

ANTIFA

FASCISTS AND ANTIFASCISTS COMPETE IN THE STREETS AND IN THE MEDIA

by Kelly Kenoyer

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eneath the surface of liberal Eugene, there's a war brewing. And both sides are recruiting.

The two sides say they consider it a war for the very soul of this nation. They both track their opponents and sometimes participate in violent protests. They're both grassroots, and while the issue is national in scale, both sides are very, very local.

Propaganda is being plastered on telephone poles around town, marking territory — safe spaces for fascists or anti-fascists respectively. Some from the “alt-right” (a term coined by white nationalist Richard Spencer to disguise the movement's racist and fascist intentions) have even dropped racist propaganda at the *Eugene Weekly* office, or replaced newspapers in our stands with hate-filled posters.

Antifa, or antifascism, is an ideology — or an action, depending on whom you ask — meant to organize against fascism.

Dante Douglas, a local antifascist activist and member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), says, “When we talk about modern fascism, what we're usually talking about is a combination of reactionary thought, militant organization and far right ideology.”

“The modern fascist in America is overwhelmingly privileged,” he says, pointing to the alt-right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August as a case study in the alt-right political spectrum — “a combination of things like the KKK, The American Nazi party, the national socialism movement — they're the other American Nazi party.”

“A lot of those people call themselves proud fascists, but a lot of them don't,” he says, adding that many call themselves fighters for “european identity.”

Those who organize against fascism call themselves antifascist or antifa. They do it, they say, to protect their communities and their families from harm. To antifa, fascism is a very real threat not only to their lives, but also to American democracy. And the best way to fight it is with an entire community behind them.

On the surface, there are many similarities between the two sides. Both participate in sometimes violent protests. Both attempt to silence voices that they oppose. Both track and monitor members of the opposing side. But antifascism is a reaction to fascism: a reaction to the very real threat to democracy that has historically led to wars, violence and even genocide around the world.

Antifa and the Media

Many of the sources *EW* talked to for this article were reluctant to use their full names. In some cases, they even used fake names or initials to protect their identities. These activists fear that if they're identified, they and their families could be hurt or killed by local fascist actors.

“Black bloc” protest attire serves the same purpose: protecting identities. That's the standard outfit associated with antifa — wearing black head to toe, including a bandana or facemask to hide faces.

Alice is a University of Oregon student and an antifascist activist. Her name has been changed to protect her identity. She's worried that if her true identity is out there, she may face problems at work or have racists knocking on her front door, aiming to hurt her or her family.

“Masking up just helps protect your identity and helps protect you from getting doxed,” she says. “I do not want to get doxed, I want to stay safe and keep my family safe, and that's just one way of doing that.”

Doxing, the act of searching out and publishing identifying information about an individual, typically with malicious intent, is a common tactic used by both antifascists and fascists.

The use of fake names or just first names in this article is a safety measure requested by those interviewed to prevent such attacks.

“I get confused by people who don't support antifa,” Alice says. “It's antifascist. I don't understand how you can not support that unless you're a fascist.”

Alice says that antifa has a reputation for being violent thanks to the media, but says that reputation is unfair. “They focus on the violence,” she says. “But you can put up a sticker that says Nazis aren't welcome here, and that is the same act of fighting fascism that one can make more easily than finding a Nazi and punching them in the face.”

Antifascist organizers generally consider antifa and antifascism to be synonyms, but the media often frames antifa as a violent group and antifascism as a belief. This distinction primarily comes from outside viewers, and doesn't extend to how most antifascists view themselves.

The media does not have a great reputation with most



antifa organizers. Some groups outright refuse to speak to the media, including Eugene Antifa. Douglas says that's because the media gets antifa wrong so much of the time. “They don't know how to report on decentralized groups,” he says.

Standard media practice generally involves reaching out to the representative or leader of an organization to get a sense of that organization's policies. With decentralized antifa, that's not an option.

The anonymity that most antifascist activists seek can rub the media the wrong way. Journalists prefer that sources use real names unless absolutely necessary, but antifascist activists often refuse to share that information.

Black bloc attire is also frequently conflated with antifa, but black bloc is actually a protest tactic, not affiliated with any political ideology. Katherine, creator of the *Friendly Anarchism* podcast, says, “The black bloc thing has to do with avoiding state repression and avoiding things like losing your job or trying to keep your family safe.”

“It also looks kind of scary, and that's the point, because you're facing down terrible people, and we are the last line between non-violent protesters and violence,” she says. “Antifa are taking punches; they're taking flagpoles to their backs. They're standing there in front of people who