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Review: Andy Ngo's new book still pretends antifa's the real enemy

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Andy Ngo, after being attacked with weapons including (almost definitely) a vegan milkshake in Portland, Ore., in June 2019. (Moriah Ratner / Getty Images)

By ALEXANDER NAZARYAN

FEB. 8, 2021 7 AM PT



ON THE SHELF

Unmasked: Inside Antifa's Radical Plan to Destroy Democracy

By Andy Ngo

Center Street: 320 pages, \$25

There is an alternate universe out there in which we never have to ponder, let alone

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Congress, and we know nothing of her musings on [Jewish s](#) **SUBSCRIBE** on of
 Democrats or “[false flag](#)” school shootings.

If you find that universe, please send directions.

Coming as it does in this weary universe of ours, a month after pro-Trump insurrectionists [stormed the U.S. Capitol](#) in search of elected officials to kidnap or kill, “[Unmasked](#)” has to be taken seriously. Not because it is a serious book — it is nothing of the sort — but because Ngo’s prominence is evidence that false flags will continue to be planted, sometimes on the very same soil where violent reactionaries have spilled American blood.

A mainstay of conservative media, Ngo is a disciple of Project Veritas founder [James O’Keefe](#), who rose to fame with videos in which [members of liberal organizations](#) were duped into making outrageous statements that were then deceptively edited. But whereas O’Keefe, whom Ngo thanks in his acknowledgments, goes after a diverse range of subjects, Ngo is singularly focused on inflating antifa’s importance. It is his black-clad white whale, his Marx-spouting Moby Dick.

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milkshake [contained concrete](#); far more likely, it was a vegar

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butter.

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Ngo was punched and kicked as well; he claims to have suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. The violence was obviously criminal. What goes unmentioned is that Ngo had a history of “embedding” with right-wing groups — including, according to [persuasive allegations](#) he has denied, the white supremacist outfit Patriot Prayer — that provoke antifa into the very fights Ngo then films. In “Unmasked,” he eagerly dons the martyr’s vestments, describing the attack with such self-serving detail, you’d think he’d been liberating Rome.

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“Unmasked” is a culmination of Ngo’s single-minded quest to depict an assortment of leftists as a unified vanguard whose mission is to “destroy the nation-state, America in

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the sentiment. As a journalist, however, I must point out that kind propaganda that keeps authoritarians in power.

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Distortions and untruths hover like flies around every shred of confirmable fact. The same section of “Unmasked” that ends with Ngo’s paean to the United States portrays a mid-November “Stop the Steal” rally in Washington as a “peaceful and celebratory” affair, with no mention of the Proud Boys amassed there. The counter-protesters, meanwhile, are a “marauding gang.”

The truth about antifa has been chronicled elsewhere, and it is a lot more quotidian than Ngo and his abettors at Fox News would like you to believe. The nation’s top mainstream antifa scholar, Mark Bray, [wrote in The Washington Post](#) that antifa is “not an organization. Rather, it is a politics of revolutionary opposition to the far right.”

Ngo’s false-equivalence manifesto comes while fencing remains in place on Capitol Hill, all because the Proud Boys of the aforementioned November lovefest decided to return on January 6. Coming in the wake of that ugly insurrection, “Unmasked” has the ridiculous feel of a warning about the dangers of German communism issued in 1939.

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“While the Brownshirts are well remembered in contemporary history of far-left paramilitaries in the German interwar years, his lack of memory,” Ngo writes, in the tendentious, pedantic tone of a Wikipedia enthusiast. I guess he didn’t get around to clicking on the entry for Auschwitz-Birkenau.

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Ngo crosses the line into truly despicable when he downplays the murders of Heather Heyer by white nationalists in Charlottesville and Black teenager Trayvon Martin by vigilante George Zimmerman. Every act of violence by antifa, meanwhile, is described so meticulously and ominously that Herr Goebbels would have been proud.

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In no way do I [make that allusion flippantly](#). Maligning the opposition was central to the Nazi strategy, and it is critical to today’s far-right extremists. Ngo’s intention here seems not just to discredit antifa, but to run a diversionary tactic for [Patriot Prayer](#) and other

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(Center Street Press)

The right is always reminding us that ["facts don't care about your feelings,"](#) so let us set out some facts. Ngo writes that the "numbers and influence" of right-wing extremists "are grossly exaggerated by biased media." while antifa poses "just as much, if not more

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[International Studies](#), hardly a lefty outfit, found that antifa **SUBSCRIBE** hat violence did occur, most of which was driven by local, autonomous actors, and that the organization's threat was "relatively small."

January 6th administered the coup de grâce to Ngo's already teetering thesis. It should not have taken this long, however. Trump's own Department of Homeland Security [warned last October](#) that "white supremacist extremists" would remain the "[most persistent and lethal threat](#)" to the American homeland.

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[A recent report in the New York Times](#) noted that Trump was so obsessed with the imaginary threat of antifa, he effectively prevented his own administration from countering the looming threat from the right. Before he was banned from Twitter, Trump retweeted Ngo's scurrilous dispatches 11 times between August and October 2020 to his nearly 90 million followers.

If trolling, not reportage, is Ngo's purpose, then "Unmasked" is a tour de force. The left helped his cause (as it tends to), protesting in front of the famed Powell's bookstore in Portland, Ore., for agreeing to carry the book. Powell's [backed down](#), giving Ngo the kind of publicity not even a Trump tweet would have brought. The book became an

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Yet no amount of commercial success can obscure Ngo's fun argument. Most of his reporting is focused on Portland and Seattle, where radicalism is not exactly new. His efforts to depict a national network are unconvincing, as are attendant efforts to show the Democratic establishment's support for antifa (for example, an Instagram post from Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez supporting [Unicorn Riot](#), an alternative news outlet that backs peaceful protests).

Seeking proof of antifa's military cohesion, he quotes from a training manual he managed to obtain: "Childcare will be provided. Please just let us know the number and ages of the children ahead of time." The road to Stalinism, I have long maintained, will be paved with BPA-free playmats.

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Before the fine folks at Gateway Pundit rush to screencap any of the above as evidence

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company's chief executive, Howard Schultz, committed to [h](#) **SUBSCRIBE** [n](#)
[refugees](#). The destruction was not just pointless, but also detrimental to the cause. The same can and should be said about the violence that sometimes followed the summer's protests.

Excuses for left-wing violence — I am thinking of Vicky Osterweil's [offensively clueless](#) "In Defense of Looting" — deserve the same level of condemnation now directed at Ngo. The only difference, and it is a *yuge* one, is that Trump openly courted the Proud Boys and other right-wing groups, which essentially turned their violent acts into state-sanctioned terror. Say what you will about President Biden, he is unlikely to invite antifa for tea and crumpets on the South Lawn.

Less honest segments of the right will nevertheless argue the opposite, using Ngo's book to pad their case. Greg Kelly, the Hannity wannabe anchor on [Newsmax TV](#), gave the game away on Jan. 15, when he complained that he was "sick of hearing" about the Capitol riot. He then quickly pivoted to antifa, deploying exactly the same argument Ngo makes in this collection of words that I am legally required to call a book.

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"Unmasked" will do no more to help Americans understand antifa than Borat helped us

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On Jan. 4, some protesters showed up in front of the Virginia Hawley. The protesters were loud and plainly unwelcome. Hawley treated them as terrorists, denouncing “antifa scumbags” whom he [falsely depicted](#) as vandalizing his property. It made for some good Fox News segments, which seems to be both the origin and endpoint of so much conservative thought these days.

Not 48 hours later, there was Hawley in front of the Capitol, fist raised **in** support of what few would call anything but treason. Followers of Trump fervently searched footage of the riot, desperately trying to find evidence of antifa agitators. But those rioters did not wear masks, so it was clear who they were — and were not.

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Nazaryan is a White House correspondent for Yahoo News and the author of “The Best People: Trump’s Cabinet and the Siege on Washington.”

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