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ABOUT

FREE SPEECH RESOURCES

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CRIMINAL JUSTICE

LAW

POLITICS & CURRENT EVENTS

FUN

ART

GEEKERY

GAMING

# On Punching Nazis

JANUARY 21, 2017 BY [KEN WHITE](#)

1. Nazis are scum.
2. Principles are in a constant struggle with viscera. I want punching Nazis to be acceptable, and find the spectacle of Nazis getting punched to be viscerally satisfying. Jesus Christ and John Donne aside, Nazi suffering does not move me. But I know that sucker-punching someone because their views are evil is wrong.
3. We have social and legal norms, including "don't punch people because their speech is evil, and don't punish them legally." Applying those norms is not a judgment that the speech in question is valuable, or decent, or morally acceptable. We apply the norms out of a recognition of human frailty — because the humanity that will be deciding whom to punch and whom to prosecute is the same humanity that produced the Nazis in the first place, and has a well-established record of making really terrible decisions. You — the bien-pensant reader, confident that sensible punchers and prosecutors can sort out Nazis from the not-Nazis — will likely not be doing the punching or prosecuting. The punching and prosecuting will be done by a rogue's gallery of vicious idiots, including people who think that Black Lives Matter should be indicted under RICO and that it's funny to send women death threats if they write a column you don't like.

4. In embracing a norm that sucker-punching Nazis is acceptable, remember that you live in a nation of imbeciles that loves calling people Nazis. Also bear in mind that certain aspects of our culture — modern academic culture, for instance — encourages people to think that you're a Nazi if you eat veal or disagree with them about the minimum wage.

5. By the way, right now there are tons of people *right now* who would welcome an emerging social norm that it's acceptable to punch, say, Black Lives Matter protesters. I know Nazis aren't remotely comparable. You do too. They disagree. And you've handed them the rhetorical tools to defend themselves, and handed the broader populace an excuse to look away. Well done.

6. In embracing a norm that punching Nazis is acceptable, also consider that the new administration's White House web page has a law enforcement section that characterizes protests as dangerous and violent and promises robust police action in response, and that Trump and his supporters have decreed that the Department of Justice will no longer persecute poor hapless police departments. Protest-related violence delivers grossly disproportionate increases in police violence and in public acceptance for police violence. The people who will face that violence the most are not the ones laughing on their Yale alumni Facebook page about a Nazi getting punched. They are mostly poor and mostly non-white. If you're okay with emboldening increased violence against poor people because you enjoy looped gifs of Nazis getting punched, you're a douche.

7. Applying social and legal norms about punching or prosecuting people based on speech shouldn't be confused for treating all speech as equivalent. All speech isn't equivalent. Nazis are scum. They don't support the social or legal norms in question and in fact support killing people based on skin color, religion, or disagreement. Saying they are scum, and that their speech is qualitatively different than other speech, and that they ought to be shunned and reviled, is not the same as punching or prosecuting them. It is a good thing to identify Nazis as scum and treat them – socially and rhetorically — accordingly.

8. Challenging a Nazi to a fight is brave. Maybe. Given that many modern American Nazis are greasy, Boo Radley pale, pock-marked mamma's boys, bravery will vary with individual circumstances. Same with charging into a crowd of Nazis. Informing a Nazi through traditional means that you are about to fight him, so he has time to assume a defensive stance, may be brave. Arguably it's even brave to surprise-attack a Nazi and then stand around to get your ass kicked or get arrested and face the legal

consequences of your actions, like a real protester. However, if you sucker-punch a Nazi with a nerve-stapled haircut and a cashmere coat while he gives an interview about the froggy pin on his lapel and then run away, you're just a pussy.

9. America has a certain number of people who are "not Nazis" but enjoy pretending to be Nazis, particularly online, for entertainment or attention. I do not concede that someone who helps normalize Nazism by pretending to be a Nazi for laughs is morally distinguishable from someone who sincerely promotes Nazism. That said, even if you think these people are to be punched, it would probably be better to leave it to their older brothers, linesmen on their high school's football team, or the first girl they try to roofie. Also, bear in mind that you cannot deliver any beating as cruel as the one life is scheduled to administer them as a result of their social inadequacies and assorted personal failures.

10. A Nazi getting punched is not by any stretch of the imagination the worst or most important thing that happened yesterday. Talking about it does not imply otherwise. If you're here to express outrage that I'm not writing about the much more important imminent extinction of the Orlando Purple-Crested Taintsnorter or something, kindly go be you someplace else.

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