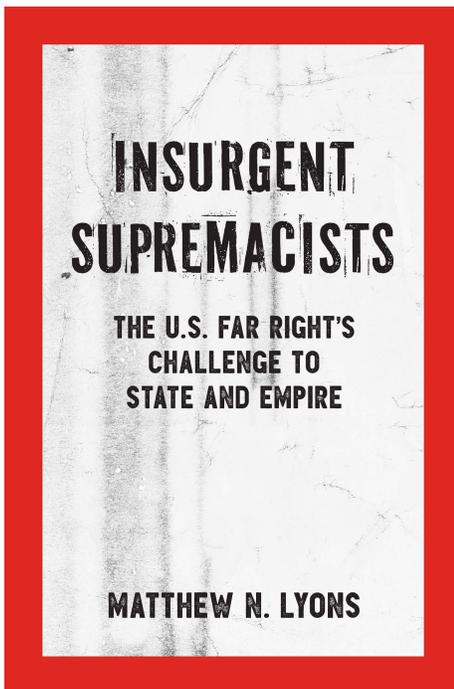


Insurgent Supremacists: The U.S. Far Right's Challenge to State and Empire

By Matthew N. Lyons

Study Guide



INTRODUCTION

1. Lyons uses precise terms in defining the U.S. far right—a commitment to human inequality and rejecting the political legitimacy of the established political system, which is followed by six core premises as well as discussion of the complexity of right-wing populism and fascism. This definition quickly challenges the popular concept of the “extreme doctrine,” where ideas, people, actions are categorized as extreme and outside the core of society. What does Lyons’ approach offer to anti-racist and anti-fascist movements today?

2. Which of the core premises Lyons articulates stands out to you? What does it shift or change in your thinking about the U.S. far right?

PART ONE: IDEOLOGICAL CURRENTS

1. Lyons argues that the U.S. far right is best defined not by one specific ideology, but rather by its withdrawal of loyalty to the state. At the same time, the U.S. far right is made up of very different currents with varied commitments to human inequality. Which currents were you familiar with? Which were new?
2. Race, religion, gender, and elitism are key points that animate different far right currents that are not loyal to the state. This premise expands general ideas of what constitutes the far right. Where do these currents show up in your work and context?

3. Lyons discusses key points—ideological as well as events in history—where disparate far right movements come together. What are they? What are key points of difference or conflict?

PART TWO: NEGLECTED THEMES

1. Lyons prioritizes three themes he believes are most often neglected in understanding the far right—gender and sexual identity, imperialism, and “decentralism,” meaning opposition to centralized political power. Why do you think he chose these three? Who neglects them?
2. What are different kinds of attacks on feminism and how do you see them show up in your work?
3. Right-wing anti-imperialism is a recurrent theme in U.S. history. What arguments animate differ anti-imperialism rooted in a far right ideology? What are some of the dangers for leftists in relating to this set of politics?
4. Lyons argues that a shift from strong state ideology to decentralism has been one of the biggest themes of the U.S. far right’s development over the past half century, and that this shift cuts across multiple ideological currents. Why do you think that is?

PART THREE: PARTNERS, RIVALS, OPPONENTS

1. Is the following quote important; why or why not? If so, what are the implications for social justice movements today?

“To the extent that leftists have addressed security forces’ relations with armed right-wing groups, they have mainly focused on the lenient treatment such groups have often received—as well as instances when the government has collaborated with them directly. These are important realities, but they are not the whole story. Federal agencies have sometimes tolerated or even supported rightists vigilantes when doing so has aligned with their goals, but at other times they have regarded them as a threat—or a useful scapegoat.”
2. How can antifascism, at times, serve as a rationale for increasing repression?

3. Lyons discusses three different ways leftists have dealt with the topic of fascism—from deploying a dramatic effect, to highlighting the dangers of a new political turn. Within this, he warns that “it’s equally important to be able to make distinctions between different kinds of right-wing threats.” What are the costs of not making these distinctions? What kinds of distinctions of different right-wing threats happening now feel useful to articulate?
4. Lyons writes, “President Trump, while building on the work of his predecessors, has intensified the U.S. government’s white supremacist and authoritarian tendencies beyond what any conventional conservative would have done. But Trump’s ability to effect change has been limited by his lack of organizational and political skills coupled with conventional conservatism’s entrenched power. The early result, as I described it in August 2017, has been ‘a harsher, more repressive, more chaotic version of neoliberalism with some America First elements.’” This assessment was written a few months after Trump took office. Looking back from today, how well does it describe his presidency after that?

CONCLUSION: DISLOYALTY IN MOTION

1. Lyons points to key themes in understanding the far right. Which themes feel useful to investigate further in your social justice work?
 - a. The far right is constantly in motion, and its political fortunes and activities may look very different from one moment to the next.
 - b. The far right encompasses multiple currents, which sometimes but not always share common positions.
 - c. Centrist pro-establishment forces are threatened by autonomous, militant antifascism at least as much as they are by fascists killing people in the streets.

APPENDIX: TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT FASCISM

1. Lyons defines fascism as a revolutionary form of right-wing populism, inspired by a totalitarian vision of collective rebirth, that challenges capitalist political and cultural power while promoting economic and social hierarchy. What does this definition of fascism point to that is distinct from capitalist authoritarianism?
2. Does fascism always include white supremacy and colonialism?
3. Lyons poses the idea of a “three way fight” between fascism, conventional global capitalism, and (at least potentially) leftist revolution. Do you agree? Why or why not? What does this shift or change, if anything, in your political work?