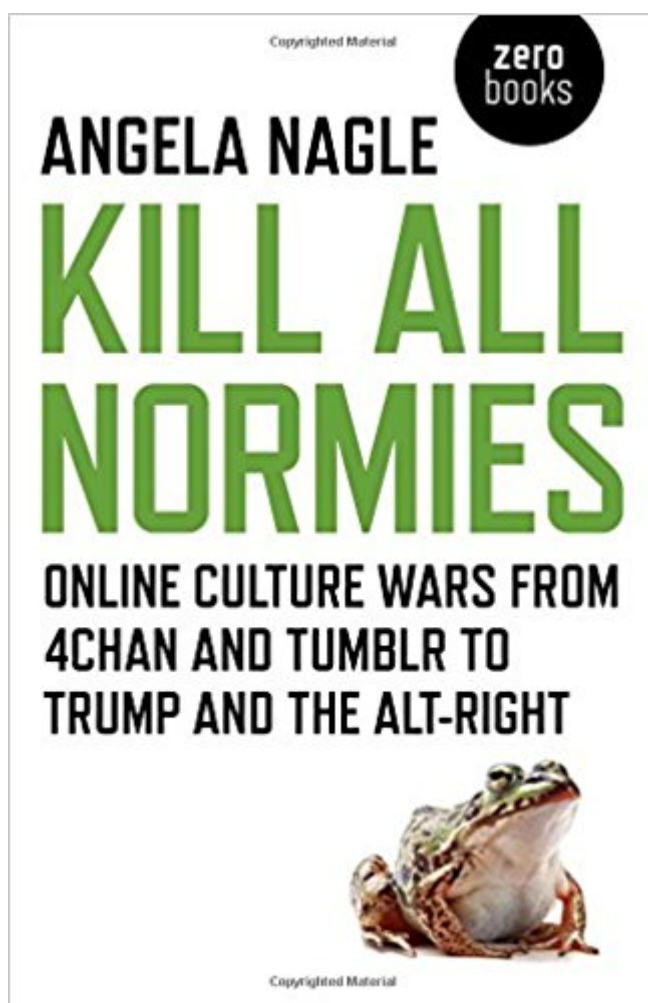


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Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars From 4Chan And Tumblr To Trump And The Alt-Right



Synopsis

Recent years have seen a revival of the heated culture wars of the 1990s, but this time its battle ground is the internet. On one side the alt right ranges from the once obscure neo-reactionary and white separatist movements, to geeky subcultures like 4chan, to more mainstream manifestations such as the Trump-supporting gay libertarian Milo Yiannopolous. On the other side, a culture of struggle sessions and virtue signalling lurks behind a therapeutic language of trigger warnings and safe spaces. The feminist side of the online culture wars has its equally geeky subcultures right through to its mainstream expression. *Kill All Normies* explores some of the cultural genealogies and past parallels of these styles and subcultures, drawing from transgressive styles of 60s libertinism and conservative movements, to make the case for a rejection of the perpetual cultural turn.

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Customer Reviews

Amidst the chaos of our times, it is a relief to have a brilliant and fearless critic like Angela Nagle to turn to. Unwilling to stomach the liberal shibboleths that fail to adequately explain the emergence and significance of right-wing subculture, she's the only one willing to descend into the grimmest of Internet grottos and give us the benefit of her incisive and cool-headed analysis. (Amber A'Lee Frost *Chapo Trap House*) With a liberal left dangerously lost in the stormy waters of middle class self-flagellation, Angela Nagle is the lighthouse keeper showing us the way out. Her writing is unsparing in its diagnosis but never cruel. Unlike much of the Left who've grown far too accustomed

to marginalization and defeat, Nagle still believes in politics as the only way of changing an increasingly brutal world. She is the writer and social critic I've been waiting for. (Connor Kilpatrick Jacobin magazine) Angela Nagle is one of the few writers anywhere who has consistently refused to hold a double standard for virulent racism and misogyny even when it came in edgy countercultural packaging. Kill All Normies is a brilliant exposé of the new faces of online nihilism and fascism, which can no longer be explained away as doing it "for the lulz" (David Golumbia, author of The Politics of Bitcoin: Software as Right-Wing Extremism)

Angela Nagle's work has appeared in the Baffler, Jacobin, Current Affairs, the Irish Times and many other journals. She's also the co-editor of Ireland Under Austerity from Manchester University Press.

I really like this author and learned a lot from her. She sheds important light on online trolls that grew out of 4chan and ended up aligned with the alt-right. She has a few central arguments: 1) that transgression is the foremost value of channers and they picked this up from modernist critics (who were usually on the left); 2) that the virulent anti-feminism of channers grew as a reaction to something called "Tumblr feminism," which started on line and then jumped to university campuses; and 3) that 4channers are "beta" males who feel sexually insecure in a post-sexual liberation world where the rewards have gone disproportionately to the top "alpha" males. She also opens with a broadside against the digital utopians who might persist in believing that online "crowds" are a force for the good -- that, she says, is so 2010. But this book is a quickie book, rushed out so quickly that no one bothered to proofread it. The author doesn't even take the time to tell you the name of books that she quotes from at length. This quick-and-dirty approach might be a wise publishing decision, given how quickly online trends come and go. But this is a book after all and it's not unfair to bring to it greater expectations than one would to a magazine or an online post. So, on the positive side, I like the author because she was a strong point of view. She advises progressives to abandon "transgression," which is simply a-moralism; she implies feminism needs to get over the trigger warning/safe space BS; and she believes that a progressive politics needs to put less emphasis on identity and identitarian politics. I don't agree with her in all respects but I appreciate her willingness to take stands. From the fairly casual style and lack of any footnotes or bibliography -- and, indeed, from her willingness to take stands -- I took her to be a journalist or freelance critic. So I was surprised to learn that she's an academic. Learning that made me wish she'd displayed some of the virtues of academic writing. For instance, she doesn't tell us anything about the research on which

she bases her observations. One assumes she spent a lot of time on social media, Tumblr, and perhaps IRC channels, in reddit forums, or whatever. But she doesn't bother to share that with us. I think it matters. For instance, what do we actually know about these guys (including the assumptions that they are all guys)? Who are they and where are they? The author is Irish but an awful lot of this book is about the US. Why not address the limitations (and potentials) of this sort of limited online research? A yet bigger problem for me is that, despite her interest in the alt-right, she really drops the ball on the issue of race. She focuses instead on the gender side of this problem because that's what she knows best. I suspect this is because she feels much more confident around gender issues. She clearly finds it easier to criticize Tumblr feminism and the influence of Judith Butler than she does the other much maligned "social justice warriors" concerned with mass incarceration, extrajudicial killing of black people, intractable racial disparities, institutional violence, etc. But haven't they played a big part in campus "anti-free speech" politics on university campuses today? And haven't they too raised the hackles of the newly emboldened on (and off) line racists? And why are young women attracted to these alt-right groups? Finally, geography and culture matter. The author makes little of the fact that she is Irish and writing in Ireland. It's as if in writing about online groups, history and specificity disappear. But, as someone reading in the US, I've got to say: history matters. Is Tumblr feminism universal? Did the alt-right play a part in Ireland's recent elections? Does "free speech" mean the same thing on an Irish campus as it does in the US? But it's really the race issue that rubs me the wrong way. Nagle can't expect anyone to think she's come to terms with the alt-right based predominantly on her interest in its anti-feminism. In the end, I find Nagle strong, intelligent and nervy, but her interpretations in the end don't address the marriage of the 4chan and the alt-right in the past few years in a way that satisfies me. For that, she needs to go deeper, wider -- and to wander offline. And she needs to admit what she can and cannot know using the methods she employs.

Honestly a great starting point for trying to really understand the parts of the internet a lot of us have spent the past several years trying to pretend doesn't exist. This book is brief and like several reviews have said, probably could have stood one more editing pass, but I personally didn't mind because I can tell it's going to send me towards more research. It has felt nigh impossible over the past few years to keep up with break neck speed of the internet as it has morphed into more and more of a demon day by day, and Nagle is the first person I've found who really starts to put the whole web together in a coherent way, to demonstrate how seemingly disparate parts of the internet pollinate and overlap. By the end, the book put me in a perplexingly existential place, making me

reconsider how I engage with the internet as a whole on a political level but also on a basic moral one. If you ascribe to the Mark Fisher "Vampire's Castle" view of the politics of the internet, you already have the sense that the culture of the web as a whole has become toxic, not just in the chauvinistic, openly sexist corners of the web. I know Nagle herself is pretty disdainful towards South Park but I thought the 20th season was the first work of fiction that truly tried to capture the strangeness of the internet, and the terrible people we can become when we feel properly shrouded in anonymity. This book is the first work of nonfiction that does the same to me, even better than Jon Ronson's "So You've Been Publicly Shamed", which I also enjoyed. A book I'd highly recommend, especially to any Grey Wolves currently reading this.

I was excited about this book, and had enjoyed hearing Nagle as a podcast guest. I plopped down my money without reading the reviews. I wish I had previewed the writing a bit more. Why? It's really poorly written, painfully so, and feels like a first draft. The book really needs an editor, and it's possible Zero Books failed her here. It also suffers from not pulling in more current research on these issues -- which again, a decent editor might have pushed her to do. As a result, it reads like an extended personal essay, but without the necessary craft that can make that form work. It's a shame, because there is a real need for a book that can provide a fresh analytical perspective on the relationship of the alt-right to internet culture. This just isn't that book.

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