

ARGUMENT

Trump Wants to Label Antifa a Terrorist Organization. What About the KKK?

For more than a century, white supremacy groups have wreaked incalculable devastation against Black Americans.

BY ANGELA R. PASHAYAN, DOCKTREL CROMARTIE | JUNE 20, 2020, 9:34 AM

Some say Ku Klux was chosen as the name for the U.S. white supremacist organization because it **mimics the sound** of a rifle being cocked, though other evidence points to the appeal of the Greek word *kyklos*, **which means circle**. That was essentially the goal of the defeated Confederate soldiers who formed the Ku Klux Klan in 1865—to encircle or kill Black Americans. As the klan grew in power, it made its intentions publicly clear: promoting Confederate jingoism; pushing back on Reconstruction-era rights; performing terrorist raids to intimidate; destructing property, especially churches; assaulting; taunting; lynching; hanging; and dragging the bodies of Black men behind cars. These acts were carried out to promote white supremacy and also for gaining political power.

In the months and years after the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution were passed—abolishing slavery and guaranteeing basic rights to the formerly enslaved—it became clear to the federal government that forcible action against KKK-led terrorism would be necessary if the newly enacted rights and protections were to have any impact. By 1871, Congress passed a series of enforcement acts that broadened the federal government’s powers to oversee elections and allowed the U.S. military to use force to stop the KKK. Barely a decade later, after the swift dismantling of Reconstruction, the Supreme Court stripped the acts of much of their power; a lack of enforcement undid the rest.

To this day, right-wing groups, including white supremacy groups, are responsible for more murders on U.S. soil than any other extremist group. Over the past decade, three-quarters of extremist-related killings were carried out by right-wing extremists, according to research by the **Anti-Defamation League**. By mid-2019, **white supremacist**

violence and arrests had already outstripped those in all of 2018. And yet, the Trump administration has slashed funding for programs to counter far-right extremism, claiming—incorrectly—a greater threat from Islamist extremism.

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But now the administration has a new bogeyman on which to focus its talk of terrorism. On May 31, U.S. President Donald Trump announced he would begin executive legislation to list antifa as a domestic terrorist group. Antifa, shorthand for “anti-fascist,” is a left-wing organization comprising various autonomous groups seeking a common goal—to protect Black people from white terrorism. The group has been accused of committing property damage during protests, particularly at demonstrations against George Floyd’s killing, although there is scant evidence to support that. If antifa is designated as a terrorist group, the U.S. military can be used against it.

Trump’s efforts are little more than bluster: There exists mechanisms only for designating foreign terror groups. But perhaps it is time for the government to create a domestic terrorism statute. In light of the institutionalized racism and terror facing Black Americans for the past 400 years, is it not time for the KKK to be shut down?

Living in terror goes beyond inequality. Perpetual anxiety leads to high blood pressure—a leading health impact of living with racism, though hardly the only one. Black Americans live in fight or flight mode, on guard for how they look, what they say, and the ever-present possibility of brutish oppression by the police. Epigenetics teaches that trauma can be mapped onto our very DNA. Therefore, every new generation adds another layer to the trauma inherited from slave ancestors. The “talk” given to 10-year-old Black boys today is not new; it’s been done since the 1700s when the discussion was even more degrading: “Bear the whips and lashes,” oral histories reveal. “Master will tire after 15.”

It is time for a federal law designating the KKK as a domestic terrorist group. No longer can the United States ignore the threat from this racist organization or allow the flow of its terrorist propaganda to go unabated. Although historically the executive branch has

immense power when considering foreign matters and war, Congress has constructed legislation specifically aimed at providing the executive branch with the legal means to rein in international terrorism. Still, congressional leaders have conspicuously chosen to ignore domestic terror cells.

Domestic terrorism is commonly misinterpreted as an act orchestrated on behalf of a foreign terrorist organization. But it is not practical to refrain from confronting an existential threat simply because it's domestic.

Perpetrators of domestic terrorism generally seek to operate as predators on factions of the U.S. population. The KKK believes its acts are justified because the government has refused to wholly outlaw its existence, regardless of the blatant danger to public safety. Thus, our terror extends to the highest level of the law—our government. From a Black perspective, antifa may be our only hope.

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