

Election Special: To Hell With Civility by Rob Bokkon

I'm so tired of re-writing this article.

The drafts kept piling up and piling up and piling up, one after the other. I'd think I was done, and then—here comes the goddamn news again.

Shock. Anger. Horror.

And again.

And again.

And again, but way worse this time.

I'm beginning to feel like a character in a Borges story, or a Lev Grossman novel. A chronicler fated to write the same story over and over again, only to find that he has to begin it all over, once more, as soon as he reaches the end.

Because the atrocities just *will not stop*.

As of this writing, bombs are still traveling through the mail to “the enemy of the people,” the media. You know, like the headquarters of CNN. Those are words, you may recall, said by the sitting President of the United States. You probably forgot that quote, given the torrent of appalling things he says daily. This most recent bomb came on the heels of many other potentially deadly packages sent to the leaders of the Democratic Party, including two former Presidents.



Poster found on Purdue campus this past week. Photo: Patrick Johanns.

As of this writing, two black grandparents are dead in my home state of Kentucky, shot down in the produce section of a Kroger by an avowed white supremacist who was heard telling another person of his race, "whites don't kill whites." The shooter was a white supremacist who had attempted to gain access to an African-American church just minutes before shooting up the grocery store.

As of this writing, a synagogue in Pittsburgh has lost eleven of its congregation. They were shot, by a Nazi, in the United States of America, in the year 2018.

The worst thing is: by now you're almost OK with it.

Stop. I don't mean you condone it. I don't even mean you accept it. But I do mean that you're becoming, more and more each day, *used to it*.

The nature of fascist violence, fascist politics, fascist ideology, is not insidious. It is not subtle. It is not clever.

Fascism is brassy. Loud. Bombastic.

Overwhelming.

Eventually, you start to tune it out. Whether from compassion fatigue or a sincere desire to protect your own mental health or just sheer exhaustion, you start to push it aside. Ignore it. Convince yourself that someone else is doing something about it, just so you can focus on the important stuff like getting dinner ready or taking out the garbage or your kid's grades.

Which is, unfortunately, exactly what fascists want.

They are counting on you to be overwhelmed. They are counting on you to change the channel. They are counting on you to see so much hateful rhetoric, so much ethnic violence, so much anti-LGBT+ legislation that you just can't anymore.

And so this, gentle reader, is where we are. We have actual Nazis marching the streets. We have a government that refuses to do anything about it, that is known to cultivate them for votes and political support, that only makes the most terse and backhanded of statements "condemning" them.

We have a Supreme Court likely to deliver the death knell to the last vestiges of a woman's right to choose, in the United States of America.

We have an executive branch making determined and deliberate assaults on LGBT+ rights on a scale literally never before seen. The rabble-rousing polemics of the George W. Bush administration, the casual hatred of Reagan: these are nothing compared to the systemic offenses committed by Trump, Pence and their evangelical cronies. The transgender military ban,

the attacks on title IX, the effort to ban the same-sex spouses of diplomats from entering the USA—all a product of Trump's America.

See? You're tired already. You've heard it all, or if you haven't, you're not surprised.

There are worse things than being tired, though.

Actively encouraging this stuff, for example. Those people, though—the ones who still support Trump, the ones who think his plan to end birthright citizenship (and with it the Fourteenth Amendment) is a great idea, the ones who believed the Democrats actually mailed bombs to themselves—those people are lost to any rational appeal. We can't count on them anymore. They've been given the opportunity to regret their decision, to show some basic decency, and they're not going to do it.

And yet, we have among us those who are, to my mind, even worse than the Trumpites. That would be the legions of people standing around wringing their hands and wondering aloud why we can't all get along. The people yelling about “the discourse.” The people who inevitably seem to lecture the left on something called “civility” while utterly ignoring the actual fascists marching in the streets.

These would be that lofty political class known as “the moderates.” I say “lofty” because every single last one of them will tell you, at some length, about their moral superiority to “extremists.” They “don't vote party, they vote for candidates.” They “refuse to condemn someone over something as trivial as politics.” They “remember when there was a spirit of bipartisanship in this country.” And what's more, they will tell you in no uncertain terms why you're what's wrong with this nation, and how it doesn't help to call Nazis what they are, and...I'm making myself sick writing this.

I just don't understand. Twenty or thirty years ago, maybe, I

could see that sort of thinking. Back when the GOP wasn't entirely composed of homophobes and plutocrats. Back when the Democratic Party still nurtured a few nasty Dixiecrat types. Back when neither party much cared about LGBT rights. Back when the GOP still believed in the social safety net. But now?

Now, in this day and age, you're telling me "you vote candidate over party" when the party platform of the GOP is explicitly anti-LGBT? You're telling me that you're sometimes OK with taking away a woman's right to choose? You're telling me that you're sometimes OK with dismantling the entirety of the New Deal and the Great Society? You're telling me that you're sometimes OK with a brutal and xenophobic, to say nothing of racist, immigration policy?

You're *sometimes* OK with the guy who was endorsed by Nazis?

Fuck that. And fuck the calls for "civility" from these very same, amoral people. These people will tie themselves in knots over Mitch McConnell getting his dinner interrupted, but then blithely ignore the fact that he is actively seeking to remove health care from millions upon millions of aged and poor people. They get upset when people shout at Sarah Sanders, but ignore the fact that she lies for, and repeats the lies of, a man who is actively placing children in cages because their parents had the audacity to seek asylum in the United States of America.

When they say "civility" they don't even know what they mean by it. They think they're calling for politeness. They think they're calling for decorum. But you cannot be polite to someone who is actively seeking to disenfranchise, dehumanize or otherwise harm you through the apparatus of the state. You cannot afford common social graces to people who, through their hateful rhetoric, inspire acts of terror against marginalized groups. You cannot extend greater consideration for those who would oppress you than they would extend to you.

Because to do so is to cede power. To do so is to say, "You are deserving of better treatment than I am." To do so is to prop up the very power structures that are currently aimed at us like weapons, to be complicit in our own ruin.

Martin Luther King did not sit down with the leaders of the KKK. Gandhi did not concede that the British Raj "had some ideas worth considering". And Marsha P. Johnson was not worried about respect, or civility, or decorum when she threw the first brick at the NYPD during the Stonewall riots. She was worried about her survival. Her right to exist. Her right to be a fully recognized human being.

So no, I won't be civil to these fascists. Not now. Not ever. And you shouldn't either.