

A Culture of Extremists

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By Jeremy Lee Quinn

There I stood in the United States Capitol, shooting video of [a crew of Trump supporters](#) tearing apart office furniture. Before recording a viral moment of [a Pennsylvania mother](#) yelling into congressional offices through a bullhorn, for months I had asked:

Is there even a far right or a far left anymore?



Atop the north scaffolding, a man in a helmet & gas mask gazes up at the US Capitol.



Washington D.C., 6 January 2021

Of the nearly 200 initial arrestees from inside the Capitol, only 1 in 10 had club affiliations such as Proud Boys, Oath Keepers or Three Percenters per a [University of Chicago](#) study. An author of the report, Keven Ruby, told me that only 1 of the arrested held an ethno-gang affiliation, 'The gang in question is the Latin Kings, not a white nationalist gang. We found no evidence of specifically white nationalist gangs (skinheads, Hammerskins, Aryan brotherhood etc.) among the arrested,' Ruby wrote.



A westward view from the scaffolding. Washington D.C., 6 January 2021.

[The Anti Defamation League](#) added QAnon & the nationalist 'Groypers' to their count, assessing affiliations among the arrestees higher at 25%. The characterization still differs from the impression sold by mass media.

In discussing political violence from the right or left, I ask if there is a collective responsibility to look at populist extremism holistically, rather than using one side's abject behavior to score

partisan political points. After all, just as violence begets violence, polarization & cultural complicity beget more of the same.



Tacoma, Washington 24 January, 2021

This thought came to mind later that month on the streets of Tacoma, Washington. I watched a dozen black-clad youths chase an evangelist counter protester away from their street fire. One individual swung at the man using a large pole with a small street sign attached on the end. The youth wielded the weapon like a giant fly swatter.



The Black Bloc moves on an evangelical counter protester. Tacoma, Washington, 24 January, 2021.

Eventually, the Black Bloc [maced the man in the face](#). The evangelist keeled over in the middle of the road. The attack, like those I had witnessed in San Francisco, Sacramento and Washington DC, was not unique for an 'Antifa' aligned mob.

That night, the crowd in Tacoma chanted 'every day, every night' as crowbar wielding [vandals smashed](#) store windows, while others left cop-hate graffiti in their wake. Little of the night's escapades made the national press. That same week in Portland, Oregon, on the night of President Biden's inauguration, rioters launched an attack [against the federal Immigration & Customs Enforcement \(ICE\) facility](#). They scrawled 'Kill cops' on the exterior.



Tear gas hangs in the air after a night of confrontation between law enforcement and self identifying Leftist rioters. Portland, Oregon January 20th, 2021.

Political riots and violence on the left have a recent history that can be traced back to events [in the San Francisco Bay Area](#) in November of 2016, the night of Donald Trump's election. Riots spread across the bay that week to Oakland, California. The [week of Trump's Inauguration](#) in January of 2017 riot tactics became more widespread in the Pacific Northwest, Chicago & D.C. The use of the techniques hit a fever pitch over the summer of 2020. The genie was out. Black Bloc tactics had gone viral.

The night after the US Capitol riot, I interviewed a California man with a [paramilitary](#) look. [He admitted to studying 'hundreds of hours' of video](#) of Leftist resistance techniques.



A [self identified an 'Extremist'](#) said he was at the Capitol the day before. 7 January, 2021

'For the last 8 months Black Lives Matter and Antifa have proven & shown that violence works,' he told me. I asked if he was an extremist. He said yes 'we are a nation of extremists.'

He also said 'I don't have a problem with National Socialism.' I had no real understanding if this man was on the fringe or the 'fringe of the fringe.' He may have moved in more than one circle.

I did not argue his point in regards to the violence I witnessed on the left. Yet, the right had its excesses prior to 2021. Unrest at two rightwing Capitol riots in Salem, Oregon in December & January were a bellweather. I would be remiss not to mention *Unite the Right* in Charlottesville, Virginia 2017 as further evidence of right wing extremism.

Independent photojournalist [Ford Fischer](#), who documented both Charlottesville and the Capitol riot, [differentiates the two crowd](#) , "It would be hard to say there were coordinated white nationalist groups at the Capitol. But you can name examples of white nationalist leaning people or white nationalist tolerant people who attended," he said.

Rampant mischaracterizations of groups taking to the streets or participating in riot actions predate the Capitol.

The Boogaloo is constantly classified as 'far right' by the press, but is better described as unaffiliated. The word 'Boogaloo' *does not* appear in the criminal complaint [against The Wolverine Watchmen](#), the militia whose members face charges in an alleged plot to kidnap the Governor of Michigan. To add to the confusion, the group was made up of several Trump supporters but the ringleader can be seen on video with [an anarchist flag](#).

The word 'Boogaloo' *does* appear in [the complaint against Steven Carillo](#) of California. The active-duty U.S. Air Force staff sergeant self identified with the movement and is accused of killing two law enforcement officers the first week of the George Floyd protests. 'Boogaloo' were not known to be among the arrestees at the Capitol.

Prosecutors, however, charged five Proud Boys with conspiracy as well as [9 members of the Oath Keepers militia](#) separately. But the Capitol arrestees who have garnered the most attention are perhaps the man in the 'Camp Auschwitz' hoodie and the QAnon 'shaman', whose vegan food requirements alone have many on the right questioning his cultural credentials. Are these fringe outliers truly representative of the wider mass? We could ask the same of the left.

In Denver, Colorado I marched next to a man with a full shoulder tattoo of Joseph Stalin. I have seen more hammer & sickles spray painted on buildings than I can count. I have heard chants for 'more dead cops' from LA to DC.

At every protest, the handful of us on the ground who kept our cameras rolling continue to ask why the media opts for platitudes over the messy truth. Why were hate-crime charges against the Antifa-led Black Bloc in Berkeley, California last October not more widely known? Black conservative activist Philip Anderson Anderson had attempted to organise a rally against Big Tech and [had his two front teeth knocked out](#) by a Black Bloc assailant wearing hard edged, carbon fiber-type gloves before the rally even began.

Those same gloves are constantly marketed to me in pop-up ads on Facebook. The algorithm must have clocked that I have been up close, watching a society in decline.

Following the Presidential Election, the Black Bloc moved unilaterally on the 14th of November in D.C. Daylight video shows them carrying a banner reading [“Punch MAGA in the face”](#) and striking preemptively to assault Trump supporters after their MAGA rally had concluded.

On [the 5th of December](#), a young conservative couple were beaten on the pavement by a group of [Berkeley Antifa](#) and *Antifa Sacramento* marchers. This also didn't make the headlines.



"They damn near killed them," [shouts an observer](#) as a Black Bloc rioter with a club walks away from the scene where a couple was beaten. Sacramento, California, [5 December](#), 2020



Antifa Sacramento led the attacks on those supporting a MAGA rally at the California Capitol. Antifa aligned medics then offered help, much to the confusion of the victims. 5 December 2020

That evening the national media, led by CNN, incorrectly reported ‘dozens of armed protesters’ had amassed outside the Michigan secretary of state’s home. Media pickups reproducing that story tallied in the dozens, However, the Detroit Police, the right wing protesters and the Michigan State police all said [they saw no weapons of any kind](#). The [raw video](#) livestream also revealed that [the right wing protesters were unarmed](#).

Why the media obsession over one event and not the other? The Sacramento attacks also yielded [sensational video of dozens](#) of vandalized vehicles belonging to Trump supporters, with symmetrical action that afternoon in [St. Paul, Minnesota](#). Yet imagined guns ruled the headlines.

Similarly, the Capitol riot trended on Twitter as an ‘armed insurrection’. Yet there were only three arrests of people carrying firearms without a licence [near the Capitol park](#) area out of a crowd of tens of thousands. Perhaps this right-wing extremism, much like the left, is now far more pedestrian than we imagine.



A man scales the northwest bleacher scaffolding outside the Capitol. 6 January, 2021

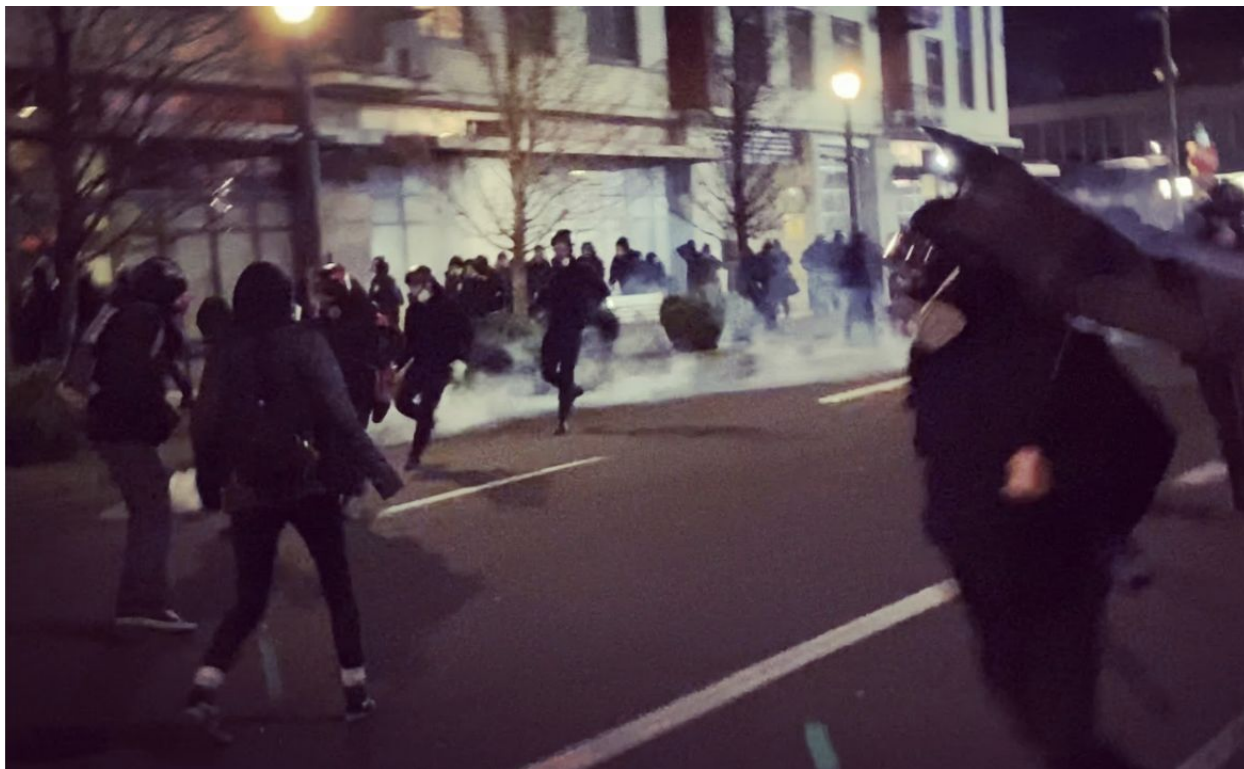
I recorded the woman with a bullhorn in the five o'clock hour in the Capitol, poking her head into a room to helicopter advice to those participating in the riot. As frenzied MAGA supporters tore apart furniture to use as an improvised barricade, she barked out what appeared to be the layout of neighbouring rooms. Only one person appeared to be listening to her.

CNN's initial headline linking to my video still lingers on posts from Facebook pages:

'US says Capitol rioters intended to capture & assassinate elected officials.' The hyperbolic headline was not the only [disputed exaggerated media talking-point](#). Empirical truth is losing to Twitter truth. Even conventional wisdom has been benched.

We knew violence to be cyclical in nature and that the impetus will always boomerang back to whichever group is disenfranchised from power. We didn't know the convulsion from the right would be so massive. Yet we saw the same "resistance techniques" on display at the Capitol as we saw in the streets for most of 2020: The same fruits of autonomous organizing.

While the militant Left characterizes themselves as a leaderless movement, the Capitol rioters were united in their loyalty to the President of the United States, Donald Trump. In both cases throngs of opportunistic supporters took to the streets reaching critical mass over the last year. They both had their share of online supporters ramping up the rhetoric. They both resulted in severe casualties.



Rioters moved in on an ICE facility the night of the Inauguration. Portland, OR, 20 January 2021

One may not need to look ‘far’ to the right or left at all to find militancy and fanaticism.

With politicians, press & and social media all too willing to distort, cheerlead or turn a blind eye to the extreme sides of our collective political passions, we aren’t just letting this violence foment. We are giving it the environment to thrive in.

Jeremy Lee Quinn has documented unrest and riot actions in over 15 cities across 8 months on PublicReport.org and [Unblocked Podcast](https://UnblockedPodcast.com). Photos by J. Lee Quinn