out. But that's not the same as believing that every single fight, every single policy contest, every single election is 'all or nothing.' (Aronoff et al. 2019, pp. 173-174)

To stop environmental destruction, a green social movement in the United States can, as the previous scholars state, embrace reforms such as the Green New Deal while pushing for greater systemic changes to the global, capitalist mode of production. Climate change and the catastrophe that follows are not inevitable. Environmental destruction and the existential havoc it wreaks upon humans and other animals alike can be halted.

CHAPTER #7

POSTSCRIPT: 2020 AND BEYOND

Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man, was jogging near his home in Glynn County, Georgia on February 23rd, 2020. Arbery was pursued from behind by two armed, white men and a third who recorded the pursuit on his cellphone. Ahmaud Arbery's death that day was ruled a homicide and the cause of his death was determined to be three shotgun wounds he sustained: two shots hit his chest and one in his wrist (Stelloh 2020). It took 74 days, the release of the video of Arbery's murder, and massive public outcry for the perpetrators to be arrested and charged with Arbery's murder.

Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman, was asleep in the home she shared with her boyfriend Kenneth Walker on the night of March 13th, 2020. Three plainclothes officers of the Louisville Metro Police Department (LMPD) executed a no-knock search warrant, and forcibly entered Taylor's apartment in Louisville, Kentucky with a battering ram. Walker believed that three men had just broken into his apartment, retrieved his gun, and fired upon the officers. The three police officers fired over twenty shots and Breonna Taylor was shot eight times and died that night. The LMPD officers were looking for two men suspected of selling drugs more than 10 miles away. Although Taylor knew one of the men, the suspect was already in police custody at the time of Taylor's death (Bogel-Burroughs 2020). The three officers involved were placed on administrative reassignment while investigations occurred and eventually officer Brett

Hanikson was fired from the LMPD. The grand jury declined to charge any of the officers with murder in Taylor's death.[cxxix]

On May 25th, 2020 George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man was killed by police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Floyd allegedly used a counterfeit $20 bill to buy cigarettes from a local grocery store. Both police body camera footage and cellphone videos from witnesses captured Floyd's death at the hands of officer Derek Chauvin. Floyd, already in handcuffs, was forced in the backseat of a police car, where he stated that he was struggling to breathe due to claustrophobia. Chauvin pulled Floyd out of the car where he fell to the ground, chest first. Chauvin then forced his knee into Floyd's neck while officer James Kueng applied pressure to Floyd's torso, officer Thomas Lane applied pressure to Floyd's legs, and officer Tou Thao stood to the side and watched the situation unfold (Bennett, Lee, and Cahlan 2020). Witness video shows Floyd repeatedly saying "I can't breathe" at least 16 times while pleading with officers to get off of his neck and saying that he was about to die. Floyd said, "My stomach hurts, my neck hurts, everything hurts" and begged the officers, "Don't kill me." Floyd, who was visibly bleeding, continued to cry for help before appearing unconscious. Officers checked for a pulse, found that Floyd did not have a pulse, but provided no medical assistance (Hill et al 2020). Videos of George Floyd's death circulated quickly on the internet and Chauvin

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[cxxix] As of this writing, the case is becoming more complicated as an anonymous grand juror in the case has spoken out, and has publicly stated that the Attorney General, Daniel Cameron, refused to pursue homicide charges against the officers. The grand jury, therefore, could not deliberate on, or consider homicide charges against the officers (Allen 2020).

was arrested on May 29th and charged with third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. Following mass protests and public outcry the three other officers involved in Floyd's death were eventually arrested on June 3rd and were charged with aiding and abetting Chauvin, who's charge was elevated to second-degree murder.

The deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd all occurred in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic; an existential crisis that paralyzed the world. While anyone can contract COVID-19, suffer from the virus and die as a result of infection, Black Americans (and people of color in the United States generally) have contracted the virus at higher rates than white Americans (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020) in both urban and rural areas (Barrón-López et al. 2020). COVID-19 is particularly deadly to people with underlying health conditions and chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, lung disease, asthma, and diabetes; all conditions which disproportionately affect African Americans (Millett et al, 2020; Poteat et al. 2020; Kendi 2020). Black Americans are also less likely to have access to health insurance and quality health care, are disproportionately employed in "essential" jobs that require in-person work, utilize public transportation which can be a site of viral transmission, and live in areas with higher rates of air pollution and human congestion (Millett et al, 2020; Poteat et al. 2020; Goody and Wood, 2020).[cxxx] Despite the

[cxxx] Specifically, scholars note high rates of Black employment in "low-wage health care sectors such as home health aides, nursing home staff, and hospital janitorial, food service, laundry, and other sectors. Many of these low-wage jobs do not provide adequate, if any, health insurance, sick leave, childcare, or other benefits which protect higher wage workers from COVID-19 exposures. Moreover, the surrounding environment magnifies risk. Black Americans are more likely to live in crowded settings

unprecedented spread of COVID-19, George Floyd's death inspired mass protests around the United States and across the globe.

Black Lives Matter in 2020

In response to the aforementioned deaths, although primarily the death of George Floyd, and after a few years of being largely dormant from mainstream public discourse, Black Lives Matter reemerged as central to American politics. Protests responding to Floyd's murder began in Minneapolis on May 26th, 2020 and continued into July. Initially, protests were localized in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area of Minnesota, but quickly became a nationwide movement, before spreading globally. There were protests in solidarity in over 2,000 cities in the United States, and in over 60 countries. While the protests generally remained peaceful, at least 200 American cities imposed curfews, over 30 states and Washington D.C. activated the National Guard (Sternlicht 2020), and over 14,000 people were arrested (Olson 2020).

Opal Tometi describes the 2020 protests in a manner that is quite similar to Garza's and Cullors's explanations of their activism following Trayvon Martin's death and his killer's acquittal. As previously noted, Garza and Cullors each connected Trayvon Martin to their families and loved ones. Similarly, Tometi explains that "People are absolutely lifting up names like Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd, but I think they are very clearly in the streets for themselves and their family

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such as public housing where the ability to practice social distancing is quite limited, if not impossible" (Poteat et al. 2020, p. 2).

members because they don't know who is next" (Chotiner 2020). Tometi theorizes that the deaths of Taylor, Arbery, and Floyd resonated with people, and sparked an existential awareness that state-sanctioned death was possible for themselves, and their families. Tometi identifies this individual feeling of existential anxiety as a motive for the largest collective action in the history of the nation, much in the way that Camus sees one's recognition of absurdity as an opportunity for participation in collective rebellion; his previously note restatement of Descartes's cogito, "I rebel – therefore we exist" (1991, p. 22). Initial estimates state that between 15 million and 26 million people participated in the protests in the United States alone which makes the protests the largest in United States history (Buchanan et al. 2020).

Various police forces involved in patrolling the protests have come under intense scrutiny as many officers have been filmed instigating and elevating violence at the protests. NYPD officers used their SUV as a weapon and rammed a barricade of people, Philadelphia police tear gassed peaceful marchers, and police in Buffalo shoved an elderly man to the ground who was standing on a street corner and left him bleeding from his ear (Way 2020). On Reddit, a user going by "AvenattiForPresident" compiled and archived video footage from the protests which documents police brutality unleashed on protesters. In total, footage exists from 36 states, Washington D.C., and several clips from unknown locations (2020PB 2020).

Professor Melina Abdullah, who co-founded Black Lives Matter's Los Angeles chapter, states in a recent interview on the movement's efforts in response to George Floyd's death, "It's good that so many white mainstream people and even businesses are

making sympathetic statements about black lives mattering, about the reality of white supremacy. The real question is, what will they do?" (as cited in E A Kaplan 2020). Abdullah's question is being answered with changes that extend beyond those which Garza had once criticized as "pretty crappy" (Eidelson 2016).

Most clearly, the protests in response to Floyd's death have brought the conversation about existing racial injustice and the efforts of Black Lives Matter back into the national spotlight, "including in Washington, where lawmakers have been unsure how to react or liaise with the groundswell" (Barrón-López 2020). Chris Hayes, in a June 2019 interview with Alicia Garza for *NBC News* noted the dearth of Black Lives Matter activity during the first years of the Trump presidency. He states,

> the movement itself feels way less present in the everyday of Trump's America than it did five years ago. The amount of cable news stories about a black man dead at the hands of police is much lower. The amount of demonstrations you see in the wake of that, right?
>
> There was a period of time in which that was so dominant in the news and in consciousness and the dominance of that in the news and the consciousness has gone away. (Hayes 2019)

One year later, Hayes' statement no longer rings true as Black Lives Matter and conversations surrounding race, racism, and racial justice in the United States have returned to the headlines as news coverage of the protests exploded. Political scientist Michael Heaney (2020) writes in the *Washington Post* that the "media focused on protest in June 2020 more than during any other month in two decades - 60 percent more than at any point in the past two decades. Not since the Kent State killings, in which National Guard troops shot and killed four student protesters in May 1970, has there been so much media attention to protest." Beyond the national conversation, the state, schools and

universities, private corporations, and elite individuals have instituted immediate and meaningful changes.

Police reforms have been instituted around the country at both the city and state levels. Cities such as Minneapolis, Washington D.C., Chicago, and Denver have banned the use of neck restraints or neck holds (commonly referred to generally as chokeholds) (Andrew and Asmelash 2020) as have several states including California, Florida and New York (Kaur and Mack 2020). The Louisville, Kentucky Metro Council unanimously voted to ban no-knock search warrants after the police killing of Breonna Taylor (Gupta and Hauser 2020). Several Mayors and police chiefs from across the United States organized the Police Reform and Racial Justice Working Group to address needed changes (Andrew and Asmelash 2020). In New Jersey, the attorney general updated its use-of-force rules for the first time in nearly 20 years, while the Dallas Police Department adopted a "duty to intervene" rule which requires an officer to intervene if a fellow officer is using excessive force (ibid). New York also repealed a law which kept police disciplinary records secret (Buchanan et al. 2020). Concurrently, schools from around the country have cut ties with local police forces including in Minneapolis, Denver, Portland, and Seattle (Andrew and Asmelash 2020).

Police have also faced budget cuts in several locales. Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti announced that the city's budget would not contain new funds for police and instead the city would find budget cuts and reinvest $250 million into jobs, health, education, and "in healing" (Matthew 2020), and New York City mayor Bill de Blasio likewise reached a deal with the City Council to reallocate $1 billion from the NYPD to

youth and community services and which moved school safety agents out of the NYPD (Durkin 2020). Most drastically, the Minneapolis City Council unanimously voted to disband its existing police department (Forliti and Karnowski 2020).

Statues and monuments of Confederate leaders and military members, as well as perpetrators of slavery and genocide have been removed as a response to the protests. Cities including Birmingham and Mobile, Alabama, Little Rock, Arkansas, Jacksonville, Florida, Decatur, Georgia, Indianapolis, Indiana, Louisville, Kentucky, Clarksville, Tennessee, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Houston, Texas, Norfolk, Richmond, and Roanoke, Virginia, and Charleston, West Virginia, have seen confederate statues removed by their respective governments (A Taylor 2020, Ortiz and O'Boyle 2020).

Monuments to perpetrators of genocide have been removed by officials in Albuquerque and Santa Fe, New Mexico, Santa Fe and Ventura, California, and Denver, Colorado. Statues of Christopher Columbus have been removed by officials in Hartford, Middletown, New Haven, and Norwalk Connecticut, Wilmington, Delaware, Boston, Massachusetts, Detroit, Michigan, St. Louis, Missouri, Camden and Newark, New Jersey, Columbus, Ohio, Columbia, South Carolina, and Houston and San Antonio, Texas. Statues and dedications to racially contentious political figures have likewise been removed including a statue of former Philadelphia Mayor Frank Rizzo, a statue of former Detroit Mayor Orville Hubbard, and a monument dedicated to Vice President John C. Calhoun in Charleston, South Carolina.

Other statues and monuments have been removed by private entities including the Sons of Confederate Veterans, United Daughters of the Confederacy, private preparatory

schools, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, University of Portland, Columbus State Community College, the Catholic Church, the Carolina Panthers of the National Football League, and the Minnesota Twins of Major League Baseball. Still other statues and monuments were defaced, beheaded, toppled or removed by protesters in cities including Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama, San Francisco and Los Angeles, California, Denver, Colorado, New Orleans, Louisiana, Frederick and Silver Spring, Maryland, Saint Paul, Minnesota, Eugene and Portland Oregon, Nashville, Tennessee, Portsmouth and Richmond, Virginia, and Madison, Wisconsin. Many other statues are currently scheduled for removal by local and state officials, but the respective removals and relocations have not yet occurred (Andrew and Asmelash 2020, A Taylor 2020, Ortiz and O'Boyle 2020).

While the removal of statues may appear small, it is a significant step in addressing the history of American racism and white supremacy. Historian Julian Hayter told *Business Insider* that the removal of Confederate statues is an historical correction. Hayter states that "[the statues] were designed to rewrite history, to essentially justify the rise of racial apartheid and segregation, and the racial apartheid and segregation of the 20th century" (as cited in Abadi et al. 2020). Fellow historian Karen Cox notes that the removal of a Robert E. Lee monument will not lead to the country forgetting who Robert E. Lee was as "The history is always going to be there" (ibid). However, the removal of the statues is one way of ending the publicly funded celebration of slaveowners and perpetrators of genocide.

Schools, colleges, and universities have renamed buildings that were previously named after members of the Confederacy, white supremacists, segregationists. For example, Robert E. Lee High School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana was renamed the Lee Magnet High School, Nicholls State University changed the names of two buildings that had previously been named after Confederates who had no affiliation with the school, and the University of Southern California (USC) removed Rufus B. von KleinSmid's name from its public affairs building for his support of eugenics and forced sterilization. Similarly, public sites – including entire neighborhoods –have been renamed. Livingston Park in Albany, New York has become Black Lives Matter Park as the Livingston family had been an importer of slaves, and the Stapleton neighborhood in Denver, Colorado is undergoing a renaming as its namesake was a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Formerly innocuously named locations were positively renamed to honor and acknowledge individuals as the NASA headquarters in Washington, D.C. would be renamed the Mary W. Jackson NASA Headquarters to honor the agency's first black, female engineer, and subway stations in Brooklyn, New York are being renamed to honor civil rights leader, Medgar Evers.

In addition to Confederate (and related) monuments, another contentious issue has been the use of the Confederate battle flag. In response to the protests, The Mississippi Legislature has commissioned a redesign of the state's flag which would omit the Confederate battle flag that has been a fixture in the state flag's upper left-hand side. Gulfport, Mississippi removed the state flag from city-owned buildings while Bay St. Louis, Mississippi stopped flying the state flag city-wide (Palumbo 2020). Similarly,

Confederate battle flags were removed from public sites in Florida and Georgia. The United States Marine Corps banned the Confederate battle flag from its military bases in all formats (including on bumper stickers, clothing, and coffee mugs) and the United States Navy has been working on a similar order (Gross 2020). NASCAR has also banned any and all use of Confederate flag imagery by both its drivers and fans (Levenson 2020).

As previously noted, Alicia Garza referred to many of the previously instituted policy responses to Black Lives Matter as "pretty crappy." However, both private and public entities responded to protests for racial justice in 2020.[cxxxi] Changes have been made in the majority of states within the United States, as well as in the United Kingdom, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand, India, and South Africa. Additionally, many private entities including religious institutions, professional sports teams and organizations, colleges and universities, publicly traded corporations, and the entertainment industry have committed to changes that aim towards increased racial justice.

Private companies and businesses which have utilized racially stereotypical imagery and naming in their branding have committed to rebranding efforts. Among the food and beverage products in question are Aunt Jemima's syrup and pancake mixes, Uncle Ben's rice, Mrs. Butterworth's breakfast foods, Cream of Wheat, Eskimo Pie ice cream, and Land O'Lakes butter (Tyko 2020). The Walt Disney Company announced that Splash Mountain – a log flume ride in both Disneyland and Disneyworld – would

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[cxxxi] The responses were so numerous that there is even a Wikipedia article compiling a "List of changes made due to the George Floyd protests."

rebrand as the ride had included depictions from the racist film *Song of the South.* The forthcoming change would incorporate Disney's *The Princess and the Frog,* which introduced the company's first black Disney princess, Tiana (Pallotta 2020). Country music artists previously known as Lady Antebellum, and the Dixie Chicks have respectively rebranded to Lady A, and The Chicks (Melas 2020). Perhaps most drastically, the Washington Redskins have committed to a rebranding which would eliminate both the team name and logo which have long been criticized for being racist (Tyko 2020).[cxxxii]

In addition to the aforementioned country artists, visual media has responded to the protests. *Cops*, the long-running television show that depicted real interactions between law enforcement officials and civilians was canceled after 32 seasons, as was the similar show *Live PD* (Blake 2020). Cast changes were made by television shows such as *Big Mouth, Central Park, Family Guy*, and *The Simpsons* as white actors (and voiceover actors) will cease playing characters of color (Itzkoff 2020). Entire shows were pulled from streaming services for having instances of racism including white actors in blackface, while some shows had specific episodes removed for similar racist depictions and jokes (Alter 2020). Ongoing television series *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* – a

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[cxxxii] The Cleveland Indians, Atlanta Braves, Kansas City Chiefs, and others using stereotypically Native American imagery have not committed to rebranding. The Cleveland Indians did retire former mascot Chief Wahoo prior to the 2019 Major League Baseball season and now wear jerseys that say "Cleveland" as opposed to "Indians." The Washington Redskins changing their imagery is significant considering team owner Dan Snyder said in 2017 that "We will never change the name of the team" (Tyko 2020).

police comedy show – has decided to re-write and film upcoming seasons in light of the protests (Katz 2020).

While the list of responses to the 2020 protests against the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd are continuing to grow, many are just as "crappy" as the prior generation of responses. Several cities have had the words "Black Lives Matter" painted on streets but have not followed this performative support by addressing any of the changes the movement seeks (King 2020). Despite the lack of federal response, and the sitting United States President Donald Trump calling Black Lives Matter "a symbol of hate" (Wilkie 2020), it is undeniable that cities, states, and private entities have instituted immediate reforms in response to the movement's protests. These reforms are undoubtedly insufficient, and do not approach the movement's larger calls for police abolition, but they are worthy of praise and recognition.

The Alt-Right in 2020

While Black Lives Matter has grown in support and achieved some significant gains, the status of the Alt-Right in 2020 is far less certain. Over the course of the last few years, the Alt-Right's internet presence has suffered some setbacks. The Alt-Right relies on the internet as its primary platform for organizing, recruitment and spreading its message (Hawley 2017; Wendling 2018). Yet the Alt-Right's access to these online platforms has become limited: Reddit banned two large Alt-Right subreddits (r/altright and r/alternativeright) (Hern 2017), Facebook banned two pages associated with Richard Spencer (the National Policy Institute and Altright.com pages) (Owen 2018b) and his

Twitter account was suspended for a time (Selyukh 2016), and the *Daily Stormer* has faced numerous issues in attempting to find a permanent registrar for its site after it was removed by its host, GoDaddy, and was subsequently removed by Google (which also deleted its YouTube account) (McGoogan 2017).

The Alt-Right has, despite these efforts, persisted in its online activities. The *Daily Stormer* may have been revoked by GoDaddy and Google, but has attempted to find hosts from across the world as it relocated to a .ru (Russian) domain (BBC News 2017), a .hk (Hong Kong) domain and a .name domain (from Chinese-based company Eranet International Limited) (M Hayden 2017a). The Alt-Right has also found alternative platforms such as Gab (Feshami 2018) and the *Daily Stormer* has found a home on the dark web's Tor Project (Murdock 2017). The Alt-Right largely relies on the internet, and rather than succumb to pressures from mainstream websites, the movement has seemed to work ceaselessly to find alternative, albeit less publicly visible, forms for online propagandizing. While the movement has become somewhat nomadic on the Internet, its presence had remained relatively strong over time.[cxxxiii] However, it is not clear how active the Alt-Right is in 2020.

About a year of publishing his first book on the Alt-Right, George Hawley argued

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[cxxxiii] Thomas Main explains that "the Alt-Right web magazines have a considerable audience, one comparable in size … to those of established organs of left, right, and centrist opinion" (Main 2018, p. 9). Main found growth in total and unique visits to Alt-Right sites between October 2015 and February 2018 which exceeded some mainstream left-and-right sites. *Daily Stormer,* despite hosting issues, had more monthly visits than *Commentary, Harper's Dissent, The Progressive, The American Prospect,* and *Washington Monthly.* If the Alt-Right is merely retaining its 2018 support, it may have a significant base of support.

that the movement appeared to be in a hopeless state of decline. Hawley presented a talk on March 15th, 2018 at U.C. Berkeley's Institute for the Study of Societal Issues entitled "Is the Alt-Right Collapsing?" In his speech, Hawley articulates his answer of "a qualified yes" that while the Alt-Right is not going to imminently disappear, the movement is no longer growing and is instead fracturing and suffering from internal divisions (Hawley 2018). Hawley cites internet censorship and public embarrassment as reasons for speculating that the Alt-Right is in decay. While the Alt-Right has functioned both online and offline, Hawley has observed that there has been growing disunity within the Alt-Right and an increase in discord among members which has led to a growth of internal factionalism. Hawley even cites some anecdotal examples of Alt-Right members that he once interviewed who have deleted their social media accounts and who are no longer openly contributing to the Alt-Right. While extremist activities have not ceased in the United States in 2020, they are not the product of the Alt-Right as the boogaloo movement and QAnon have respectively gained notoriety.

The boogaloo movement (or the boogaloo boys), a violent, far-right, anti-government movement has taken over extremist headlines in 2020. There are important differences between the movement and the Alt-Right. First, the boogaloo movement often presents itself as libertarian while the Alt-Right favors a strong, central government (Dickson 2020, Owen 2020). While both movements oppose the extant governmental structures and institutions of the United States, the boogaloos are often accelerationists who want to increase civil disorder, so as to spark a civil war and the downfall of the state and society (Coaston 2020, Pemberton 2020). The Alt-Right's supporters are a

disproportionately 30-and-under crowd of white males who work in the tech industry and who have swooping "Macklemore" style haircuts (Lewis 2017) while boogaloo boys are often seen in either full tactical body armor, or in their Hawaiian shirts, having embraced an entirely different set of memes than the Alt-Right (Pemberton 2020).

Most significantly, the boogaloo movement is less clearly white nationalist than the Alt-Right. Reporter Jane Coaston (2020) of *Vox* explains that "Not all boogalooers are white supremacists … And while frequently using racist images and tropes online, many members of the boogaloo movement have no specific ties to white nationalism or the white power movement." While the Alt-Right is rooted in racial concerns, and pursues a white nationalist *telos*, the boogaloo movement is not dedicated to white nationalism. Yes, the boogaloo movement has openly racist elements, but it is more clearly dedicated to anti-government activities than to white nationalism.

The boogaloo movement supports a range of anti-government activities including violent uprisings against both liberal political opponents and police officers (Zadrozny 2020) and resisting mandatory lockdowns and masks during the COVID-19 pandemic (Al Jazeera 2020). While some boogaloo supporters actually supported the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests since the protesters opposed police killing and violence (Owen 2020), others used the protests as a distraction to commit anti-governmental attacks (Price and Sonner 2020). Several boogaloo supporters have been arrested on charges ranging from murder, to arson, to possession of unregistered firearms, to making a terroristic threat, to inciting a riot to drug charges. In one instance which grabbed headlines, active duty United States Air Force sergeant Steven Carrillo and Robert Justus,

two boogaloos, were charged in the murder of a Santa Cruz County deputy in June 2020, and an earlier murder of a Federal Protective Service officer in Oakland in May 2020 (Mendoza and Dazio, 2020, MacFarquhar and Gibbons-Neff 2020). In October 2020, at least 14 people were charged for their roles in a terroristic plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Several of those arrested have been tied to the boogaloo movement (Jones and Waldrop 2020; Starr et al. 2020). The boogaloo movement is not alone in garnering attention with far-right supporters in 2020 as the QAnon conspiracy has likewise berthed a movement.

QAnon is a far-right conspiracy theory began with an anonymous post on the imageboard 4Chan by "Q." The anonymous individual purported to be a government official who had classified information regarding the Trump administration and its political opponents. In short, Q has accused countless liberal politicians, celebrities, and other high-ranking officials of being members of a global cabal that worships Satan, operates an international child sex-trafficking ring, and plots against Donald Trump. Supporters have backed Trump who, according to the conspiracy, is supposedly quietly battling these efforts and related efforts of a liberal coup by Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, George Soros, and other sympathizers. Q followers believe that there will be a forthcoming event known as "the Storm" in which mass arrests of high-ranking people will occur, followed by "the Great Awakening" in which the non-believers will realize that QAnon's claims were accurate (Roose 2020; WSJ Staff 2020).

QAnon traffics in additional conspiracies such as believing that John F. Kennedy Jr. faked his death, has been living as a Trump supporter named Vincent Fusca, is

exposing high-level, deep state conspiracies, and would reveal himself to the world as Trump's 2020 reelection, Vice Presidential running mate. Some also believe in a longstanding conspiracy theory that the United States federal government is run by reptilians, while others believe that Hillary Clinton was arrested and imprisoned and the "Hillary Clinton" who is free today is actually a clone, while still others believe that Kim Jong Un was installed in North Korea as a CIA puppet (Milbank 2020). QAnon may not be a social movement, but it is a far-right group that has garnered significant mainstream attention. QAnon, clearly, is distinct from the Alt-Right and the boogaloo boys, as QAnon is rooted in a far different set of beliefs and conspiracy theories than either movement.

The only significant connection between QAnon and the Alt-Right is that both traffic in anti-Semitism. QAnon supporters often use classic anti-Semitic tropes such as targeting influential Jewish figures (George Soros and the Rothschild family) and claiming that they are secretly enacting a political agenda, and promoting the fabricated anti-Semitic text, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* which falsely describes a plan for Jewish world domination (Choi 2020). While QAnon and the Alt-Right may share some anti-Semitic sentiments, QAnon is far more invested in formal American political institutions than the Alt-Right.

In 2019 and 2020, several Republicans running for congressional office expressed sympathies with QAnon. Matthew Lusk ran in the Republican primary in Florida's 5th Congressional District, openly supported QAnon and listed "Q" as one of the 51 issues he wished to address in congress on his campaign website. Danielle Stella ran in

Minnesota's 5th Congressional District and her campaign frequently retweeted QAnon messages and used QAnon's calling-card statement, "Where We Go One We Go All" or shortened, "WWG1WGA." Similarly, Rich Helms ran as a Republican primary candidate in Texas' 33rd Congressional District and retweeted QAnon posts. Lusk withdrew prior to Florida's Republican primary, Stella lost in Minnesota's Republican primary, and Helms withdrew prior to Texas's Republican primary.

Erin Cruz ran in California's 36th Congressional District and while her campaign materials did not mention Q, she acknowledged that her supporters included QAnon supporters and was careful to not denounce their movement (Franco and Radford 2019). Cruz lost in the 2020 general election to incumbent Democrat Raul Ruiz. Jo Rae Perkins was the Republican nominee for the 2020 United States Senate election in Oregon and was among the most vocal supporters of QAnon of any candidate in the country (Mapes 2020). Perkins lost in the 2020 general election to incumbent Democrat Jeff Merkley.

In total, at least twenty-seven candidates who endorse or minimally have promoted QAnon material online are on ballots in the November 2020 general election (A Kaplan 2020). While the Alt-Right has not run candidates, and the boogaloo boys generally oppose the government's existence, QAnon supporters proudly stand behind sympathetic candidates for office, and support the presidency of Donald Trump.

Trump – who is the centrally supported figure in the Q movement – has stated that he does not know much of the QAnon movement but claims that Q supporters are "people that love our country" (ibid). At a news conference, Trump stated, "I understand they like me very much" and he has retweeted many accounts promoting QAnon

(Associated Press 2020). Trump rallies have had Q supporters prominently displayed in the crowd (Stanley-Becker 2018), and Trump has proudly supported and endorsed some of the QAnon-supporting Republicans running for office such as Marjorie Taylor Greene (Maclean 2020) who is now the representative-elect in Georgia's 14th Congressional District, and Angela Stanton-King (Laughland and Silverstone 2020) who ran in Georgia's 5th Congressional District but was defeated in the 2020 general election by Democrat Nikema Williams.[cxxxiv] QAnon, unlike the Alt-Right, is highly invested in Trump's presidency, and makes its presence visible at Trump rallies and campaigns. While the Alt-Right has not run candidates for office, and candidates have not, in turn, publicly supported the Alt-Right, the same cannot be said for QAnon as many QAnon supporters are on ballots for office in 2020.

Although the Alt-Right may not be dead, it is not the far-right movement that is most prevalent in the United States in 2020. One should not conflate far-right movements as the Alt-Right, boogaloo boys, and QAnon vary in their ideological origins, have different relationships with governmental institutions, and have vastly divergent sociopolitical goals. The Alt-Right may have taken a backseat to the violence of the boogaloo boys, and the mainstream candidacies of QAnon supporters, but the movement had been largely quiet before Charlottesville, and can certainly reemerge from the internet, to the streets.

[cxxxiv] Georgia's 5th Congressional District had been represented by John Lewis who passed away between the 2020 Democratic primary and general election.

Albert Camus in 2020

When COVID-19 began to infect Americans, many mayors and governors mandated quarantines and other stay-at-home orders to minimize the spread of the virus. I instantly thought of Camus's novel *The Plague* in which the city of Oran is quarantined due to an outbreak of the titular bubonic plague. Dr. Rieux, the story's narrator states that it is not a story of heroism as fighting the plague is a communal effort and a duty of the town's citizens. Those who volunteer to join the sanitary squad organize to ensure sanitary conditions in congested areas, while others accompany doctors on house visits, evacuate the infected, and transport the sick and deceased. Yet *The Plague* is also a story of isolation, loneliness, and a longing for loved ones while collectively struggling against death. Many people will die due to a plague – nearly 250,000 Americans have died due to COVID-19[cxxxv] – and every death is a "defeat." Yet even the removal of the plague, or a vaccine to end COVID-19 is not a defeat of mortality as there can be no eternal victory as all people will eventually die. Thus, Rieux and the others in *The Plague,* like the doctors working during the COVID-19 outbreak, are fighting an absurd battle of assured defeat. Yet, like Sisyphus, Rieux in *The Plague,* and the real medical professionals today persist in a Sisyphean manner to treat patients and attempt to halt the widespread suffering and death.

Albert Camus has perhaps not been this relevant in mainstream American circles since his death. Historian Robert Zaretsky, who published a book on Camus's life in

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[cxxxv] This number sadly continues to rise and is accurate as of November 18, 2020. Similarly, over 1.3 million people have died across the world.

2010, penned an op-ed in the *Houston Chronicle* tying *The Plague* to the COVID-19 outbreak. He concludes, "Were Camus alive today, he would not be surprised how the spread of Covid-19 has, in part, been enabled by authoritarian regimes like China and Iran that fear the transmission of truths more than they do the transmission of viruses. Nor would he be shocked to learn that this fear courses through our own administration" (Zaretsky 2020). Philosopher Alain de Botton, in a *New York Times* op-ed likewise conflated *The Plague* and the COVID-19 outbreak. Despite the fictious outbreak affecting one-quarter of Oran, De Botton (2020) states that he people "keep imagining reasons it won't happen to them. They are modern people with phones, airplanes and newspapers. They are surely not going to die like the wretches of 17th-century London or 18th-century Canton." De Botton is talking about the novel's characters, but it runs parallel to a disturbing portion of people in the United States who question the validity of epidemiology, and refuse to isolate or even take precautions as simple as wearing a mask to prevent COVID-19's spread.

Sean Illing, a political theorist turned *Vox* journalist, associates the collective suffering of *The Plague* to America's COVID-19 outbreak. Illing explains, "Each character in the story is defined by what they do when the scourge comes. No one escapes it, but those who revolt against it, who reduce the suffering of others, are the most fulfilled. The only villains in *The Plague* are those who cannot see beyond themselves" (2020b). Suffering, whether from a pandemic, or political injustice, may never cease, and therefore the struggle against suffering – the fight to minimize its impact – is likewise a Sisyphean task. Illing concludes

> A pandemic, terrible though it is, highlights our mutual interdependence in a way that only tragedy can. The beauty of *The Plague* is that it asks the reader to map the lessons of the pandemic onto everyday life. The principles that drive the hero, Rieux, are the same principles that make every society worthwhile — empathy, love, and solidarity.
>
> If we learn these lessons now, in a moment of crisis, we'll all be better off on the other side of it. (Illing 2020b)

With plague, as with COVID-19 "The essential thing was to save the greatest possible number of persons from dying and being doomed to unending separation. And to do this there was only one resource: to fight the plague. There was nothing admirable about this attitude; it was merely logical" (Camus 2004c, p. 119). Everyone is condemned to death, but in times of the greatest existential anxiety such as during pandemics, the Sisyphean battle to save and improve lives continues. Dr. Rieux summarizes the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak in the United States as much as the fictious plague in Oran, "I have no idea what's awaiting me, or what will happen when all this ends. For the moment I know this: there are sick people and they need curing" (Camus 2004c, p. 114).

Conclusion: Beyond 2020

When I began conducting research for this dissertation, only 35 percent of white Americans had a favorable view of Black Lives Matter (Easley 2017). By the middle of 2020, perceptions have changed and Black Lives Matter now has increased white support and boasts a multi-racial and multi-ethnic coalition of protesters. *Pew Research Center* found that 60 percent of white, 77 percent of Hispanic and 75 percent of Asian respondents support Black Lives Matter (in addition to 86 percent of Black Americans) (Parker et al. 2020). A similar *Wall Street Journal/NBC News* poll of registered voters

found that 57 percent of voters support the protests in response to Floyd's death and 58 percent are more concerned with racial inequality in the United States as a result of the protests (Siddiqui 2020). In June 2020, Black Lives Matter was respectively more popular than both the sitting United States President, Republican Donald Trump, and his general election opponent, Democrat Joe Biden. In a staunch reversal from the movement's earlier years, Black Lives Matter became the most favorably viewed national political organization or politician in the United States (Wilkinson 2020). Yet increased white support for the movement and its actions raises the question, do white supporters of Black Lives Matter also support the movement's prerogatives?

Most Americans in a poll produced for *ABC News* by Langer Research Associates oppose key segments of Black Lives Matter's political aims. While the majority of white respondents believe that Black people are treated in racially discriminatory manners, only 34 percent support reducing police funding. Additionally only 38 percent of whites support removing Confederate statues, and 16 percent support removing statues of slave-owning United States Presidents (although 31 percent of white Democrats support removing statues of slave-owning presidents) (Langer 2020). A similar *Gallup* poll found that while most Americans feel that changes are necessary in terms of policing, there is a vast racial divide between the 88 percent of Black Americans, and the 51 percent of white Americans who feel that major changes are needed. Even more divisive is the question of police funding; 70 percent of Black Americans support reducing police department budgets, but only 41 percent of white Americans concur (Crabtree 2020). While these polls do not separate white supporters of Black Lives Matter from white

Americans in general, they do hint that white support for Black Lives Matter has grown while white support for some of what the movement desires, has not necessarily increased at the same rate.

The disparity between support for Black Lives Matter and support for the movement's priorities is concerning. It is not clear what would happen if white supporters read the Vision for Black Lives or learned that the movement's founders are police abolitionists and anti-capitalists.[cxxxvi] Would white support for Black Lives Matter decrease? Would white support for these policies and positions increase? Will Black Lives Matter become more conservative to retain white support? Moving forward in the midst of a global pandemic during the end of Donald Trump's tenure as United States President may leave us with more questions than answers.

What is clear is that my initial argument remains consistent; Black Lives Matter is a rebellious social movement that has responded to the existential anxiety associated with state-sanctioned Black death, and has taken a radical realist stance which achieved meaningful reforms while acting in a Sisyphean manner and pushing endlessly for more radical changes. George Floyd's murder was another existential catalyst in Black Lives Matter's political push much in the way that Trayvon Martin's murder was the catalyst for the movement's formation, and Mike Brown's murder was the catalyst for the movement's public arrival. Much has changed since 2013 and much remains to be seen.

[cxxxvi] Anecdotally, a friend of mine who works for an elected official in New York City posted on social media that Black Lives Matter's calls for defunding the NYPD did not mean eliminating the police, but only reducing their budget by $1 billion (about 18% of their budget). How would he respond to the movement's generally abolitionist stance?

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