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## White Terrorism



**Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair**

The number of bereaved families and friends of those massacred by white terrorists in the United States tragically continues to expand. Within the last year alone bodies riddled with the bullets of military-style weapons lay strewn on the streets of large cities like Pittsburgh and El Paso to small towns like Poway and Gilroy. Fueled by anti-Semitic and anti-Hispanic rhetoric, the paranoid projections and racist rhetoric of white nationalism and white supremacy have been weaponized into white terrorism.

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Yet white terrorism also stalks those seeking refuge at our southern border. Imagine a distraught mother, reeling from the murder of her child. With other young children at risk, she decides to begin a perilous journey to escape any further violence. Because she hopes to prevent being attacked on the long trek, she joins with others, equally at risk. Having only a vague hope of joining distant relatives once she arrives at her destination, she and her children withstand the many deprivations over the long haul. Finally, arriving at what she has been told is a land of refuge, her children are ripped from her care. She, in turn, is taken to an overcrowded caged facility where she finds hundreds of others languishing in deplorable conditions.

This story has been repeated over and over by the thousands to Central Americans seeking asylum in the United States. Not only have those thousands been denied even the opportunity to request asylum, but they have been labeled by the President of the United States as an “infestation” of “invaders,” bringing with them crime and disease. Thousands of children, many violently separated from a parent, now remain in caged surroundings, denied even the basics of care.

The policies promulgated by the Trump Administration and carried out by often vindictive and uncaring Border Patrol agents can only be described as a form of white terrorism. These brutal policies and vicious rhetoric are intended to diminish the increase of brown people in the United States and reinforce the delusions of white nationalism perpetrated by its advocates in the White House and on hate-filled websites.

The fact that the most recent murderous attacks on brown people by angry armed white nationalists in Gilroy and El Paso reflects the paranoia and racism stoked by Trump, his Republican enablers, and the dark neo-Nazi and white supremacist sites on the web. Those sites reinforce the paranoid rhetoric of invasions and “white genocide” and help create a death cult of white terrorism.

Although opposing these forces of white terror is essential, the deep roots of such violence require even more radical solutions than impeachment, electoral defeat, and bans on hate speech. Confronting this history of white nationalism and white supremacy means recognizing its institutional and ideological past and its persistence under different circumstances in the present. Indeed, it is this institutional and ideological matrix that informed state-sanctioned white supremacy and white nationalism in the past, leading to forms of white terrorism against Native Americans and people of African descent. Both

legal and extra-legal mechanisms, under the imperatives of settler colonialism, were used to commit genocide against Native Americans and the enslavement of Africans.

White terrorism, therefore, was bred into the expansion of the United States and the exploitation of enslaved Africans for profit. To guarantee the suppression of resistance by either Native Americans or African Americans, whites were recruited into state militias, slave patrols, and the military. Constitutional provisions, such as the Second Amendment, and laws like the Fugitive Slave Act, provided both 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century whites with instruments of terrorism. Policing policies grew out of these slave patrols and such imperial vigilantes as the Texas Rangers.

In the aftermath of the armed rebellion of thousands of African Americans during the Civil War, white vigilantes, like the Ku Klux Klan, operated during the Reconstruction as a vindictive weapon of white terrorism. In combination with the emergence of Jim Crow laws, Southern states became bastions of white terrorism up through the 1950s and 1960s when both the legal system and the civil rights movement upended state-sanctioned white supremacy.

Immigrants from the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century also faced forms of white supremacist oppression and white nationalist backlash. The KKK became a national phenomenon during the 1920s as the Congress shut the doors on open immigration. Xenophobia and racism defined who was included and excluded in the American polity. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Border Patrol, established in 1924, reflected such xenophobia and racism throughout much of its early history, practicing forms of white terrorism.

Now, the resonances of xenophobia and racism continue to inform the practices of the Border Patrol and ICE. The white terrorism on our southern border may not be as lethal as the murderous massacres perpetrated by angry armed white men. On the other hand, the emotional and physical trauma suffered by those victimized by state-sanctioned white terrorism on our southern border remains a tragic reminder of the cruelty promoted by the Trump Administration.

The documentation of this cruelty by lawyers, doctors, lawmakers, and immigrant rights advocates, along with the demonstrations around the country against Trump's border policies, indicates a determination to denounce in words and deeds such policies. However, contending with both governmental white terrorism and free-lance white terrorists will require a range of formidable resistance within the courts, Congress, and in

the streets. If we are truly moved by the cries of those victimized by white terrorism, we must fight to disband ICE, demilitarize the border, decriminalize those seeking refuge, and disarm, both figuratively and literally, all of the perpetrators and advocates of white terrorism.

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