**Clinton Attacks Trump Over 'Alt-Right' Ties**

Just a few months ago, very few people were talking about the alternative right, or even had any idea what it is. The movement, more commonly known as the alt-right, pretty much only existed on the fringes of the internet, mainly in youth-dominated message boards filled with white nationalist and anti-Semitic memes.

But that's quickly changing. Bolstered in part by the unexpected rise of Donald Trump and Britain's decision to leave the European Union, the anti-establishment political movement has received big headlines in recent months. No longer just a fringe subculture, its young supporters boast about their perceived new influence in the Republican Party.

"We won the meme war; now we've taken over the GOP," said Andre Anglin, who runs The Daily Stormer, which bills itself as the world's most visited alt-right website. "And we did this very, very quickly."

Anglin was referring to Trump's decision last week to promote media executive Steve Bannon as CEO of his presidential campaign. That's notable because Bannon ran the conservative news website Breitbart, considered a major platform for the alt-right.

The website was founded by Andrew Breitbart, who died in 2012. Under Bannon's leadership, the outlet has increasingly warmed to the alt-right movement, publishing a steady stream of anti-immigrant, anti-feminist articles.

Bannon's promotion was the biggest public relations boost yet for the alt-right. It also provided an opening for Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton to link Trump to the movement.

Clinton blasts Trump's 'prejudice'

In a Thursday speech on the alt-right, Clinton accused Trump of "taking hate groups mainstream and helping a radical fringe take over one of America's two major political parties."

Clinton said Bannon's appointment to CEO amounted to an unprecedented merger between white supremacists and the Republican Party.

"Donald Trump built his campaign on prejudice and paranoia. The de facto merger between Breitbart and the Trump campaign represents a landmark achievement for the alt-right. A fringe element has effectively taken over the Republican Party," Clinton said.

Clinton also ran down the list of Trump's actions she said suggest discrimination, including: refusing to quickly disavow Klu Klux Klan leader David Duke; calling Mexican immigrants rapists, drug dealers and criminals; repeatedly retweeting white supremacist Twitter accounts; and proposing a temporary ban on Muslim immigration to the United States.

"A man with a long history of racial discrimination, who traffics in dark conspiracy theories drawn from the pages of supermarket tabloids and the far reaches of the internet, should never run our government or command our military," Clinton said.

Trump rejects racist label

The Trump campaign has rejected accusations of racism and shrugged off any reported links between it and the alt-right. Ahead of Clinton's speech Thursday, Trump told a rally in New Hampshire that neither he nor his supporters are racist.

"When Democratic policies fail, they are left with only this one tired argument. 'You're racist, you're racist, you're racist.' They keep saying it ... and it's a tired argument," Trump said. When Republicans are labeled as racist, Trump said they "have a tendency to be defensive, to back down, and feel bad. Not Donald Trump."

Trump did not mention the alt-right, and indeed he has not brought it up on the campaign trail.

But earlier, Trump's campaign manager, Kellyane Conway, addressed the alt-right issue specifically, telling CBS News: "We've never even discussed it internally. It certainly isn't part of our strategy meetings."

Asked whether the Trump campaign was providing a platform for the alt-right, Conway responded: "No, not at all."

But just weeks ago, Bannon was expressing a different message. The media executive proudly boasted of Breitbart's influence in the alt-right community.

"We're the platform for the alt-right," Bannon told journalist Sarah Posner at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland in July.

Bannon, who has largely stayed out of the spotlight since taking his new position, has acknowledged that the alt-right may contain a certain number of white nationalists, anti-Semites and homophobes.

"That's just like, there are certain elements of the progressive left and the hard left that attract certain elements," he told Posner.

What is the alt-right?

But are the white supremacists within the alt-right just outliers, or is the group itself bigoted? That question is the subject of intense debate, partly because "alt-right" is an umbrella term that encompasses a diverse group of ideologies.

While neo-Nazis, white nationalists and anti-Semites often dominate alt-right forums, others do not express such outright racial animosity. For those, the alt-right isn't so much about race specifically as it is about lashing out against what they see as the social evils of political correctness: globalism, multiculturalism and feminism.

Notably, alt-right activists are also opposed to mainstream conservatism, which they see as naive and outdated.

The phrase "alternative right" itself was first used by conservative writer Paul Gottfried in 2008, in part to describe fellow conservatives who were opposed to President George W. Bush. The phrase became further popularized after one of Gottfried's colleagues, Richard Spencer, started the Alternative Right website, which espouses views described as “identitarian.”

'Reset' of white nationalism?

Whatever phrase is used, whether “identitarian” or other recent iterations such as “race realist" or "racialist," it amounts to a rebranding exercise for white nationalists and an attempt to soft-pedal racism, says Daryle Lamont Jenkins, the founder of the One People's Project, which monitors far right groups.

"I am very apprehensive about using the term ‘alt-right' or ‘alternative right' because, in truth, it really is just another term that certain white supremacists out there have been using to avoid calling themselves white supremacists or even white nationalists," Jenkins told VOA.

"I understand that people are reacting to it because it's what's out there in the media, and that's what they call themselves," he said. "But personally, just because I've been doing this for a number of years, I have to reject this latest term.”

Many alt-right activists agree with Jenkins on this point. That includes Anglin, who concedes the movement is white nationalism for a younger generation — essentially an attempt to make white supremacy cool again.

"The alt-right is a reset on white nationalism, as the older manifestations of it had become bogged down in libertarian claptrap, religious cult gibberish, and really uncool music," Anglin said.

According to Anglin, many people who identify as alt-right view the older incarnations of white nationalism, such as the Klu Klux Klan, as "a bit dorky, [and] definitely stale."

But while the alt-right may have different external trappings, any difference is superficial, Anglin says.

"I am against any attempts to classify the alt-right as something categorically different than white nationalism. It's an aesthetic difference," he added.

Even while lamenting the fact that Breitbart is "full of Jews," something he said "makes a lot of white nationalists uncomfortable," Anglin says he is happy overall with the direction of the site.

"Sometimes I read an article on Breitbart, and I think I am reading my own writing," he added.

Breitbart responds

For its part, in an article Thursday, two writers at Breitbart, Allum Bokhari and Milo Yiannopoulos, denied that the publication supports the alt-right, which they called a "complex and fascinating movement."

"The reason why the media can't stand Breitbart's coverage of the alt-right," the article said, "is that we actually made an effort to understand the movement, instead of lapsing into the tired, knee-jerk assumptions that prop up the establishment worldview."