

# **From J20 to Charlottesville**

**Repressing Dissent from Above and Below**

CrimethInc.

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# Contents

Prosecution and Legislation . . . . .	3
Grassroots Vigilantism . . . . .	4
What It All Means . . . . .	5

Over the past two years, the right wing has declared war on protest in the United States. They've fought this struggle from the top down with police, courts, and legislatures—and from the bottom up with militias, fascist groups, and lone extremists. These strategies work in tandem to threaten social movements. This is what connects the fascist murder in Charlottesville last weekend to over 200 demonstrators arrested at Trump's inauguration on January 20 who were all charged with eight identical felonies just for being on the same city block. This connection is all the more obvious after August 15, when Trump attacked anti-fascists and disingenuously denied that the fascists who chanted Nazi slogans in unison were all white supremacists. The White House stands solidly on the side of those promoting and orchestrating far-right violence.

How do state and autonomous right-wing attacks reinforce each other? Why is the right escalating its campaign to repress dissent? And how can we counter this repression?

## **Prosecution and Legislation**

While it's nothing new for the state to repress protest, the past two years of legal and legislative attacks represent a substantial escalation against resistance movements. Since the uprising in Ferguson forced national attention onto racist police violence, the idea of Black communities, poor people, and radicals becoming ungovernable has inspired some and terrified others. Protestors inspired by Ferguson have blocked highways, occupied police departments, sabotaged pipelines, shut down airports, and disrupted Trump rallies.

But defenders of the economic and racial status quo have taken advantage of this to stoke white working-class resentment and suburban fears of disorder. Trump's image as "the law and order candidate" capitalized on the racialized concerns stirred up by this wave of protest.

From day one, the new administration made good on its promises to crack down on protest. On January 20, over two hundred counter-inaugural demonstrators were trapped in a kettle and mass arrested. Rather than receiving citations or misdemeanors, they now face the prospect of decades in prison simply for being caught on the street during a march. Meanwhile, hundreds of cases from Standing Rock clog the North Dakota courts, where water protectors face fines and prison terms for their efforts to prevent private companies from profiting on the poisoning of Sioux people's water supplies.

In addition to maximizing repression through the current legal system, politicians are expanding the law to further criminalize demonstrations. Nearly twenty state legislatures introduced anti-protest bills this year that range from troubling to downright bizarre. Arizona politicians attempted to allow the state to seize the assets of people arrested for protesting, while North Carolina legislators tried to invent something called "economic terrorism" and to force protestors to pay the cost of police efforts to repress them. North Dakota's legislature passed a litany of new bills fed to them by the pipeline industry, from allowing police to use weaponized drones against demonstrations to increasing the legal penalties for a wide range of activity. This legislation went directly into effect against hundreds of water protectors.

Finally, this year, legislators in Florida, North Dakota, and Tennessee have attempted to pass bills allowing drivers to run over protestors without legal consequences. This is especially chilling in the aftermath of Charlottesville.

Every one of these laws emerged as a direct response to protests that were effectively disrupting the status quo. The sponsors of North Carolina's failed anti-protest bill specifically cited the

ferocity of resistance in Charlotte after the police murdered Keith Lamont Jenkins as their inspiration for the new law. The spread of highway blockades during anti-police rebellions prompted a wide range of legislation targeting the obstruction of roads, including the aforementioned “hit and kill” bills. In response to widespread indigenous and ecological resistance to pipeline construction, several new state laws would advance penalties specifically tied to disruption of energy infrastructure. These efforts by politicians to protect the interests of their corporate cronies and police attest to the threat that our movements pose.

## **Grassroots Vigilantism**

But the state isn’t confident that legal methods alone will be enough to stem the tide of popular resistance. Enter the autonomous fascists, stage right.

Where police and legal restrictions haven’t sufficed to suppress demonstrations, the armed right-wing has stepped in. Beginning in states such as Arizona that have open carry laws and widespread gun culture, right-wing demonstrators had already been appearing at their own rallies visibly armed; yet until recently, they had rarely appeared at the protests of their political opponents. In 2014, members of the Oath Keepers, a right-wing militia, appeared in the streets of Ferguson toting assault rifles. While most politicians and law enforcement officials outwardly condemned this challenge to the state’s monopoly on violence, in some places the state began openly partnering with the grassroots extreme right. In June, the Multnomah County, Oregon Republican Party voted to allow Three Percenters to provide anti-protestor “security” for them at events.

Meanwhile, the alt-right and other fascists have slowly but surely escalated from online threats to violent attacks. The massacre that Dylan Roof perpetrated at a Black church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015 failed to spark the race war he intended, but the following year, the election of a president who openly courted white nationalists provided the catalyst for increasing extreme right violence. Numerous media outlets reported an immediate rise in racist, xenophobic, and anti-Muslim activity after Trump’s election, from graffiti to verbal harassment to physical assaults. Bigots have ramped up attacks on mosques from Minnesota to Tennessee, while a man spouting Islamophobia stabbed two people to death on a train in Portland, Oregon this spring.

While many of these attacks served as general intimidation against marginalized groups, protests against oppression have become a particular target for fascists. In 2015, heavily armed right-wingers fired into a Black Lives Matter occupation in Minneapolis, injuring five protestors; a bystander noted that they “were using police tactics.” During the Trump campaign, Trump supporters frequently carried out violent attacks on protestors; white nationalist Matthew Heimbach faced criminal charges this spring for physically attacking a young Black woman at a campaign speech. At a Seattle protest against Milo Yiannopolis in January, a right-wing Milo fan shot an anti-racist protestor in the stomach after threatening online to “start cracking skulls” of “snowflakes.” Yet antifascists and anarchists remained the villains in the discourse spread by politicians, police, and media pundits, even as right-wing attacks continued to escalate. This underscores that their goal is neither peace nor law and order, but maintaining their power against all who threaten it.

The murder of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville is the latest event in this crescendo of hate and violence. We must understand her death in the context of the right-wing war on protest. It has been building inexorably towards this outcome for years.

If right-wing citizens hadn't taken the initiative to begin threatening and injuring protestors, politicians in North Dakota wouldn't have introduced legislation to protect them. The growing Three Percenter and militia movements aim to use force to secure the stability of Trump's rule in the face of widespread resistance. The stories we've heard from the streets of Charlottesville—like so many other cities—show that the police are happy to let fascists do their bloody work for them on the streets.

And if the fascists go too far and provoke a popular backlash, as the murder of Heather Heyer has, politicians will attempt to use that to their advantage, too. By framing fascism and anti-fascism as symmetrical forces of chaos and disruption, as Trump explicitly did in his initial response, they present the state as the only force capable of restoring order—through more police, surveillance, and control. Whether they tacitly support or openly condemn vigilante violence, right-wing politicians aim to come out ahead either way.

## **What It All Means**

Make no mistake: the people who want us to accept white supremacy, environmental destruction, and police murder are working together to keep us out of the streets. They're using every tactic they can—from mass arrests to new laws to outright murder—because they're afraid of our power.

They are going to such lengths because all over the world, people are coming together to threaten their privileges and profits. Countless thousands of us have clogged the arteries of capital, affirmed the value of Black lives against the brutality of the police, confronted pipelines and power plants, shielded our neighbors from deportation, stood watch against bigots at mosques, defended reproductive freedom, and organized across the borders they attempt to impose on our land and in our hearts. They know that unless they can terrorize us back into submission, their days in power will be numbered.

In short, the right declared war on protest because we have the power to take them down. It won't be quick and it won't be easy, but it is possible, and they know it. They're trying to raise the costs of resistance so high that we'll listen to Governor McAuliffe and hide out at home while they continue impoverishing us, scapegoating immigrants and Muslims, brutalizing people of color, subjugating women, poisoning the earth, militarizing the borders, and escalating police surveillance and control.

The options are clear: take the streets to fight together, or hide at home while they come for us one by one. The choice is yours.

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