

Katherine V. Aumer *Editor*

# The Psychology of Extremism

 Springer

# The Psychology of Extremism

Katherine V. Aumer  
Editor

# The Psychology of Extremism

 Springer

*Editor*

Katherine V. Aumer  
University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu  
Kapolei, HI, USA

ISBN 978-3-030-59697-2                      ISBN 978-3-030-59698-9 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-59698-9>

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2020

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG  
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

# Foreword

On a sweltering July day in 2015, I found myself in a bar on the outskirts of Knoxville, Tennessee. The bar was of the divey sort, located next to a freeway with a body shop and a strip club as its closest neighbors. It was early in the day, so the two pool tables in the back of the bar were unused and the jukebox in the corner was quiet. Surrounding me around the shaded tables on the bar's front porch was a menagerie of Nazis, klansmen, Southern secessionists, and garden-variety racist, almost all of them in some way draped in a Confederate flag.

Only a few weeks earlier, the white supremacist Dylann Roof had attacked the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, killing nine people as they worshipped, because, according to Roof, "black people raped white women daily" (Chicago Tribune News Sources, 2016). Radicalized in the online cesspool of white supremacy, the same ecosystem that had already produced Anders Behring Breivik in Norway and would go on to motivate Brenton Tarrant's Christchurch massacre, Robert Bowers' attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and many others, Roof came armed with 8 ammunition clips, each capable of carrying 13 rounds. Roof however had loaded them with only 11 rounds because he wanted to fire 88 shots, no more no less. In the numerology obsessed world of white supremacists, eight represents the eighth letter in the alphabet. 88 = HH. "Heil Hitler."

The racists in the bar in Knoxville were there as a response to Roof, or rather as a response to the response. The massacre in Charleston had set off a much needed discussion in America about the widespread use and profoundly racist meaning of the Confederate flag. This in turn had led to talk of tearing down Confederate monuments and the removal of the flag from federal buildings. It was a conversation that was deeply painful for many and cathartic for some. It forced a reckoning of sorts, and although grievously overdue and profoundly lacking in scope, it was a reckoning that compelled American society to explore its racist past and present, as complex, ugly, confusing, and heartrending as it was and still is. To everyone except the crowd in the bar, that is.

"They want to take our heritage," a skinhead with a face full of tattoos said in a measured manner that completely contradicted the message sent by the "Racial

Holy War” tattoo that was adorning his skull. “It’s a genocide of white people and white culture.” The group had just driven through downtown Knoxville, waving their flags and shouting slogans like “heritage not hate” and “southern pride.” According to the main speaker of the rally, national-socialist Matthew Heimbach, the Left and the Social Justice Warriors of the world smeared the Confederate flag with their accusations of racism and bigotry. Slavery had nothing to do with it, according to them. Nor did systemic racism, the specter of Jim Crow and the groundswell of white nativist sentiment that at that moment was about to manifest into the alt-right. In their eyes it was all a ruse, designed to malign them and their ancestors by their enemies. Thus, the past had been sanitized and bleached. Scrubbed of nuance and uncomfortable notions of guilt and enduring culpability. It was easy, neat, and required no painful introspection and evaluation, not on a personal and a societal level. It was a frame of mind that had echoed through history, an ideological bait-and-switch that had informed Jim Crow laws, the rise of the KKK, Richard Nixon’s Southern Strategy, and all the way to today’s maligning of the Black Lives Matter movement. It was, in a word, simplicity. Blissful and comforting simplicity.

Throughout my near decade-long foray into the world of white supremacy in America, where I embedded myself as a journalist (I should point out that I never concealed my identity, my profession, and my admittedly left-leaning politics) within some of the most racist and extreme groups in the country, I encountered this yearning for simplicity in almost everyone I met. I still see it in the racist and conspiratorial subcultures that I’m currently researching. Although there are myriad ways to be radicalized, a common factor seems to be the yearning for simplicity and reason in a capricious and befuddling world. A white supremacist’s certainty that Jews are secretly controlling the world and working tirelessly toward the eradication of the white race is not so different from a QAnoner’s assertion that a Satanic core of Democrats are working to destroy a Messianic Donald Trump. Both these views create significance from happenstance and order from chaos. To put it simply: extremism is a way to make the confusing understandable. At its core, radicalization and the embracing of extremist ideas are a way to carve out a place for the self within a turbulent and complex world. This is of course not unique to extremists. The feeling of helplessness that often comes with living in the modern world can be deeply painful. The knowledge that we live in a society to which we as individuals are, statistically speaking, immaterial, marooned on a world which will spin just as reliably with or without us through a universe that is utterly oblivious and unmoved by our presence, is enough to cast even the strongest of us into bouts of existential malaise. However, the process of radicalization aims to divide a confusing world into easily digestible narratives of victims and oppressors, of struggle and valiant battle.

The allure of the extremist mindset is that it lifts you out of the passive and into the active. You are no longer a hapless bystander as the world takes place around you. You are a player. One of the most infamous and influential slogans of the white supremacist movement is “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.” Conceived in prison by convicted white supremacist David Lane, these 14 words have become a mantra among a vast swath of white racists

throughout the world, so ubiquitous that it has been reduced to the shorthand “14 words” or simply “14.” These words serve as a useful reminder of the key selling point of extremism: it provides the individual with agency and offers the person a place of power and significance within a greater struggle. This call to action and the promise of a seat at the table are vital, and remarkably similar across disparate extremist movements. Just as ISIS offer its fighters an opportunity to step out of their humdrum existence in a secular society and bring about the prophesized Caliphate (McCants, 2014), white supremacists see themselves as part of a bloodline that reaches back through history and that is locked in an epic struggle for its very survival. Banking on a feeling of dispossession, these movements provide their recruits a new identity and a sense of manifest destiny. Who among us wouldn’t want that?

On a muggy evening in Georgia in 2016, I stood among the hulking skinheads of the Confederate Hammerskins, a notoriously violent white supremacist group, and listened to their then leader, Chester Doles, lay out this idea plainly. Holding a hollowed-out horn harvested from some unknown bovine creature and filled with tepid Miller Lite, a particularly American spin on a homage to the Norse Vikings, Doles cast each and every person on that field—they were overwhelmingly male—as players in an epic struggle. “We are modern day Vikings,” he explained to the heavily tattooed, extensively armed, and precariously drunk crowd. “We are the alpha males of today. We are men with courage and have great pride in our European heritage. We are husbands and fathers. We are protectors and providers of our families. We are proud, white men.” He then explained how the Vikings would tie a lock of their wives’ or daughters’ hair around their weapons before going into battle and that they should do the same, although he advised that they use AR-15s rather than swords and axes.

Looking around I could tell how his words resonated with what appeared to be a crowd of low education and income. He was offering them a choice. When they looked in the mirror they could choose to see a helpless cog in a vast machine, lost to the whims of a capricious system, or they could see a warrior; the culmination of their bloodline and a shaper of their own future. All of them had chosen the latter.

Interestingly, this is a more positive approach to radicalization than what others have pointed to as common methods of individual radicalization. For instance, the National Institute of Justice at the US Justice Department claims that “the radicalization process often involves embracing a terrorist belief system or narrative that identifies particular others or groups as ‘enemies’ and justifies engaging in violence against them” (Smith, 2018). While this is no doubt a vital part of the radicalization process, my experience often suggested that it was not the initial step. Rather than creating enemies, the white supremacists I spent time with seemed to base not only their radicalization efforts, but also the continuing maintenance of their networks, on building a positive sense of community. The groups I researched tended to define themselves by who they were, not who they were against. The Hammerskins considered themselves a tribe. The KKK often saw themselves as family and kin. The neo-fascist group Proud Boys call themselves a fraternity. These groups differ vastly

in ideology and methods, but they all emphasize forging of internal bonds before fighting an enemy.

Providing new members with a sense of belonging, an ideological family, is imperative in the radicalization process, and both my experiences taking part in the lives of white supremacists and the research bear this out. In fact, a study by the Kanishka Project in Canada, the Arc of Terrorism and Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism research programs in the United Kingdom, and the Department of Homeland Security from 2015 cite feelings of lack of meaning, wanting status, and wanting to belong as key risk factors for radicalizing to violent extremism (National Institute of Justice, 2015). An “us versus them” worldview and the feeling of being under threat are also cited, but it is clear that extremist groups prey on feelings of isolation and lack of self-worth. You don’t just go up to someone and start blaming the Jews for the ills of the world. First you make the person feel heard, respected, and valued.

In his book about growing up in rural Appalachia, *Hillbilly Elegy*, the author J.D. Vance writes “There is a lack of agency here—a feeling that you have little control over your life and a willingness to blame everyone but yourself.” While this is both a facile and unfair description of the inhabitants of Appalachia, it does point to the sense of impotency and anger that fuels the wave of right-wing populism that has bedeviled democracies all over the world of late. In America in particular, a confounding rise in the mortality rates of white, middle-aged men raises many red flags. A study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* attributed the trend to what they called “despair deaths,” which are suicides, drug overdoses, and alcohol-related diseases (Bernstein & Achenbach, 2015). In a report for the *Commonwealth Fund* David Squires and David Blumenthal write “On a range of social and economic indicators, middle-aged whites have been falling behind in the 21st century. They have lower incomes, fewer are employed, and fewer are married” (Khazan, 2016). In her book *The Politics of Resentment*, political scientist Kathy Cramer explains how rural Americans often feel disrespected and tread on by elites who do not understand or care about them. Taken together these paint a picture of an electorate ripe for radicalization, and millions of column inches have been written to explain how this resentment and desperation gave rise to Donald Trump. While it is an unfair oversimplification to blame the presidency of Donald Trump on angry Appalachians, the frustration and anger felt in many parts of America due to deindustrialization, opioid addiction, lack of education, and employment opportunities have provided fertile ground for far-right extremist recruiters. However, it is far from the whole story.

When Caleb Cain dropped out of college after three semesters and moved back to his small Appalachian hometown, he struggled with bouts of depression and loneliness (Roose, 2019). Many of his friends had left town and Cain felt disconnected, both from the friends he had left in college and from the community he had returned to. Seeking a way out of his depression he began watching self-help videos on YouTube. Initially his viewing habits were mostly benign, videos with tips on how to cope with loneliness, but he soon found himself drawn to YouTubers whose ideas on mental health and happiness had a more sinister tone. He discovered Stefan

Molyneux, the self-professed philosopher and at the time hugely popular YouTube personality. Molyneux spent a lot of time talking about masculinity and what it meant to be a man. He danced up to the line of acceptability, but Cain liked that about him. Raised in the era of online gaming, Cain had an affinity for those who pushed boundaries simply for the joy of pushing. Molyneux talked extensively about feminism. He was a men's right advocate and claimed that feminism was socialism and that modern gender roles had been forced onto society by the Left and that it was holding young men back. The more Cain watched the more he agreed with what he saw and the more he agreed the happier the YouTube algorithms were to feed him ever more content. Via Molyneux, Cain was introduced to a host of right-wing influencers, all thriving within the permissive ecosystem of YouTube. He discovered Paul Joseph Watson, a conspiracy monger and alt-right pundit who would later be banned from Facebook for being a "dangerous individual," Lauren Southern, a white nationalist with a huge audience, and Jordan Peterson, a Canadian men's rights activist. None of these were the rabid, foaming-at-the-mouth blowhards one might associate with white supremacists, rather they presented themselves as rational, tongue-in-cheek iconoclasts who weren't afraid of speaking truth to power. Caleb was enthralled. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Caleb explained that "When I found this stuff, I felt like I was chasing uncomfortable truths. I felt like it was giving me power and respect and authority" (Roose, 2019).

When I first met Caleb a couple of years ago, he explained to me the heady feeling of having your world explained to you, to watch the pieces fall into place and to see, finally, what your role in that world is. In a real sense, his world had been made simple for him. He was not to blame for his troubles; feminists were, socialism and the Left were. I met Caleb when he had made his way out of the morass he had sunk into, and since then he had achieved a clarity that he wanted to share with others. He recognized the factors that had pushed him into his online radicalization. He was honest about having had troubling and deeply offensive beliefs, and assigns blame to both himself and the online snake oil salesmen that litter the internet, waiting to pounce on kids like himself. However, he was most disturbed about the ease with which YouTube had facilitated his descent into political extremism. While the algorithms that decide what video you watch next are vastly complex and ever changing, the programming that governed the site at the time of Caleb's radicalization was primed to encourage users to delve deeper into whatever rabbit hole they currently found themselves. Also, as Becca Lewis at Data & Society revealed in her report *Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube*, political influencers on YouTube had created an "Alternative Influence Network (AIN)," an alternative media system that adopts the techniques of brand influencers to build audiences and "sell" them political ideology (Lewis, 2018). In her report, Lewis claimed that YouTube had become "the single most important hub by which an extensive network of far-right influencers profit from broadcasting propaganda to young viewers." She also concluded that "YouTube monetizes influence for everyone, regardless of how harmful their belief systems are. The platform, and its parent company, have allowed racist, misogynist, and harassing content to remain online—and in many cases, to generate advertising revenue—as long as it does not explicitly

include slurs.” Of course, at the time, Caleb and the thousands of other young men, just like him who were tuning into increasingly extreme content provided to them by the world’s largest video sharing website, had no idea that their radicalization was incentivized and monetized. They just felt seen and understood for the first time. They had gone through the looking glass. In the parlance of online extremism, Caleb had been redpilled.

In the 1999 movie *The Matrix* the main character Neo is offered a chance to see the world as it really is. A mysterious stranger that seems to understand him in a way nobody else does offers him a choice of two pills: “You take the blue pill—the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill—you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes.” Since then “taking the red pill” or “being redpilled” has become shorthand for a political awakening. In the world of modern extremism, radicalization itself has become a meme.

The dawn of online culture has caused a seismic shift in not only the way extremist groups organize and recruit. While historically only a small part of the right-wing extremist movement has belonged to organized groups, the movement itself was dominated by influential individuals and groups. Organizations like Aryan Nations, The Hammerskin Nation, and National Alliance were powerful entities that to a large degree dictated the tone and tenor of the right-wing movement. By contrast, the alt-right was conceived by a fractious coalition of online trolls and racist contrarians and never coalesced into a cohesive movement in anything but the loosest sense of the word. While the extremists of old were forced into making some kind of personalized buy-in—a real mailing address for newsletters or actually showing up to group meetings—the alt-right required no such thing and encouraged a wholly nihilistic way of political engagement. Their vocabulary and frames of reference were heavily influenced by online and gaming culture, and the movement found a vast cache of adherents in the legion of disaffected young men spending their days engaging with the world through the flickering light of a computer screen. Borrowing heavily from popular culture and gaming, the movement developed a nomenclature not just tailor-made to entice the disaffected men who came to it, but also to push them further. Those who had been redpilled often found themselves “blackpilled” meaning that they had moved beyond political awakening and discovered that the world is irredeemably broken. In the world of right-wing extremism, the black pill means realizing that the system will always be rigged against white men. The black pill then becomes a gateway to mass murderers like Anders Breivik, Dylann Roof, Brenton Tarrant, and Robert Bowers. In the bleak and dystopic world of incels, the black pill is the realization that the world has no use for men like them, and that there is no remedy except death, their own or that of others.

The key here is the ease with which a shorthand for radicalization has developed. A new online ecosystem has emerged where for the most part unaffiliated extremists share memes, conspiracy theories, and methods designed to fast-track the radicalization process and facilitate the dehumanization of everyone who does not belong to the movement. It is from this subculture that has risen not only the infamous mass murderers mentioned above but also a new generation of extremists,

determined to accelerate the race war that they pine for. However, I would argue that as different the modern right-wing extremist movement is from earlier incarnations, it is still driven by the same fundamental impulses that drove others before it and that drives other violent extremist ideologies: belonging.

In March 2019, before he massacred 50 people in Christchurch, New Zealand, the white supremacist Brenton Tarrant posted his rambling manifesto to the message board site 8chan. The same site was used by Patrick Crucius before he killed 22 people at an El Paso Walmart and so did John Earnest before opening fire inside a synagogue in Poway, California. 8chan had become a breeding ground for violent extremists and a cesspool of murderous fantasies. The website's tagline was "Embrace Infamy," and that was exactly the goal of the men posting their manifestos there. As much as their predecessors and their cohorts in other violent extremist movements, this new generation of white supremacists yearn for meaning and belonging. This iteration of the movement provides a way for them to transcend the fleeting meaninglessness of their lives and step into a pantheon of warriors and martyrs, aided by a steady numbing to the realities of mass violence and the dehumanization of their alleged enemies. As such, this version of the right-wing extremist movement shares many key aspects of Islamic extremism as espoused by ISIS. Much like Chester Doles in George implored his Hammerskin members to take part in a generational struggle, the modern right-wing mass murderers yearn to place themselves within a larger battle. The language and methods are different, but the need to belong and to matter is the same.

There are of course many roads that lead to Rome and people come to violent extremism in a myriad of ways and for different reasons. Some, like many of the KKK members I met, are born into the movement, raised in a generational hatred that can be difficult to get out of. I once attended a KKK funeral with a man who, after having threatened to kill me at least twice, explained to me how he was introduced to the Klan by his father when he was nine back in the 1970s and made to do terrible acts that he didn't want to talk about. "Nobody should make a child do what I had to do," he sobbed loudly while a cross burned behind him. Others seek it out as an escape from loneliness, or as a lark that over time can become deadly serious. Plenty of alt-right extremists have claimed that they joined the movement "for the lulz," internet speak for "as a joke," drawn to the offensive, boundary pushing mayhem of internet message boards. Yet others drop into the rabbit hole out of curiosity, falling for the enticing distortions of YouTube charlatans or bigoted pseudo-scholars, and antisemitic revisionists and eugenicists who preach racism and hatred concealed in garbage science. Then there are those who are filled with violent fantasies, those who care less for politics than for the prospect of mayhem, murder, and power through terror. Although they are relatively few compared to the others, these are the ones who end up in the news: the Tarrants, Breiviks, and Roofs of the world.

Yet as different as their motivations are, there is one factor that is reliably the same with only a few exceptions. The trolls of the alt-right, the mass shooters, the incels, the ISIS warriors, the neo-Nazis, and anti-government militia members are almost always men. It is impossible to underestimate the gender gap in violent extremism. Although there are exceptions to the rule, violent extremist spaces are

overwhelmingly masculine. When the FBI compiled a list of active shooters in America between 2010 and 2018 it revealed that only 9 out of 250 shooters were women (FBI, 2019). Islamic extremism is almost exclusively governed by men and although there are many examples of women undertaking operational roles in jihadi organizations—ISIS, Jaish al-Fatah, and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham are all known to use female fighters—it has been reported that these women lack agency within the larger organization (Women in International Security, 2017). The far right, certainly in America, is utterly dominated by men. Women play a key role although they are more often than not reduced to archetypes rather than human beings with interests of their own. There are women in the movement, some of them even have prominent roles and, in the influencer-driven ecosystem of modern online culture, they command large followings. Female superstars of the alt-right like Faith Goldy, Lauren Southern, and Brittany Pettibone have all been vastly influential. Likewise the anti-Islam bigots Pamela Geller and Laura Loomer have both built influential personal brands. However, their impact on the movement has rarely been to empower women, rather to perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes that reduce women and equate progress with decline, or as in the cases of Geller and Loomer, use the term feminism as a cudgel to attack Islam through distortions and generalizations. In an interview on the alt-right podcast *Hanging Chads*, Faith Goldy explained that “there has been in the past 50, 60 years, an organized campaign to tear down the institutions that provide order outside of government. And that is mainly the family.” This campaign’s goal, Goldy asserted, is to “deconstruct man and woman as they are intended to be” (Eyes on the Right, 2017, para. 3). Lauren Southern, an alt-right darling and white nationalist, has equated feminism with female supremacy and claimed that it makes victims of men (Southern, 2015). Brittany Sellner (2019), a far-right men’s rights activist who is married to white nationalist Martin Sellner, has described feminism as a “war on men,” and said that “It comes as no surprise to me at this point that movements such as the men’s rights have gained such popularity. Men are tired of being shamed for their inherent qualities such as masculinity and pigeonholed as the perpetrators of all the world’s problems.” One might argue that at least part of the reason why these women have gained popularity in such a masculine space is because they espouse a particularly reactionary view of gender that resonates with those who feel threatened or disturbed by progressive values and equal rights. These women serve a role as radicalizers because they not only confirm the prejudices about society in general and feminism in particular that the young men who fall into these rabbit holes often hold, but by nature of being women who preach anti-feminism, they give them legitimacy. In a sense, these women only remain influential so long as they are oppressing themselves.

In general, women are ciphers within a far-right movement that is often incredibly hostile to them. The problem of domestic violence in extremist circles could fill many books, and many of the women who have left the movement leave with stories of violence and abuse. This is no doubt the result of a movement that is incredibly violent, rife with alcohol and substance abuse, and overwhelmingly masculine. In terms of the radicalization process however, women serve different purposes to different groups. In the hypermasculine fraternity that is the neo-fascist group Proud Boys, women are banned because they are a distraction to the valuable bonding

between men who worship “western culture.” To them feminism has softened the Western Man and made him weak. As a tonic, the Proud Boys promise their recruits male companionship. The absence of women is a major selling point.

The incel movement is fueled exclusively by hatred toward women and feminism, no doubt concealing a much greater self-loathing by its members. To them women are evil and calculating, winners of a genetic lottery that has made perennial losers out of them. Far from all incels harbor violent fantasies toward women and only a miniscule fraction act on those fantasies, but incels are behind several brutal mass killings. In their world, failure with women and morbid self-loathing are badges of honor, worn with pride. Their redpilling moment is when they realize that they will never be loved. Their blackpilling moment is when they see that they never stood a chance in the first place.

To white supremacists, women fill several roles. They are a weaker sex that needs to be protected by the barbarian hordes, they are walking wombs to perpetuate the white race, and they are enemies whose fight for equality will no doubt mean the demise of said race. Anti-feminism, the desire for reactionary gender roles, is a powerful recruitment tool to a generation of men that often struggles with figuring out what it means to be a man. This is a moment when the fight for equal rights for women, people of color, and the LGBTQ community has gained acceptance throughout large parts of society. It has exposed deep structural and cultural inequalities and shown us how behavior once accepted and even encouraged is harmful and damaging. Much like how recent events have given us an opportunity to face this country’s racist past, we are also grappling with society’s misogynistic past and present. Like the former, the latter also provides fertile ground for extremist recruitment. There is significant overlap between the manosphere, the incel movement, and the white supremacist movement. All of them share a profound feeling of victimization and of living in a world they no longer recognize and are no longer welcome in. It is this sense of aggrievement that often leads young men to groups and ideologies where they feel heard and where their anger is validated, a movement that will allow them to look in the mirror without a confused face staring back at them.

At their most basic level, extremist groups offer their members a world that is tidy and neat. They abhor progress as weakness because it creates confusion, and confusion is the antithesis of the extremist ideal: simplicity. The modern world, with its equality and progressive norms, is antithetical to the simpler times for which extremists pine. It is the same yearning found in Donald Trump’s slogan “Make America Great Again.” While utterly unspecific, as most slogans are, it implies that there was once a better time and that something nefarious and pernicious has eroded our society and taken it away from those better times when things were great. It is pointless, as I have learned through years of painful effort, to point out that this ideal time never existed. There was never a time when women were universally happy in their subservience nor is it true that, as a participant at a Richard Spencer rally in Alabama once told me, “blacks were happy during Jim Crow because they knew where they stood.” Yet this hardly matters. Extremism is never about altruism or the greater good. It is not about making society better for everyone so much as it is to make it bearable for yourself. It is an eminently egoistic frame of mind, however

much the zealots try to convince us otherwise. The world of the extremist is a zero sum game where the progress of some comes at a cost for others. It is a world where if black lives matter, then white lives matter slightly less, where if women gain rights men lose theirs. It can be an enticingly simple world to live in.

Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism  
New York, NY, USA

Vegas Tenold,

## References

- Bernstein, L., & Achenbach, J. (2015, November 2). A group of middle-aged whites in the U.S. is dying at a startling rate. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/a-group-of-middle-aged-american-whites-is-dying-at-a-startling-rate/2015/11/02/47a63098-8172-11e5-8ba6-ccc48b74b2a7\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/a-group-of-middle-aged-american-whites-is-dying-at-a-startling-rate/2015/11/02/47a63098-8172-11e5-8ba6-ccc48b74b2a7_story.html)
- Chicago Tribune News Services. (2016, December 10). Dylann Roof's confession, journal details racist motivation for church killings. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved from <https://www.chicagotribune.com/nation-world/ct-dylann-roof-charleston-shooting-20161209-story.html>
- Eyes on the Right. (2017, November 25). Faith Goldy preaches the gospel of anti-feminism on alt-right podcast. *Angry White Men*. Retrieved from <https://angrywhitemen.org/2017/11/25/faith-goldy-preaches-the-gospel-of-anti-feminism-on-alt-right-podcast/>
- FBI. (2019, July 3). *2000 to 2018 active shooter incidents*. Retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-2000-2018.pdf/view>
- Khazan, O. (2016, January 29). Why are so many middle-aged white Americans dying? *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/01/middle-aged-white-americans-left-behind-and-dying-early/433863/>
- Lewis, R. (2018, September 18). *Alternative influence: Broadcasting the reactionary right on YouTube*. Data & Society. Retrieved from <https://datasociety.net/library/alternative-influence/>
- McCants, W. (2014, November 5). *Islamic state invokes prophecy to justify its claim to caliphate*. Brookings. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2014/11/05/islamic-state-invokes-prophecy-to-justify-its-claim-to-caliphate/>
- National Institute of Justice. (2015, July 28–30). *Radicalization and violent extremism: Lessons learned from Canada, the U.K. and the U.S.* U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249947.pdf>
- Roose, K. (2019, June 8). The making of a YouTube radical. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/06/08/technology/youtube-radical.html>
- Sellner, B. (2019, October 5). *The War on Men*. [Video File]. YouTube. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBjMuiQxFg&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBjMuiQxFg&feature=emb_logo)
- Smith, A. G. (2018, June). *How radicalization to terrorism occurs in the United States: What research sponsored by the National Institute of Justice tells us*. U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/250171.pdf>
- Southern, L. (2015, April 8). *Lauren Southern: Why I am not a Feminist*. [Video File]. YouTube. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=56&v=vNErQFMowq0&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=56&v=vNErQFMowq0&feature=emb_logo)
- Women in International Security. (2017, May). *Women in Jihadist Organizations: Victims or Terrorists*. Retrieved from <https://wiisglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/5th-WIIS-Policy-Brief-v3-5-26-17.pdf>

# Preface

Extremist ideologies and violence wax and wane over time. Between 2015 and 2019, the Institute for Economics and Peace has noted a 320% increase in far-right terrorism in Western Europe, North America, and Oceania (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019). Although terrorism and extremism can be an extension of any ideology, the rise in far-right extremism in the U.S. is especially concerning. The U.S. covers a broad geographical area populated by people from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds, and it is estimated that Whites will be a minority of the U.S. population by 2045 (Fey, 2018). Far-right extremism can be associated with broad ideologies rooted in the ongoing politics of a given geographical area. However, the common thread throughout most far-right extremism is nationalism, authoritarianism, nativism, and racism (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019). The recent rise in far-right extremism, especially in the U.S., may have far reaching consequences not only to the growing diverse population of those within the U.S., but to those in other democratic nations.

This book was initially written and compiled before the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Since that time, much has occurred. This preface both acknowledges the rapidly changing events happening in the U.S. and provides readers with a guide to the chapters in this book and their respective application to these events. One particular event occurred on January, 6, 2021. Hours after President Donald Trump told his supporters that "...if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore," the U.S. Capitol with senators, representatives, and the vice president in it was attacked (Savage, 2021). Afterwards, some characterized this attack as a protest (Brown, 2021). However, the brandishing of weapons, breaking of windows, violence, placing of pipe bombs, and subsequent deaths suggest that the term "protest" may not be the most accurate or appropriate description of events. Although the investigation of the attack on the U.S. Capitol is ongoing, this event seems to have had some coordinated planning by far-right extremist groups such as the Proud Boys (Feuer, 2021). U.S. senators, representatives, and the vice president had to be evacuated to safe hiding places to protect them against threats to their lives. While