

The New York Times promotes an American Nazi

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In a feature article published Saturday and running to more than 2,000 words, the *New York Times* gave a sympathetic portrayal of an American fascist and neo-Nazi. By Sunday night, the article had provoked so many protests and objections from its readers that national editor Marc Lacey was commissioned to write a semi-apologetic explanation of how and why it was produced.

The article, written by Richard Fausset, an Atlanta-based reporter for the *Times*, with several accompanying photographs, profiled Tony Hovater, a 29-year-old welder from the Dayton, Ohio suburb of Huber Heights. Under the headline, “In America’s Heartland, the Voice of Hate Next Door,” the piece might be described as a day in the life of your friendly neighborhood white supremacist.

No detail is spared in presenting Hovater and his new wife as just another young couple living an ordinary American life: “They registered at Target. On their list was a muffin pan, a four-drawer dresser and a pineapple slicer.” The two “were shoulder to shoulder at a table, young and in love. He was in a plain T-shirt, she in a sleeveless jean jacket. She ordered the boneless wings.”

Hovater is described as “polite and low-key”, while “his tattoos are innocuous pop-culture references: a slice of cherry pie adorns one arm, a homage to the TV show ‘Twin Peaks’.” He is a fan of *Seinfeld*, and the couple patronize Olive Garden and Panera Bread, listen to National Public Radio, and have four cats.

There is no disguising the fascistic character of Hovater’s political beliefs: he is described as an admirer of Hitler, a Holocaust denier, a founding member of the neo-Nazi Traditionalist Worker Party, and a supporter of the fascist mobilization in Charlottesville, Virginia where a liberal

counterdemonstrator, Heather Heyer, was murdered by a white supremacist who drove his speeding car into a group of protesters.

The delicacy with which Fausset treats his subject is shown by the fact that Heyer’s name never appears in the article, and Hovater was apparently not asked whether he approved of her killing. Such a line of inquiry would have contradicted the article’s purpose, which is to portray Hovater as a salt-of-the-earth type, someone who has just married his sweetheart and whose “Midwestern manners would please anyone’s mother.”

It is significant that Fausset chose to describe Hovater from the beginning of his article as a “white nationalist.” This is a term, as the WSWS has previously explained, chosen by the neo-Nazis and their apologists at Breitbart News because it sounds less threatening and more legitimate than “white supremacist,” “white racist” or “anti-Semite,” although it means the same thing. It also allows the ultra-rightists to claim that they are merely a “civil rights movement” for whites, following the example of “black nationalists” or Latino activists.

As Fausset admitted later, in his own response to readers’ criticisms, the article fails—or more properly, makes no real attempt—to provide an explanation for Hovater’s political development, described in the article as “from vaguely leftist rock musician to ardent libertarian to fascist activist.” Hovater did not experience economic deprivation at any point in his life, or personal conflict with people of other races.

The unstated conclusion is that this evolution could become the political trajectory of virtually anyone in Hovater’s demographic: whites without a college education. This is, of course, the line of argument that the sections of the US political establishment for which

the *Times* speaks, mainly the Democratic Party, have been making for the election of Donald Trump: it arose not from the deepening economic desperation of tens of millions of working people, but from the inexplicable and apparently innate racism of the white working class.

One significant detail is noted but unexplored: according to the article, Hovater grew up on a series of Army bases. Evidently, his father was a career military man. This background, under conditions of American wars waged continually throughout Hovater's lifetime, could well have played a role in molding his fascist outlook.

The *Times*, as a liberal political apologist for all of these imperialist wars, from the Persian Gulf in 1991 to Bosnia and Serbia in the late 1990s, to Afghanistan, Iraq and more recently Libya and Syria, is evidently unwilling to explore that avenue. The Army bases are described only as "integrated," and there is no description of Hovater's parents' occupations, political views or influence on their son.

Once the article was published, the volume of hostile emails, tweets, letters and phone calls was evidently so large that the *Times* editors felt it necessary to give an explanation for why the article took the form that it did, under the headline, "Readers Accuse Us of Normalizing a Nazi Sympathizer; We Respond."

The response penned by Marc Lacey, the newspaper's national editor, is thoroughly dishonest. He acknowledges that many readers "found the story offensive, with many seizing on the idea we were normalizing neo-Nazi views and behavior." Lacey then proceeds to confirm this criticism, writing, "The point of the story was not to normalize anything but to describe the degree to which hate and extremism have become far more normal in American life than many of us want to think."

Lacey admits that readers were correct in denouncing the inclusion in the story of a link to a website where Nazi paraphernalia are advertised for sale, making the article a virtual recruiting tool for the fascists it was profiling. The link has now been removed.

Then he resorts to citing support for the *Times* piece from a representative of the pseudo-left, Shane Bauer, a reporter at *Mother Jones* magazine, who tweeted in response to the outraged protests over the article, "People mad about this article want to believe that

Nazis are monsters we cannot relate to. White supremacists are normal ass white people and it's been that way in America since 1776."

Bauer lumps together the politics of the American bourgeoisie in its revolutionary heyday (1776) with the politics of the German bourgeoisie under conditions of acute crisis and deep fear of the proletarian revolution (1933). George Washington was a slave owner, Hitler was a fascist anti-Semite, both were "white people" and "it's been that way in America" for nearly 250 years. Here historical falsification and political reaction join hands.

The WSWS has written elsewhere on the progressive historical significance of the American Revolution, despite the fact that key leaders like Washington and Thomas Jefferson were slave owners, and defended that revolutionary tradition against the slanders of today's advocates of racist identity politics. Suffice it to say in this context that Bauer's claim that "white supremacists are normal ass white people" is a political libel against the American population, the vast majority of whom—black, white, Hispanic and Asian—oppose racism.

The *Times* has been doing its best to promote racialism for a number of years. As we noted before, "Hardly a day goes by without one or more articles in the *Times* portraying America as a racially polarized society with a white population—especially white workers—seething with hatred for blacks."

The logic of this political narrative is that all social and political questions in America must be viewed through the prism of race. This view is put forward with increasing insistence because the emergence of economic inequality on an unparalleled scale—with three mega-billionaires, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, possessing more wealth between them than half the American population—underscores the reality that class, not race, is the fundamental dividing line in American and world capitalism.



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