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## The Jewish Organizations Fighting Fascism in the United States

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# The Jewish Organizations Fighting Fascism in the United States



Honors Thesis

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Department: History and Religious Studies

Advisor: William Trollinger, Ph.D.

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## Abstract

Recent years have shown a rising trend in fascist and antisemitic actions and attitudes in the United States. In response to this trend, communities have organized into various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) committed to mobilizing people to combat fascism and antisemitism as they see it. An analysis of these organizations' methods and varying degrees of success will offer a blueprint for future action against fascism. Due to their historical connection to this type of mobilization against fascism, this research will be focused on Jewish-led and organized NGOs. NGOs are often the first to call attention to actions by groups and states that violate citizens' human rights and are therefore useful resources in determining the state of human rights. By analyzing these NGOs, the scope of the rise of fascism and antisemitism will be illuminated as well as which methods are best to overcome this unwanted drift and to promote peace.

## Acknowledgements

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## Intro

On a quiet, normal Saturday, a Jewish couple married for over 60 years went to celebrate the Sabbath at the synagogue they got married in; they were likely greeted at the doors by two brothers who enjoyed welcoming the congregants. Everything was ordinary until a man (Robert Bowers), armed with an AR-15 rifle, walked in and began shouting slurs and firing at all those in attendance. This October 27, 2018 tragedy at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh – which resulted in eleven deaths and six injuries – instilled great fear and grief in Jewish Americans across the country.<sup>1</sup> This attack was not just a result of one angry mad man, but rather was a symptom of the United States’ long struggle with antisemitic and fascist beliefs.

While the Tree of Life tragedy was shocking both to the nation and the Jewish community, these types of incidents are not new and are not over. Recently, in January 2021, one of the fascists who infiltrated the Capitol and led the failed insurrection was seen wearing a shirt emblazoned with the words “Camp Auschwitz” and “Work Brings Freedom,” a translation of the German phrase written on the concentration camp’s gates. The United States is, however, not new to this type of antisemitic behavior and attitudes. From the Ku Klux Klan, who helped inspire the actions of the Nazis, to Henry Ford’s distribution of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the United States has a long history of fascist and antisemitic beliefs.

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1. Gajanan “‘Resiliency, Strength and Community Collaboration’ How Tree of Life Synagogue is Moving Forward 1 Year After Tragedy”

Many identify the end of the second world war as the end of fascism; however, while the fighting was over, the beliefs lived on around the globe, including in countries that had fought against those very same views. Countries anticipated the possibility that fascism may spread and attempted to counteract it through the creation of the United Nations and the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” The nations of the world agreed to prevent the massive violations of human rights that occurred during the war and work instead to promote peace and human dignity for all. Despite this effort, fascism, and the antisemitism that was at the heart of the movement, remained and is alive and well in the world. In the United States, this return of fascism and antisemitic attitudes has taken the form of a revival of Nazi symbols and imagery, shootings of Jewish synagogues, bomb threats to Jewish organizations, and the January 6 insurrection. This increase of fascist and antisemitic acts has deeply unsettled Jewish communities; however, it poses a significant risk not just for the Jewish population in the United States, but for all its inhabitants and the democracy itself.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are often the “watchdogs” of the countries they are situated in and they frequently identify and seek to combat the human rights violations and other societal issues that are occurring. In the case of the persistence of fascism and antisemitism in the United States, many of the NGOs tackling this issue are Jewish-led and operated. Many of these NGOs express a desire to prevent this rise from developing further and a concern it could develop into another large-scale tragedy similar to the Holocaust. Due to their familiarity with the issue and experience in employing methods to combat it, these NGOs can offer valuable insights into what fascism looks like today and what actions are successfully weakening this movement.

The first organization interviewed for this research is Never Again Action. The National Organizer and Training Director of the organization, Ethan Aronson explained in the interview that Never Again Action began as a part of the whirlwind moment, when a friend decided to organize a group to shut down a detention center. Since then, the organization has remained a decentralized, grassroots movement working against the detention and deportation system in the United States.

The second organization interviewed had a different approach. Arielle Gingold, the Deputy Washington Director of Bend the Arc: Jewish Action described the organization as the largest national Jewish organization in the United States working on domestic policy issues. As such, they conduct voter contacting operations and support various political campaigns to remove antisemitic, authoritarian, and white nationalist politicians from office or ensure they do not get elected in the first place.

## **Literature Review**

As fascism is not particularly new idea, there has been a great deal written about what it is and how to combat it. Current discussions largely focus on determining a precise definition for fascism as a way to understand how it operates in the world and identify it where it appears. Many of these definitions are rather broad but suggest various attributes that appear frequently in fascist groups and individuals. Understanding how these characteristics manifest in the world is essential to fully comprehending the extent to which the United States of America is currently facing fascism. Further, it is important to understand what the United States experienced in the past, how it has influenced and generated fascist thinking, and how organizations have historically fought against fascism.

Various scholars have offered up suggestions for a precise definition for fascism, though they vary greatly in terms of scope. Shane Burly, in his book *Fascism Today*, attempted to define fascism broadly as, “inequality through mythological and essentialized identity.”<sup>2</sup> This definition, while broad, covers some important characteristics of fascism that are discussed in depth later. Another author, Jason Stanley, in his book *How Fascism Works*, explains that while each context is unique, for the sake of generalization fascism is, “ultranationalism of some variety (ethnic, religious, cultural), with the nation represented in the person of an authoritarian leader who speaks on its behalf.”<sup>3</sup> This definition offers more precision, while still being somewhat loose so as to not risk excluding some fascist movements. Historian Robert Paxton had a similar approach, defining fascism first by its characteristics or “mobilizing passions” and then by the stages fascist movements go through. He identifies five of these stages as, “the initial creation of fascist movements; their rooting as parties in a political system; the acquisition of power; the exercise of power, and finally, in the longer term, radicalization or entropy.”<sup>4</sup>

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2. Shane Burley, *Fascism Today: What it is and How to End it* (AK Press, 2017), 50.

3. Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (Random House, 2018), XXVIII.

4. Robert O. Paxton, “The Five Stages of Fascism.” *Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 1 (1998): 11.



One of the most prevalent and agreed upon aspects of fascism is that it glorifies a “mythic past” about the greatness of the traditions of their nation. This myth serves as a key part of their identity and the pride they take in the myth is often the source of their extreme nationalism. Jason Stanley explains that this mythic past often misrepresents the nation as an illustrious conqueror founded on patriarchal and authoritarian ideals. This is done to show that the old nation would support the proposed fascist ideology.<sup>5</sup> Shane Burley explains that for fascists, identity is inherent, not chosen, so they believe this mythic past is a core element that explains who they are.<sup>6</sup> This grandiose history serves to increase the group’s sense of identity as well as their individual self-esteem.<sup>7</sup> If in their mythic history, the nation had a patriarchal and authoritarian structure with a racial hierarchy, then it is essential to perpetuate that system or reinstate it if it is no longer in place. However, the mythic past which fascists create is intentionally fake, as Stanley highlights that Benito Mussolini admitted as much at the Fascist Congress in a 1922 speech where he said, “The myth is a faith, as passion. It is not necessary for it to be a reality.”<sup>8</sup> Fascists intentionally distort the past to gloss over a nation’s serious offenses and instill a sense of victimhood when those offenses are discussed. In this way, they weaponize the past so that even mentioning atrocities committed long ago or refusal to honor past leaders who organized those atrocities is viewed as traitorous.

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5. Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 4.

6. Burley, *Fascism Today*, 51.

7. Paxton, “The Five Stages of Fascism,” 6.

8. Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 5.

Speaking more on this sense of victimhood, Jason Stanley writes that, “Rectifying unjust inequalities will always bring pain to those who benefited from such injustices. This pain will inevitably be experienced by some as oppression.”<sup>9</sup> As the world has been working to remedy the inequalities of society, those who have historically benefited from those inequalities start to feel as though they are being slighted. This sense of victimhood where there truly is none is a core aspect of fascism. As Paxton explains, fascists utilize this false victimhood to justify their attacks on or hatred for other groups that they claim are their oppressors.<sup>10</sup> Typically, these groups, especially Jews, are just scapegoats for fascists’ grievances with the world. This sense of victimhood that fascists develop is deepened by the unreality fascists create with their propaganda, particularly by way of conspiracy theories. Stanley explains that conspiracy theories, such as the “Pizzagate” conspiracy in 2016, are not necessarily intended to be taken as true but rather as slander which can then be utilized to discredit the media when they do not report on the conspiracy.<sup>11</sup> Further, they help to destroy the ability of non-fascists to debate or educate fascists as they are operating on an entirely different set of facts and beliefs about the world.

Fascists do not just believe in the mythic past, conspiracies, and other propaganda they create. They also require a forum to spread these ideas as well. This is why, despite being deeply anti-intellectual and anti-enlightenment, fascists are interested in speaking

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9. Stanley, 98.

10. Paxton, “The Five Stages of Fascism,” 6.

11. Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 61.

and working at universities. They often claim that it is in the interest of free speech and healthy debate that they should be given a platform. But as Stanley notes, this “makes room for the study of myth as fact.”<sup>12</sup> By only teaching their version of history, fascists are able to ensure that the sense of victimhood and extreme nationalism are spread throughout society and reinforced throughout the education system. Once there is sufficient widespread acceptance of these feelings, then mobilization against the perceived victimizers may begin, so that, as Burley explains, the modern society can be destroyed, and the mythic past can come into being once more.<sup>13</sup>

This type of action is often achieved through violence, which Paxton describes is viewed by fascists as beautiful when it is done for the betterment and survival of the group.<sup>14</sup> This violence is often disguised as being in the name of “law and order” though as Stanley explains, fascists believe that one group, the chosen nation, is inherently lawful and those outside the group or those who defy them are inherently not.<sup>15</sup> This division then leads to the belief that the outside group is a threat to the chosen nation, permitting violence against them. While fascist groups will use any crime committed by a member of the scapegoat group to highlight that group’s depravity, even a simple traffic violation, the crime of rape is what they utilize the most to instill a sense of fear of the

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12. Stanley, 47.

13. Burley, *Fascism Today*, 55.

14. Paxton, “The Five Stages of Fascism,” 7.

15. Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 110.

scapegoats and a sense of victimization from them.<sup>16</sup> Burley describes fascism as idolizing masculinity and traditional gender roles to the point that they are taken as fact.<sup>17</sup> As such, when there is a threat to these beliefs, fascists view it as an attack on nature itself. A disruption to masculinity would upset the patriarchal family dynamics that fascists idealize, as well as call into question the patriarchal government structure that places their great leader in a spot of glorification and ultimate authority. By attacking those whose existence is at odds with masculinity and traditional gender roles, such as homosexuals and transgender people, fascists believe themselves to be defending their leader and protecting their hierarchy.

While each of these attributes are discussed at length as being related to fascism, it would be regarded by most as inaccurate to label anyone employing any of these attributes as a fascist. These aspects of fascism are not solely employed by fascists, nor are they the only tactics and beliefs that fascists hold. The issue with giving fascism a precise definition is that as Burley explains, “it will constantly redefine itself.”<sup>18</sup> This adaptability of fascism works in its favor, as if one deems a movement fascist too early, they will be charged with over exaggeration.<sup>19</sup> However, Burley explains that allowing for an evolving definition for fascism is useful not just for historical purposes, but for

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16. Stanley, 126.

17. Burley, *Fascism Today*, 51.

18. Burley, 55.

19. Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 190.

developing resistance as well.<sup>20</sup> In this way, defining fascism with its adaptable nature in mind allows antifascist organizations to better identify movements as fascist and understand how to work against them.

One final key for defining fascism and understanding how to work against it is to identify the scapegoat. The scapegoat is the group that becomes the victim of fascists' violence, the enemy in the mythic past, the inherently criminal, and ultimately the one who must be defeated to create a fascist reality. Throughout history Jews have been the most prominent scapegoats for fascists. As such, antisemitism has become inextricably tied to fascism. Antisemitism is a great deal easier to define and identify than fascism, which makes it a useful way to determine that a movement may be fascist in nature.

The United States of America is unfortunately not new to the ideas of fascism and antisemitism, with some American works even becoming inspiration for the atrocities committed by the Nazis. One of the greatest sources of antisemitism and a catalyst for the second coming of the Ku Klux Klan, the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" was published by Henry Ford. This publication was a forged copy of the minutes of a meeting between Jewish leaders, where they discussed how to control the world's finances and press to create world domination.<sup>21</sup> While Ford did not create the forgery, which was plagiarized from a satire book by Maurice Joly, he did disseminate half a million copies, enough for

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20. Burley, *Fascism Today*, 49.

21. Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (W.W. Norton, 2017), 11.

Hitler to read and believe the conspiracy.<sup>22</sup> The Klan believed in the conspiracy as well; however they believed it to be outdated, thinking instead that the Jews already were in control.<sup>23</sup> This conspiracy has survived into the twenty-first century, the modern iteration being aimed at the American George Soros, due to his Hungarian Jewish origin and philanthropic endeavors to promote democracy.<sup>24</sup>

While the United States has clearly not been a stranger to antisemitism and fascism, this has given the people ample time and experience to develop methods of resistance. While there has been some international effort to combat fascism, such as The “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and other human rights conventions that codify the inherent human dignity and equality that is the antithesis of fascism, much progress comes first from the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that communities develop.

One way that organizations have worked to stop fascist movements from growing is by keeping them from having access to a platform. Burley explains that to stop fascist groups from organizing, antifascist groups should not even entertain debates as any public speech is an opportunity for recruitment.<sup>25</sup> In Hilary Moore and James Tracy’s book *No Fascist USA!*, they explain that, “ignoring fascist and racist formations, no

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22. Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 59.

23. Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK*, 49.

24. Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 64.

25. Burley, *Fascism Today*, 257.

matter how small does not prevent them from growing”<sup>26</sup> As such, confronting those who aim to spread fascist beliefs is essential to stopping their spread. Stanley seems to agree, using an analogy to explain that “no one thinks that the demands of free inquiry require adding researchers to university faculties who seek to demonstrate that the earth is flat. Such a position we have determined through conclusive scientific inquiry to be fruitless.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, to debate a fascist does nothing to further knowledge or understanding; instead, it merely becomes an opportunity for fascist ideas to spread and become more violent.

In the past, the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee found success in encouraging solidarity within the movement and building diverse alliances. By creating meaningful relationships with one another within movement, they were able to resist the threats and attacks from fascists as they were helping to protect not just themselves, but their friends as well.<sup>28</sup> Further, the committee created coalitions between various organizations from different movements, which allowed them to help normalize community resistance.<sup>29</sup> Burley also highlighted the importance of having an intersectional approach to resistance, explaining that, “the antifascist approach is rooted in undoing the conditions that formed

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26. Hilary Moore and James Tracy, *No Fascist USA!: The John Brown Anti-Klan Committee and Lessons for Today's Movements* (City Lights Books, 2020), 211.

27. Stanley, *How Fascism Works*, 46-47.

28. Moore and Tracy, *No Fascist USA!*, 208.

29. Moore and Tracy, 214.

fascism.”<sup>30</sup> Without such conditions, fascism will lose its appeal and consequently also its power.

## Analysis

While fascism and antisemitism are unfortunately not new, this does mean that society has had time to develop various methods of combatting them. Jewish organizations in particular have incentive to combat fascism as it is prone to increasing antisemitism. Recently, there was a short decrease in antisemitic hate crimes and then a major increase in 2017.<sup>31</sup> This increase has also been followed by an increase in Jews perception of antisemitism as a “serious problem.”<sup>32</sup> While this is not a perfect bellwether of an increase in fascism, it has created sufficient alarm for antifascist mobilization. For this analysis, leaders from two Jewish organizations, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action and Never Again Action, were interviewed to determine how the United States is experiencing fascism and antisemitism, what these organizations are doing to combat it, and what progress they have made.

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30. Burley, *Fascism Today*, 274.

31. Tom W. Smith and Benjamin Schapiro. "Antisemitism in Contemporary America." In *American Jewish Year Book 2018*, eds. Arnold Dashefsky and Ira M. Sheskin. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019) <https://ebooks.ohiolink.edu>.

32. Herbert F. Weisberg, “The Presidential Voting of American Jews” in *American Jewish Year Book 2019*, eds. Dashefsky, Arnold, and Ira M. Sheskin. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020) <https://ebooks.ohiolink.edu>



## Definitions

Just as in the academic discussion of fascism and antisemitism, the interviews with the NGOs highlighted the significance of and difficulty with determining a precise definition for each of these terms. In order to identify how antisemitism and fascism exist in the United States today and how to combat them, it is necessary to understand how they operate and why.

Ethan Aronson from Never Again Action explained antisemitism as a scapegoat of sorts that is used by the elite or ruling class to distract the working class from recognizing the true source of their oppression.<sup>33</sup> Instead of directing their anger towards the elites, antisemitism gives the working class a different source to blame and attack, Jews. This generates division and distraction, preventing the people from recognizing and dismantling the structures of domination and exploitation. Arielle Gingold from Bend the Arc: Jewish Action, described it in a similar manner. She explained it as a part of a broader ideology that instills division and fear, operating within the white nationalist movement.<sup>34</sup> In this way, antisemitism is a part in a system of oppression and can fuel other forms of oppression. She also expressed that the language of describing it as a cog in a system is important as it highlights the reality of antisemitism being something human made, that we can overcome, rather than a natural phenomenon that terms like “virus” or “cancer” may unintentionally convey. Both definitions identify antisemitism as

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33. Ethan Aronson in discussion with the author, July 2021.

34. Arielle Gingold in discussion with the author, February 2022.

a kind of collective threat that does not only harm Jews, but everyone in a society. With these definitions then came a caution to be critical of what and who is being labeled as antisemitic and stressing the importance of acknowledging the difference between those who are utilizing the systemic roots of antisemitism to harm and oppress and those in need of education.

Fascism was described as operating in the world in a variety of ways. Aronson explained that fascism “has emerged throughout history in different contexts,” particularly when there is a crisis in the liberal system. Both Aronson and Gingold described the breakdown or destruction of democracy that is both a result of and a warning sign for fascism. In the context of the United States, they identified Trumpism as having this quality of undermining the democratic institutions that can lead toward fascism. Gingold described that this aspect of fascism can be overt as it was on January 6, 2021, or it can be more covert by restricting voting access and thereby who is able to participate in democracy. Aronson highlighted that this can be seen in the millions of undocumented immigrants and incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals who are unable to vote. He also mentioned that a common aspect of fascism is seeing it as, “somehow okay or moral or legitimate to take people and put them in cages.” Aronson further explained that Never Again Action views fascism as, “a popular movement for authoritarianism, racism, nationalism, corporate hegemony, and destruction of the working class and destruction or demonization of some racialized groups”. Since this definition covers so many aspects of fascism, it is understandable that the organization thinks that the only way to fully get rid of fascism is to uproot its foundational systems,

rather than just fighting hate speech or overtly racist acts. One thing became clear in both organization's descriptions, antisemitism and fascism are deeply intertwined as they work together and aim to distract from and perpetuate oppression.

### **State of the US**

With this understanding of how antisemitism and fascism operate, there is now ample context for how the United States is experiencing them in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both organizations noted that antisemitism in particular shows up in many different ways which exist on a spectrum from comments on television to violent extremism. The organizations saw fascism in a variety of ways in the United States, highlighting their definitions of fascism as perpetuating many other systems of oppression.

While they found aspects of fascism evident in many different areas, Never Again Action believed there to be “a decrease in overtly fascist political actors” since the Trump administration lost power. However, Aronson cautioned that when a group is in opposition, it can be incredibly energizing, as they have a common enemy and mission. While the country was under the Obama administration, he explained that the immigrants' rights movement stalled because there was division over the best way to approach change and the best strategies. Likewise, under the Trump administration, the immigrant rights movement flourished because there was a clear obstacle to justice. Aronson believes that this is likely what the white nationalist and fascists are doing right now, regrouping, and organizing as Hitler did after the Beer Hall Putsch. He cautioned that despite Hitler's failure there, the status quo that was leading to fascism continued

until he eventually did bring the Nazis to power, so just because it is not as overt right now does not mean it has gone away.

While Aronson mentioned a decrease in overt fascism, that does not mean the two organizations do not see it existing in other ways currently in the United States. Gingold explained that Trumpism could represent a side to fascism, particularly the undermining of elections and democratic institutions which can lead to a breakdown of democracy. She described how, “every state that tries to restrict voting rights and tries to restrict who can participate in democracy can bring us one step closer toward fascism.” Gingold also suggested that elections over the next several years will likely be indicative of what direction we are headed and that what happened on January 6, 2021 was a good example of what could happen if the country does not protect democratic processes. To Gingold, protecting democracy does not mean maintaining the status quo, but rather by making it more representative of the people through expanded voting access and removing the filibuster.

The organizations saw antisemitism existing in the United States in different ways that are on a spectrum of sorts but are all connected to the same tactic. One of the most evident ways that Bend the Arc sees antisemitism is through violent extremism. Gingold described that the recent hostage situation in Colleyville, Texas resulted from the gunman believing the antisemitic trope that Jews control society and all know each other so much that he believed his actions at a synagogue in Texas would allow him to get another person released from jail. Another aspect that fuels these violent attacks is when antisemitism meets anti-immigrant xenophobia, like at the shooting at the Tree of Life

Synagogue in Pittsburgh. Both organizations mentioned how the coded messaging that the right wing uses around George Soros funding immigrant caravans to come to America fuels this xenophobia and antisemitism that leads to these violent acts.

While antisemitism is clearly an issue in the United States, both organizations expressed that there can sometimes be danger in equating some antisemitic acts with others. Gingold used the example of the media discussing Whoopi Goldberg's comments about the Holocaust as antisemitic, but which Gingold viewed as coming from a place of not knowing rather than a place of attacking. She explained that sometimes people use the antisemitic label as a weapon, especially against people of color. This can create a dangerous false equivalency between ignorant antisemitic remarks and intentionally violent antisemitic attacks, like the ones in Pittsburgh and Colleyville.

Likewise, Aronson expressed that there is a need to differentiate from someone utilizing antisemitism to enact oppression and people who are under oppression and say or do something antisemitic. Gingold expressed that when there are antisemitic comments, the focus should be on education, as our current system is not great at educating about antisemitism and much of this learning is done casually, so it is hard to expect people to already know everything about these issues. Like Gingold, Aronson also cautioned that antisemitism can be used as a weapon against people of color and others, explaining that some organizations may even call him, a Jew himself, antisemitic. The key part for both organizations was emphasizing that not all antisemitism is equal, and some can be overcome with education.

## Methods

In an effort to combat antisemitism and fascism, various methods have been employed as there are so many different ways in which they exist today in the United States. Many of these methods focus on eliminating the root causes of these issues, as due to the definitions of how antisemitism and fascism operate, the organizations believe this to be the only way to eradicate them completely. Another part of what these organizations work on is education and trainings, as people don't always know exactly what forces they are up against and can only combat what they know is an issue. Never Again Action mentioned that while combatting antisemitism is not a central part of their mission as it is not the main source of exploitation in the United States currently, any effort against white-supremacy and the systems of oppression and incarceration makes it safer for Jews.

Creating resources and trainings on how people can mobilize against fascism and antisemitism was key to both organizations. Never Again Action trained people in direct action skills so that they could learn how to deescalate or escalate if needed in protest against white nationalists. Bend the Arc generates messaging guides that are shared with members of Congress and their staff and address how to talk about antisemitism and focus on it as a collective threat. They also spread awareness by calling out bad faith attacks of antisemitism that are used to harm people of color as well as Jews.

For both organizations, addressing the root causes of fascism and antisemitism is key, but they have different approaches. Never Again Action focuses primarily on fighting the detention and deportation machine as their means of combatting fascism. In

their approach to fight against antisemitism and fascism, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action focuses on a variety of issues such as upholding the right to vote, economic justice, alternative community safety.

In working to end the deportation machine, Never Again Action concentrates on interrupting US Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operations. They have successfully been able to stop them from working with Greyhound buses in New Hampshire, from starting an ICE citizen's academy in Chicago, and from deporting people in specific cases. Never again Action also organized a blockade of an ICE site in New Jersey, preventing at least one ICE van from carrying out its duties. These efforts have all worked to keep ICE from "ripping people away from their families," and thus combatting that symptom of fascism or the carceral state. Bend the Arc also does some work in this area, helping to cut funding for immigration and detention and the agencies that carry those out. They believe this combats fascism as it is, "fighting for the ability of anybody to seek refuge and asylum in this country and be able to vote for who represents them in government and to be able to run for office themselves as well." Voting rights are big for Bend the Arc as they also help to elect candidates who will be elected officials for everyone and defend democracy, while also working on removing Trump candidates who do not share those values.

Another key area that Bend the Arc focuses on is creating and supporting alternative forms of community safety. They want to make sure that all people feel safe at synagogues, not just the white Jews. Gingold explained that while there is funding for training in keeping synagogues safe, it often comes with increased police and law

enforcement presence that would not make Jews of color feel safe. To help ensure every member of the community feels safe, they are thinking of alternative methods that do not contribute to the carceral system. Bend the Arc also supports divesting from incarceration and policing and using that to promote investing in communities and economic justice. Gingold explained that antisemitism can make a good scapegoat in times of great economic insecurity so by investing in communities, they are helping to reduce, “the conditions in which antisemitism can be used to oppress people and harm Jews.”

### **Progress/Successes**

While many of the actions discussed in the previous section were successful in their goals, it is important to also consider whether they are useful as methods to end fascism and antisemitism. Progress and success can be difficult to measure, particularly in activism as the ultimate goal, ending fascism and antisemitism in this case, is such a monumental task. By focusing on and determining the success of specific actions, patterns of change can be identified that highlight the progress.

Both organizations shared the sentiment that determining what progress is and looks like, is difficult. Aronson explained that while all the campaigns and actions that he shared Never Again Action had done in the previous section were successful, that does not hold true with all direct actions or campaigns. In his experience organizing with Never Again Action, most direct actions meet some of their goals and not others, and their demands are often different from the goals. While one of their campaigns may demand the end to a policy or removal of a government official, the goals may be to build political will and bring new people into the movement. Where they might not get their



demands met, the organization will likely succeed in some part on their goals. Aronson explained that it is important in organizing to take the ails of society, divide them into issues, and then divide those issues into campaigns. This allows organizers to see what the next step is on the path to progress.

One of the progressive patterns that Gingold has noticed is that society has started to identify antisemitism and antisemitic violence as not just a problem for Jews but as a broader part of white supremacist violence. She thinks this makes the movement stronger as it recognizes that people “can’t fight just one oppression in a vacuum because the same people who are attacking Jews are the same people who are attacking immigrants are the same people who are attacking black churches.” As society is beginning to understand the collective threat, there becomes the opportunity for unity that can help reduce the feelings of isolation that antisemitism has caused.

Another way that progress has been made is through upholding democracy. Bend the Arc mentioned that increasing access to voting and making Congress look more representative of America promote democracy, which makes progress against fascism. Bend the Arc has seen success in this area particularly in Georgia where they had to work against an antisemitic election campaign, but Georgians were able to vote and chose to elect the people targeted by that campaign. Electing people who are more representative of America and are not only governing for the people like them is a great sign of progress for Bend the Arc.

## Hope for Future

Ultimately, there remains the question of whether any of these actions could lead to the end of fascism and antisemitism. Both Aronson and Gingold expressed uncertainty but a great deal of hope as well. Gingold explained that antisemitism is something that was created by humans and used by humans so it should be able to be stopped by humans as well, reemphasizing the importance of defining it as human made rather than a natural phenomenon. For ending fascism, she explained that it will take not becoming complacent, involving constant efforts for democracy and equity. Protecting democracy through voting rights reforms, campaign finance reforms, and making government accessible and representative of all is essential for this to work. However, she noted that the bigger question is not whether we can reduce violent antisemitic incidents, but whether we can reduce gun violence, economic injustice, the wealth gap, and improve healthcare and mental health care.

Both explained that while they believe the end of fascism is something that they see in the future, it will take multigenerational work in order to fully achieve it. Aronson explained that there is an indigenous phrase about organizing where you think about organizing in the context of reaching back seven generations and forward seven generations. While fighting fascism is likely going to take many generations working over many years, Aronson also expressed faith in the idea that it could happen at any moment. He explained that there is a Jewish folkish saying or joke that goes, “We’ll talk about it in a week, if the messiah doesn’t come before then,” acknowledging that people should still work towards an end to fascism, but that radical transformation could happen

at any point, even tomorrow. Aronson described how in activism, there are moments of whirlwind, where everyone becomes energized and mobilizes for change, that can happen any day, but it is still important to not wait or rely on these moments but rather think strategically and long-term.

## **Conclusion**

While the United States has struggled with and at times encouraged the spread of fascist ideas and principles, there has been historical and modern resistance. A resurgence of fascist and antisemitic acts has disturbed the nation, but also has generated significant mobilization against these groups and institutions. Fascism is a complex beast, one that has infiltrated mostly every system in the United States, and as such will require a great deal of work to dismantle. However, just as fascism has its supporters, its opposition has become incredibly energized and committed to ending it. These people have created grassroots organizations to disrupt systems perpetuating inequality and ensure their communities are no longer a haven for fascism. They are protesting, voting, educating, running campaigns, spreading awareness, investing in their communities, and promoting democracy. This type of multifaceted approach is the only way to address all the causes of fascism and prevent its spread and appeal. It is unlikely that the conditions that encourage fascism will all be deconstructed in this lifetime, but the possibility and hope for peace in the future does exist and should be encouraged.

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