

# The Story of Anarchist Violence

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*The main plank of anarchism is the removal of violence from human relations.* —Errico Malatesta

Anarchism names a quite specific species of social violence. This species, however, is radically distinct from the variety assumed by liberals and conservatives alike. In the literal sense of the term, it is more accurate to designate this species as “counterviolence,” or even, as Natasha Lennard puts it, “impossible nonviolence.”<sup>1</sup> In the figurative sense that I mainly intend, the “violence” perpetuated by anarchism involves an adamant refusal to acquiesce to an unjust status quo, and a corresponding vehement insistence of constructing just ways of organizing social life. Anarchist violence is thus more an issue of *violation* (of what it views as untenable norms, etc.) than it is of death and destruction. Given how large violence looms in discussions of anarchism, including, I assume, in many readers’ imaginations, it will be best to wind our way slowly toward this conclusion.

The reader should view what follows as a kind of litmus test for determining where you stand on the issue of the necessity of forceful action in bringing about change. It is not, of course, intended to incite you to violence. Neither is it intended to shame you into sympathizing with violent perpetrators. In fact, such perpetrators represent a small minority within the anarchist tradition, past and present. Far more typical is the attitude expressed in the epigram, which alludes to the very incompatibility of destructive violence and the anarchist principles of non-coercion, non-domination, and good will camaraderie. Yet, given the extent to which the reception and reputation of anarchism has been marked by its relationship to violence, I feel it is best to address that relationship in all of its contradictory, deeply problematic messiness.

More, perhaps, than any other figure, Errico Malatesta embodied the tensions inherent in the story of this relationship. We heard from him earlier, fierly advocating total revolution. Early in his life, he expressed the logic, and the justification, of anarchist violence as one of dire necessity.

It is our aspiration and our aim that everyone should become socially conscious and effective; but to achieve this end, it is necessary to provide all with the means of life and for development, and it is therefore necessary to destroy with violence, since one cannot do otherwise, the violence which denies these means to the workers.

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<sup>1</sup> Natasha Lennard, *Being Numerous: Essays on the Non-Fascist Life* (London: Verso, 2019), 48.

The general position of first and second wave anarchists (i.e., from roughly 1840–1920) was that violence was part of the solution for those who advocated for justice and equality because the privileged minority would otherwise never give an inch. As an explicit strategy, however, violent tactics were eventually dismissed as ineffectual. Emma Goldman, Peter Kropotkin, and other major nineteenth century anarchist figures would eventually express views similar to Malatesta's passionate plea against violence in *Violence as a Social Factor*. Given the fact that anarchism has been so deeply branded, in the public's eye, as irredeemably violent, I cite Malatesta's mature view at length before giving the reader a fuller account.

Violence, i.e., physical force, used to another's hurt, which is the most brutal form that struggle between men can assume, is eminently corrupting. It tends, by its very nature, to suffocate the best sentiments of man, and to develop all the antisocial qualities, ferocity, hatred, revenge, the spirit of domination and tyranny, contempt of the weak, servility towards the strong. And this harmful tendency arises also when violence is used for a good end...How many men who enter on a political struggle inspired with the love of humanity, of liberty, and of toleration, end by becoming cruel and inexorable proscribers...Anarchists who rebel against every sort of oppression and struggle for the integral liberty of each and who ought thus to shrink instinctively from all acts of violence which cease to be mere resistance to oppression and become oppressive in their turn are also liable to fall into the abyss of brutal force...The excitement caused by some recent explosions and the admiration for the courage with which the bomb-throwers faced death, suffices to cause many anarchists to forget their program, and to enter on a path which is the most absolute negation of all anarchist ideas and sentiments...In short it is our duty to call attention to the dangers attendant on the use of violence, to insist on the principle of the inviolability of human life, to combat the spirit of hatred and revenge, and to preach love and toleration.<sup>2</sup>

The heyday of anarchist violence was roughly the mid-1870s to the early 1900s. This era is marked by a tactic called "propaganda by deed."<sup>3</sup> Like "propaganda by word" (an instance of which this manifesto aspires to be), propaganda by deed was seen as a "powerful means of awakening popular consciousness." Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921), an early advocate and later renouncer of this tactic, believed that particular acts of violence had a catalyzing capacity to "awaken boldness and the spirit of revolt by preaching by example."<sup>4</sup> The "awakening" alluded to by Kropotkin involves critical awareness of the social, political, and economic forces held by the emerging socialist analyses to be at work in our collective oppression, as well as the capacity

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<sup>2</sup> Errico Malatesta, *Violence as a Social Factor*, n.p., theanarchistlibrary.org. Accessed November 5, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> The term "propaganda" now has the purely pejorative connotations of "biased," manipulative," misleading," and so on. In nineteenth-century usage it was a neutral term. It simply meant what its root word, Latin *propagare*, denoted: *to propagate, to spread*.

<sup>4</sup> Olivier Hubac-Occhipinti, "Anarchist Terrorists of the Nineteenth Century," In *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to ISIS*, ed. Chaliand Gérard and Blin Arnaud (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016), 116. Writing in the Swiss socialist journal *Le Révolté*, Kropotkin would eventually conclude that "a structure based on centuries of history cannot be destroyed with a few kilos of dynamite." See James H. Billington, *Fire in the minds of men: origins of the revolutionary faith* (New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1998), 417.

of each individual to strike against those forces.<sup>5</sup> The “example” being demonstrated in propaganda by deed concerns the necessarily transgressive manifestation of individual or collective autonomous power.<sup>6</sup> So, to whatever extent a person might be convinced *in theory* of the value of anarchism as an analysis of the structural causes of social suffering, it is only through immediate *assaults* on either the individual or collective perpetrators of those structures, this thinking goes, that meaningful change can come about.<sup>7</sup> For reasons that make sense within the late nineteenth-century context of the tactic, the gathering of activists agitating for working people globally, called the International Anarchists Conference, boldly declared in London on July 14, 1881 that “the time has come to...act, and to add propaganda by deed and insurrectionary actions to oral and written propaganda, which have proven ineffective.”<sup>8</sup> Ineffective toward what end? Toward, of course, the destruction of oppressive structures. Propaganda by deed aimed to add ballast to the spoken and written word. It did so by placing “the dagger, the rifle, and dynamite” in the anarchist’s arsenal of propagation.<sup>9</sup>

As critics of anarchism rightly charge, the “deed” involved overt physical violence. But don’t picture gangs of armed thugs roaming the streets, much less an organized discharge of militias or armies against the state. Observers of more recent anarchist violence may be tempted to picture the Molotov-throwing clashes of the German Autonomen against the police in Berlin in the 1970s and 1980s, or their most recent incarnation as the black bloc in 1999 during the anti-globalist “Battle of Seattle”<sup>10</sup>, or even the antifa (anti-fascist) interventions against neo-fascists and white supremacist in Charlottesville in 2017. These recent instances, which I will come back to later, are clearly the genetic offspring of the older generation of deed propagandists, but such contemporary large-scale demonstration tactics would not have worked for their purposes. Instead, they advocated the precise targeting of powerful individuals who were directly involved in the maintenance of the apparatus of oppression. Among the most prominent examples are the assassinations of members of the ruling class, such as King Umberto I of Italy, in 1900; Sadi Carnot, the president of the French Republic, in 1897; Empress Elizabeth of Austria in 1898, Antonio Canovas, the president of the Spanish Council of Ministers, in 1897; and of course President William McKinley of the United States, in 1901. Industry leaders were also targeted. A particularly notorious example is the attempted assassination of the American industrialist Henry Clay

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<sup>5</sup> From its explicit inception with Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865), who provocatively declared in *What is Property* (1840), “I am an anarchist,” anarchism was considered a variety of socialism. It still is, although, ever since the split explained below in note xx, typically with the modification “libertarian” in distinction to “authoritarian.” The core concept of socialism is simple: public, rather than individual or corporate, ownership of the “means” (machinery, equipment, raw materials, facilities, etc.), production, and distribution of social wealth.

<sup>6</sup> Necessarily transgressive, because “Everything is good for us which falls outside legality.” (Kropotkin in *Le Révolté*, December 1880, quoted in Jean Maitron, *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1880–1914)* (Paris: Société universitaire d’éditions et de librairie, 1951), 70.

<sup>7</sup> A “structure” is a socially established arrangement of complex parts, the purpose of which is to catalyze specific activities and to disable others. For example, the life of a university student as university student, like the careers of professors, administrators, and staff, is determined to a decisive degree by requirements, rules and regulations, customs, and so on, that largely float free of the people executing them. In this manner, students are *subjects of* the university because they are *subjected to*, and are, an anarchist would contend, subjugated by, the machinic structure that is the university.

<sup>8</sup> Hubac-Occhipinti, “Anarchist Terrorists, 116.

<sup>9</sup> Kropotkin in his Swiss journal, *Le Révolté*, in 1879. Cited by Miriam Brody, “Introduction,” in Emma Goldman, *Living my Life* (New York, Penguin, 2006 [1931]), xvii .

<sup>10</sup> The current English terminology reveals the German heritage of these formations: antifa, from *antifaschistisch* (antifascist) and black bloc, from *Schwarze Block*, named for their black clothing and masks.

Frick, chairman of the Carnegie Steel Company Chairman, by Alexander Berkman (1870–1936), in 1892.<sup>11</sup> On at least one occasion—the bombing of Café Terminus in Paris, in 1894—the target was the class of people who owned and operated or otherwise acquired wealth from the factories and various emerging industries, and hence were deemed responsible for exploiting workers, namely, the “bourgeoisie.”<sup>12</sup>

So, for the most part, the deed was carried out by a lone assailant targeting a specific person of influence. At least that was how the tactic was supposed to work. In one famous case—the 1906 bombing of the royal wedding procession of the Spanish king Alfonso XIII and his bride, Victoria Eugenie—twenty-four bystanders were killed and over a hundred wounded, but the king and his bride remained unharmed.<sup>13</sup> Remarkably, however, one historian estimates that throughout the several decades when propaganda by deed was practiced, “anarchists and anarchist sympathisers initiated perhaps 40 violent attacks...and were to blame for 100 deaths throughout the entire world.”<sup>14</sup>

I hope you are surprised by these numbers, speculative as they may be. I hope so only because of the corrective to a falsified historical record that such number serve. But by looking for surprise, I am not, of course, looking for your forgiveness of the killers. Writing in the heyday of propaganda by deed, Malatesta, furthermore, should disabuse us of any suggestion of a “they do it to” justification.

Hatred and revenge seemed to have become the moral basis of Anarchism. “The bourgeoisie does as bad and worse.” Such is the argument with which they tried to justify and exalt every brutal deed.<sup>15</sup>

Casting what is perhaps the greatest aspersion possible on a self-proclaimed anarchist (“authoritarian!”), Malatesta adds, “It is true that these ultra-authoritarians, who so strangely persist in calling themselves Anarchists, are but a small fraction who acquired a momentary importance owing to exceptional circumstances.”<sup>16</sup>

Having said that, such low figures certainly raise questions: Why was the official reaction so vehemently hostile to anarchism? Why did the press of the day write headlines like “Cut Throats Caged,” “Anarchist Leader and His Satanic Subalterns Jailed in Chicago,” “The Cowardly

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<sup>11</sup> Although Berkman shot Frick twice in the neck and stabbed him with a dagger four times in the leg, the industrialist survived.

<sup>12</sup> One person was killed and twenty were injured. [Explain meaning of term]. For these and other cases of propaganda by deed, see Hubac-Occhipinti, “Anarchist Terrorists.” Another valuable source is “Anarchist Incidents, 1886–1920: Topics in Chronicling America,” at the Library of Congress’s online Research Guides. Accessed May 1, 2020, guides.loc.gov. The somewhat outdated French term “bourgeoisie,” originally referred to people who lived within the walled cities (*bourg*) as opposed to the nobility and to the peasants in the country. It eventually takes on the sense of a class of people, beginning, namely, with the merchants and the craftsmen who held political power, and then those who possess the bulk of social and financial capital.

<sup>13</sup> Angel Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution, and Reaction: Catalan Labour and the Crisis of the Spanish State, 1898–1923* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 163.

<sup>14</sup> Jeff Sparrow, “In the end, we forget the anarchists, bombers and ‘lone wolves’. But the hysteria they provoke stays with us,” *The Guardian*, accessed May 2, 2020, www.theguardian.com.

<sup>15</sup> Errico Malatesta, *Violence as a Social Factor*, n.p.

<sup>16</sup> Errico Malatesta, *Violence as a Social Factor*, n.p.

Curs Quieted?”<sup>17</sup> Why did U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, a self-declared “progressive,” declare in 1908, “When compared with the suppression of anarchy, every other question sinks into insignificance”? Why were numerous draconian anti-socialist laws passed around the world? Most importantly for our purposes, why does this reputation persist down to the present day, even among intelligent, critically-aware people, as I imagine my readers to be?

One explanation is that the killing of a state official posed, or was perceived as posing, a legitimate threat to stability. After all, historians consider the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir apparent to the Austrian-Hungarian throne in 1917 to be a major contributor to World War I and the devastation that came in its wake.<sup>18</sup> Yet other such destabilizing threats in that era—economic downturn, foreign hostilities, the advance of communism—do not appear to have elicited a similarly vehement response. My suggestion is that the “violent” threat of anarchism was, as I said at the outset, social in nature. As I will show in more detail later, anarchists were at the forefront of the justice movements of their day. Anarchist speakers, renowned for eloquent rhetorical skill, barnstormed the United States, speaking before hundreds and even thousands of receptive listeners. One of the most popular was Emma Goldman, whose “impassioned advocacy of politically unpopular ideas and causes like free love, anarchism, and atheism...led many of the powerful to fear and hate her.” Famously, U.S. Attorney General Francis Caffey called her “a woman of great ability and of personal magnetism, and her persuasive powers make her an exceedingly dangerous woman.” Perhaps the real threat of the anarchist orators lay in their relationship to the beleaguered masses as educators, “who in nationwide lecture tours spread modern ideas and practices to a young and provincial country.”<sup>19</sup>

Returning to the harsh reality of propaganda by deed, I hope that exposing readers to an actual propagandist’s justification behind the violence he committed, will give perspective on this epoch of anarchist history. My purpose in doing so is to lay the groundwork for the reader’s revised perception both of the true perpetrators of violence and of the actual version of violence that anarchism represents, then and now. We can do no better than listening to one Auguste Vaillant (1861–1894). In 1893, Vaillant, a committed anarchist, was arrested for throwing a bomb from the public gallery of the Palais-Bourbon in Paris into the Chamber of Deputies. Like countless others, Vaillant was anguished at his inability to support his wife and child on a workingman’s cruelly paltry wages. Vaillant was trapped inescapably in abject poverty with no way out. At his trial he confessed that he had contemplated suicide, but determined instead to die in a manner that meaningfully symbolized “the cry of a whole class that demands its rights and will soon add acts to words.” (We hear in that statement that Vaillant shared Kropotkin’s belief that propaganda by deed was a potent means of consciousness-raising and of “awakening boldness and the spirit of revolt.”) Vaillant, at his trial, eloquently explained the general anarchist motivation for agitation, whether it applies to oneself or only to others:

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<sup>17</sup> *Omaha Daily Bee*, May 6, 1896. The latter two are actually subtitles of an article on “Chicago’s Reign of Terror,” which we now refer to as the Haymarket Affair/Riot/Massacre, depending on one’s politics. Accessed May 1, 2020, [chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov)

<sup>18</sup> It is commonly believed that Gavrilo Princip (1894–1918), the assassin, was an anarchist. This is not accurate. Like countless other disaffected and searching youths of his day, Princip had indeed read the anarchists writers. At the Gymnasium in Sarajevo, he was exposed to, his own words, “many anarchistic, socialistic, nationalistic pamphlets, belles letters and everything.” As we read in “Dr. Martin Pappenheim’s Conversations With Gavrilo Princip,” ultimately, “Princip’s radicalism became misdirected into the poison of nationalism and militarism.” [libcom.org](http://libcom.org). Accessed November 5, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> *The Emma Goldman Papers*, [www.lib.berkeley.edu](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu). Accessed November 5, 2020.

I have seen capital come, like a vampire, to suck the last drop of blood of the unfortunate pariahs. Then I came back [from an attempt to find work and dignity in Argentina] to France where it was reserved for me to see my family suffer atrociously. This was the last drop in the cup of my sorrow. Tired of leading this life of suffering and cowardice I carried this bomb to those who are primarily responsible for social misery.

Vallant's homemade nail bomb was so weak that only a few deputies were slightly injured. This meagre result, Vallant said, had been his intention from the outset. Still, he was, of course, quickly found guilty of attempted murder and sent to the guillotine.

Gentleman, soon you will strike me. But in receiving your verdict, I will at least have the satisfaction of having wounded the existing society, this cursed society in which one may see a single man spending, uselessly, enough to feed thousands of families; an infamous society that permits a few individuals to monopolize social wealth.<sup>20</sup>

We could consider many more instances of anarchist violence, real or imagined. Readers may be familiar with, for example, two such notorious American cases: the Haymarket Affair and the case of Sacco and Vanzetti.

The Haymarket Affair—variously referred to as the Haymarket Riot, Massacre, Episode, Incident, or Tragedy, depending, I suppose, on one's political leanings—is still considered both “an enduring symbol of the anarchist terror of that time”<sup>21</sup> and *the* singular event that “influenced the history of labor in...the United States, and even the world...whose consequences are still being felt today.”<sup>22</sup> On May 3, 1886, workers advocating for an eight-hour workday had gathered in Chicago's Haymarket Square. (I feel a need to repeat that with the proper emphasis: *advocating for an eight-hour workday!* The incendiary slogan of the day was: “Eight Hours for Work! Eight Hours for Rest! Eight Hours for What We Will!”) This event was part of a coordinated national movement that commenced on May 1, 1886. Some 350,000–500,000 workers participated in a nationwide work stoppage. Their aim was simple: force the hands of employers and the government to adopt an eight-hour workday. The webisode, “The Rise of Labor,” gives some context for this goal:

Steelmen worked twelve hours a day, six days a week, for little pay. Textile workers—many of them children—worked sixty to eighty hours a week. Conditions were often dangerous. Miners worked underground with explosives but without safety regulations. In one year, 25,000 workers died on the job; many more were injured. Child workers had three times as many accidents as adults. If a person lost an arm in an accident, no one helped with doctor's bills. If a worker complained, he was fired. And women were often paid half a man's wages.<sup>23</sup>

It is this moment that gives birth to labor unions. The obvious purpose for unionization was the protection of workers and effective bargaining through strength in numbers. So, given that

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<sup>20</sup> See, Hubac-Occhipinti, “Anarchist Terrorists, 127–128, and *The Anarchist Encyclopedia*. Accessed May 6, 2020, [recollectionbooks.comm\[web.archive.org\]](http://recollectionbooks.comm[web.archive.org])

<sup>21</sup> Hubac-Occhipinti, “Anarchist Terrorists,” 403.

<sup>22</sup> “The Haymarket Affair,” Illinois Labor History Society, [www.illinoislaborhistory.org](http://www.illinoislaborhistory.org). Accessed July 17, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> [www.thirteen.org](http://www.thirteen.org). Accessed July 17, 2020.

the Haymarket rally was a labor event, let's hear from one of its organizers, German immigrant August Spies (1855–1877), an upholsterer and, yes, a committed anarchist. Standing on the makeshift speaker's platform, Spies proclaimed:

There seems to prevail the opinion in some quarters that this meeting has been called for the purpose of inaugurating a riot, hence these warlike preparations on the part of so-called "law and order." However, let me tell you at the beginning that this meeting has not been called for any such purpose. The object of this meeting is to explain the general situation of the eight-hour movement and to throw light upon various incidents in connection with it.

Tensions in Chicago were elevated. Two days before, Lucy Parsons led a peaceful march of some 35,000 workers down Michigan Avenue to high-spirited chants of "an eight-hour day/with no cut in pay!"<sup>24</sup> The next day, however, peace erupted into violence when the officers of "law and order" referred to by Spies, i.e., the Chicago police, attacked and killed picketing factory workers, predominantly Irish-Americans, at the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company plant. Perhaps it was fortuitous that this evening on Haymarket Square the expected turnout of 20,000 dwindled to a mere 200 or fewer. The event was quickly becoming anti-climactic. It began over an hour late. Most of the scheduled speakers did not show up. As darkness fell, a chilly wind kicked up, rain began to fall, and people began leaving. Even Chicago's pro-labor mayor, Carter Harrison Sr., went home early.<sup>25</sup> Then, some 200 policemen appeared, marching shoulder to shoulder, clubs in hand, down the street and into the square. The captain bellowed at the speaker to stop and the crowd to disperse. Someone—to this day no one knows who it was—threw a bomb into the police ranks. The police began firing their pistols into the darkness and murky chaos. While the actual explosion killed one policeman, six others died later from gunshot wounds, and sixty were injured. Four workers were killed by gunshot, and numerous others injured. The crowd frantically fled the scene. In the subsequent investigation, one officer anonymously confessed to the *Chicago Tribune* that "A very large number of the police were wounded by each other's revolvers...It was every man for himself, and while some got two or three squares away, the rest emptied their revolvers, mainly into each other."<sup>26</sup> This anonymous statement gains credibility from an official report, which contains this account:

[The police] swept both sidewalks with a hot and telling fire, and in a few minutes the Anarchists were flying in every direction. I then gave the order to cease firing, fearing that some of our men, in the darkness might fire into each other.<sup>27</sup>

Apparently, they did just that. Yet, eight anarchists were eventually convicted of conspiracy to murder, although neither the bomb thrower nor the source of the bomb were ever discovered.

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<sup>24</sup> Parson's (1851–1942) was a remarkable woman. An African-American, she was born enslaved. She later became a self-described anarcho-communist, and a leading figure in the labor struggle. Parsons became famous throughout the United States when she advocated for her white husband, Albert Parsons, who was implicated in, and eventually executed for, the Haymarket Affair. Read her sleep, "I am an Anarchist," at *Black Past*, [www.blackpast.org](http://www.blackpast.org). Accessed July 17, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce C. Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs: A Social History of Chicago's Anarchists, 1870–1900* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 188.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 209.

<sup>27</sup> "Inspector John Bonfield report to Frederick Ebersold, General Superintendent of Police, 1886 May 30, *Chicago Historical Society*, [www.chicagohistoryresources.org](http://www.chicagohistoryresources.org). Accessed July 17, 2020.

In fact, no evidence was presented at trial that tied any of the eight anarchists to the bomb in any way. In fact, some of them were not even present at Haymarket, or in Chicago, that evening. Spies, our speaker, was one of four men eventually hanged. Standing on the gallows, shrouded, hands tied behind his back, Spies yelled out as the executioner placed the noose around his throat, “The day will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today!”<sup>28</sup>

Only a few years later, in 1893, John Peter Altgeld, the governor of Illinois, pardoned the three surviving Haymarket anarchists. As the legendary lawyer Clarence Darrow said at his funeral in 1902, Altgeld “fearlessly and knowingly bared his devoted head to the fiercest, most vindictive criticism ever heaped upon a public man, because he loved justice and dared to do the right.” The right that Altgeld performed was “to redress one of the most shameful injustices in the state’s history,” the Haymarket trial.<sup>29</sup> It will be instructive to note the governor’s reasons for taking the extraordinarily rare action of issuing a career-ending pardon to inconsequential workers:

FIRST: That the jury which tried the case was a packed jury selected to convict.

SECOND: That according to the law as laid down by the supreme court, both prior to and again since the trial of this case, the jurors, according to their own answers, were not competent jurors and the trial was therefore not a legal trial.

THIRD: That the defendants were not proven to be guilty of the crime charged in the indictment.

FOURTH: That as to the defendant Neebe, the state’s attorney had declared at the close of the evidence that there was no case against him, and yet he has been kept in prison all these years.

FIFTH: That the trial judge was either so prejudiced against the defendants, or else so determined to win the applause of a certain class in the community that he could not and did not grant a fair trial.<sup>30</sup>

The second notorious American case also ended in a governor’s abashed pardon. This case, known as the Sacco and Vanzetti Affair, concerns Nicolo Sacco, a heel-trimmer by trade, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a fish peddler. In 1920, these two Italian immigrants, and self-professed anarchists, were accused of killing two employees during the anarchist-plot motivated robbery of a Braintree, Massachusetts factory. The details are not relevant to my purposes here.<sup>31</sup> What is relevant is that the shakiness of the evidence and the prevalence of blatant anti-Italian and anti-leftist sentiments in the case were so glaring that it became an international *cause célèbre*, with

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<sup>28</sup> Avrich, *Haymarket Tragedy*, 293.

<sup>29</sup> “Governor John Peter Altgeld Pardons the Haymarket Prisoners,” *Illinois Labor History Society*, [www.illinoislaborhistory.org](http://www.illinoislaborhistory.org). Accessed July 17, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> You can read this rare, extraordinarily courageous political pardon in its entirety, where each of these five points is exhaustively argued: “The Pardon of the Haymarket Prisoners (June 26, 1893),” *Famous Trials*, [famous-trials.com](http://famous-trials.com). Accessed July 17, 2020.

<sup>31</sup> For the details, see Moshik Temkin, *The Sacco and Vanzetti Affair: America on Trial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). The title of the book is, obviously, very telling in itself. The case of Sacco and Vanzetti was not a “trial” as much as an “affair,” a controversial, convoluted, fiasco. In that regard, it had more in common with the 1894–1906 French political scandal, “L’Affaire Dreyfus,” whereby an artillery captain was falsely accused of passing military secrets to the Germans. As with the identity of Sacco and Vanzetti as Italians and anarchists, a crucial key in understanding this affair is that fact that the accused, Albert Dreyfus, was Jewish, a merely tolerated outsider.



writers, academics, actors, religious leaders, and even future U.S. Supreme Court justice Felix Frankfurter, calling for a pardon when Sacco and Vanzetti were convicted. Instead, they were, of course, electrocuted. The only clear outcome of this “calamity,” according to one prominent European observer, was that it laid bare “this frightful America, whose heart is made of stone; this America, for whom humanity does not exist.”<sup>32</sup> Fifty years later, the governor of Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis, publicly admitting the tragic failure of the justice system to render a fair verdict to Sacco and Vanzetti, issued a proclamation that “any disgrace should be forever removed from their names.”<sup>33</sup>

What might have instigated injustices so profoundly shameful that even agents of the State felt compelled to redress them? Since I am asking my reading to consider, however momentarily, violence from the side of anarchism, I will present the answer to this question from the perspective of labor. Today, Labor, of course, stands nowhere near anarchism in either its self-understanding or articulation of values. In fact, on the political spectrum, labor is arguably closer to the center, where conservative meets liberal. Labor does, however, share at least one crucial premise with anarchism. And it is the reality behind this premise that provides the proper frame for anarchist—and labor—violence. Consider this explanation from the Illinois Labor History Society, under the entry “Governor John Peter Altgeld Pardons the Haymarket Prisoners:”

Those enjoying increasingly concentrated wealth in Chicago had little patience with working people, especially those of foreign birth, who had the gall to stand up for their rights. Such activities were seen as a threat to the free market, the individual’s right to work 10 to 12 hours a day for a pittance...The Chicago establishment, led by Joseph Medill’s *Tribune*, saw the incident as a chance to wipe out the leadership of the city’s radical labor movement and send a message to all who would seek just wages, decent working conditions, and reduced hours for working men and women.<sup>34</sup>

I could cite additional examples of violence. But it is not necessary. Whether you are prepared to believe that “The notorious events that took place in Chicago in 1886 [and elsewhere] had more to do with self-defense than terrorist action”<sup>35</sup>, as one scholar claims, I hope you will consider the outlines of a simple logic. Roughly, the logic goes like this: *Premise 1. Oppressed people—the poor, wage workers, and politically radical immigrants, in our examples—lack faith in “the system.”* Experience has proven to them that the laws, with its courts and police; the politicians, with their massive government bureaucracy; and even the “respectable” class of citizens known, in the older parlance as the bourgeoisie, or today simply as the middle class, with its investment in the perpetuation of the status quo and their privileged position within it, will block access by all means necessary. *Premise 2. The means of oppression, exploitation, and denial of social goods can be summed up in a word: violence.* This premise holds that the very formations that make up the status quo, including in addition to those just mentioned, the education system, the media, the

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<sup>32</sup> Temkin, *The Sacco and Vanzetti Affair*, 118.

<sup>33</sup> See “Guide to the FBI Files on Sacco and Vanzetti on Microfilm,” Cornell University Library website, [tinyurl.com](http://tinyurl.com). Accessed July 17, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> “Governor John Peter Altgeld Pardons the Haymarket Prisoners,” *Illinois Labor History Society*, [www.illinoislaborhistory.org](http://www.illinoislaborhistory.org). Accessed July 17, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Hubac-Occhipinti, “Anarchist Terrorists of the Nineteenth Century,” 122. Speaking of self-defense, a headline from the Washington Post reads, “Trump ordered federal forces to quell Portland protests. But the chaos ended as soon as they left.”

entertainment industry, the corporate world, finance and banking, and so on, function in ways that cause widespread harm. The term for this variety of social harm is “structural violence:”

Structural violence is one way of describing social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm’s way...The arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are violent because they cause injury to people...Neither culture nor pure individual will is at fault; rather, historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces conspire to constrain individual agency. Structural violence is visited upon all those whose social status denies them access to the fruits of scientific and social progress.<sup>36</sup>

Recall that “capitalist realism,” as articulated by Mark Fisher, operates largely unobserved, like a “pervasive atmosphere,” simultaneously conditioning and constraining perspectives, beliefs, and behaviors. I feel certain that few of my readers would characterize the American health care system as inherently “violent.” But the claim here is that structural violence is typically invisible even to itself, even, that is, to the actual people who are subjected to the structure, both as agents and, literally in this case, as patients.

Over 20 years’ worth of studies show that people of color who arrive at a hospital while having a heart attack are significantly less likely to receive aspirin, beta-blocking drugs, clot-dissolving drugs, acute cardiac catheterization, angioplasty, or bypass surgery. Race, class, and gender clearly make a difference in how patients are diagnosed and treated.<sup>37</sup>

Premise 2 holds, furthermore, that structural violence is enabled by a facade of naturalness and inevitably. That is, we have become so inured to “the way things are” that we fail to see that—like Ursula Le Guin’s observation about the divine right of kings, which for millennia seemed as natural as the rising of the sun—our currently harmful social formations are wholly contingent human creations. What makes it so difficult to see this fact is that our shared social experience is saturated by features that legitimize the violence.

Aspects of culture and social life—exemplified by religion, ideology, language, art, law and science—that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence, making direct and structural violence look, or even feel, right—or at least not wrong.<sup>38</sup>

We can take as an example the structure that, after health care, I imagine many people will find the least plausibly “violent.” Virtually every instance of blackness and darkness that I gave

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<sup>36</sup> “Structural Violence,” *Structural Violence: inequality and the harm it causes*, [www.structuralviolence.org](http://www.structuralviolence.org). Accessed July 19, 2020. The origination of this term is usually ascribed to Johan Galtung and his 1969 article “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3. (1969), 167–191. Galtung, a Norwegian sociologist, is considered a central figure in the founding of peace and conflict studies.

<sup>37</sup> “Structural Violence,” *Structural Violence: inequality and the harm it causes*, [www.structuralviolence.org](http://www.structuralviolence.org). Accessed July 19, 2020.

<sup>38</sup> “Cultural Violence,” *European Institute for Gender Equality*, [eige.europa.eu](http://eige.europa.eu). Accessed July 20, 2020.

earlier—the angry black male “thug,” the hyper-sexual black female, the black welfare queen, the negligent black father, etc.—proliferated through American culture as entertainment, whether on the internet, on television, in movies, in advertising, on the nightly news (arguably pitched largely as entertainment), or in literature, high and low. The ubiquity of such imagery has the effect of creating a social imagination for which the images are, effectively, true. So, when a young black man is killed by a police officer, we are already primed to assume the former’s guilt, or at least that he must have somehow deserved it.

In our nineteenth-century examples above, the social imagination drew from a vast store of imagery related to immigrants, workers, and the poor. Many of the leading figures in the socialist movement of the day were, like August Spies, the speaker at Haymarket, German immigrants. In fact, five of the eight men arrested for the Haymarket Massacre were German immigrants. The comic stereotype of the German male was of a ponderous big-bellied, big-chinned, lager-swilling butcher or bar owner with a thick accent. But this comic image was overshadowed by a much more ominous one, engendering in the American middle class imagination a deep-seated suspicion and fear of “Deinameit Schwatz.” A favorite target of the popular press was Johann Most (1846–1906). On release from a German prison for his seditious journalism, Most came to America and threw himself into socialist causes as a newspaper editor and orator. His impassioned speeches in a heavily accented German presented the middle class press with an easy caricature:

His name it was Deinameit Schwartz  
He was born in the slums of Berlin.  
His beer he demolished in quarts  
He possessed large abundance of “chin.”  
He came to America’s shore  
With a new patent bomb-shell or ball;  
With a thirst for destruction and gore,  
And a liver distended with gall.  
He was met by ten brazen-tongued bands;  
Escorted ‘neath banners of red;  
And ‘mid anarchist shouts and demands  
For a speech, to his quarters was led.<sup>39</sup>

The funny, or rather cruelly ridiculous, image of a male Italian immigrant was of an unshaven, droopy mustached, organ grinder or construction worker belting out opera librettos as he works.<sup>40</sup> As with his German comrade, however, the often anarchist leanings of the Italian immigrant rendered him “hot-blooded and volatile, given to quick argument and frequent violence.” Even workers and the poor were targeted in the press. Workers were ungrateful men, women, and children, whose ignorant presumption gave them the gall to challenge the domination of the superior middle and upper classes by, for example, demanding an eight-hour workday. The poor were depicted wearing ripped rags as clothing, with ratty disheveled hair, filthy faces, and dirt-stained bare feet. They were characterized as vile, base, lazy, disease-infected, non-humans

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<sup>39</sup> *Texas Siftings*, 6 (June 5, 1886): 9, cited in William R. Linneman, “Immigrant Stereotypes: 1880–1900,” *Studies in American Humor*, vol. 1, no. 1 (April 1974): 35–36.

<sup>40</sup> Linneman, “Immigrant Stereotypes:” 37.

who earned and deserved every misery and privation that came to them.<sup>41</sup> All of these examples appeared in the burgeoning “humor” magazines of the day. That is to say, they appeared, disingenuously, in a form that made their consumption all the readier, namely, in the guise of entertainment:

Written largely for the urban middle class male, the influence of the illustrated humor periodicals went far beyond their combined 500,000 weekly circulation. They were sold in public places—barbershops, trains, and saloons—and each copy might have several readers. Newspapers clipped their material and spread their opinions further. Their impact on public opinion should not be underestimated. They not only recorded the times, they helped create the times.<sup>42</sup>

So, to review our logic of anarchist violence: *Premise 1. Oppressed people—the poor, wage workers, and politically radical immigrants in our examples—lack faith in “the system.”* The reader should be able to infer that anarchism stands on the side of the oppressed. This is true regardless of the social position of the individual anarchist. (If you, too, stand here, you are well-positioned to become a committed anarchist.) *Premise 2. The means of oppression, exploitation, and denial of social goods can be summed up in a word: violence.* This violence, moreover, is not merely the brutal physical, bodily violence of policing, punishment, and prison; it includes insidious everyday forms of structural and cultural violence. So, let’s conclude with a question: *Conclusion: “is it not cruel to demand peace from those who are not permitted to live in it?”* And another question: “A few windows got smashed. Why are 214 people looking at ten years in prison?” These questions appear in Natasha Lennard’s book, *Being Numerous: Essays on Non-Fascist Life*.<sup>43</sup> The first question is Lennard’s take on philosopher Bernard Williams’s contention that “to say peace when there is no peace is to say nothing.” The second question was posed by a twenty-three-year-old protester at Donald Trump’s presidential inauguration, named Olivia Alsip, who, with other protesters, journalists, medics, and legal observers, was brought up on felony riot charges.<sup>44</sup>

Lennard’s argument will be instructive to consider, particularly since it brings us up to our own time. I ask the reader to consider that while the terms have changed from the nineteenth-century, the logic has remained exactly the same. That is, Mexican, South American, and Arab immigrants have replaced Germans, Italians, Irish as the scourge threatening America. The “poor” has been replaced by “the 99%,” those who struggle to keep their heads above financial waters working underpaid and typically meaningless jobs, including often the once secure professional

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<sup>41</sup> See, Federica Durante and Susan T. Fiske, “How Social-Class Stereotypes Maintain Inequality,” *National Institutes of Health*, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov). Accessed July 21, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Linneman, “Immigrant Stereotypes:” 28.

<sup>43</sup> Natasha Lennard, *Being Numerous: Essays on the Non-Fascist Life* (London: Verso, 2019), 87, 88. I am referring to the ebook, whose page numbers may differ from the printed book.

<sup>44</sup> The lead prosecutor of the case (or should we say “affair?”), Assistant U.S. Attorney Jennifer Kerkhoff, justified this draconian act as follows: “A person can be convicted of rioting when they themselves have not personally broken a window or personally thrown a rock. It’s the group that’s the danger. The group that’s criminal.” Charges against Alsip and most of the other defendants were eventually dropped on the basis of prosecutorial misconduct. Prosecutors failed “to disclose potentially exculpatory evidence to the defense before trial, a violation of the so-called Brady rule.” Even more egregiously, they edited out video evidence that was favorable to the defendants. The presiding judge ruled that the Brady violations were “‘serious’ and ‘intentional,’ but reserved judgment about whether they were ‘malevolent.’” See, Sam Adler-Bell, “With Last Charges Against J20 Protesters Dropped, Defendants Seel Accountability for Prosecutors,” *The Intercept*, [theintercept.com](http://theintercept.com). Accessed July 21, 2020.

class. The 99% stands in direct contrast to “the 1%,” who own nearly as much wealth as everyone else combined.<sup>45</sup> The class consciousness and societal imaginary that used to identify “workers” has been obliterated by decades of continuous, often illegal and violent, anti-union activities by employers backed by the State.<sup>46</sup> Thus, “workers,” or in Marxist terms, “the proletariat,” has been replaced by “the precariat,” the growing class of perpetually insecure workers who generate the obscene wealth of corporate America.<sup>47</sup> (Some Covid-19 pandemic-era headlines read: “Jeff Bezos Adds Record \$13 Billion in Single Day to Fortune;” and “This is the last week of \$600 unemployment benefits.”<sup>48</sup>) Interestingly, two terms of fear-mongering derision have remained the same: socialism and anarchism. In the summer of 2020, Donald Trump, in a wall-of-mirrors mashup of nineteenth century anti-radical rhetoric and Richard Nixon’s 1968 law and order platform, banked his re-election campaign on inciting fear of anarchists and socialists. His immediate, urgent task was to get “radical-left anarchists” off the streets in the wake of the protests sparked by the police murder of George Floyd. Because anarchists were “doing everything within their power to foment hatred and anarchy,” his administration designated antifa a terrorist organization. As Attorney General William Barr put it, “The violence instigated and carried out by Antifa and other similar groups in connection with the rioting is domestic terrorism and will be treated accordingly.”<sup>49</sup> The longer term intention of the Trump plan is to cast socialism as a dire threat to America. In a recent speech, his surrogate, Vice President Mike Pence, declared six times with virtually the identical phrase: “My fellow Americans...We have two paths before us: one of freedom and opportunity, the other of socialism and decline.”<sup>50</sup> Given the rise and increasing popularity of left-leaning politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT) among young voters, even liberals like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi feel compelled to make clear: “I do reject socialism...If people have that view, that’s their view. That is not the view of the Democratic Party.” In fact, so far apart are liberals and barely left of liberal Democratic Socialists, that a recent article reported that “Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is prepared for the possibility that Democrats in New York could redraw her district after the 2020 election.” That’s *Democrats!*<sup>51</sup>

What is going on here, and what does it have to do with violence? First of all, I want to emphasize that, even if you are reading this manifesto years after it was published, I believe you

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<sup>45</sup> “Comparing the assets of the rich, poor, and middle class,” *Economic Research: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis*, fredblog.stlouisfed.org. Accessed July 21, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> “U.S. employers are charged with violating federal law in 41.5% of all union election campaigns,” *Economic Policy Institute*, www.epi.org. Accessed July 21, 2020. The report of this non-partisan think tank finds: “The data show that U.S. employers are willing to use a wide range of legal and illegal tactics to frustrate the rights of workers to form unions and collectively bargain. Employers are charged with violating federal law in 41.5% of all union election campaigns. And one out of five union election campaigns involves a charge that a worker was illegally fired for union activity. Employers are charged with making threats, engaging in surveillance activities, or harassing workers in nearly a third of all union election campaigns. Beyond this, there are many things employers can do legally to thwart union organizing; employers spend roughly \$340 million annually on “union avoidance” consultants to help them stave off union elections. This combination of illegal conduct and legal coercion has ensured that union elections are characterized by employer intimidation and in no way reflect the democratic process guaranteed by the National Labor Relations Act.”

<sup>47</sup> See Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> *Bloomberg*, www.bloomberg.com, and CNN, www.cnn.com, respectively. Accessed July 21, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> “Trump Lays Blame for Clashes on ‘Radical Left Anarchists,’” NPR, www.npr.org. Accessed July 22, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> “Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Dangers of Socialism,” *The White House*, www.whitehouse.gov. Accessed July 21, 2020.

<sup>51</sup> Aida Chávez, “New York Democrats Could Eliminate Ocasio-Cortez’s District After 2020,” *The Intercept*, theintercept.com. Accessed July 21, 2020.

will discover that, on analysis of your current situation, the *logic* that I am illustrating, if not the actual terms, remains valid. Second of all, I want to warn the reader that what follows may be rough going, and ask only that you read to the end and with an open mind.

According to Lennard, the violence that is endemic to our current situation is an “accident” of liberalism. (It is an intricate argument with a venerable lineage. Here, I can only give a broad sense of what that argument contends.<sup>52</sup>) By “accident,” Lennard means something like an unintended consequence. For instance, 1.35 million traffic deaths and 50-some million non-lethal injuries per year are an accident of the invention of the automobile; a hole in the ozone layer is an accident of industrialization; the disproportionate murder of young black men by the police is an accident of Enlightenment conceptions of “racial” hierarchies, and so on. As “accidents,” such consequences are, she says, “baked into the context.” Our current “context” is provided by modern-day liberalism, the kind that is represented by the American Democratic Party. “Liberal centrism,” Lennard argues, echoing my own belief, “is conservative.” While liberals typically see themselves as socially progressive good guys, the historical record shows that “Many progressive victories claimed by its [i.e., liberalism’s] adherents were built on the back, at least in part, of decades-long radical struggles.” Such co-opted struggles include women’s suffrage, abolition of slavery, an eight-hour workday, abolishing child labor, work safety regulations, civil rights, collective bargaining, and, most recently, Stonewall and LGBTQ rights, and Black Lives Matter. It is typically only in hindsight, long after the risks, and lumps, have been taken and the many losses incurred, that liberals stake a claim in the cause. Lennard is, however, making an even more serious charge against contemporary liberals. She is, namely, implicating their attitudes, beliefs, and ways of being, or “habits,” with fascism.

Unwilling to reckon with the accidents attendant on innovations they otherwise applaud, which are not mistakes, centrist ideologues fail to offer weapons, let alone a sturdy shield, against the fascism of the state, the white supremacist constellations it encourages, and the micro-fascisms that permeate daily life and habit.

Her explanation for why liberal ideology does not protect society against fascism is Lennard’s most damning contention of all. Its import is bound up in the term “micro-fascisms.” “Fascism” here does not denote the large-scale twentieth-century totalitarian regimes of Hitler and Mussolini. It is not used as a political marker of contemporary white supremacist organizations, the neo-Nazi movement, or the alt-right. Neither is it intended to define tendencies within Trump’s administration, which, as I write, has sent unidentified federal forces to fight the “ugly anarchists” in Portland, and threatened to do likewise in Chicago, Philadelphia, New York City, Detroit, Balti-

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<sup>52</sup> See also, Walter Benjamin, *The Critique of Violence* (link at end); Paul Virilio, *Speed and Violence: An Essay on Dromology* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1977 [1986]) and AK Thompson, *Black Bloc, White Riot* (Oakland: AK Press, 2010). In an interview, AK Thompson says of the latter book: “I argued that black bloc violence was both seductive and disconcerting to the white middle class because it made clear that another sort of politics existed beyond representation. Although the black bloc could not move decisively into this new political space, it served as a kind of limit situation for those who remained trapped within the representational sphere. Rather than making demands, black bloc violence tended to open up zones in which new forms of sociality might emerge. In this way, it helped to reveal the intimate connection between violence, production, and politics.” Benjamin’s text is available online at the *Critical Theory Consortium*: [criticaltheoryconsortium.org](http://criticaltheoryconsortium.org). Accessed July 21, 2020.

more, and Oakland.<sup>53</sup> Fascism is all of that, and more—or perhaps, and *less*. Much as I am arguing for anarchism in this manifesto, Lennard contends that these large-scale manifestations of fascism are possible only because of the quotidian “fascistic habit” that conditions so much of our lives in our liberal democracy. Long before this habit results in the desire of the body politic “to dominate, oppress, and obliterate the nameable ‘other,’”<sup>54</sup> it manifests as everyday, micro-level domination and oppression, acceptance of hierarchy, respect for law and order, deference to authority, acquiescence to top-down-leadership, and so on. Significantly, the liberal “habit” of fascist tendencies shows up as equivocation concerning the place of violence in the struggle for social change. Given that every single one of the radical victories that I cited above came in the wake of police batons, teargas, jailhouse beatings, maiming, concussions, lacerations, incarceration, and death, this equivocation is profoundly revealing.

Lennard provides a litmus test for where a reader might stand on the continuum from liberal-conservative-fascist to socialist-libertarian-anarchist. Do you recall the time that American neo-Nazi leader Richard Spencer was giving an interview to an Australian news crew on the streets of Washington D.C. following the inauguration of Donald Trump? If not, please pause your reading and watch it: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). As you will see, Spencer was sucker-punched hard in his face by a black-clad figure (antifa?) appearing suddenly in the frame. Lennard, who was on the streets demonstrating that dark, rainy day in January, writes: “I had thought we could all agree: a prominent neo-Nazi was punched in the face; it was a good thing. I had miscalculated ‘we.’” So, we can turn Lennard’s reaction into a political litmus test: What do you think, *was* it “a good thing”? Lennard reasoned that since the liberal media—*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, MSNBC, NPR, etc.—had been wringing its hands over the fascist tendencies exhibited by the newly installed Trump administration<sup>55</sup>, it would celebrate the unambiguous silencing of a prominent fascist voice. She was dead wrong. The punch “was met with censure from the same liberal media microcosms that had spent the previous weeks nail-biting about fascism.”

Why should Lennard be surprised at this outcome of disapproval, and why is it a litmus test of political standing? It has to do with your attitude toward violence. In light of the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville in 2017, where a neo-Nazi drove his car into a crowd of protesters, killing Heather Heyer, “liberal commentators who had [previously] written baseless screeds comparing the threat of far-left anti-fascists to that of white nationalism would surely think twice about such a false equivalency.” No, that did not happen. After hearing the president of the United States say, in the aftermath of the confrontation between white nationalists and Charlottesville, that “there’s blame on both sides”<sup>56</sup>, Lennard felt certain that the liberal media was about to drop its false equivalency between far-left and far-right violence.

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<sup>53</sup> “Portland protests: Trump threatens to send officers to more US cities,” *BBC News*, [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com). Accessed July 21, 2020. His “ugly Anarchists” remark was in reference to the autonomous zone created in Seattle in the aftermath of Black Lives Matters protests against the murder of George Floyd by police. Twitter, [twitter.com](https://twitter.com)

<sup>54</sup> French philosopher Michel Foucault refers to, “The fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.” And an anarchist motto goes, “Kill the cop inside your head!” Cited in Lennard, *Being Numerous*, 36 and 38, respectively.

<sup>55</sup> Lennard lists as such tendencies marked out by the press: “selective populism, nationalism, racism, traditionalism, the deployment of Newspeak and a disregard for reasoned debate,” 22.

<sup>56</sup> See *PolitiFact* for the entire transcript of Trump’s now infamous “good people of both sides” statement, [www.politifact.com](http://www.politifact.com). Accessed July 22, 2020.

Instead, it doubled down. In the month that followed the intolerable events in Charlottesville, America's six top broadsheet newspapers ran twenty-eight opinion pieces condemning anti-fascist action, but only twenty-seven condemning neo-Nazis, white supremacists and Trump's failure to disavow them.<sup>57</sup>

What was underway was the predictable process of normalizing fascist tendencies within a liberal democracy, a process that the liberal media had just recently been warning about. This process relied on the "platforming" of, for instance, the "'polite' Midwestern Hitler fan with a Twin Peaks tattoo whose manners 'would please anyone's mother'...the 'dapper' white nationalist"<sup>58</sup>, and, of course, the equally dapper, Ivy-educated, fascist spokesperson son of a doctor and an heiress, Richard Spencer. This is a key element of our litmus test. Should a liberal democracy enable enemies of such basic values as, for instance, equality, inclusion, and multiculturalism, to get so much as a foothold in public discourse? Do you agree with liberal icon Michelle Obama's strategy of going high when they go low? Or do you agree that no amount of liberal appeals to goodness and moral superiority can effectively counter "a fascist epistemology of power and domination—[which] are Spencer and his ilk's first principles."<sup>59</sup> I would like to suggest that we have come to a starkly divided pathway. Equivocation is not neutral. Equivocation is positioned on the side of the status quo. And "the status quo" is the name for a context in which violence is *already* the norm. Anarchist violence, if you accept that premise, is then properly termed "counterviolence," or ever more to the point, "impossible nonviolence." It is:

not an instigation of violence onto a terrain of preexisting peace. A situation in which fascists can gather to preach hate and chant "blood and soil"—this is a background state of violence. The problem we face, then, is not so much that of *necessary violence* as it is one of *impossible nonviolence*.<sup>60</sup>

It is a difficult premise to accept, but bears repeating: the term "fascist" ultimately is not limited to the blatant examples represented by torch-bearing thugs chanting "blood and soil" or by State death cults like Hitler's Nazi Party. Rather, the term is shorthand for insidious "habits" within liberal democracy itself. The most determinate of these habits is also the most difficult for liberals to shake: a commitment to law and order. In this regard, nothing has changed since the days of Auguste Vaillant, Sacco and Vanzetti, and the deed propagandists. As long as the "accidents" of liberalism are with us (capitalism, for instance) the logic of violence will remain valid. Ironically, this is a phenomenon recognized by one of white liberals' favorite go-to figures for issues of social justice. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" is a remarkable indictment of the fact that law and order, and the numerous accompanying values and structures that enable it, is baked into American liberal ideology. King wrote his letter in response to another letter, titled "A Call for Unity," written and published openly by eight white clergymen appealing to demonstrators "to observe the principles of law and order and common sense." These clergymen, representing several Christian denominations as well as a rabbi, held the "honest convictions [that] racial matters could properly be pursued in the courts but urged that

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<sup>57</sup> Lennard, *On Being Numerous*, 27.

<sup>58</sup> Lennard, *On Being Numerous*, 28.

<sup>59</sup> Lennard, *On Being Numerous*, 32.

<sup>60</sup> Lennard, *On Being Numerous*, 48.



decisions of those courts should in the meantime be peacefully obeyed.” They further held that “hatred and violence have no sanction in our religious and political tradition.”<sup>61</sup> King makes two “confessions” concerning his response to the letter. His confessions bear directly on the argument I am making. It will be instructive to quote Dr. King’s powerful, eloquent, and absolutely damning “confession” at length:

First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action;” who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a “more convenient season.” Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.”<sup>62</sup>

If you are thinking that the logic of violence does not apply to a practitioner of nonviolence, such as King was, I ask you to consider two brief rejoinders. First, as King’s metaphor of opening the boil “with all its ugliness” indicates, nonviolence, whether in Gandhi’s India, Mandela’s South Africa, or King’s America, is predicated precisely on the eruption of violence, of violence that already exists, barely below the surface of civility. Violence, in other words, is the necessary condition for effective nonviolence. Second, as Vicky Osterweil notes, the liberal claim that civil rights advances were made because of nonviolence disregards the fact that persistent, seemingly unending, destructive riots played a consequential role in John F. Kennedy’s “Report to the

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<sup>61</sup> “Alabama Clergymen’s Letter to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.” tinyurl.com. Accessed July 22, 2020. King’s response follows.

<sup>62</sup> You can read the original typewritten letter in its entirety online at *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute*, okra.stanford.edu. Accessed July 22, 2020.

American People on Civil Rights”<sup>63</sup>, which led to Lyndon Johnson’s historic signing of civil rights legislation: “To argue that the movement achieved what it did in spite of rather than as a result of the mixture of not-nonviolent and nonviolent action is spurious at best.”<sup>64</sup>

The question is unavoidable: Where do you stand? Recall John Dewey’s definition of a liberal as someone with particular “moral attitudes and aspirations.” Similarly, this exercise is intended to reveal a stark attitudinal-aspirational *decision*—literally, a cut, or fissure, that lays before us the chasm separating Vaillant and his accusers; Alexander Berkman and Henry Clay Frick, the exploitative chairman of the Carnegie Steel Company Chairman whom Berkman attempted to kill; the Haymarket victims and the state-business nexus that wanted them “wiped out;” George Floyd, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Breonna Taylor, and 772 other black Americans and the police officers who killed them.<sup>65</sup> This litmus test is intended to force each of us to take a stand on one side or the other; and to do so, if not with consequential action, then at least with our “moral attitudes and aspirations.” Can you think of any other way to avoid perpetuating the “great liberal tradition [of standing] on the wrong side of history until that history is comfortably in the past?”<sup>66</sup>

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#### NOTES

Excerpted from *An Anarchist’s Manifesto*

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<sup>63</sup> View Kennedy’s speech to the American people: “Report to the American People on Civil Rights,” *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, [www.jfklibrary.org](http://www.jfklibrary.org). Accessed July 23, 2020.

<sup>64</sup> Lennard, *On Being Numerous*, 82.

<sup>65</sup> See *Statista*. This figure is from 2017 to July 2020. [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com). Accessed July 22, 2020.

<sup>66</sup> Lennard, *On Being Numerous*, 29.

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Anti-Copyright



Glenn Wallis  
The Story of Anarchist Violence  
2020

An excerpt from *An Anarchist's Manifesto* provided by the author. Book is published by Warbler Press.

This is an excerpt of a larger book *An Anarchist's Manifesto*

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