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The Nazification of the Republican Party



Drawing by Nathaniel St. Clair

After World War II, the Nazis who helped Hitler rise to power and murder millions of people, including at least 6 million Jews, were put on trial to send a warning to the world. Not all of them faced a judicial process, but enough were not protected by their high status, official offices, or claims of “innocence” and “patriotism.” Power through violence was the only language they spoke—not justice, not freedom—and they were held accountable. These criminals faced a tribunal at Nürnberg (Nuremberg) so momentous that the disgraced word “Nazi” is forever attached to those who participated in and enabled their horrific crimes.

After the war, Germany banned Nazi flags and neo-Nazis. In fact, the only way that Nazi paraphernalia got into Germany was through smuggling from other countries such as the United States, like from Nazi propagandist Gerhard Lauck in Nebraska, the man called the

“Farm Belt Führer” who served four years in a German prison for distributing banned pro-Nazi materials throughout Europe.

I know this because I teach a course on White Supremacy at Smith College that focuses on anti-Semitism, anti-Black racism, and the many intersecting components of white supremacist ideology. After more than 30 years of organizing and teaching about fascism as a Black feminist activist and academic, I know the destructive influence of these noxious ideas, and I teach young people how to interpret and resist them.

Global contempt for the word “Nazi” is a lesson for us today in the United States after the attempted criminal coup at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. Anyone identified as sympathetic, supportive, or financing these seditious acts that attempted to deny the peaceful transfer of power in our country should be treated with the same public condemnation that the Nazis received after World War II. This includes Nazified people in Congress, in the media, in universities, in regular jobs, and throughout society because fascism is not the fevered dream of one delusional man. Trump is a white supremacist; that he is also a deranged narcissist is really incidental.

The Republicans are a morally bankrupt political party that supported a deranged president who brought this fragile, evolving democracy to the brink of extinction simply because they can’t stand the glacially slow and righteous empowerment of people of color and any limits on their power to amass an immoral amount of wealth. To paraphrase noted Black educator Vincent Harding, we are citizens of a country that has yet to be realized.

The Republican brand as a legitimate political party will be forever associated with far-right ideologies, including neo-Nazis and neo-Confederates. These so-called “respectable” leaders coddled and stoked a white supremacist insurrection by Trump for the past four years. Their transactional opportunism enabled Confederate flags to be defiantly paraded in the U.S. Capitol, a shame not even achieved during the Civil War. They proved they don’t want to share a pluralistic democracy with other political parties and interests.

If Republicans can’t permanently dominate this country with a demographically shrinking number of angry white people, they proved they are ready to blow it up, figuratively and literally. Now they want us to rush to forgiveness and reconciliation, and ignore that truth and accountability come first in the achievement of healing.

Hitler led an insurrection against the German government in 1923 and was sentenced to five years in jail, served one, and used that leniency to commit the Holocaust. Never forget that premature forgiveness before accountability is dangerous. Fascists are violent because of who THEY are, not what WE DO—like the ordinary Germans who underestimated the Nazis and thought they were just another political party on the right. Germans who weren’t Nazis passively went about their normal affairs by denying the realities of their Jewish neighbors, all for the sake of “unity.”

Republicans are no longer entitled to exist as a legitimate political party because this authoritarian backlash has been building since new Civil Rights laws were passed in 1964 and 1965 in response to white racist violence captured on TV that required the National Guard to quell. Then-President Lyndon Johnson predicted that most white people would flee the Democratic Party to join the pro-segregationist, anti-feminist, and anti-gay revanchist political movement of George Wallace, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan. Every undemocratically selected Republican president since the 1960s (by an electoral college designed to be disenfranchising) has failed to repudiate this neo-fascist wing of their party.

I'm through giving Republicans the benefit of the doubt after 50 years.

The term "Nazi" is not even strong enough to convey the opprobrium and disgust human rights activists feel for those who brazenly claim they are simply patriots with different opinions. From the White House, to the Congress, to the streets, they declared war on democracy. They are seditionists, co-conspirators, and neo-Nazis hiding in plain sight who chose to use whatever power, platforms, and microphones they had to overturn this system of government. Their apparent goal is an apartheid-like system in which an embattled minority of people rule over millions of people who oppose them. We must send an unmistakable signal that this will not be tolerated when a more competent neo-fascist seeks to gain permanent power in the Congress or White House in the future.

I'm calling them American Nazis, who adapted the playbook of the Third Reich. Trump may be gone but Trumpism is not. As House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said, they prioritized their "whiteness over democracy." This is highlighted by their implacable attack on voting rights. Republicans who encouraged this dangerous resurrection of fascism are already trying to erase what happened or describe it as simply a "First Amendment Protest." These apologists trying to launder their shredded reputations should be denied jobs, media opportunities, publishing contracts, and all other opportunities to spread their contempt for democracy. As philosopher Karl Popper observed in 1945, "In order to maintain a tolerant society, the society must be intolerant of intolerance."

We must defend an open, democratic society against these forces of fascism disguised as a respectable Republican Party that encouraged a white supremacist insurrection that seeks to rule like kings above the law. They see calls for unity and civility as weakness, as all fascists do. They take advantage of an open society to undermine the incremental progress of the 20th century in race, gender, citizenship, national, and international relations. For over a century they've proven they can't be trusted with military power, disrupting other democracies by fomenting wars and low-intensity conflicts around the world that have killed millions of people. They are unable to accept the complexity of a multi-cultural and multi-racial globalized world, so they stew in their resentments, and fight every effort to democratize the privileges and benefits of our world. They are at the natural demise of a political party that

sought to hold onto power through a web of lies to their followers to enrich a small cabal of people.

America's tattered global reputation is at stake in this unending Civil War. Instead of denouncing the traitors in 1865, we allowed them to be rehabilitated and enshrined in monuments across the country. Will our descendants look back and see that we flinched yet again when it was time to hold insurrectionists accountable? If not, we'll have the shortest Reconstruction in history.

Our commitment to human rights, just laws, social welfare, global peace, and democratic governance is what authoritarians seek to undermine through abuse of the concept of freedom. We should call them all American Nazis and prevent them from hiding behind mealy-mouthed words because they've shown us who they are. Now we must believe them.

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*Loretta J. Ross has co-written three books on reproductive justice: [Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice](#); [Reproductive Justice: An Introduction](#); and [Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundations, Theory, Practice, Critique](#). Her current book, *Calling in the Calling Out Culture*, is forthcoming in 2021.*