

I confronted Richard Spencer at my gym. Racists don't get to lift in peace.

White nationalism is harmful all the time, even when its leaders are off the clock.



By C. Christine Fair May 25

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On May 22, Richard Spencer, the young, clean face of white nationalism in America, took to [YouTube](#) to lament that his gym privileges were taken away because a woman — me — called him out at his local fitness club for being a vocal propagandist for racism. Spencer, in addition to mendacious distortions of key facts, naturally employed misogynist tropes to portray me variously as dumb, ignorant, fat, hideous, triangular and the ugliest woman he'd ever seen; he likewise recounted my “Austic Screeching,” apparently mocking persons with autism to humiliate me. I do not screech. But that is the vernacular with which Spencer describes female protest.

Spencer sought to garner sympathy by arguing that he is a model gym user — he should be allowed to spread hate and stoke racist, misogynist, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic and other bigoted forms of violence, and organize torchlit nighttime rallies that conjure up images of similar rallies staged by the Klan — all without facing consequences for his actions when off the job, so to speak. Spencer wants us to believe that when he is not publicly exclaiming the superiority of the white, Christian male and asserting that this country belongs to such men, he should be allowed to mingle in polite, ethnically diverse society.

But Spencer is wrong.

While Spencer was recording his defense of his arrogated right to deadlift in peace, the grieving family of Richard Collins III was making funeral arrangements. They will not know peace for a long time, if ever. Collins was a talented and accomplished man who was preparing to graduate from Bowie State University this week. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army and had attained one of the highest honors of being airborne certified. But the man accused of killing him, Sean Urbanski, has been involved in an [online Facebook group that posts racist material](#). Authorities are investigating the case as a possible hate crime. If it is, Collins would be just the most recent African American killed because of

his or her skin color. But he will not be the last, just as the nine black churchgoers murdered by white supremacist Dylann Roof in 2015 were not the last.

Spencer does not like to be called a neo-Nazi, much less an ordinary Nazi, even though he and his followers have addressed President Trump as their Fuhrer and “honored” Trump with Nazi salutes and the Nazi form of address “Hail Trump,” summoning to mind the Nazi heil. Spencer is fond of using Nazi terminology like “Lügenpresse” (“lying press” in German), sports a Hitler Youth haircut, and festoons his public addresses with anti-Semitic verbiage. He prefers to be identified as the leader of the “alternate right,” or alt-right, a term he invented. Spencer’s twisted vision for America is an “ethno-state so that our people can ‘come home again,’ can live amongst family and feel safe and secure.” His desire for this so-called white “ethno-state” is motivated by his racist conviction “that Hispanics and African Americans have lower average IQs than whites and are more genetically predisposed to commit crimes.”

Spencer goes to great lengths to portray himself as the clean-cut white nationalist you may even bring home to a Seder. He does not use racial epithets even though he outright refuses to denounce Hitler or the Klan and has even suggested that to the best of his knowledge, the Klan may not even be a real thing. He lets his proxies and troll armies use racist, anti-Semitic, misogynist, body-shaming, Islamophobic and other perverted bigoted verbiage instead.

Unlike the Klan and Nazis in Germany, Spencer claims that this revolution should be accomplished through a “peaceful ethnic cleansing” and dreams of a “new society, an ethno-state that would be a gathering point for all Europeans,” by which he means white Europeans. Yet, when pressed on the absurdity of his posited utopia being birthed through peaceful means, Spencer eventually concedes the truth: “Maybe it will be horribly bloody and terrible. That’s a possibility with everything.”

And this brings us back to reality. It already has been “horribly bloody and terrible.” The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that groups like Spencer’s are currently enjoying an unprecedented resurgence. Where once they were deep underground and limited in number, they have spread like a toxic fungal mist throughout our country and polities, empowered by the current political configuration beginning with the White House and its cabinet appointments and allies in Congress, and those who privately object but are too pusillanimous to challenge this increasingly important part of the new conservative base. While Trump and his ilk have convinced many Americans that the biggest threat confronting our country comes from Muslims and foreigners, in fact we are more likely to be harmed by a homegrown white supremacist, the sort Spencer’s rhetoric encourages.

The stakes for our country could not be higher. I imagine Germans sitting around their tables in December 1932 lamenting the eroding civil society and expansion of hateful, nationalist rhetoric between bites of Wiener schnitzel and sips of beer. They see what’s coming but they are too uncomfortable to do anything. Maybe they even believed that in some way the coming months would augur change for the better or at least desired change. This is our December 1932. We have a choice. Good people can acquiesce to the purported demands of polite society and concede that Spencer’s right to lift weights in peace is more important than the rights of men like Collins to live full and productive lives, that being a white supremacist is not a 9-to-5 job, and that as long as he doesn’t bring his torch into an establishment, Spencer and his associates should be treated as any other civilized person. Or we can refuse to treat this hateful, dangerous ideology as just another way of being, and fight it in every space we occupy.

I've made my choice. You need to make yours.

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