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*Digital Journalism and the Facilitation of Hate*. Gregory P. Perreault. New York; Abingdon, UK: Routledge Focus, 2023. 132 pp. \$59.95 hbk. \$17.46 ebk. ISBN 978-1-032-25685-6.

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In the past decade, we have witnessed a resurgence and mainstreaming of racism and the far-right in the United States and beyond. Much of the responsibility has been placed on Trump(ism) and the internet. Yet, analysis of the latter has mostly focused on social media and extremist or extremist enabling platforms that spread these ideas, radicalize individuals, and harm the targets of racism. These foci often overshadow the role of media and journalism in the legitimization, facilitation, and mainstreaming of hate. I am not just referring to reactionary right-wing outlets, but less overtly ideological media that may not spread hate as part of a political disposition or project, but amplify and legitimize hate speech and actors, as well as their narratives, under the auspices of covering or reporting current affairs and representing “both sides.”

That is not to say there has not been criticism of the media and journalism in this respect from academics, activists, and other journalists. In this vein, Gregory P. Perreault’s *Digital Journalism and the Facilitation of Hate* provides a well-researched, well-written, in-depth analysis of reporting on hate speech and hate groups in the digital context specifically. Perreault, an Associate Professor of Media Literacy and Analytics at the University of South Florida, focuses on problems with reporting on hate, some of which are misunderstood in today’s fraught political climate in which a resurgence of the far-right in America has precipitated broader crises for both journalism and American democracy.

Based on interviews with digital journalists and case studies that include GamerGate, Unite the Right, and the January 6 Capitol Siege (including the media livestreaming of it), the book focuses on digital journalism’s role in the facilitation of hate, the reasons and factors behind it, and possible ways of addressing it. Each chapter considers one aspect or element of the analysis and the situation or “problem.” The introduction begins with instructive and illustrative anecdotes and stories from the world of digital journalism, followed by the author’s own reflections on his identity, positionality, training, and experiences with structural bias and reporting on hate. It also lays out some of the big questions, such as how and why journalists report hate groups and their strategies, including those that implicate and rely on the media. The book also examines journalistic fears with regard to reporting on hate groups, such as the dangers of facilitation and legitimization, as well as journalists’ personal safety and “hitting a wall,” which occurs when a story and demand for reporting outpace their ability to acquire sufficient knowledge of the topic. For Perreault, these are not merely issues of good and bad practice, but also a product of digitization itself. While he notes that what we are seeing is not a new problem, it is amplified by this historical transformation and the business model of digital journalism, including the demand for fast-paced reactive reporting that gets clicks, the overall decrease in resources and training, and a subsequent increase in journalist precarity.

Chapter 1, (Digital) Journalism, takes us to the field, exploring how digital journalists define digital journalism and understand journalistic values, practice, and vulnerabilities. Chapter 2, The Problem of Audience Orientation, examines assumptions about who the audience is; the economic, professional, and political pressures to serve it; and the implications of these pressures, including the platforming of hate. Chapter 3, The Problem of Churnalism and Being First, looks at this “frowned upon” practice where data and information is quickly aggregated, reinterpreted, and sent out as part of the “thirst to be first” (p. 17) without proper training and safeguards, framing these practices within the broader digital business model pertaining to the job of reporting and analyzing hate. Chapter 4, The Problem of Definition Makers, examines the problematic issue of labeling hate groups and actors, particularly the ways that this may serve to legitimize and mainstream them (e.g., the “alt-right”), signal to audiences, and inform their responses to the problem. In terms of the latter, Perreault looks at the way the FBI and wider state have resisted defining hate groups in terms of domestic terrorism.

The Conclusion, *A Modest Proposal for Boring Journalism*, synthesizes the content of the book and proposes ways to help digital journalists and journalism avoid facilitating hate and impacting its targets and journalists (although these are not mutually exclusive). This involves both specific practical recommendations, including turning off comments sections, not providing real-time live shots of events, greater reliance on official, authoritative sources and facts, and the removal of storytelling from reporting on events (p. 103). Perreault also offers more fundamental and systemic solutions that lie in the normative principles of journalism but are the “antithesis” of what has been successful in digital journalism, including painstaking, careful reporting, comprehensive interviewing, and adherence to Associated Press–style guidelines. He acknowledges though that it is financially unviable and technologically counterintuitive to demand digital journalism reject what is fundamental to its operation and success, so instead argues that we need to treat reporting on hate groups as operating in a different or exceptional category that demands this normative approach (pp. 17, 112).

It is great to see that on top of the much-needed critical analysis, this book proposes both practical and principled solutions to the problems of reporting on hate in digital journalism. This is crucial today as we are seeing the ongoing normalization of hate and mainstreaming of the far-right that the media not only played a role in, but continues to do so. The proposed solutions do raise some questions for me, though.

The first concerns the principle of neutrality and whether it is robust enough in a context where hate groups and wider reactionary forces have weaponized it, demanding space in the media as if denied by a biased media. In the Introduction, Perreault argues that “This call to journalistic neutrality does not negate the fact that journalists are also activists for an open and inclusive public sphere” (p. 2). This is important, but hate groups can and will seize on the admission of “activism” as evidence of such bias *and* journalist’s commitment to an openness and inclusivity as an opportunity for platforming and representation, as they frequently have and the media has proven susceptible to.

The second concerns the return to normative principles and legacy of journalism more generally. Perreault acknowledges that the problems associated with, and exacerbated by, digitization are not new, but amplify longer standing issues with journalism, including, I would argue, the legitimization and facilitation of hate and reaction historically. The question is whether these are viewed as outliers *or* linked to the wider politics and economics of the media *and* America in ways that demand more radical rethinking and action on both, as opposed to a return to or reassertion of normative principles.

The third concerns the proposed designation of hate group reporting as an exceptional category. If one of the issues we are facing is the mainstreaming of hate and the far-right, and those that it targets are also most affected by systemic inequalities and injustices such as racism, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia, then how can we treat it as exceptional as a phenomenon *and* a category of journalism?

I ask these questions as points of reflection and refinement rather than criticism because of how important and urgent this intervention and proposal is. Speaking of urgency, politics, media, and technology do move quickly and it is important to say that this book is not only timely but also stands to have longevity. This is because the analysis, critique, and lessons contained in it are not only vitally important today, but are rooted in longer standing journalistic approaches and challenges, as well as social and political issues, and intervenes at a conjuncture that we will continue to look to and learn from. Perreault also helpfully suggests avenues of further research, particularly on reflexivity, education, and training, particularly for journalists targeted by hate groups. For these reasons, I highly recommend this book to those studying, researching, and working in journalism and media, as well as those studying and working on hate, the far-right, sociology, and politics.