

Elle Reeve, *Black Pill: How I Witnessed the Darkest Corner of the Internet Come to Life, Poison Society, and Capture American Politics* (Atria/ Simon & Schuster, 2024)

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Review: Elle Reeve, *Black Pill: How I Witnessed the Darkest Corner of the Internet Come to Life, Poison Society, and Capture American Politics* (Atria/ Simon & Schuster, 2024).

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The American journalist Elle Reeve has written a remarkably readable book titled *Black Pill: How I Witnessed the Darkest Corners of the Internet Come to Life, Poison Society, and Capture American Politics* – but it is not pleasant reading.

It is about the alt-right. For the most part, young white men make up the alt-right. They are misogynistic, racist, and antisemitic, and they fancy themselves to be fascists and nazis. The leaders of the alt-right are high IQ young white men. Many of them have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (pp. 47-52).

It turns out that the book *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray (1996) strengthened the white supremacy of the alt-right (Reeve, 2024, pp. 52, 53-54, 57, 94, and 126).

Now, I advanced an environmental explanation of black and white IQ differences in my controversial article “IQ and Standard English” in *College Composition and Communication* (1983, pp. 470-484). In it, I drew on the work of Walter J. Ong and Eric A. Havelock to construct an environmental explanation of black and white IQ differences. I formulated my explanation as a hypothesis to be tested. Sadly, my hypothesis has never been tested in longitudinal tests.

Subsequently, I published “A Defense for Requiring Standard English” in *Pre/Text* (1986). Subsequently, it was reprinted in the anthology *Rhetoric: Concept, Definitions, and Boundaries*, edited by William A. Covino and David Jolliffe (1995, pp. 667-678).

Now, the front of the dust jacket on Reeve’s new 2024 book *Black Pill* features a blurb about it by the American journalist Brian Stetler: “Powerful and propulsive . . . Reeve fearlessly investigates some of the most insidious corners of the internet and showcases, to horrifying effect, how these radical pockets are threatening the rest of us.”

Stetler’s characterization of Reeve’s prose as “propulsive” is apt.

On the back cover of the dust jacket, there are no further blurbs by anyone else – nor on the inside flaps of the dust jacket.

Now, the *Wikipedia* entry on Elle Reeve says that “Reeve earned her Bachelor of Journalism degree at the University of Missouri School of Journalism in 2005.”

According to *Wikipedia*, “Reeve covered the August 2017 United the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, for *Vice News Tonight*, during which she interviewed neo-Nazi Christopher Cantwell and other demonstrating white supremacists, capturing footage of them carrying tiki torches while chanting ‘Jews will not replace us!’ which went viral. Her report, entitled *Charlottesville: Race and Terror*, earned both her and *Vice News Tonight* a Peabody Award, four Emmy Awards, and a George Polk Award.”

Now, in Reeve’s “A Note on Sources” in her new 2024 book *Black Pill* (p. 253), she says, “This book is based on countless hours of interviews from 2013 to 2023, as well as contemporaneous emails, text messages, social media posts, police reports, plane tickets, receipts, etc. Some of the internal communications between Unite the Right organizers [of the tragic August 2017 rally in Charlottesville, Virginia] were revealed as evidence in the federal civil lawsuit *Sines v. Kessler* in 2021. Facts reported by other news media are noted. Some names have been changed, including Anna and Lisa, in some cases to protest those who feared violence from the people they used to know.”

The August 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville turned tragic when twenty-year-old James Alex Fields from Ohio plowed his car into the Charlottesville crowd, killing Heather Heyer and injuring others (p. 184).

According to Reeve, “In Maumee, Ohio, a twenty-year-old with a framed photo of Hitler in his bedroom, named James Alex Fields, thought [Richard] Spencer should be the president of the United States. At least that’s what

he told his mom, many months later, from jail, after he was arrested for murder at the rally” (p. 152). The federal lawsuit *Sines v. Kessler* was filed in October 2017 by “Roberta Kaplan, a lawyer who’d successfully argued at the Supreme Court to end the ban on gay marriage” (p. 198). “There were nine plaintiffs – people who lived in the area and were hurt on one or both nights. The twenty-six defendants, including Richard Spencer, Elliot Kline, Nathan Damigo, Jason Kessler [a local], Christ Cantwell, Jeff Schoep, Matt Heimbach, and Matt Parrott, could not afford such fancy lawyers, if they could afford one at all. A few had convinced a lawyer to represent them, only to be dropped when they failed to pay” (p. 198). In the “Index” (pp. 269-283) in Reeve’s new 2024 book *Black Pill* (pp. 269-283), there are multiple page references for Spencer (pp. 281-282), Kline (p. 277), Damigo (p. 272), Kessler (p. 276), Cantwell (p. 271), Schoep (p. 281), Heimbach (p. 275), and Parrott (p. 278). In addition, in Reeve’s “A Note on Sources,” she says, “I have reproduced the hateful comments of the people I interviews only where necessary and to remove any doubt that terms such as white supremacy, misogynist, and fascist are accurate” (p. 253).

However, even though we may be thankful for her restraint in reproducing their hateful comments, she reproduces enough of them that her book is not pleasant to read.

As to Reeve’s title *Black Pill*, she explains in her “Prologue: Surf the Kali Yuga” (pp. 1-5) that it was derived by certain people on the internet from the 1999 movie *The Matrix*. Reeve says, “In *The Matrix*, the hero, Neo, is presented a choice: take the blue pill and return to life in a pleasant illusion created by machines, or take the red pill and learn the truth. And what is the truth? ‘That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else, you were born into bondage, born inside a prison that you cannot smell, taste, or touch. A prison for your mind.’

“The red pill became the main metaphor of internet politics. It didn’t suggest a conversion – that you had adopted a new set of beliefs – but that you had liberated yourself from politics entirely. You saw the world as it really is. You were thinking clearly for the first time in years, maybe in your whole life.

“I’d heard the red pill narrative of dozens of alt-right trolls (whose red pill was that white supremacy was good) and radical virgins called incels (whose red pill was that feminism had ruined society) long before I’d heard it from QAnoners (whose red pill was that Trump was fighting a secret satanic pedophile cabal that had seized control of the government). Many had been searching for an explanation for something – a breakup, a bad idea, a felony conviction, the financial crisis – and discovered this secret knowledge. A gay Jewish lawyer told me he could point to a single meme that made him a Holocaust denier.

“Once the red pill took hold, endless variations followed – the green pill, the white pill, the iron pill, etc. You could be Russia-pilled or crypto-pilled or Marx-pilled; the term could express pride in your own epiphany or contempt for a nutjob. The only one that matters is the ‘black pill.’

“The black pill is a dark but gleeful nihilism: the system is corrupt, and its collapse is inevitable. There is no hope. Times are bad and they’re going to get worse. You swallow the black pill and accept the end is coming” (pp. 2-3; for further discussion of blackpilling, see pp. 4, 5, 24, 38, 63 78, 96, 163, 228, 229, 245-246, and 248).

In James Davison Hunter’s new 2024 book *Democracy and Solidarity: On the Cultural Roots of America’s Political Crisis* (Yale University Press), he singles out nihilism for special discussion (for specific pages references, see the “Index” [p. 477]).

I have discussed Hunter’s new 2024 book *Democracy and Solidarity* in my OEN article “James Davison Hunter on the Cultural Roots of America’s Political Crisis” (dated July 4, 2024):

<https://www.opednews.com/articles/James-Davison-Hunter-on-th-American-Identity-Americans-Authoritarian-Politics-Communication-240704-597.html>

Now, in Reeve’s “Prologue: Surf the Kali Yuga,” she also says, “‘I know it is dark at times but you gotta learn to enjoy it, man. Embrace being the bad guy. Surf the Kali Yuga,’ a 4-chan user posted in 2014. This appears to be the first use of the phrase ‘surf the Kali Yuga. It was a reference to Julius Evola, a mid-twentieth-century fascist philosopher who believed humanity was in the Kali Yuga, a time of violence and vice, one of the four repeating eras in Hindu cosmology. Evola believed the elite should ride above the degenerate society as it crumbled, and maybe nudge it along its collapse, because the next era would be a Golden Age. Online fascists turned Evola’s

books into memes, putting the title *Revolt Against the Modern World* over glitchy pastel images of Greek marble statues or square-jawed white men” (p. 4).

Subsequently, Reeve says, Taking the black pill allows you to justify any action: cruelty, intimidation, violence. The people you hurt are beneath you, because they’re still blinded by society’s lies. If your action causes more violence and chaos, that’s good, because it will help bring about an end to the corrupt regime” (p. 4).

Now, In Reeve’s Chapter 1: “The Wizard” (pp. 7-), she discusses Fredrick (“Fred”) Brennan (born in 1994), who “was born with osteogenesis imperfecta, or ‘brittle bone disease,’ a genetic mutation that affects collagen” (p. 7). He is confined to a motorized wheelchair. Brennan ran an online site called Wizardchan.

Brennan is one of the most extensively discussed persons in Reeve’s new 2024 book *Black Pill* (for specific page references, see the “Index” [pp. 270-271]).

Richard Spencer (born in 1978) is another person that Reeve discusses extensively (for specific page references, see the “Index” [pp. 281-282]).

Wikipedia has entries about both Fredrick Brennan and Richard Spencer:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fredrick_Brennan

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_B_Spencer

Now, in Reeve’s Chapter 3: “According to Federal Court Documents, I’m His Best Friend” (pp. 45-49), she says, “I was a sad, weird teen” (p. 51). Subsequently, she says the following about herself: “There was enough I recognized in the ‘autist’ posts that it made me nervous. Obsessive intensity, social anxiety, sensitive to sound? I had all those things. I’m left-handed! I’m good at standardized tests! I was a huge loser in school and resented its inscrutable hierarchy. YouTube commentators taught me that my eye contact was suboptimal, because they were always posting under my interviews that I looked stoned. So I found a clinical psychologist who specialized in adult autism diagnosis and got myself tested.

“The results? ‘Elle presents with some features of ASD [autism spectrum disorder], though there is insufficient evidence to support a clinical diagnosis. She does not currently present with restricted/repetitive behaviors that cause functional impairment, and she has many high-order social communication skills. Instead, Elle can be conceptualized as a twice-exceptional (2e) adult – someone with extraordinary cognitive abilities along with ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder]” (p. 51).

Now, in Reeve’s Chapter 8: “The Great Meme War” (pp. 119-136), she says, “At the Republican National Convention [in 2016], Steve Bannon said *Breitbart [News]* had become ‘a platform for the alt-right’ under his leadership” (p. 129).

Subsequently, Reeve also says, “Hillary Clinton addressed this strange new element [the alt-right] in the 2016 presidential election in a speech that August. ‘The de facto merger between *Breitbart [News]* and the Trump Campaign represents a landmark achievement for the “alt-right.” A fringe element has effectively taken over the Republican Party,’ she said.” (p. 129).

Now, the most efficient way for me to provide you with an overview of Reeve’s new 2024 book *Black Pill* is to tell you its parts:

“Author’s Note” (pp. ix-xiii).

“Prologue: Surf the Kali Yuga” (pp. 1-5).

Chapter 1: “The Wizard [Fredrick Brennan]” (pp. 7-31).

Chapter 2: “No country for Old Racists” (pp. 33-43).

Chapter 3: “According to Federal Court Documents, I’m His Best Friend” (pp. 45-49).

Chapter 4: “The Connie Situation” (pp. 61-76).

Chapter 5: “Smart People” (pp. 77-79).

Chapter 6: “The Useful Idiot” (pp. 81-102).

Chapter 7: “The Free Speech Party” (pp. 103-117).

Chapter 8: “The Great Meme War” (pp. 119-136).

Chapter 9: “Right-Wing Women” (pp. 137-159).

Chapter 10: “‘Well, Hello, Sweetheart!’ (Chris Cantwell, Every Time I Answer the Phone)” (pp. 161-166).

Chapter 11: “Charlottesville” (pp. 167-193).

Chapter 12: “Aftermath” (pp. 195-208).

Chapter 13: “The Initial Period of Absolute Chaos” (pp. 209-218).

Chapter 14: “Fantasizing About Self-Defense” (pp. 219-224).

Chapter 15: “For History” (pp. 225-238).

“Epilogue” (pp. 239-249).

“Acknowledgments” (p. 251).

“A Note on Sources” (p. 253).

“Notes” (pp. 255-268).

“Index” (pp. 269-283).

“About the Author” (p. 285).

At the end of Chapter 11: “Charlottesville,” Reeve says, “The next day, President Trump said at a press conference, ‘You had very fine people on both sides.’ On CNN, Anderson Cooper used footage from our documentary to fact-check the president. And from there, it exploded. Tens of millions of people watched our story. I sat on my hotel bed, still in Charlottesville, and flipped through the cable news channels. Everyone was playing it. My mom said I’d given the country clarity on who those fine people really were” (pp. 192-193; for other specific page references to Trump, see the “Index” [p. 282]).

For an insightful psychological profile of Trump, see Justin A. Frank’s 2018 book *Trump on the Couch: Inside the Mind of the President* (Avery/ Penguin Random House).

I have discussed Dr. Frank’s insightful book in my *OEN* article “His Majesty, Baby Donald!” (dated October 1, 2018):

<https://www.opednews.com/articles/His-Majesty-Baby-Donald--by-Thomas-Farrell-Allies-Anxiety-Babies-Courage-181001-571.html>

In Reeve’s “Epilogue,” she says, “The alt-right is essentially dead” (p. 245). However, subsequently, she says, “But the culture of 4chan has seeped into the mainstream, and some memes and fixations have infiltrated the conservative movement, even if the people expressing them might never have been on 4chan” (p. 245). That’s the problem.

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