

America 2019: A Pocket Guide To Life & Resistance in Times of Fascist Terror

by Mel Figueroa

I met Mel Figueroa in 2016, and was immediately impressed by her encyclopedic knowledge of movement history. Rarely have I meet someone with such a deep grounding in history and theory who was also such a skilled and practical organizer. In a nutshell, when Mel Figueroa speaks, I listen.

Mel began to warn about emerging fascism in 2016 (well before the horror of the Unite the Right tragedy of Charlottesville, VA in August of 2017). Her warning were not vague-- she showed me how hate groups were using 4-chan and 8-chan bulletin boards to recruit and educate a new generation. She explained how they were using memes to "weaponize irony" and proved how successful they were. It was chilling.

So she and I spend most of 2017 conducting a series of ["Movement Schools for Revolutionaries"](#) which were workshops designed for people who recognized the critical need to restructure society. One of the core lessons was to understand the rise of neofascism and the universe of far-right extremist groups operating in the US today.

*This month Mel wrote an essay that lays out concrete and practical steps for what we can do--what we **MUST** do-- to defeat the emerging fascist threat in modern times. As a member of the POCLAD collective, I ask you to read, reflect and act on the information and analysis contained in this important piece.*

David Cobb
Member of the POCLAD Collective



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Aug 4 · 13 min read



Werner Twertzog
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Dear America: You are waking up, as Germany once did, to the awareness that 1/3 of your people would kill another 1/3, while 1/3 watches.

8:41 AM - 23 Aug 2017

No, Werner Hertzog didn't say this. But whoever they are, this Fake Werner Hertzog has a point.

As I write this, the nation is reeling yet again from the [250th mass shooting to take place in the United States in 2019](#) — that is, *250 mass murders in the last 215 days*. Sadly, what was remarkable about this shooting at an El Paso Walmart, leaving 20 dead and 26 wounded at last count, was that it did elicit so much shock and outrage in the general public, who had previously responded with varying degrees of sadness, outrage, prayers and thoughts, but also creeping fatigue and indifference over the last 249.

What is of note now is that we have passed the more-than-daily mark for mass shootings; and one distinct pattern that appears

to be emerging is a common thread of white nationalist sentiment that motivates the shooters — most explicitly in the most recent wave of shootings, but a line that can be traced back to 2015, when Dylann Roof opened fire in a Black church in Charleston, killing nine.

Welcome to the new dystopian reality of the United States in 2019: where you can't go to school, enjoy a movie, have a day out with the family at a garlic festival, or just fucking *be* in nearly any public space without the constant, looming threat of random mass murder. While this may be disorienting to many Americans who have grown up in a relatively benign and civil version of "America," and have not had much exposure or

experience to the cultures of racism, hate, and brutality that until recently lurked in the shadows beneath the seedy underbelly of our nation, it is all too familiar to many of us whose roots come from various peoples whose subjugation, enslavement, colonization, and genocide at the hands of an array of colonial settlers, armies, plantation owners, and all kinds of folks identifying as "White," are foundational chapters in the American story: Black folks whose ancestors were enslaved, lynched and subject to police murders all the way up to today; Native peoples who suffered a hundred million losses from disease, starvation and systematic, state-sanctioned genocide; Chinese forced labor 'coolies' who built the railroads; Latinx/indigenous workers and farmers (many of whom, even now in the camps, are NOT immigrants to this continent); Japanese immigrants who still remember their own concentration camp experience on American soil; LGBT communities; and my own people, from the Philippines, colonized by the USA in 1899, subjected to genocide in 1901, and paraded in human zoos at the 1904 World's Fair.

So if you're devastated by what's happening in this country, feeling like a stranger in a strange land that is not recognizable as the America you grew up in and love, and are feeling rather lost as to how to navigate this new reality — as a person of color, I'd like to say on behalf of my melanated brethren:

Welcome to our world.

This guide is for you, our erstwhile and aspiring "allies" among the White, White-passing, middle-class and

generally comfortable layers of American society — especially if you are a person of conscience who hasn't had much experience with racism but are horrified, shocked and want to help end it. It is very, VERY important, right now, to just take a moment, close your lips and open your ears: *listen to people of color and think about the ways our American experience is different from your own.*

You are the wild card, the X-factor that can help make or break the reign of terror that is trumpeting its battle cries as it thunders into the mainstream. As we go down the nightmare rabbit hole of an increasingly violent, fascistic societal trajectory, it is *you* who have the option of being in that middle third of society, caught in the midst of the conflict, who might stand back and watch as the slaughter continues — you may not be happy about it, you wring your hands, send your thoughts and prayers — but at best, sitting on the fence and playing the part of a neutral spectator renders you immobile and of no use to anyone; and at worst, a bumbling hindrance whose equivocations will endanger us and strengthen the position of those *who are killing us*. There will undoubtedly be more random violence, more terrorism, more state collaboration and repression — and you should at least be *aware* of where you stand, what you could choose to do, and how your choices affect the overall trajectory of how all of this goes down.

The minimum fascists require to take over society and fulfill its murderous goals is your inaction.

So please, I invite you to sit down, grab a cup of tea, vodka,

or whatever's your jam, and read on — here are a few truths, tips and tricks to navigate this new reality that you should know:

1. KNOW YOUR ENEMY: THE SHOCK TROOPS OF AMERICAN FASCISM Fascist elements are converging in frightening and violent ways, but this is NOT fascism (yet), and Trump is NOT the Generalissimo. While emboldened by Trump's rhetoric, these acts of violence are bred from a loosely networked ecosystem of extremist elements determined to uphold White supremacy as a core American value.

When we map these white nationalist-inspired mass shooting incidents onto the larger context of national politics, the core features of a larger ecosystem centered around racism, White supremacy, violence, and exclusion are readily apparent:

- Trump's increasingly overt racial attacks against people of color, including members of Congress;
- The provocative actions of organized white nationalist groups (or "identitarian" as they like to call themselves) such as the Proud Boys and Identity Evropa, who engage in doxxing, confrontational demonstrations, stalking, and intimidation;
- The behind-the-curtain influence of extreme-right online groups, such as 4chan and 8chan, creating a culture of media disinformation and Internet havoc even as they expose disaffected young white

men to fascist ideologies and encourage acts of terror;

- Efforts to demonize organized anti-fascists ("Antifa") as a terrorist group — although, since Antifa is *not* actually a group but rather a moral and ideological conviction *to stop fascists from committing acts of terror*, leaves any number of social justice minded groups and individuals vulnerable to criminalization and repression;

- Generalized public awareness that the U.S. Government is literally operating concentration camps on our borders, as ICE raids to kidnap and imprison immigrants and separate families intensify.

Indeed, El Paso showed a frightening convergence of this last point with the shooting itself: as CNN reported shortly after the incident, several potential victims and their families [avoided treatment and emergency services](#) because of the fear that ICE agents would be patrolling hospitals and reunification points looking for undocumented immigrants among the victims.

To be clear: I do NOT believe these groups are coordinating and plotting together according to some Grand Plan for Fascism — quite the opposite actually, which makes it even more dangerous. Trump, while being the most public individual and a person of great influence within this milieu, *is not functionally its leader*. While his actions are obviously provocative, dog-whistling to a racist supporter base, it's not like he is a Godfather or puppet master orchestrating it all; if that were the case, it would be way simpler to just cut the head off the monster and win the day. While resisting Trump is a very

critical thing to do, since he gives all of this an air of state sanction and legitimacy, this is not the type of situation where we can wait for some Democrat or progressive savior to beat Trump at the Boss Stage and make everything right again.

The monster we are dealing with, in these seemingly random bursts of violence, is more like a Hydra: a loosely networked but mutually reinforcing white supremacist/proto-fascist milieu that spontaneously breeds terrorists and acts of [stochastic terrorism](#). Driven particularly by the online culture of 4chan, 8chan, sites like Stormfront and other platforms, they actively inspire and anticipate violent acts, but do not know where they will happen or coordinate them in advance: they stoke the fires, celebrate the eruptions, and egg on others to follow suit. Street-level groups such as the Proud Boys and Identity Evropa engage in recruitment and real-life intimidation of right-wing targets ([as they have done on college campuses for the last 2 years](#)). Official state actors, such as ICE, are formally at a distance, though many members of these agencies are known to share these views and participate in racist discourse online; and, like in El Paso, act opportunistically in ways that cause further terror and hardship for target groups. As George Ciciarello-Maher, an early target of alt-right harassment, said in his comment on El Paso, anyone who becomes deeply involved in these forums and organized alt-right groups "is a mass shooting waiting to happen."

It is critical to look at these multiple, mutually reinforcing layers not like units in an army or parts of an engine; they are *emergent conditions* whose convergence reflects some very old and enduring structural

features of American culture who are now simply throwing off their hoods to bask in the open air.

Online, these elements often hide in plain sight, hoping to “redpill” or recruit new members into the group. They infiltrate all kinds of networks — including social media, Reddit, and even online groups and organizations in the growing progressive movement. [This Contrapoints video is a great primer on spotting the signs and dogwhistles of these groups.](#)

DO NOT ENGAGE THEM ON SOCIAL MEDIA. The less reacts they get, the less likely the algorithms will promote them. Do not share their memes. Block them from your groups where they cause trouble. Discourage your friends, family, and online acquaintances from engaging with them; and educate others to spot the signals where they occur and discourage engagement and circulation of their messages.

It’s tough, and terrifying, to realize that this growing movement is spawning tentacles everywhere — and while many politicians who could help us are focusing on Russians, or anyone else who is an easily identifiable ‘enemy,’ White supremacy is so baked into our system that, barring those proudly sporting MAGA hats, our homegrown terrorists blend in perfectly with the generic male white American mainstream. Focusing specifically on these groups, their movements and communications, and thwarting the spread and influence of their messaging wherever you can is key.

2. THE POLICE ARE NOT ON OUR SIDE. Instead, organize your communities to help protect and defend targets of harassment and violence, and to send a message to extremists that they are not welcome in your community.

Wondering where the old traditional White supremacist and neo-Nazi groups are nowadays? [According to the FBI, they have spent the last decade or two infiltrating police departments all over the country.](#) What we have seen at countless demonstrations, including Charlottesville, is the passive, and sometimes active, behavior of police: either protecting the racists, or standing by and not interfering as racist groups act aggressively and violently against people of color and antifascist protestors.

Obviously, in a mass shooter situation, the police will be obligated to intervene — but what about the countless everyday interactions and confrontations with racist aggressors and provocateurs that happen around the country? Where are the people who “protect and serve” when community members are attacked by racists? If you’ve been paying any amount of attention to the Black Lives Matter movement over the past several years, you know about the attitudes, actions and implicit biases of police towards Black and Brown people that, more often than not, end up getting [horrific numbers of Black and Brown youth killed.](#) If people of color are being confronted, harassed, or attacked by racists, calling the police will likely bring potentially deadly force down on them instead of the racist aggressors.

An effective alternative — that proved its worth in Berkeley during the alt-right’s Free Speech Week in August 2018 — is to raise awareness in your community of this insidious problem, and mobilize as many as you can to make the whole town a safe space for people of color and other targets of right-wing violence. In Berkeley, businesses and neighborhoods were mobilized to recognize the signs of Proud Boys and other groups and refused service or otherwise discouraged their presence. Others organized to support people who had been targeted, making sure they had an escort home or other ways to defend themselves. And on the day the racists were to rally, we outnumbered them 1000 to 1 in a strong and peaceful show of solidarity. At the end of the day, punching Nazis will become unnecessary if your community stands united against hate.

3. DO NOT ENCOURAGE THE CRIMINALIZATION OF ANTIFASCISTS. Every single decent human being who resists fascist violence and stands up for the vulnerable is Antifa.

The recent calls from Trump, Ted Cruz and other Republican leaders to [criminalize “Antifa” as a terrorist group](#) should sound alarm bells for anyone who thinks a fascist America is a bad idea. Antifa — short for *anti-fascist* — is NOT an organized group; there are no membership lists, no leaders. Anyone who resists fascists — not just masked Nazi-punchers but anyone affiliated with a progressive, social justice, or racial justice movement who stands up to the thuggish and violent behavior of right-wing extremist hate groups — could

potentially be charged with terrorism under the proposed legislation; and under current counterterrorism laws, could be held indefinitely without trial.

ZERO deaths have been attributed to Antifa — by terrorist standards, a rather shitty body count — whereas [every single extremist murder in the United States since the end of 2017 has been at the hands of White supremacists](#) or White nationalists.

Anti-fascism is as old as fascism itself. Since 1932 in Germany, anti-fascists have appeared wherever fascists appear — for reasons that should be totally obvious. When fascist violence is directed at vulnerable people, there have always been those who defended themselves or defended those who were being attacked. Technically, the US military as well as Allied forces from 1941 to 1945 were Antifa; see where we're going with this?

There is literally only ONE group that benefits from criminalizing anti-fascists: **Fascists**. And perpetuating calls for “civility” in dealing with people who literally want to commit genocide, or parroting the moral equivalency argument — equating anti-fascist defense with fascist offense — only encourages the fascists while leaving their targets isolated and vulnerable.

So what can we do? Just like communities all over the country have resisted ICE by jamming hotlines and overwhelming their systems, we can do the same thing — by standing up proudly for anti-fascism. You don't have to punch a Nazi to be Antifa.

Anyone who thinks fascism is bad and takes a stand against it — demonstrating at ICE facilities, helping people who are targeted, people who educate each other about fascism, and speak out against racism — are all Antifa. Any decent human being in these times who stands up against White supremacist and racist hate speech and violence is Antifa. When we are all Antifa, we win.

4. END RACISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY IN AMERICA FOR GOOD. We must work hard, in our communities and within ourselves, to excise the cancer of White Supremacy from our culture once and for all.

Ultimately, to get to the root of this problem, what we will need to do — fundamentally and decisively, if we are to stop this monster once and for all — is confront the deep history of White supremacy whose cancerous influence plays a central role in American history, going all the way back to the origins of this country.

It is our sacred duty — as people who are born and bred in this nation, especially for White Americans but also all humans of conscience — to learn this history: not just that slavery and genocide existed, but the forms that it took and the systematic dismantling of culture, identity and agency, particularly of Black and Indigenous people. Learn about Indian residential schools, the California genocides, the Middle Passage, Nat Turner and the Tulsa Massacre; about Red Summer and Black August, the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee.

Then comes the really hard part: engaging in honest, painful, and humbling struggle to recognize and overcome the internalized assumptions and implicit biases that American White supremacist culture has instilled within yourselves, and within all of us. And none of us can do it alone — the tough but liberating work of rebuilding relationships and discovering new kinds of sociality rooted in true equality — work that should be done collectively, with others in your community, taking guidance and leadership from communities of color. [SURJ \(Showing Up for Racial Justice\)](#) is one organization with chapters around the country that provides a space for White allies to educate themselves, examine the latent biases that permeate everyday life, and organize against racism and in support of communities of color and their struggles. Or it could take a number of small, deep conversations, one on one or in groups, to find clarity and understanding about what it will take to achieve real justice, and what it means to be, and live, in solidarity with all people as equals.

It is also incumbent upon our White allies and people of conscience to talk to, educate and check other White people for racist behavior. Tell Becky to put down her phone if she tries to call the cops on Black people for living their life. Dismantle your local Confederate monument. Throw someone out of your place of business if they are harassing minorities and causing trouble. Learn the codes and signs of White nationalist and identitarian groups and let them know they are not welcome in spaces where they may be able to target people for violence and harassment.

If we do not want this Hydra to rear its head again, *we must excise the cancer of White Supremacy from our culture once and for all* — and create a society that truly is of, by, and for all people.

If we get through this dark period in history, how will you want to be remembered? As the third who ignored the problem, lived their lives watching helplessly at the carnage — or will you rise to the challenge of our time, and stand for justice on the right side of history?

Whatever you do, please — for all of us who may find ourselves in the crosshairs of extremism and racial violence if this continues — *do not numb yourself to these atrocities and allow them to be normalized.* Daily mass shootings, concentration camps, public racism and state repression — this nightmarish world cannot become our “new normal.”

Rage against it. Talk about it. *Organize your communities.* You can be a real “good American” by speaking out and standing up, using your democratic rights (what we have left) to push past the darkness and finally fulfill the ideal of “justice for all.”

A Publication of the PROGRAM ON CORPORATIONS, LAW & DEMOCRACY

By What Authority (ISSN: 524-1106) is published by the Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy. The title is English for *quo warranto*, a legal phrase that questions illegitimate exercise of privilege and power. We the people and our federal and state officials have long been giving giant business corporations illegitimate authority. Today, a minority directing giant corporations and backed by police, courts, and the military, define our culture, govern our nation and plunder the earth. **By What Authority** reflects an unabashed assertion of the right of the sovereign people to govern themselves.

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BWA is a tool for democracy proponents to rethink and reframe their work. To that end we encourage readers to engage us with comments, questions and suggestions.

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