Required software to e-Annotate PDFs: Adobe Acrobat Professional or Adobe Reader (version 11 or above). (Note that this document uses screenshots from Adobe Reader DC.)

The latest version of Acrobat Reader can be downloaded for free at: http://get.adobe.com/reader/

Once you have Acrobat Reader open on your computer, click on the Comment tab (right-hand panel or under the Tools menu).

This will open up a ribbon panel at the top of the document. Using a tool will place a comment in the right-hand panel. The tools you will use for annotating your proof are shown below:

1. Replace (Ins) Tool – for replacing text.
   - Strikes a line through text and opens up a text box where replacement text can be entered.
   - How to use it:
     - Highlight a word or sentence.
     - Click on T.
     - Type the replacement text into the blue box that appears.

2. Strikethrough (Del) Tool – for deleting text.
   - Strikes a red line through text that is to be deleted.
   - How to use it:
     - Highlight a word or sentence.
     - Click on T.
     - The text will be struck out in red.

3. Commenting Tool – for highlighting a section to be changed to bold or italic or for general comments.
   - Use these 2 tools to highlight the text where a comment is then made.
   - How to use it:
     - Click on T.
     - Click and drag over the text you need to highlight for the comment you will add.
     - Click on T.
     - Click close to the text you just highlighted.
     - Type any instructions regarding the text to be altered into the box that appears.

4. Insert Tool – for inserting missing text at specific points in the text.
   - Marks an insertion point in the text and opens up a text box where comments can be entered.
   - How to use it:
     - Click on T.
     - Click at the point in the proof where the comment should be inserted.
     - Type the comment into the box that appears.
USING e-ANNOTATION TOOLS FOR ELECTRONIC PROOF CORRECTION

5. **Attach File Tool** – for inserting large amounts of text or replacement figures.

   Inserts an icon linking to the attached file in the appropriate place in the text.

   **How to use it:**
   - Click on attach file.
   - Click on the proof to where you’d like the attached file to be linked.
   - Select the file to be attached from your computer or network.
   - Select the colour and type of icon that will appear in the proof. Click OK.

   The attachment appears in the right-hand panel.

6. **Add stamp Tool** – for approving a proof if no corrections are required.

   Inserts a selected stamp onto an appropriate place in the proof.

   **How to use it:**
   - Click on add stamp.
   - Select the stamp you want to use. (The Approved stamp is usually available directly in the menu that appears. Others are shown under Dynamic, Sign Here, Standard Business).
   - Fill in any details and then click on the proof where you’d like the stamp to appear. (Where a proof is to be approved as it is, this would normally be on the first page).

7. **Drawing Markups Tools** – for drawing shapes, lines, and freeform annotations on proofs and commenting on these marks.

   Allows shapes, lines, and freeform annotations to be drawn on proofs and for comments to be made on these marks.

   **How to use it:**
   - Click on one of the shapes in the Drawing Markups section.
   - Click on the proof at the relevant point and draw the selected shape with the cursor.
   - To add a comment to the drawn shape, right-click on shape and select Open Pop-up Note.
   - Type any text in the red box that appears.

For further information on how to annotate proofs, click on the Help menu to reveal a list of further options:
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The Middle Ages, and ideas about modern culture drawn from or rooted in the medieval period, have found themselves recurring with alarming frequency within recent political discourse. From President Bush’s crusade rhetoric surrounding the War on Terror to the Far Right’s location of White nationalism within an ongoing framework of medieval nation-founding, the past has increasingly been used in the service of the present. In their more egregious forms—such as the rise of White supremacist movements in Europe, the USA, and Australia and their amalgamation into mainstream political discourse—the use of medieval national and cultural memories has led to a whitewashing of the medieval past. This article argues that these instances of medievalism are not simply inaccuracies but come about through a recirculation of vague ideas about the Middle Ages through online in-groups. Consequently, such political uses of the medieval past are often what have been termed "banal" medievalisms in the sense that they are not always intended as deliberate references to history by useful appropriations in the service of the present.
done—reach for terms and concepts from parallel fields. In this essay, I use another methodology which allows for analysis and critiques of recent, and deeply worrisome, attempts to appropriate the medieval past within modern political discourse, particularly the co-option of a whitewashed medieval past as articulated by the Far Right in Europe and Australia and the emergence of the alt-right in the USA throughout late 2016 and 2017. Using a theory of “banal medievalism,” adapted from Michael Billig’s concept of banal nationalism and elaborated by Andrew B. R. Elliott in his recent book, Medievalism, Mass Media and Politics (Elliott, 2017, p. 16ff), the essay briefly explores the ways in which the Middle Ages are appropriated throughout modern mass and social media. The main section of the article moves on to use the theory of in- and out-groups, drawn from research into the psychology of groups, to explain the ways in which online communicative practices and the freedoms to reuse the past as they wish has allowed for the hijacking of the Middle Ages by social and online networks.

2 | PRECURSORS TO INTERNET MEDIEVALISM

Of course, as Finke and Shichtman’s work makes clear, such a misuse of medieval symbols and ideas is nothing new at all. Egregious examples can easily be found of the blatant and wilful misappropriation of the Middle Ages almost from the point at which we date the emergence of the Early Modern world. As Umberto Eco comments in his famous essay which in many ways launched the modern field of medievalism, “Modern ages have revisited the Middle Ages from the moment when, according to historical handbooks, they came to an end [...] Immediately after the official ending of the Middle Ages, Europe was ravaged by a pervasive medieval nostalgia” (Eco, 1987, p. 66).

As much as recent scholarship on periodization warns us to be wary of such neat periodizations, and the “othering” which can often ensue, the point is that the Middle Ages have always been repackaged to suit presentist agendas. Such a nostalgia as Eco describes would, as is well known, last for quite some time, with successive generations of poets, artists, and writers each repackaging the Middle Ages with their own interpretation of them. Brian Stock, in a key essay on medievalism, describes the period not as a temporal expanse but, in the broader cultural memory, as “a prevalent cultural myth” (Stock, 1974, p. 538). As a myth, it is one which would hold enormous rhetorical power as an ongoing project of revision and renovation. Such an ongoing revision often speaks more to the present than to the past so that “it is possible to find in each successive reuse of the medieval period an underlying ideological project which appropriates the period as a means of defining the present” (Elliott, 2017, p. 28).

Certainly, the 20th century offers plenty of examples of such redefinitions. Though they are far from the exclusive preserve of the right, and not always so pernicious, perhaps most striking are their associations with National Socialism. Himmler’s attempts to “find” the grail reveal less about the medieval than about a broader need to imbus a modern Nazi ideology with the pseudo-legitimacy of a medieval precedent, annexing the power of the Middle Ages (albeit one half-remembered as a nation-founding moment, as Patrick Geary describes it [Geary, 2002]) to support a hyper-nationalist ideology. Likewise, other attempts by the Nazi regime to seize the power of Arthurian myth in general suggest, as Finke and Shichtman observe, “an unsavory kinship between the armored warriors of medieval Europe [...] and the armored divisions of Nazi blitzkrieg” (Shichtman & Finke, 2014, p. 280), a kinship which would continue well beyond the Second World War and into a range of neo-Nazi and White supremacist projects even up to the present day.

Indeed, almost every dictator or leader of a repressive regime from 20th-century Europe has demonstrated a similar fascination with the Middle Ages, including Spain’s Francisco Franco (Sánchez & Hesp, 2015), Romania’s Nicolae Ceausescu (Petrescu & Petrescu, 2007, p. 375), and Portugal’s António Salazar (Ribeiro de Meneses, 2010, pp. 84–85; Sapega, 2008, p. 25). Likewise, amid the turbulence of late 20th-century middle-eastern politics, successive rulers have each laid claims to various aspects of medieval history, including Syria’s Hafez al-Assad and Iraq’s Saddam Hussein, both of whom claimed ownership of Saladin’s legacy in the creation of modern medievalist myths (Elliott, 2017, pp. 115–117), as well as the recent hijacking of the legacy of Caliphat by the terror group describing themselves as Islamic State (Elliott, 2017, chapter 8).
3 | BANAL MEDIEVALISM

Looking more closely at such uses of the medieval past raises obvious questions about how these medievalisms are deployed and what is so appealing about them to modern politics? The first point to be made here is that there are (at least) two varieties of medievalism at work in the support of these ideologies. The first group are more closely related to medieval studies proper, since they cover those instances which, like Salazar, Franco, Assad, and Hussein, are deliberate references to medieval precursors as something tangible, agreed-upon, and definably historical. This group might profitably be described as overt medievalisms, or what David Marshall has usefully termed “genealogical medievalism” (Marshall, 2007, pp. 3–5). It is in this vein, for instance, that much of above “officially sanctioned” uses of the past are deployed by fascist dictatorships. Through their attempts to legitimize current abuses of power, they anchor the present as a logical inheritor and descendent of a medieval precursor. In so doing, they point backwards to a recognizable and concrete element of the Middle Ages as a point of reference from which to triangulate or negotiate fraught modern identities.

The second form, banal medievalism, is more insidious. In this mode, these same medievalisms are deployed not to point backwards to approximate the present with a medieval past, but rather the reverse process. The unintentional medievalism instead forces the medieval world into direct contact with the present. In these cases, the medievalism is not banal in the sense of lacking power or impact, but in the sense that such medievalisms most often pass unnoticed as references to the past and are usually accepted as innocuous or atemporal references to a phenomenon understood by all.

As Bruce Holsinger has argued, such is the case with a concept like “crusade” (Holsinger, 2007). Despite the backlash against George W. Bush’s use of the term in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, terms like “crusade,” and the orientalist logic on which they are predicated formed a key part of a broader neomedievalist rhetoric which, as Holsinger demonstrates, prominently featured in the discourse throughout the fraught neoconservative-led War on Terror (Holsinger, 2007, pp. v–vi). Indeed, “crusades” continued to be deployed throughout the Bush administration not as conscious references to a medieval war but as a generic concept used to encompass a whole host of ideas with which the current term is bound up. Moreover, they powerfully divided the world into the “modern” and the “medieval,” politically suggestive and expedient terms which mapped geopolitics onto popularly understood history. Thus, “the effect [of this use of the middle ages] has been a mass enlistment of all things medieval into a global conflict in which the Middle Ages function as a reservoir of unconsidered analogy and reductive propaganda” (Holsinger, 2007, p. 15).

In this insistent usage, then, my proposition is that even a deliberately historical referent like “crusade” can, when used to describe a present phenomenon, pass from genealogical to banal medievalism. The logic underpinning this transferal from intentional to accidental thus implies that medievalisms contain within themselves an elasticity of temporal frames, akin to what Finke and Shichtman called, above, an “imbricated succession.” Such a shift thus suggests that as medievalists in some case, we ought to refocus our attention away from the direct referent of a given medievalism, and onto the context in which it is used as well as the mechanisms by which that medievalism is disseminated—which is what will be explored in this essay.

4 | IN- AND OUT-GROUPS

The banal medievalism at work here, then, functions by using a very specific kind of medievalist rhetoric, one which bridges a divide through an indexical reference to a supposedly shared cultural—or in this case, historical—capital. In its rhetorical (and ahistorical) use of a term like “crusade,” the Bush Administration was able to summon up an implicit Clash of Civilizations between the West and the East by referring to an entirely mythical historical unity and thus sidestepping any overtly Islamophobic rhetoric.¹

The seemingly innocuous term “crusade” thus contains within it a symbolic coalition of Western powers united under the banner of a modern we, united in horror against the actions of the them. It is thus, rhetorically, identical
to the uses of medievalism to underpin nationalistic discourse in the Far Right, which uses the same process—a reference to an English knight with St. George’s cross, a statue of Joan of Arc, or Norse mythology—to divide ethnicity into an entirely invented sense of autochthonous belonging and cultural Other. In this imagined continuity of cultural ethnicity from the past to the present, implicit assumptions about nationalism and national identity are revealed to be working on precisely the same lines as the origins of ethnography in antiquity which were used to formulate what Patrick Geary terms “the myth of nations” in medieval Europe in the first place (Geary, 2002, chapter 2).

Such an idea about the imagined community of the we united against the them thus hides what is an essentially exclusionary form of patriotism rooted in an imagined and whitewashed Middle Ages, masquerading as an inclusive and participatory form of patriotism. The logic suggests that national identity is open to anybody who wants to belong to a given nation, but in reality, it is only by openly signaling adherence to, or symbolically ‘pledging allegiance to,’ a racially homogeneous and intentionally politically incorrect shared historical capital.

The appeal to the shared capital of the Middle Ages thus exerts a powerful pull on those who anchor national identity within an imagined, mythical, medieval past, since it masks the fact that “modernity depends on the archaic (on ‘the construction of culture and the invention of tradition’)” (Ingham & Warren, 2003, p. 3). The power of banal medievalism to underscore nation, then, is that it covertly rejects any form of alignment with outsiders in the form of political correctness, multiculturalism, or European integration as inherently deleterious to the interests of national sovereignty and as a historical impossibility within a homogeneous White medieval culture.

It is no coincidence, then, that this kind of banal medievalism is precisely the same modus operandi deployed by whole swathes of Far Right groups around the world (though particularly in Europe where they might assert a secondary kind of colonial ownership of the past), whose rhetoric of White supremacy attempts to bypass overt racism by a covert form of racism rooted in a similar kind of exclusionary politics. A similar example can be seen in Stormfront’s literal rewriting of history in Don Black’s PDF “book,” A History of the White Race. Written as a propaganda piece for the Far-Right, White Supremacist group, Stormfront, the book is in reality an attempt to rewrite the history of the world to show the inherent superiority of what they call the “White race.” The book’s argument proposes an a priori superiority of the “White race” not by denigrating people of color, but by refusing to acknowledge their very existence in the unfolding of the history of what they suggest is the civilized (i.e., Western) world, thus recasting all progress and modernity as the cultural and historical work of Whites.

The book thus tries to position itself rhetorically as inclusive by suggesting that it is somehow a celebration of whiteness, but in reality, it is rooted in a wholly invented medieval heritage. As Sierra Lomuto notes in a guest post for In the Medieval Middle, the re-emergence into the mainstream of White Nationalist discourse is often insisted upon as an inclusive and positive attempt to perform nationhood as a

> celebration of European heritage and [it] even employs a rhetoric of inclusion through reference to a shared global identity. The absence of hate speech and racist language is strategic not only to deter those who oppose white nationalism, but also to recruit those who wouldn’t otherwise want to be associated with swastikas, the Ku Klux Klan, and other more recognizable forms of white supremacy (Lomuto, 2016).

Such a form of banal medievalism is pernicious in part because it is hidden among a range of cultural assumptions and layered within a (thoroughly mendacious) rhetoric of cultural inclusion. However, it is doubly pernicious when it seems to be supported by a broader machine of cultural assumptions about origins, insistently locating the roots of modernity in medieval Europe.

A part of the problem is that the very organization of the academic study of the past in is some ways structured on the legacy of earlier assumptions about race and ethnicity.² Such a stance conforms to Helen V. Young’s contention that “modern constructions of race which take the Middle Ages as the originary moment developed in large part to justify the global expansion of European powers and peoples by creating racial hierarchies.” Following Young’s argument, it emerges that, however unwittingly, “Modern English-speaking nations, including the USA and Australia, owe the nature of their current existence to a historical belief in the mental, moral, physical, and political superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race” (Young, 2013, pp. 2–3).
Daniel Wollenberg describes the emergence of the Far-Right groups who capitalize on such a historical belief as part of a broader movement which he terms the “new right,” comprising “populist movements that distance themselves from the post-Holocaust taboos of explicitly racist or fascist imagery and language to appeal to a wider electoral base. Rather than ‘blood’ or race, culture and heritage have become the key factors in constructing communal identity” (Wollenberg, 2014, p. 312). In this vein, put simply, the “White race” is reconfigured as the natural, logical descendent of modernity and rationalism, and thus depicted by these websites as the victim of discriminatory practices. To celebrate the past is, de facto, to celebrate whiteness-as-patriotism. It is racism by omission, rather than by overt exclusion, and the myth of the whiteness of the Middle Ages provides powerful fodder for their suggestions.

5 | PARTICIPATORY CULTURE AND MEDIEVALISM

Consequently, following their development from 18th-century theories of race to Nazi appropriations of the medieval, to the uses of Crusade rhetoric by the Bush Administration and up to their reuse in the United Kingdom’s Brexit negotiations, it seems that from then to now, very little has changed in the misappropriation of the medieval past, particularly by the Far Right. In its ideology, it is a continuation of the Nazi reconfiguration of the Arthurian legend, according to which “they turned to the Middle Ages to create rituals that made the fraternity more palatable to Nazi rulers by locating their origins in medieval chivalry” (Shichtman & Finke, 2014, p. 285). It is, however, in the implementation of those misappropriations that the significant differences of the New/Alt-Right emerge. In the final section of this essay, I want to explore the mechanisms through which the Middle Ages are reconfigured as banal medievalism, as a product of two levels of exclusion of the non-White Other.

The first takes place at the level of the themes broached, the use of medieval symbols which have been corralled into a broader, often neo-Nazi, ideological discourse, and the formalized academic study of the Middle Ages as Hsy and Kim, as well as several other key thinkers like Cord Whitaker, Helen Young, Amy Kaufman, and others have identified (see particularly Whitaker, 2015; Young, 2013). At this level, the thematic similarities with earlier forms of White supremacist medievalism are evident, as several scholars already mentioned have made clear. The second level, however, forms an in-group through the mechanisms by which those White supremacist sentiments are communicated and uses a mode of communication reliant on branding and media discourse, of which more below.

In order to define the terms, a brief illustration of the theory of in- and out-groups, on which the exclusion of the Other is rooted in such discourse, is needed. In its simplest form, the in-group is described as a result of perceived or actual commonalities across individuals. As William McDougall defined it as early as 1921, individual opinion is not a preexisting entity but an ongoing negotiation influenced by what he terms the “group mind,” which he defines as a powerful extrinsic mode of thinking informed by a series of other external factors. In particular, he describes group psychology as being an essential part of identity, claiming that “the fundamental conditions for collective mental life were a common object of mental activity, a common mode of feeling in regard to it, and some degree of reciprocal influence between the members of the group” (cited in Hogg, 1992, p. 15). In forming such groups, the “group spirit” is formed by two dialogical processes, namely, “the acquisition of knowledge of the group and formation of some sentiment of attachment to the group” (Hogg, 1992, p. 16). These processes operate in opposite directions. The former, the acquisition of knowledge, takes its information from the outside and feeds it into the group; the latter recirculates that information and uses it to forge strong links between members of the group itself. The power of these offline groups has, since the invention of the Internet, only been intensified since—despite the greater social distance between users—the reach of the group has been exponentially increased through the capacity of social media to provide “timely and relevant information that is socially curated by like-minded network participants” (Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014, p. 215).

Indeed, as early as 1993, Howard Rheingold could be found describing a protean form of participatory culture in precisely these terms, not as disconnected users but as networks of people which he notably termed “virtual communities,” crossing the new frontiers of the internet as a form of “digital homesteading” (Rheingold, 2000). With the
development of faster and more pervasive connection tools and infrastructure, the opening up of the Internet beyond a select group of digital pioneers has led to what Sherry Turkle terms, in the title of her book, being "alone together," wherein formerly isolated individuals can find communities online (Turkle, 2011; see also Boyd, 2014). Nancy Baym describes such a strong group mentality as germane to certain online communities:

Many online groups develop a strong sense of group membership. They serve as the basis for the creation of new relationships as people from multiple locations gather synchronously or asynchronously to discuss topics of shared interest, role play, or just hang out. [...] members of these groups often describe them as "communities" [...] transcend[ing] time and distance to create meaningful new social formations (Baym, 2015, p. 81).

Accordingly, as an expression of online solidarity, the in-group transforms the ways in which marginalized far right groups conceive of and talk to one another. The Group Mind thus circulates within a shared interest built not around feeling but powerful social formations.

6 | IN-GROUPS AND THE FAR RIGHT

The creation of an in-group is clearly illustrated through the Far Right's promotion of medievalism through their online presence, and particularly through their associated and heavily interlinked social media platforms. For instance, as noted above, the use of Crusade metaphors to describe current events is well noted (Elliott, 2017, chapter 4; Fiala, 2007; Holsinger, 2007), and it is to this specific understanding of the crusades that examples like that above make reference.

However, an equally virulent strain of Crusade memes, metaphors, and pseudo-academic blogsites can be found at work through a staggering range of online social media platforms. These references to the crusades are not only genealogical but banal (though, of course, many are both), ranging from alt-right trolls derailing discussions on established newspaper comments sections to walled gardens of private discussion groups devoted to neo-Nazi or White Supremacist causes. Sites like the English Defence League, Stormfront, or the so-called counterjihad websites of Robert Spencer, Pamela Geller, and Gates of Vienna also groan with references to the Crusades, either as deliberate, genealogical medievalisms which ostensibly function as a "celebration of European heritage," as Lomuto terms it, or else as covert ways of talking about genocidal "solutions" to contemporary Islamist fundamentalism and their associated terror attacks.

Most often, the content is overtly racist in tone, such as the EDL Facebook page's common practice of posting links to newspaper articles reporting terrorist attacks, or crimes perpetrated by British Muslims to "prove" the fundamental incompatibility between Islam and modern Britain, an incompatibility which is reliant on Samuel Huntington's famous Clash of Civilizations theory (Huntington, 1993, 1997; see also Wollenberg, 2014; and Elliott, 2017, chapter 5). However, equally prominent among such sites is the more user-friendly mode of internet memes, which allow for the manipulation of images with posted text comments, which allow for easily digestible chunks of information to be rapidly disseminated, by virtue of being simply copied-and-pasted, or shared with other users via Facebook's "Like" or "Share" functions, which repost the exact same information onto others' newsfeeds. As Limor Shifman observes, the use of memes allows for a high degree of fidelity in the initial message, permitting them to "reflect deep social and cultural structures", replicating those structures both rapidly and widely among other users (Shifman, 2014, p. 15). The result, according to Shifman, is that,

like many Web 2.0 applications, memes diffuse from person to person, but shape and reflect general social mindsets. The term describes cultural reproduction as driven by various means of copying and imitation—practices that have become essential in contemporary digital culture. In this environment, user-driven imitation and remixing are not just prevalent practices: they have become highly valued pillars of a so-called participatory culture (Shifman, 2014, p. 4).
The power of such memes is also consolidated by powerful algorithms deployed by social media sites to arouse the attention of their subscribers, and which use search history and website tracking to tailor content to the users' pre-established predilections and taste. The result is thus a vicious cycle according to which what the user sees will determine more of what that user will see in the future. This cycle has famously been termed a "filter bubble" by internet scholar Eli Pariser, according to which the algorithms' "personalization can lead you down a road to a kind of informational determinism in which what you've clicked on in the past determines what you see next—a Web history you're doomed to repeat. You can get stuck in a static, ever-narrowing version of yourself—an endless you-loop" (Pariser, 2011, p. 16).

When coupled with such a filter bubble, memes thus compound the effect of the in-group community, defining and shaping each user's online world, redefining the horizons of their online experience (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006, p. 5). For the purposes of online extremism, then, what has changed in the era of User-Generated Online content is not the deployment of medievalisms to refer to contemporary positions in the present but the mechanisms by and through which those medievalisms are deployed. Not only is the information provided tailored precisely to confirm preexisting beliefs (which psychologists call "confirmation bias") but also the lowered barriers of entry mean that the authors of such information are no longer necessarily bound to the same demands of fact-checking and authority as the journalists, authors, and opinion leaders of the past.

This admixture of amateur writing and tailored content thus makes participatory culture the perfect petri dish for the formation of extreme opinions which are unlikely to encounter dissenting voices and which are not subject to any rigorous editorial filters. Hence, exactly the same process as that seen above is repeated. The proliferation of a series of memes or Facebook posts seems to reflect an open and democratic group, but in reality, the circle is closed, self-selecting, and dangerously exclusive, since it sets in motion an in-group which is inevitably defined by a putative "out-group." Offering seemingly insurmountable evidence for their racial intolerance, users of these sites can only see reinforcements of their own dominant patterns of thought. They literally see a different world to those outside of the in-group.

Thus, when a Facebook user belonging to a Far Right group like the English Defence League posts a meme featuring, say, a crusading knight, the user might feel as though he or she is celebrating the ancestry of a nation-founding group of knights, and thus reaffirming the legitimacy of (White) British nationalism. However, in the context of the in-group to which they are however unwittingly declaring allegiance, the rhetoric of such medievalisms plays a complex threefold game of noncontradiction, confirmation bias and groupthink which is perhaps even more powerful than the state-sponsored propaganda illustrated by Finke and Shichtman.

First, because of the filter bubble and the closed groups of social media, there is often no one connected to the group who might be able to contradict that statement (however much we as medievalists might be able to outline how and why it is false). This represents the policy of noncontradiction which, as Bertrand Russell observed, is a fundamental first stage of creating authenticity and credibility (Russell, 1936, pp. 86–88). Second, the content is confirmed not by independent fact-checking but by its conformity to all of the other content posted within that group, creating a powerful impetus not to challenge the group think of its members. This second level demonstrates the power of confirmation bias in online groups which, as Cass R. Sunstein has shown, leads groups to gravitate towards extremism which surpasses each individual's own belief system (Sunstein, 2008, see also Sunstein, 2009).

Third, the image itself, having thus been defined only within the context of that group's discursive rhetoric, is doubly perceived to be a celebratory form of patriotism which memorializes English national identity and heritage, because its meaning for the specific in-group has been determined as such. The belief in its innocuousness thus makes it (for them) innocuous, whereas in reality, it obscures and further marginalizes the non-White other. This last level is only made possible by a culture of connectivity which allows each user to post, share, and comment in order to demonstrate a level of "opting in" which masquerades as participation extending beyond digital culture and into everyday life. Such a culture of connectivity or convergence creates a closed system which Jose van Dijck calls an "ecosystem of connective media—a system that nourishes and, in turn, is nourished by social and cultural norms that simultaneously evolve in our everyday world" (Dijck, 2013, p. 21: italics in original).
As a result:

Rather than acting as a forum for dispassionate deliberation, pockets of political opinion can emerge, and participants of such blog cults positively reinforce their own ideal without consulting alternative arguments. In such an environment, blogs are no renaissance in communication [...] but merely an instrument of apartheid for individual perspectives (Jacobs and Rushkoff in Bruns & Jacobs, 2006, p. 245).

It is within these "pockets of political opinion," then, that the insistence on the fundamental and exclusionary whiteness of the Middle Ages comes to form a self-confirming belief within the in-groups of the Far Right, among the self-created filter bubble of White supremacist groups online.

By way of conclusion, then, the above theories of virtual communities and participatory culture show how and why the Far Right's use of the Middle Ages proves to be so popular and irresistible. It is of course worth noting that political appropriation of the past is neither limited to the Middle Ages (our colleagues in Classical Studies have long suffered from similar attempts by external agencies to renegotiate the terms and meaning of their chosen period) and nor is it exclusively misappropriated by the political right (Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri's book, Medioevo Militante, for instance, outlines a number of ways that the Middle Ages has been reused by both right and left, to positive and negative ends). However, in this online version, by understanding them as "banal" medievalisms—that is, that there is no attempt to insist on the accuracy of those references—it is possible to understand the power of those medievalisms. Their power lies in providing self-referential fodder for online groups, so that the references to the medieval past pass from intentional ways of using the past to banal, self-confirming references to contemporary issues from the present. These are not isolated moments, but the spilling over of a virulent strain of medievalism wherein "the deep structures of nostalgia for the Middle Ages and modelling of recuperation are strikingly similar" (Young, 2015).

As the activities of these groups spill over into the offline world, through grassroots movements like the EDL, Finland's Soldiers of Odin, or with so-called lone-wolf terrorists like Anders Behring Breivik and Dylann Roof, and seen most recently in the rise of Far Right political parties in Europe and the Alt-Right's violence at Charlottesville, Virginia, the security of online in-groups can move from purportedly celebratory patriotism to terrorism, with fatal results. In short, however, banal their medievalisms might be in their online discourse, the (ab)use of the medieval past has serious effects which can and do matter in the real world.

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ENDNOTES
1 This is not to say, of course, that the Bush Administration was entirely free of such Islamophobic content. Bruce Holsinger's book outlines a number of highly problematic official statements emanating from the White House which rely on such anti-Muslim rhetoric, though perhaps not quite to the same extent or quite so overtly as the current Trump administration. My point is that a term like "crusade" allowed Bush and his spokespeople to avoid singling out Muslims explicitly, by referring to a mythical medieval unity of Christendom.


3 I am grateful to my anonymous reviewers who pointed out that the political appropriation of medievalism is by no means restricted to the political right. For the purposes of the current discussion, my point is that we are currently witnessing a far greater degree of such appropriation by the so-called Alt-Right than by other belief systems.
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