

Charlottesville and the Rise of Fascism in the USA

What We Need to Do

CrimethInc.

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On Friday, August 11, a wide range of far-right groups from around the US gathered in Charlottesville, Virginia for a march the night before their “Unite the Right” rally. Hundreds of them carrying lit torches paraded across the town with very little visible police presence. The streets were largely empty, thanks to a request from Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe. When the march arrived at the foot of the statue of Thomas Jefferson ringed by a few dozen counterprotesters, the men with torches surrounded it and attacked them.

Until now, some of the participants have been coy about their politics. Now that they have all joined in explicitly fascist chants like “blood and soil” while many of them raised their arms in the Nazi salute, it is clear that all of them—the so-called Alt Right, the Proud Boys, and all the militiamen and Oathkeepers and basement-dwelling trolls who keep them company—are openly endorsing fascism. They aim to create a situation in which they can terrorize and murder with impunity in order to create an even more white supremacist, even more totalitarian state.

With this march in Charlottesville, the far right has crossed a threshold. Until now, they appeared to be a motley array of online groups, most of which lacked the courage to identify unironically with fascism. Today, they have arrived as a social movement that can pull together hundreds of people to carry out organized acts of violence while the police look on. They hope to weaponize the ignorance and insecurity of the precarious white working class to trick poor white people into serving once again as cannon fodder for their own oppressors.

But it’s not too late—not yet, anyway. The fascists are coming to prominence before they have the numbers or legitimacy in the public eye that they need to defend their new position. If we act swiftly and decisively—giving them neither legitimacy nor quarter—there is still time to stop them before they move the clock from 2017 to 1933.

Remember last November, when Donald Trump was elected and it seemed like the entire US was about to veer into a far-right dictatorship? While liberals were immobilized by shock, anarchists immediately went on the offensive in order to destabilize the Trump regime before everyone got accustomed to a new level of tyranny. We recognized that the far right had come to power too early, before they could build a broad consensus in favor of their agenda, and that this put them in a vulnerable position. By acting decisively against the inauguration and the Muslim ban, we helped to show that there could be no business or politics as usual under Trump, and this created fractures within the halls of power.

If not for these immediate, massive expressions of defiance, judges might not have dared to block the Muslim ban, or White House employees to leak information. Imagine the US right now if Trump were ruling with the full apparatus of the state united behind him! Instead, today, the US government seems more dysfunctional than ever. That may explain why Trump is threatening war to shore up his position, while fascists are no longer counting on his government to carry out their agenda under cover of normalcy.

Now we have to use the same strategy to forestall the threat of a new widespread fascist movement in the US. We have to respond immediately, cutting its oxygen supply and blocking its growth. But how do we do that?

First, we can’t accord fascists any legitimacy. One network described them as “white activists” last night. Such euphemisms are inappropriate for people giving the Nazi salute.

It must be clear to everyone that they are not attempting to participate in a dialogue, but rather seeking to start a war.

By the same token, we must not look to the police or any other aspect of the state for deliverance. The complicity of the police in supporting one fascist undertaking after another is well-established by now. Besides, anything the state does against the far right, we can be sure it will do to us twice as hard. It would be a mistake to give anyone the impression that state intervention could solve this problem without creating even bigger problems. If history is any guide, whatever power the state is accorded will eventually end up in the hands of fascists.

We also can't defer to authorities like Governor McAuliffe when they tell us to respond to the situation by hiding indoors. In effect, this means ceding the streets to the fascists, in which to do whatever they want to whomever is still out there. Recommending this strategy makes Governor McAuliffe complicit in the rise of fascism. Sticking our heads in the sand will not make this situation go away.

Likewise, it won't help to gather in churches, as some did in Charlottesville last night, congratulating ourselves on how nonviolent we are while fascists patrol the streets. Last night, when the church locked its doors, many were trapped outside, dramatically outnumbered. This kind of behavior is also complicity.

It's essential to build fighting formations capable of facing down far-right violence. Fascists love to portray themselves as victims in order to claim the right to do violence to others; their entire narrative is built around the contradiction that they are simultaneously master race and underdog, victorious and persecuted. They treat any resistance to their program as an affront to their dignity and a violation of their safe space. Nonetheless, we have to be able to stop them in their streets, because they are in the business of purveying revenge fantasies. Any footage they can record of successful attacks, however cowardly, will help them recruit from their base of bullies and sadists. Because of this, it is preferable not to enter into conflict with them except when fully prepared—but at all costs, we must not let them attain control of the streets.

Most of this is not a matter of physical confrontation. We need people to put up posters; we need people to hand out handbills, and form local organizations, and coordinate neighborhood response teams. We need to organize legal support for those arrested fighting fascists and institutions like the US border that are already accomplishing their stated goals. We need people to infiltrate their groups; we need to set up fake online accounts with which to monitor them or spread disinformation and strife. We need to identify the fault lines along which their alliances can be split, and open gulfs between them and the rest of the right wing. One can do a great deal to fight fascism without ever entering a gym.

As in our efforts against the Trump administration, we can't take on fascism alone. We have to make sure that we are part of a much broader movement, yet that our efforts are not diluted or reduced to some lowest common denominator.

Above all, we have to popularize another set of values, so that the cheap victim narratives and fantasies of authority that fascists offer can gain no traction among the general public. We have to show how fulfilling it is to treat each other as equals, rather than serving simultaneously as a peon and a petty tyrant in a chain of command. We have to distinguish

true self-determination from supposed self-determination for “nations” or “peoples,” which always boils down to being bossed around by someone of your own ethnicity or religion. We have to foster a sense of self-worth that is not based in membership in invented categories, but in our personal relationships and values and accomplishments.

In the growing popularity of fascism, we can see the failure of guilt-based liberal anti-racism and anti-sexism. Mere privilege politics have failed us; we have to show what *everyone* stands to gain from the abolition of whiteness and patriarchy, and to present this as a positive program rather than as nothing more than the elimination of unfair advantages. However unfair an advantage is, someone is bound to want to keep it—we have to convey that there’s nothing whiteness or male domination can offer that is worth having in the first place, compared to the genuine intimacy and care that are possible when we approach each other as equals, without borders or abstract criteria of belonging.

This is the opposite of pandering to the supposed ignorance or self-interest of “the white working class,” as if that were a single entity. On the contrary, it means appealing to what is wisest and most honorable in all people.

Anarchism is one of the most thoroughgoing forms of opposition to fascism, in that it entails opposition to hierarchy itself. Virtually every framework that countenances hierarchy, be it democracy or “national liberation,” enables old power imbalances like white supremacy and patriarchy to remain in place, hidden within the legitimacy of the prevailing structures. Under democracy, white supremacy has not disappeared; it has just disguised itself. If we want to be done with fascism once and for all, we have to cut to the root of things.

In that regard, we can see the struggle ahead of us as an opportunity to challenge everything about our society and ourselves, not just the violence of a radical fringe group. As society polarizes and things escalate, we should not simply be drawn into a violent grudge match with our opposite numbers on the far right, but look for escape hatches through which all humanity might escape from this long nightmare.

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