

# Moving from Resistance to Defiance

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Tom Benthin, Indivisible Sonoma County

Presentation to the Sonoma Valley Democrats

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photo: Jesse Kornblum / [ProBonoPhoto.org](https://ProBonoPhoto.org)





- ❖ I'm going to talk a bit about what I'm seeing and how I think we can respond.
- ❖ There's an awful lot being broken right now that needs to be fixed.
- ❖ You don't have to agree with me; you may have a different take or idea about what would work best. That's fine. Do that instead.
- ❖ We don't really know what will work, we're all trying to figure it out. Let's try lots of things.
- ❖ The main thing is that I'm opposed to the fascists & billionaires. I'm assuming you're here because you are, too.







Kennedy defined my image  
of what a president should  
be & what patriotism was...

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...and what it meant to be a Democrat

# Profiles IN Courage

DECISIVE MOMENTS IN

THE LIVES OF CELEBRATED AMERICANS

Senator John F. Kennedy

Foreword by ALLAN NEVINS







“When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross.”

*—Anon.*









# Indivisible Sonoma County, 2017

Founded to "Resist the Trump Agenda" - in other words, to fight the fascist assault on our democracy

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# Fascism breaks politics-as-usual

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You cannot play the game with fascists, because their goal is  
to *BREAK THE GAME*





# Politics-as-Usual

“The Old Game”

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- ❖ Leave it to the media to inform the public
- ❖ Win elections
- ❖ Govern by passing legislation & budgets
- ❖ Value compromise and negotiation; be civil

# Fascism

“The New Game”

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- ❖ Use propaganda to shape public opinion
- ❖ Break or ignore the rules of the game to advance your cause; take no prisoners
- ❖ Seize power, then change the rules to cement it
- ❖ Remove obstacles to placing all power in the hands of a dictator / gang of billionaires



# Fascism is a Game Changer

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- ❖ You can't defeat the New Game by continuing to play the Old one
- ❖ Compromise, seeking unity, cordiality - all are weaknesses fascists will exploit
- ❖ You cannot win fascists back to the Old Game by setting a good example
- ❖ Think of fascism as a kind of innovation, but one that is evil - it is designed to *use* democracy to *eliminate* it





# The “Old Game” Enables Fascism

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- ❖ Fascists, like bullies, advance by crossing lines to see how far they can go
- ❖ If they are not stopped, they will go further and further
- ❖ Stopping fascists also requires naming them as the villain
- ❖ These behaviors are the opposite of what makes a successful Old Game player





# Stopping Fascism

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- ❖ Requires **CONFRONTATION** & **OPPOSITION**
- ❖ Fighting despite the cost or obstacle\*
- ❖ Joining the fight with intensity of purpose\*
- ❖ And opposing the fascists without compromise\*
- ❖ These, too, are taboo to an Old Game player

\* A.R. Moxon, "Being More Like Republicans"





# Behavior Persuades

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- ❖ Actions speak louder than words
- ❖ Making it clear that you will fight every transgression can stop the transgression before it starts
- ❖ Even when it doesn't, it communicates the stakes and your determination to others





And yet, Democrats as a party are still largely  
committed to the Old Game. Why?

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# The Centrist Theory

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- ❖ Win elections by appealing to voters “in the middle”
- ❖ Prioritize the needs of the “frontliners” holding districts “in the middle”
- ❖ Allow / encourage frontliners to vote against their party to demonstrate their independence
- ❖ Attack to your left as needed to curry favor with “the middle”
- ❖ Assume that voters to the left will have to vote for you





# Once a Strength...

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- ❖ Promote based on seniority and loyalty to leadership
- ❖ Select for adherence to the centrist theory of move right, punch left
- ❖ Recruit and fund centrist candidates
- ❖ Defend centrist incumbents





# ...Now a Liability

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- ❖ Fighting fascism requires a unified opposition
- ❖ A party that allows members to vote fascist when they want to isn't an opposition party
- ❖ Republican-adjacent voters ("the middle") won't be won over, but base voters to the left will be lost
- ❖ Search for bipartisanship contradicts the message that fascism is dangerous
- ❖ The party seems opportunistic, doesn't stand for anything





“Two of probably the most foundational, defining things about American history is that we beat the Confederates and we beat the Nazis. And I don’t know what side people may be on today, but I still am not rocking with anyone sympathetic to Nazis. And I will do that until I am six feet in the ground.”

*–Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez*









photograph by Jesse Kornblum / ProBonoPhoto.org



# Push Democrats to play the New Game

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- ❖ Look for Democrats already playing the New Game and support them
- ❖ Encourage New Game behaviors at all times
- ❖ Don't accept Old Game excuses from your representatives
- ❖ Don't *make* excuses for their Old Game behaviors
- ❖ Use your volunteer time & donations to support the move to New Game behaviors





# Encourage Renewal

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- ❖ Rethink your “circular firing squad” assumptions
- ❖ Primaries are a mechanism for renewal; embrace them
- ❖ Although they require resources, they also give voters a choice
- ❖ Apathy is a key problem that choice can combat





# The Story is the Difference

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- ❖ Republicans win by telling a better story
- ❖ Their story is a vicious lie, but it is compelling, speaks to problems their audience feels, has vivid villains, and gives people a way to understand the world
- ❖ Even better, they tell their story constantly - and their actions are consistent with it
- ❖ By election time, the public's attention has already been focused in the way Republicans want it to be





# Tell the Better Story

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- ❖ There is a better story for Democrats to tell, but it requires them to name the villains: a fascist Republican party & billionaires
- ❖ It also requires their behavior to be consistent with the story - to be in vigorous opposition to the villains
- ❖ And it requires them to be human, open & vulnerable





# Dilemmas

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- ❖ Democrats need to oppose billionaires, but will have to confront their donors
- ❖ Democrats need to move to the New Game, but also need a stable caucus
- ❖ Activists need to push the party to reform, but also need to keep getting Dems elected





# Model Defiance

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- ❖ Practice defiance in the little things
- ❖ Treat Trump / Musk as illegitimate
- ❖ See and name things as they are
- ❖ Grow your bubble of rejecting fascism
- ❖ Decide for yourself





# You Can Start Now: Resistance, Refusal, & Ridicule

A way forward from Anat Shenker-Osorio

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- ❖ Pick a thing (one!) that you care about and can be motivated to stay the course with - go as local as possible about that thing:

And so if it is education, just take that for instance, then you decide with yourself and a handful of your friends, you have a potluck beforehand, you do you. Do something fun and entertaining and get together beforehand. You look up in the public record when the next school board meeting is in your local community. And you go there and you make statements about ensuring that all children have the freedom to learn the truth of our past, and that all children have the freedom to belong and be who they are within their schools. And you oppose any kind of effort to implement the draconian fascist agenda in your own community.

- ❖ Wear your beliefs:

Get yourself a “Fabulously Fighting Fascism” t-shirt. One of the things that is most important to the right and to any authoritarian force is to suck our uniqueness, is to suck out our being. I say all the time, put up a billboard in the middle of nowhere that shows people across the gender spectrum just having themselves the best possible time, and say “Fabulously Fighting Fascism.” you will get so much local media and local attention, even if it’s in the middle of nowhere because it is a saucy message. Show, not tell, that you do not agree with this, that you refuse it.

- ❖ Join a union and/or support union efforts