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False Equivalencies and the Resurgent Far Right in a Messy, Violent World

John Mink

2019

Fascist scum
Expected a parade
Your welcoming committee
Was an Antifa brigade
— G.L.O.S.S., ‘Fight’

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On April 15, 2017, a group of around 200 anti-fascist, black block, BAMN (By Any Means Necessary), Bay waters, and other associated radicals came to Provo Park in Berkeley, CA— right across the street from Berkeley high school, with it's more than 4000 students from all over Berkeley and Oakland. The radicals, who were also mostly from all over Barkley, & Oakland. The radicals, who were mostly from Oakland, Berkeley, and other surrounding towns in the bay area, showed up to confront a “Trump rally” attended by between two and 300 people from all over the country, organized by a constellation of neofascist

groups (the so-called “alt-right”). These groups included identity Evropa/American Identity Movement (white nationalists inspired by similar Identitarian groups in Europe), the Oath Keepers (a far-right paramilitary/militia made up of Islamophobic veterans from the Post-9/11 wars), DIY Division/Rise Above Movement (Ultraviolent neo-Nazi inspired by “Fight Club” who wear skull bandanas and work out way too much), 2 Million Bikers (notorious for the Altamont-style “security” they provided at the Trump Inauguration in D.C, where they viciously attacked protesters), Proud Boys (Vice magazine founder Gavin McInnes’s “Western Chauvinist” gang/club, where to become a “fourth-degree” member—the highest possible status—you have to have “endured a major conflict related to the cause”), the III% (a right-wing libertarian/separatist anti-immigrant group), and others.

United In their love for Trump and emboldened by his particularly American brand of neofascism, the rally organizers and attendees Had recently been given A big boost by the orange daddy himself.

In January 2017, Trump tweeted out threats to cut Berkeley’s public university funding—citing Berkeley’s supposed disrespect for “Free Speech”—in so wake of a decisive rebuke of far-right provocateur and former Breitbart editor Milo Yiannopoulos on campus. In that California Berkeley—during which he planned to publicly doxx dozens of transgender and undocumented students—was shut down by a massive diversity of tactics, including “peaceful” protest, civil disobedience and direct action. Unfortunately, in part due to the aforementioned direct threats from the president of the United States, and in part due to mainstream media manipulation of the optics surrounding the direct action tactics (aka “burning garbage can porn”), typical skittishness and radical shaming kicked in. In the time between the my little shutdown and the April rallies, many liberals stopped showing up to confront these ever-growing and increasingly violent displays by the far- right. The mass response to fascist provocation

“opinion” is asserted and when the student can back up Spencer’s purported validity by his repeated appearances on mainstream media such as CNN/Fox/MSNBC/etc. (in the name of “balanced coverage”)?

What happens in a class discussion at an adult school, when an undocumented Salvadoran refugee and self-declared communist comes out as a Trump supporter, because he sees Trump as the only person who can supposedly crush neoliberalism and the corrupt political class, which pretty much everyone in the class agrees is a problem (though the rest of them hate Trump)? And what happens when he cites the basis for his support as a bunch of sketchy YouTube channels that peddle conspiracy theories and white supremacist hate—the same channels that Trump himself cites? What happens when a teacher gets fired for allowing a student to elaborate on a chain of thought where the student was comparing Trump to Hitler in some respects; meanwhile another student fumes in the corner and quietly goes home to complain to his Trumpist parents, who then complain to the administration? The latter happened, by the way, not in Iowa, not in Iowa or rural Ohio but in Mountain View, California—the home of Google, aka the ad and profit-driven replacement for defunded libraries worldwide.

We find ourselves in an increasingly dark and dangerous world, where education will be redefined and weaponized in a million different ways we can’t imagine as of yet. If you are another teacher or otherwise deeply invested in education, please consider the questions I just posed as a few potential starting points for helping other teachers to understand the way you are dealing with these changing dynamics in the classroom and beyond Don’t forget to keep up the good fight.

dissipated, as liberals resorted to old tropes, including “Ignore them and they will go away” (Obviously didn’t work well so far), “let’s just have a civil conversation” (about whether genocide, slavery, and exclusion based on gender identity are okay?) and a common misapplication of horseshoe theory “anti-fascists and fascists are just extremists, all the same” (no comment necessary).

Partially as a result of this liberal retreat, things grew markedly worse on the ground for those who were left holding the bag confronting the growing wave of fascism. During this subsequent neofascist rallies held in Berkeley—most notably April

15,2017—roughly similar numbers of fascist and anti-fascist protesters lost any semblance of conflict equilibrium due to direct collaboration with the police. Antifa was disarmed by the police at the cordoned-off entrance to the park, while many neofascists were permitted to keep their weapons (particularly the military, combat-trained veterans from Oath Keepers). Verbal goading resulted in multiple assaults, and witness accounts plus a wealth of publicly available video footage show quite that nearly all of these assaults were initiated by neofascist forces—particularly members of the DIY Division, 2 Million Bikers, Proud Boys, and Identity Evropa/AIM. However, there was only one charge filed against a neofascist participant (Kyle “Based Stickman” Chapman), while numerous anti-fascist radicals who engaged in self-defense from fascist attacks were charged with assault. In at least one instance, the police have used Photoshopped “evidence” provided by anonymous 4Chan message board trolls to arrest and charge a professor from a local community college. In the end, this asymmetrical warfare (and make no mistake, this was a real fight) what is so tilted toward neofascists and their state enablers in the police force that radicals how to make a full retreat from the park, following which neofascists poured into downtown Berkeley to terrorize people of color, queers, and women, shoot out Windows with black lives matter displays, and serve as a powerful message of hate to the liberals Who were previously walking around eating

ice cream and ignoring the open battle happening a scant few blocks away. During the entire protest, 4Chan trolls, Infowars reporters, and related tech-savvy fascists were openly filming the entire rally, with a particular focus on capturing images of radicals whose faces were not covered—images they then put through facial recognition software and posted online along with what they could find out about the identities/addresses/etc. of the people, they were doxxing.

Some of these doxxed images were of kids from Berkeley High, which, as mentioned earlier, it's right across the street from Provo Park. Berkeley High is made up of several thousand teens from very diverse backgrounds who are furious about a bunch of white supremacist Neofascists coming right into their neighborhood and screaming in their faces about how they plan to dehumanize and crush them under a Trumpist state-sanctioned bootheel. However, many of the students are inclined to not wear masks, because they view this (rightfully) as their space and are not always aware of the gravity and potential danger of the situation (for themselves and their families) when they are doxxed on the internet. When one of their teachers (who may or may not be someone I am familiar with) pops off their mask for a second and tells them it might be a good idea to mask up for safety, we are definitely crossing into the kind of scenario that right-wing propagandists salivate over as they spin tales of leftist indoctrinating kids. Naturally, of course, these kids need no indoctrination—they are generally more capable of seeing fascism for what it is than their typically liberal parents and are less inclined towards the false equivalences such as “FASCISM AND ANTIFASCISM ARE EXACTLY THE SAME!!”

Still, situations such as this are just one aspect of a giant, thorny question as to how teachers—radical and otherwise—contend with this steadily increasing rise of neofascism and the far right, as manifested on the streets by paramilitaries and bolstered by the state (now more explicitly in the U.S. than ever before). This is not just an American problem, of course, as Europe, Asia, and the Middle

East see some of their flawed corrupt democracies falter under manipulative, authoritarian pressure from many of the same people gaming those systems for individual advantage, to begin with

In their book *Trouble on the Far Right: Contemporary Right-Wing Strategies and Practices in Europe*, Laura Lalorie and Maik Fielitz define the far right as a “political space whose actors base their ideology and action on the notion of inequality among human beings, combining the supremacy of a particular nation, ‘race’ or ‘civilization’ with ambitions for an authoritarian transformation of values and styles of government.” [1]

How do the teachers reconcile they need to provide a safe, open space for all student inquiry, intellectual exploration/constructiveness, and critical assessment of information when such toxic and implicitly destructive political philosophy is ascendant? It is now a given that the current wave of far-right/neofascist sentiments has become part of the system or even taking over power in many countries including the United States. So how do teachers (especially radicals/activists) contend with the conversations and power disparities that inevitably result in our classrooms, with parents, with administrators, and deal with potential conflicts with Internet trolls and/or even governmental authorities over content, outside class political activities, or other factors? How can we deal with the inevitable demands for a “conversation” giving equal time and a lack of “bias” when talking about Neofascist ideologies that are rapidly becoming normalized, when one actor (student, parent, teacher, cop, whoever openly advocates for things that would—and often already do—actively oppress other students in the same classroom, or maybe another classroom or another school or another city? How does a teacher in Iowa, in a class full of rural white kids, make it clear to a student that Richard Spencer (aka the Nazi that got punched on the Internet) isn't just offering “another opinion” when he publishes a piece advocating for “peaceful genocide” of Black Americans—particularly when that student doesn't have to look Black students in the eye or answer their questions when the