



INDEPENDENT

Donald Trump, there's no such thing as the 'alt-left' – and even white supremacists know it

Kristy Major

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Nearly 48 hours after the bloodshed in Charlottesville which saw Heather Heyer killed and many more injured when a car crashed into a crowd of anti-racism protestors, President Donald Trump came out to condemn the violence. Well, almost.

Speaking from Trump Tower, the President defended those who had organised protests against the removal of a statue of Robert E Lee and sought to apportion the blame to both the “alt-right” and the “alt-left” for the violence that ensued.

“What about the ‘alt-left’ that came charging at, as you say, the ‘alt-right’?” he asked. “Let me ask you this: What about the fact they came charging – that they came charging with clubs in their hands, swinging clubs? Do they have any problem? I think they do.”

How could the President blame a white supremacist domestic terrorist when the assailant was faced with a few anti-fascists with sticks? Both groups were just as bad as each other, clearly, in name as well as nature.

Donald Trump blames both sides for Charlottesville violence

But Charlottesville wasn't actually the horseshoe theory in action – the left and right didn't diverge from their usual points on opposite sides of the political spectrum to form a circle around the Confederate General's statue and meet each other in the middle, mutually violent and out of control.

As much as the “alt-right” (and their apologists) would like to paint this picture as to deflect attention from their actions, there is no such thing as the “alt-left”. Whatever nomenclature you use the result is the same. The opposite of a neo-Nazi is not a neo-Nazi. The opposite of a fascist is not a fascist. The opposite of a racist is not a racist. We really don't need to develop any new terminology for this. The old ones work just fine.

“Alt-right”, a term which Richard Spencer takes credit for inventing, is an umbrella phrase for those who believe in far-right ideologies and who reject conventional conservatism in favour of white nationalism. Like Spencer's slick suits, it has been used as a ruse to hide what was always underneath – the idea that white people are better and that their history, culture, and “race” should be preserved above all else, to the detriment of others.

No one on the other side of the political spectrum ever took on the mantle of the “alt-left”. They didn’t coin the term to hide their anti-racist agenda while they lurked in sub-Reddits discussing whether the general public was ready for their multi-cultural revolution.

Charlottesville, Virginia Protests

Aside from a few confused racists with a proclivity for distributive economics who took a liking to the phrase, the name was one thrown onto those of a more radical left-wing persuasion.

It was coined by the centre-ground in US politics to draw parallels between the anti-establishment sentiments expressed by the left with those on the right. The term originally encompassed those who supported Bernie Sanders and opposed the liberal candidate Hillary Clinton. It was later adopted by the far right when discussing any radical elements of the left.

The left, especially those who took part in anti-racist protests, never saw the need to hide their political beliefs under any other label. Those protestors were there because they opposed the presence of white supremacists. They were putting their bodies on the line (often without healthcare) because they opposed racism.

There was also never parity of deed in their political activities. I’m not supporting the use of violence as a tool of protest, but there is no equivalence between brawling and driving a vehicle into a crowd fast enough to kill someone. Charlottesville wasn’t an isolated incident. According to research carried out by the Cato Institute, over the past 25 years right-wing groups have been responsible for 12 times as many fatalities and 36 times as many injuries as those on “the left”.

Trump and the far-right know this – and deflecting the conversation away from them, their beliefs and their actions by using the straw man of the “alt-left” isn’t fooling anyone.