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Why We Fought in Charlottesville

A Letter from an Anti-Fascist on the Dangers
Ahead

CrimethInc.

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I am one of the thousands of people who confronted Nazis and white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia last weekend. I am a blue-collar person, with a job, family, and responsibilities. I would have preferred to do other things with my weekend. However, I had to ask myself: *If these people are allowed to run roughshod over this town, what will they do next?*

“We would have been crushed like cockroaches if it were not for the anarchists and the antifascists... They saved our lives, actually. We would have been completely crushed, and I’ll never forget that.”

–Dr. Cornel West

No, I did not behave peacefully when I saw a thousand Nazis occupy a sizable American city. I fought them with the most persuasive instruments at hand, the way both my grandfathers did. I was maced, punched, kicked, and beaten with sticks, but

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I gave as good as I got, and usually better. Donald Trump says that “there was violence on both sides.” Of course there was. I might add that there were not murderers on both sides—but that’s not really my point.

I would like to ask a different question. What would have happened if there had *not* been violence on both sides? What would have happened if there had only been violence on *one* side?

On the night of Friday, August 11, 2017, I saw something that I never thought I would see, and that I hope I never see again: 500 Nazis and white supremacists marching across the campus of the University of Virginia while police did nothing, surrounding 30 counter-demonstrators who were holding hands around a statue of Thomas Jefferson, and beating them with torches while calling them “nigger” and “boy.” By the end of the night, it was clear to me that the “Unite the Right” march had been organized for the express purpose of killing people on Saturday.

Permit me to quote a post from a clergyperson in Charlottesville at length, because it correctly explains what happened on Saturday morning, and why. There are countless other narratives like it online.

“A note on the Antifa:

They are the reason Richard Spencer did not speak today. They are the reason the “Unite the Right” march didn’t happen. They strategically used violent tactics to incite the Nazis to violence, such that the governor declared a state of emergency before noon. Before the “Unite the Right” rally was scheduled to begin.

One could argue this meant Nazis dissipated into the streets faster making it less safe, but let’s be real: Nazis have been making these streets less safe

In the spirit of Robert Grodt, who fought fascism in Raqqa, and in the spirit of Heather Heyer, who fought fascism in her own hometown—

An anarchist

for a long time. They would have been out and about soon enough with or without the antifa.

I was with a group of clergy committed to non-violence today. We did our part. We bore witness to the pain and hatred in this city. We provided pastoral care/support as needed, especially during traumatic violent acts. This was our determined role going into today. Yes, some clergy risked injury and arrest to stop the Nazis. They formed a blockade at the entrance, but they were overpowered by the Nazis. The police did not view us as threatening enough to shut things down, because again, we were not there to threaten.

The antifa strategically incited enough violence before noon to make the police declare it illegal to gather in Emancipation Park. Through this strategic violence they effectively made a previously legally permitted Nazi rally, illegal.

We may not agree with each others tactics. We may have had different goals, but if you're looking to praise people specifically for shutting down the "Unite the Right" rally, praise/thank the antifa. Not the clergy and not the police."

I do not want it to be soon forgotten that American anarchists and anti-fascists shut down the largest Nazi and white supremacist gathering on US soil in decades. We accomplished this despite being outnumbered, underequipped, and literally fighting up a hill—at great personal risk and at a terrible cost.

What if things had gone differently? What if we had done as the mayor recommended and stayed away from Emancipation Park, so as not to "feed into a cycle of violence"? What if the rally had proceeded as planned? What if Nazis and white supremacists had been able to build momentum into the night?

Based on what I saw Friday and Saturday, there is no doubt in my mind what would have happened next: they would have terrorized the city of Charlottesville. They would have left their leadership a degree of plausible deniability, broken into smaller groups, and killed and injured any number of people in decentralized locations throughout the city. It was to be their Kristallnacht, their burning cross, their triumphant return.

Instead, they had to leave town in disarray in fear of us, the people of Charlottesville, and the police—in that order. They sent twenty people to the hospital and murdered Heather Heyer.

It could have been much, much worse.

These are dark and dangerous times. Nazis and white supremacists have shown that they are ready to kill and able to mobilize in great numbers, and they have the blessing of the President of the United States. They are well on their way to solidifying their position as the paramilitary arm of the Trump administration. These groups hope to be to Trump what ISIS is to Erdogan and what the Taliban is to the government of Pakistan: terrorist auxiliaries that provide strategic depth against enemies of the state.

On the other hand, Nazis and white supremacists discredited themselves completely in the eyes of millions of American people this weekend, as did their President by emboldening and defending them. The names and faces of many of those who participated in the “Unite the Right” rally are being broadcast on twitter feeds such as “yes, you’re racist,” and more extensive doxxing is undoubtedly soon to come. It seems a stressful and rather lonely moment for our opposition.

On the government side, Steve Bannon has lost his job, but he is back at his old post at Breitbart, preparing to catalyze another wave of grassroots nationalism. As always, Trump is either on the ropes or on the verge of pulling off an authoritarian coup. It is time for Americans of good conscience to resume

the offensive, before this match made in hell has time to regain its footing and to consolidate further.

Donald Trump was elected head of state through the democratic process, of course, as was Adolf Hitler. He has the support of millions of people; so did Adolf Hitler. His government is in bed with people who dream about carrying out a second Holocaust and reinstating slavery, among other things. We have every right to topple this government if we can. It would be unfortunate to look back on this moment with regret, realizing that we missed our chance.

In my opinion, the high-water mark thus far of resistance to the Trump regime was the wave of airport occupations at the end of January, which set in motion a course of events that ultimately led to Steve Bannon being iced out of the foreign policy sphere by the few remaining adults in Trump’s circle. Unfortunately, they left Bannon the domestic sphere as his playpen, and the Deep State doesn’t care very much. No one is coming to save us.

What would it take to rise to this occasion? We would have to mobilize large crowds nationwide to shut down government infrastructure, prioritizing everything nearest and dearest to Bannon and his faction. Something like that might work. I don’t think it’s too late.

Of course, after Charlottesville, all such crowds will be considered soft targets by fascist murderers. We will have to demonstrate that we are able to exert deadly force to deter such attacks, as Redneck Revolt did admirably in Charlottesville.

If Americans of good conscience push hard enough, we may be able to force Trump to abandon Bannon and Bannonism. We might be able to topple Trump entirely. But under no circumstances will anyone with any self-respect ever submit to governance by Nazis. This government and its fascist allies should think carefully before they choose their next move.