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From the "Island of Garbage" to Dark Maga: The Resurgence of a Masculinist Alt-Right in the 2024 Election?

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The 2024 American presidential elections are now behind us. The discourse adopted by the Republican candidate Donald Trump has been influenced by a decade-long change in the digital world. The rise of the MAGA movement is, in fact, deeply grounded in a political hegemony fueled by the Alt-Right phenomenon. Born on the fertile digital ground of 4chan and obscure forums in the early 2010s, the movement fed on the manosphere as early as 2014 and the #Gamergate phenomenon. Young white men took over digital spaces to both create and unite themselves in a reactionary political identity. A decade has passed by. This commentary examines the integration of various elements associated with online far-right movements into Trump's political strategy, analyzing how the rhetoric of masculinity and The Red Pill discourse have been used to attract young white male voters. The analysis ultimately seeks to provide an analytical base for further reflection on the 2024 Trump campaign's use of far-right discourse and the resurgence of masculinist, reactionary ideologies in American politics.

The Alt-Right's Shared Lexicon Strikes Back

Central to understanding the strength of the now-defunct Alt-Right movement is the lexicon on the red pill which was, when it emerged, both a term and a place. The term in itself originated from the movie *Matrix*, where it represented a process of awakening. Used within online masculinist spaces, it has taken the shape of an awakening to a supposed truth about societal structures, initially focused on gender roles and later race.

A sub-reddit named r/TRP helped in spreading the concept to a wider audience, including young men. It established a place where an online community could grow around the idea that young white men were oppressed by feminist movements, progressive ideologies and were attacked by "Social Justice Warriors," enhancing a fighting narrative. Like many other online spaces, this sub-reddit is not only an echo chamber but also a development site for the development of masculinist and reactionary political views. The red-pilling process is one of ideological radicalization. Members embrace the idea of a return to traditional, patriarchal values. The rise of the Alt-Right brought a racial undertone to the red pill process, weaponizing it into a political ideology advocating for reactionary views on both gender and race.

For public figures like Elon Musk and Donald Trump, this red pill process has become a useful political tool to both master and use. Musk and Trump are both controversial figures who have used this specific lexicon in online spaces. In the context of the 2020 presidential election, and in the wake of the Alt-Right's propagation of the lexicon, one of Trump's Twitter exchanges with Musk marked a moment of public ideological convergence. Musk's embrace and use of the red pill discourse allowed him to resonate with young white men who were already disillusioned with mainstream politics. It helped establish his public persona as an outsider, a reference figure for young white men. Trump's use of the red pill aimed mobilizing this specific group of voters by using a shared lexicon representing both their grievances and aspirations.

In addition to using the red pill lexicon, Trump's 2024 campaign focused on bringing forward alternative media, thus being able to put forward The Red Pill's ideological content without being perceived as being political. His various interviews with Adin Ross, Logan Paul, and Theo Von aimed at placing his themes in mainstream discussions. While the content from said discussions might not be perceived as being political, Trump has introduced a young male audience to his reactionary themes and therefore started a red pill process at a scale which has never been seen before. Trump's 2024 strategy was to build upon an already-existing dynamic, strengthening the feeling of alienation regarding liberal and progressive moments and presenting the latter as the ultimate threat regarding societal norms of gender and race.

A Masculinist Galaxy Rises Again

Another decisive element of Trump's 2024 strategy has been his association with figures from the world of sports, particularly mixed martial arts (MMA) and professional wrestling. Trump's decade-long relationship with UFC president Dana White, as well as his appearances at wrestling events such as WrestleMania 2007, allowed him to converse directly with a masculine audience and therefore position himself as a masculine public persona. Associations with figures like White and wrestling icon Hulk Hogan enabled Trump to emerge as a discursive self-made

masculine man, a construct which is closely associated with the strength and virility projected by fighting culture.

White embodies the archetype of the rugged, self-reliant man, which Trump has successfully used in his outreach to male voters using a reactionary conservative ideal of manhood. The 2024 Republican National Convention, where White and other similar figures have spoken, underscores the alignment between Trump's campaign and the world of professional fighting on themes of strength, aggressivity, and domination. The portrayed values of strength and domination fit in the red pill's reactionary ideology regarding both gendered and racialized power relationships.

Moreover, Trump's relationship with Joe Rogan, podcast host, UFC commentator, and close associate of White, is another pivotal part of this masculinity-driven strategy. Rogan's podcast, *The Joe Rogan Experience*, has become a central space for discussing issues related to masculinity and "political correctness" and for conveying an anti-establishment view. His podcast has turned into a platform for far-right views and served as a space where controversial guests, including Trump allies and Trump himself, can speak freely without what they present as the constraints of mainstream media.

The convergence of Trump's campaign with these masculinist figures illustrates the growing influence of combat sports and alternative media figures on American politics. Through these associations, Trump is able to directly convey his political message to a subculture of young men who find value in the "tough guy" persona and reject what they perceive as the emasculation of men in modern society. This "masculinist galaxy" forms another iteration of what was formerly the Alt-Right movement, where Trump's rhetoric resonates with the grievances of young men seeking to reclaim their sense of power in a world they feel is increasingly hostile to traditional masculinity.

Dark Maga: The Return of the NrX

One of the most significant shifts in the masculinist discourse during the 2024 election is the emergence of what has been called "Dark Maga," a term championed by Elon Musk. In October 2024, Musk publicly declared, "I am not only MAGA, I am Dark Maga," signaling a more extreme, reactionary version of the MAGA movement that draws on the ideological underpinnings of the Neoreactionary (NrX) movement. The NrX, a relatively obscure but influential far-right ideology born in the confines of the internet, advocates for authoritarian governance, the rejection of democracy, and a return to monarchistic or feudal structures.

Dark Maga incorporates elements of the NrX's antidemocratic discourse, which celebrates reactionary views on governance and society. The Neoreactionnaries thrive on a shock effect and on a subversive rhetoric. It is therefore only natural that they found a new home within the MAGA movement. Trump's embrace of this ideology, whether genuine or only tactical, represents a significant turning point in his discursive

radicalization. By aligning himself with figures like Musk, Trump has capitalized on the disillusionment with and feeling of alienation of younger voters from mainstream politics, offering them a platform that speaks to their sense of rebellion and frustration with the social norms perceived as being oppressive.

The phrase "Island of Garbage," which Joe Rogan's associate comedian Tony Hintchcliffe used during Trump's rally at Madison Square Garden, highlights the discontent felt by many young men who find themselves at odds with the dominant cultural narratives. The phrase is both subversive and shocking. In it resides a racial innuendo anchored in a racial competition envisioned by young white men as being biased against them. They perceive and portray the racialized Other as being both inferior and threatening their own social status. That is why the phrase used by Hintchcliffe is crafted for its audience, the red-pilled masculine element of the MAGA movement. Consequently, Trump's MAGA movement has become a refuge for those seeking to escape the perceived control of liberal elites and progressive forces. The embrace of Dark Maga, with its blend of radical right-wing politics and youthful, rebellious energy, signals a more intense phase of Trump's political resurgence and access to power.

Conclusion

The manosphere, once a fringe element of the internet, has undergone a transformation in the years between Trump's first and second terms, spreading in different shapes and forms, from obscure online forums to mainstream platforms like Joe Rogan's podcast and various social media outlets, often depoliticized. Through these platforms, figures like Donald Trump and Elon Musk have successfully reached a voting group of young white men who feel alienated from the broader cultural and political establishment. Trump's 2024 campaign, by integrating discursive elements from the Alt-Right and the manosphere, capitalized on the growing power of the red pill ideology and the already-existing trend of hypermasculine, reactionary politics.

As the MAGA movement continues to evolve, it is clear that the intersection of digital platforms, celebrity culture, and far-right politics has created a powerful and seemingly unstoppable political dynamic. The resurgence of masculinist rhetoric and the embrace of reactionary ideologies like NrX suggest that the use of far-right rhetorical or ideological elements is not only a response to contemporary political crises but also an attempt to reshape the cultural landscape according to a vision of masculinity that rejects the values of liberal democracy. The 2024 election, therefore, serves as a crucial juncture in the ongoing battle for the soul of American politics, where the Alt-Right's vision of the future threatens to reshape the nation's political and cultural institutions in profound and lasting ways. From 2016 to 2024, the real struggle has always been the content of the political hegemony.