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RECKONING WITH ECOLOGIES OF VIOLENCE IN CAMPUS (COUNTER) PROTESTS

“You had a group on one side that was bad, and you had a group on the other side that was also very violent... the other side that came charging in without a permit... were very, very violent.”

~Donald Trump

the administration to express concerns. A petition urging that the event be canceled pointed out administrative hypocrisy, arguing that the University was "fostering an environment in which hate speech is able to proliferate by providing Milo Yiannopoulos with a formal platform for student outreach and recruitment" (UCD Organizes 2017). The petition expressed concern that the presence of white supremacists not only "interferes with the learning of students," but would encourage further violence locally. Unionized graduate student workers even filed a grievance regarding what they felt were unsafe working conditions.

The fears of counterprotesters are hardly unwarranted. Blee (2017: 6) argues that white power activists' "vile depictions of racial, religious, and sexual minority group members... are intended to be immediately damaging to those who see them, as well as to instill fear." Fights broke out at UCD on the night of the event, and a week later at a similar event at the University of Washington, a supporter of Yiannopoulos shot an anti-fascist protester (Halverson 2019). White supremacist organizing also incites further racist violence in local communities, including hate crimes (ADL 2018a; Blee 2017; DoED Campus Safety and Security 2018; Feinberg, Branton, and Martinez-Ebers 2019).

As this context shows, the violence that unfolded at U.Va./Charlottesville did not arise in a vacuum. Historically, U.Va. and Charlottesville have deep ties to white supremacy. In the 1920s, U.Va. had its own chapter of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), which donated an endowment equivalent to \$16 million dollars today (Schmidt 2017). On May 13, only months before Heather Heyer's murder by a white supremacist, Richard Spencer—a U.Va. alumnus—led a torch lit protest through Charlottesville against the removal of a Confederate statue (Toy 2017). Then, in July, the KKK held a rally where around fifty Klan members were escorted by police, who later fired tear gas on thousands of counterprotesters (Toy 2017).

On Friday, August 11th, 2017, white supremacists gathered at U.Va. and marched to the heart of campus. Using their torches as weapons, they attacked a small group of unarmed counterprotesters composed of students, staff, and faculty. Numerous witnesses reported police failed to intervene despite their presence (Vasquez 2017). Several days later, one of the counterprotesters suffered a stroke that journalists claimed was related to injuries they sustained during the attack (Stimping and Gluckman 2017).

Emboldened by Friday's events, Saturday's "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville quickly turned bloody as white supremacists and counterprotesters

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During the melee, Richard Preston, imperial wizard of the Maryland KKK, was filmed shooting a pistol at a Black counter-protester who was attempting to burn a confederate flag (Shapiro 2018). White supremacists beat a Black teacher, DeAndre Harris, nearly to death, an assault caught on camera by the press. Harris continued to receive death threats for months (Modano and McShane 2017). By 11:40am, the city declared a state of emergency, canceled the rally, and riot police began to clear Emancipation Park. At 1:45 pm, white supremacist James Alex Fields Jr. drove his car into a crowd of counter-protesters leaving the area, killing Heather Heyer and injuring at least twenty, several of whom were permanently disabled (Wilson, Helmke, and Swaine 2017).

In the aftermath of U.Va./Charlottesville, white supremacists and counter-protests have often been framed as comparably violent. White supremacists are cognizant of this and use the equivocation to justify their actions. For example, after the murder of Heyer, white supremacist organizer Christopher Cantwell claimed

None of our people killed anybody unjustly... Someone [struck] that vehicle. When these animals attacked him again, he saw no way to get away from them, except to hit the gas. And sadly, because our rivals are a bunch of stupid animals who don't pay attention, they couldn't just get out of the way... It was more than justified... I think a lot more people are going to die (VICE 2017).

In this instance, Cantwell equates an anti-fascist protester striking Fields' car as "violent" justification for the subsequent vehicular attack, framed by Cantwell as an act of self-defense (or at least, defense of property).

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interpretations of violence. Staff, faculty, and other workers often have varied alignments with

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The effects of passive institutional violence endure beyond enabling white supremacist organizing. Administrative responses to counter/protests generally call for greater surveillance and administrative control of campus spaces, often further militarizing the University. For example, administrators at U.Va. emphasized stronger relationships with police after the attacks to address community concerns (Sullivan 2017; Lamplin 2017). The tightening of University relationships with police is often accompanied by greater efforts to surveil the speech and organizing efforts of anti-racist organizers. In the wake of white supremacist organizing across the University of California system, administrators have sought to limit the capacity of anti-racist activists to organize, increasing levels of administrative punishment and surveillance (Fuller 2017; Greenwald 2017). In addition to white supremacist violence creating conditions of danger for targeted communities, the responses of the University to such incidents continue to privilege whiteness within academic spaces and often create structural conditions that further marginalize vulnerable members of campus communities.

The third incarnation of violence observed is

. This incarnation is defensive in that this violence (especially when directed against living beings) typically occurs after offensive white supremacist attacks have begun. It is also organized from a historically and structurally marginalized location (having had and continuing one the tree t rb

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The way we lump and split social movements, actors, and institutions into “violent” and “nonviolent” categories has important implications for the preservation and empowerment of white supremacy and fascism. Binary conceptualizations of “violence” (and its presumed foil, “nonviolence”) present an epistemological and methodological problem for research on social movements, reinforcing assumptions that violence is a simple, uniform, and easily measured feature of social life. It is imperative to problematize “violence” as a label that is socially and historically situated within relationships of racialized, classed, and gendered power. Of the many incarnations of violence that exist, only some incarnations are deemed “violent” at particular historical moments while others become legitimized by powerful institutions like Universities. Conceptualizations of a nonviolent binary benefit established social orders by presenting “violence” as contradictory to a presumed benevolent, “nonviolent” set of institutions. Nevertheless, spaces like the University are not neutral ground, nor are theories of violence deployed without its. Much. Such institutions are built on unceded Indigenous territories and rely on the continued oppression of people of color (Dohmage 2017; Haney and Moten 2013; Watkins 2001; Wilder 2013). By better understanding the relationships between incarnations of violence, it is our hope that we can identify more effective ways to unceremoniously

reproduce, and/or expand existing systems of power. These realities are challenged by counter protesters on college campuses, who seek to reformulate dominant power structures to create a safer, more socially just, and equitable future.

To understand and respond to contemporary campus counter/protest, we must be wary of solutions that appear to alleviate one incarnation of violence—say, offensive white supremacist violence—by increasing other manifestations that disproportionately harm marginalized populations, particularly passive institutional violence. University administrations have overwhelmingly responded by increasing the power of predominantly white police forces and cracking down on activists in general. This approach lumps offensive and defensive forms of violence together, even though these incarnations of violence are distinct (see Chiumbolo, Mayer, and de Witte 2006). However, research has shown that members of groups historically marginalized in Universities, like people of color, are more likely to be involved in anti-racist organizing (Banos and Mirkin 2020; Jones and Reddick 2017; Linder et al. 2019; Quayle, Linder, Stewart, and Satterwhite 2022). If anti-racist, anti-fascist organizing is framed as equally violent to white power activism by Universities who increasingly criminalize protest, we risk excluding those who are already at the margins of academia into the mass incarceration system. In the case we study, University administrations often try to solve the violence of white supremacy by adding punitive policies to an institutional structure that remains inherently violent. Yet this approach risks tightening the ropes of oppression rather than loosening them (Garces, Anbriz, Johnson, and B2 rs c M25 E2

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