

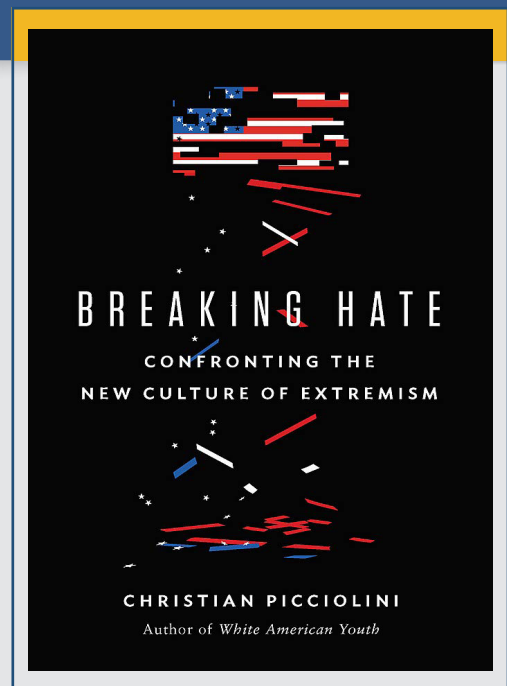
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BOOK REVIEW



BREAKING HATE CONFRONTING THE NEW CULTURE OF EXTREMISM

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Book Review

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Book Review

BREAKING HATE CONFRONTING THE NEW CULTURE OF EXTREMISM

It stands to reason that confronting extremism starts by ideology in principle and develops into applicability in practice. Confronting extremism draws on a high-level culture developed by writers and thinkers who are keenly aware of the threat of extremism in reality. Therefore, they cite telling examples to convince the target readers of their ideas. They also invest their personal experiences to provide cogent evidence of what they argue for, seeking to further foster the awareness of individuals and society.

Certain Americans have become aware of the threat of homegrown extremism, especially following the events that took place in the American capital and the siege of the Capitol Building, January 6, 2021. Many people entrusted with counter-terrorism and target violence did not feel truly surprised. Against a backdrop of a spate of events, Christian Picciolini – in **BREAKING HATE: CONFRONTING THE NEW CULTURE OF EXTREMISM** – elaborates on the main social and personal factors that drive individuals into carrying out terrorist acts.

Wide and Valuable Experiences

BREAKING HATE falls into three parts, which are subdivided into twelve chapters. Picciolini cites individual stories of extremists, supported by a wide range of telling examples drawn from different environments and circumstances. BREAKING HATE also addresses the causes and factors contributory to their extremism, highlighting the treatment approaches adopted to crack the code of extremism, with important insights made available based on the author's first-hand and vicarious experience in extremist groups, and his extensive expertise in extremism and prevention and protection methods.

In BREAKING HATE, Picciolini adopts two pathways: illustrative (explanation of key topics) and indicative (discussion of cases of freedom and extremism). Picciolini uses individual narratives to analyze the impact of mental disorders on the target willingness and readiness to extremism. Picciolini examines the threats online, the reasons for extremism of some military veterans, the link between homegrown extremism and hostile foreign actors, and the changing face of racist white supremacist movements. Of great note, the root causes of extremism and prevention methods are further discussed.

Mental Distraction and Extremism

In seven chapters, Picciolini discusses the story of Cassandra, who is a white, middle-class teenager in New Jersey, providing a thrilling account of extremism by showing the human side of Cassandra and her ideas, which were a breeding ground conducive for her supremacy.

Chapter One shows that extremism may crop up outside the family, as exemplified by the story of Cassandra, who comes from a middle-class family in the suburbs. Her family didn't realize that their daughter was white supremacist nationalist until it was too late, when a neighbor warned them that their daughter was streaming live hate video footages. This important idea shows the difficulty of applying the [Chuck Norris can do anything] approach. Cassandra's parents were unaware that she was communicating via the Internet with like-minded people who promoted their ideas online.

Chapter Two showcases Cassandra's story to explain the author's theory of the pre-extremism stage. This theory is based on the fact that if the effects of emotional, psychological and physical shocks, shame and

loss are not addressed, a given individual will slip into extremism because such an individual will see in the breeding ground of extremism one's identity, society, goals and dreams. Cassandra's upbringing is a telling example. Unlike her outgoing twin sister, Cassandra was unable to cope and interact with her environment; Cassandra believed that her sister's interaction with others, especially a group of young women, was unfair to her because they robbed her twin sister and deprived her of her company.

Given the failure of this young woman to form positive and good social relations, and her social isolation, Cassandra lost her identity and goals, slipping into the extremist networks she encountered online, unwittingly decoyed into the online community of hate and malice. Instead of searching for white supremacist nationalist material, Cassandra found herself trapped on the notorious Stormfront messaging website, which she accessed via a link posted in the comments of a Facebook group on teen depression. This contradicts the common notion that extremism starts at home, as Cassandra proves otherwise.

Chapter Five elaborates on Cassandra's experience in cyber-extremism, and further explains to the readership how the online community on Stormfront has met her needs, where the users have become her own close community. As such, Cassandra has become of an identity and goals in a community that appreciates her and listens to her problems. Cassandra's online extremism has ballooned into reality, much attached to such activity.

Anyone who violates the common concepts and principles and challenges the hate community on Stormfront is subjected to a sharp attack and severe criticism. This is one of the most severe obstacles facing those seeking to detach themselves from the extremism that Cassandra has promoted and propagandized through her own methods, which gave her a higher status across the extremist community. Beyond a shadow of doubt, understanding this microscopic part of extremism is critically important; it addresses the difficulty of breaking off the shackles of extremism, given the aftermath physical and social risks, manifested in the community-based unacceptance of returning individuals.

Chapter Seven explains that Cassandra was suffering from an undiagnosed psychological disorder. The au-

thor personally persuaded her parents to follow up on her condition. It was later found that Cassandra had an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The symptoms were manifested in problems communicating with others, constantly repeating the same behavior, and inadaptability to change. With this coming into play, Cassandra shut herself off from others, causing her social isolation and behavioral disturbances leading to extremism. The author emphasizes the need to conduct behavioral health care within the scope of the response, with a special attention critically attached to the fact that identifying weaknesses does not necessarily imply an immediate solution to the problem.

Chapter Nine addresses other challenges, including the loss of certain alternatives to adapt following the disengagement from extremism. After disengagement from her extremist community and the sessions with a therapist, Cassandra's behavior began to change, and hate-driven ideologies subsided. However, Cassandra soon returned to her previous community, following a new psychological problem, triggered by her alienation and anxiety caused by severe depression.

The author provided insights and tips to enlighten anti-extremism practitioners, providing particular insightful and informed guidance for the families of extremists. The author also shows the great similarity between Cassandra's case and drug addicts' cases; such people remain vulnerable to relapse and recidivism to drugs unless their needs are met, or when they are exposed to a psychological disorder. Progress achievement does not necessarily lead to entire treatment; care and attention must be continued until certain and complete recovery is realized.

Army Experience

One of the most important added-value contributions made by the author is a research study on the spread of extremism among the army veterans, who suffered as a result of violent shocks, lost their identity, vision and goals, isolated society, and are vulnerable to join extremist groups.

The author cites two research studies conducted by the FBI in 2006 and 2008 on the burning desire of extremist organizations to infiltrate the military and law enforcement agencies. Based on the findings revealed by the FBI, white supremacists recruit war veterans in Iraq and Afghanistan. White fanatics had successfully infiltrated law enforcement agencies. In Chapter Four, the author cites two examples of two veterans who suffered from



difficult circumstances and untreated psychological trauma, pushing them to join the extremist white supremacist movement.

The author identifies the weaknesses of the first individual in his military career and susceptibility to extremism; he felt distressed after losing his comrades in the war and did not overcome his hardship and hard time. Therefore, he took harmful substances to relieve the impact of the shock. Failing again, he fell victim to drug abuse and was eventually imprisoned. This narrative is seminal because the general public has been concerned with the issue of military extremism in the events of January 6, 2021, when the Capitol Building was stormed. Although the army veteran in the previous example did not display extremism until after imprisonment, it makes it critically difficult to well understand

the relationship between extremism and the army. It is clear that the trauma suffered during the war increased his weakness and inability to face such daunting challenges. Also, his military experience made him an easy prey to white supremacist leaders. His imprisonment triggered his involvement and deviation; he was imbued with the ideologies of extremism from some inmates.

The second person joined extremist movements during his military service and became a friend of a skinhead he knew in one of the drills. He was then introduced to his extremist peers following his retirement from the Marines due to a knee injury. The two army veterans cited in the previous two examples did not have inherent inclinations to extremism due to the propaganda of extremism; rather, they were allured into this bad pathway by extremists. These two anecdotal stories are telling evidence that joining extremist groups by individuals is still an important cause and a major factor in extremism, despite the interest and concern of policy makers with the self-extremism of individuals online.

The anecdotal stories of these two men also highlight the importance of providing psychological and social support of the military during and after service, and the urgent need to combat extremism in the army and prisons. According to anecdotal accounts, these two places are a breeding ground for recruiting extremists.

Changes and Metamorphosis

The author indicates that certain changes happened to the methods of the white supremacist movement in

America; white supremacists switched from using hate discourse and cultural symbols, such as racist tattoos, boots, and red laces to methods more acceptable among the pseudo-intellectuals. They wore formal dress, such as official dress for meetings; what was explicit has become implicit but more prevalent.

The author exemplifies such transformation and change through an anecdotal story of the old warrior who joined a university club called European Heritage Front. The club members wear a suit and tie to look like a white supremacist nationalist in disguise and different from the pattern of strong racist organizations, such as KLU KLUX KLAN. However, he was involved in violent activities; he assaulted a black priest in Denver and contributed to organizing a Unite the Right march in Charlottesville, Virginia. It is clear that the white supremacist nationalists' renunciation of their racist insignia does not mean they do not contribute to acts of violence.

In the final chapter, the author elaborates on the transformation from overt racism to covert racism by the movement and recounts the details of his meeting with Richard Spencer when his mother entered into a public argument with a real estate broker in their town. Subsequently, a large campaign of defamation and intimidation followed, and a community event was held to solve and settle the dispute. Spencer gave a speech, for which the author had a two-hour talk with Spencer. Spencer adopts the alternative right-wing nationalist ideology, with degrees from the universities of Duke, Virginia and Chicago. He promotes his idea with propound speech-





es with false ideological content, logical fallacies and couched in racism.

This chapter is critically seminal to further discussions; it shows that the alternative right is less racist only outwardly, and practically intersects and overlaps with the traditional public organizations. The author chronicles the alliance made by Richard Spencer and Andrew Anglin, founder of the Daily Stormer, turning the spotlight on the damage caused by the attacks of non-physical violence, such as defamation and telephone harassing, caused by the alternative right activities. The author brings to focus the initial failure of some attempts to dissuade extremists from their extremism, and the abject failure of some attempts. Spencer's behavior did not change as he did not abandon extremism, although he listened to the author's two-hour talk. However, the talk bodes well for a fruitful interaction; it proves an important fact that much work to combat extremism is still available and urgent, and that temporary failures in combating extremism will be followed by great successes.

Chapter Eleven discusses the reality of a neo-Nazi terrorist network called the ATOMWAFFEN, which means nuclear weapons in German. The author retells an anecdotal story of an ex-member named Koval. The author

deepens the understanding of the white supremacist movement by discussing the nihilistic margin represented by Charles Manson and Satanist ATOMWAFFEN. The heinous beliefs and actions of this group frighten other movements and organizations, classifying this paramilitary organization as critically extremist.

It is critically important to learn about this group; its structure is irregular, its members practice extremist violence, and it is difficult to monitor and combat such flimsy and ramshackle organizations. The author also examines the reality of paramilitary hate camps that inculcate their members with military tactics aimed at violence. The author had a meeting with Koval, who joined one of such camps; it is critically dangerous to distract extremists and criminals and derail their plans. However, the real threat is to brush aside the address the issue to eliminate the associated threat along with the potential legal considerations.

One of the most important aspects that needs requires investigation into of the different approaches within the white supremacist movement is its transnational pattern. The author discusses the Russian actors who influenced Cassandra, the young woman whom the author disengaged from extremism. Government officials,

researchers, and journalists paid great attention to the Russian influence and disinformation during the 2016 US presidential election. *BREAKING HATE* provides a substantive analysis of the impact of the Russian influence on individuals.

Our understanding of the campaigns of the Russian influence is further enhanced and deepened the account of how Cassandra dealt with a man based in Russia who allures young women online into extremism in the United States. This indicates that the Russians approached American citizens and instrumentalized them to spread propaganda, desiring to destabilize the American society, drawing on pre-existing social divisions. After publishing the information, the author did not get the support of the federal government or local officials, which shows the great failure of the organizations responsible for addressing such issues. The unfortunate reality shows the US administration poor application of the [Chuck Norris can do anything] approach, which many Americans are familiar with following the 9/11 Attacks of 2001.

Challenges and Countermeasures

The government poor support was not perhaps the only challenge the author highlights in *BREAKING HATE*; rather, he explains other challenges, including a large online campaign targeting him personally for his support to Cassandra, the infiltration of his website by a network of Russian trolls and hackers of the white supremacy ecosystem online, threatening and defaming his image in e-forums. This is a major obstacle and a real threat to the anti-extremism efforts. Therefore, the individuals and organizations concerned should well protect their websites, take other security measures, and prepare

for every cyberbullying and organized spam campaign.

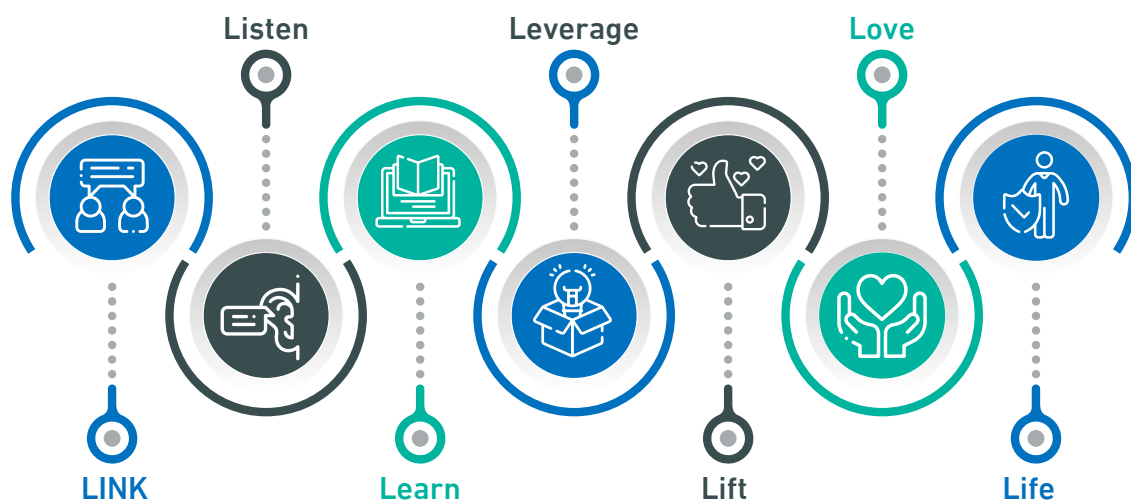
The author suggests a holistic anti-extremism approach to the various environmental, emotional and physical challenges. The said approach includes seven steps aimed at disengaging individuals from extremist groups, considering the conditions experienced by all people in the pre-extremism stage. The seven-step disengagement approach includes Link, Listen, and Learn, Leverage, Lift, Love & Life. Each step has a special chapter to explain with real experiences and anecdotal stories cited:

1. LINK

In Chapter Fifteen, the author explains LINK to build trust with the target; the author cites an example of his link with Koval, one of the members of the ATOM-WAFFEN network, explaining the importance of fruitful and informal communication with ideologically different individuals. This provides practitioners with a favorable opportunity conducive for engaging with current ideological perceptions without delving into the ideology of the target individual. The importance of this step is reflected in the fact that it is the first steppingstone in any attempt to help people involved in extremism; and it is the most difficult step in volunteering. Any mistake may lead to alienation and reluctance on the side of the target individual, preventing the subsequent disengagement steps.

2. Listen

In Chapter Sixteen, the author discusses this step, citing the case of Omar, a former ISIS member who returned to Belgium after disengaging from ISIS. The author received a phone call from him and attentively listened



SEVEN-STEP DISENGAGEMENT FROM EXTREMIST GROUPS



up to him. It became clear to the author the strong similarities between the motives and experiences that led to the extremism of Koval and Omar, despite the great difference between the two extremist movements to which they joined. The need to attentively listen to the life problems that many extremists have sustained may contribute to directing efforts, communicating with such extremists, and determining the appropriate support, as the similarities between extremists are many albeit different ideologies.

3. Learn

In Chapter Seventeen, the author explains how to help extremists regain their identities, define their goals, and gain positive social relationships that protect them from recidivism to the former hate-fueled society, with a special attention to the social suffering of those wishing to disengage from extremism; their previous actions make them socially *personae non gratae*. The author highlights the importance of holding individuals accountable during their rehabilitation, as the negatively charged society and past misbehaviors sometimes make such people always punished.

4. Leverage

In Chapter Eighteenth, the author explains how the resources necessary to disengage target individual from extremism should be further leveraged. For an individual to desist from extremism, such an individual must be provided with what is missing and lacking with the problems contributory to extremism practically solved. This reduces recidivism to extremism, making such an

individual a resilient person not easily allured into an extremist identity, deviant goals, or negative social relationships. Attention must be duly given to providing integrative services according to a given individuals' need for personal and service support.

5. Lift

In Chapter Nineteenth, the author explains how appreciation pays off, citing emotional experiences, which make people sympathize with those who are once seen as demonized and dehumanized. This contributes to the safe reintegration of victims free from the shackles of extremism into society, while closely monitoring such individuals to maintain the safety of all the people involved. The number of people keenly willing to support the newly disengaged individuals has often been surprising to the author.

This includes supporting such individuals for disengagement, while promoting their human values and they had not previously acted with hate and extremism of their own free will; rather bulldozed to act so under the influence of extremist groups and their deviant ideology. Most importantly, the author provides instructions on how to best approach a recently disengaged former extremist, how to integrate such individuals safely into society, and determine the conditions that must be met by a volunteer. Although many people appreciate the author's efforts, and evince their readiness to provide support, the difficulties of approaching someone previously charged with hate and extremism, and who espoused a hate-triggered ideology are not easy to overcome.

6. Love

In Chapter Twenty, the author identifies the conditions for the realization of love, including the ability of a given individual to adapt to the society concerned, to have an identity, goals and interaction with society, and to believe in the positive values of life. The author describes in detail an encounter between a former white supremacist named Daniel and the mother of Heather Heyer, a victim of white supremacist violence who was murdered at the Unite the Right march in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The author challenges Daniel's hypothesis about the victim's mother and provides him with sympathy from an unimaginable source. This changed Daniel's extremist convictions and guilt for taking to the street and joining the march, providing him with a positive emotion and an appetite for life. As such, the author links the step of love with the step of leverage, without going through the step of link by volunteers to communicate with the individual disengaged from extremism. The communication in Daniel's incident was direct with the victim's mother, who gave him affection and appreciation without a mediator who manages the process of integrating into society.

7. Life

In Chapter Twenty-First, the author cites Cassandra's anecdotal story to talk about life as a step, assuming that those disengaged from extremism find a certain opportunity to lead a happy and healthy life again. This step goes ideologically in line with the previous steps and confirms an individual's need to be responsible for one's personal life, albeit not detailed.

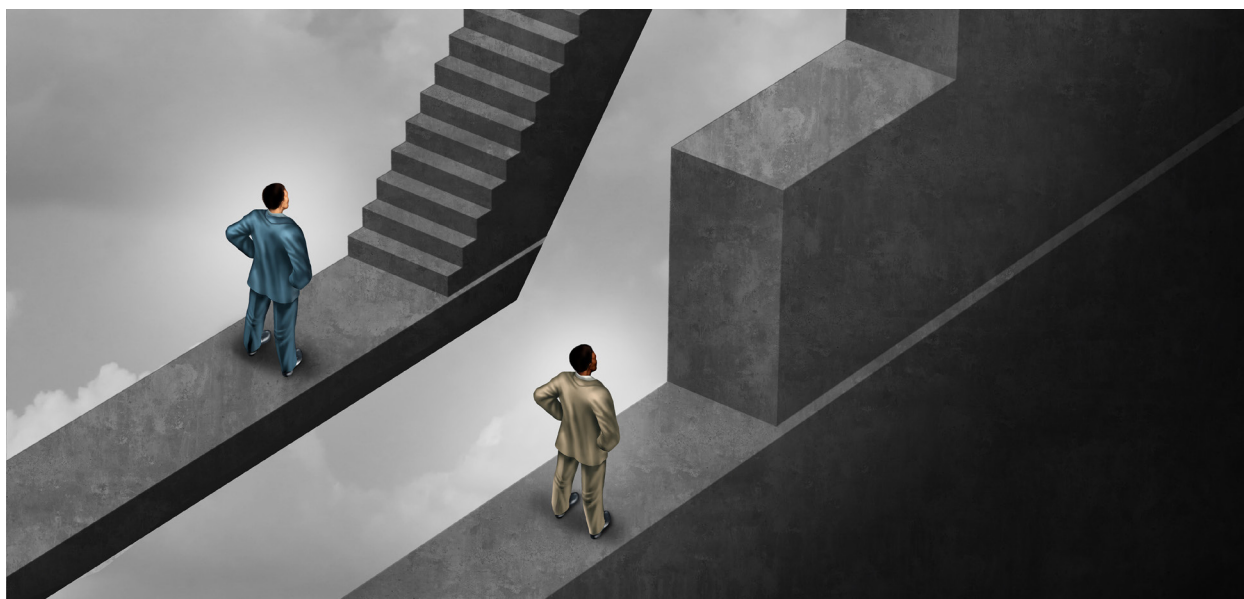
In Chapter Twenty-Second, the author spells out his assistance to Cassandra, and further explains how her family saved her in close cooperation with the police and the investigator, who sought to recruit her in extremist movements, and reviewed the difficulties of disengaging someone from the networks that provide him with an identity, goals and negative interaction with his community. The author exemplifies this step only through the anecdotal story of Cassandra and how she disengaged from extremism. It would have been better had the author provided other practical examples.

The Seven Steps to Deradicalization is a robust and anecdotal approach that is seminal and helpful for counterterrorism and violence practitioners, mental health professionals, counsellors, family members of victims, and others. It would be much better to provide a guide to the book to further facilitate the understanding and application of such contributions. The author has gained high confidence in disengagement from extremism and reintegration to society. The approach would have been better to have relied on the scientific methodology in this research study, not merely relying on the author's previous first-hand and vicarious experience in extremism and his anti-extremism efforts and robust engagement. The research study presented by this book is still very useful.

Conclusion

BREAKING HATE: CONFRONTING THE NEW CULTURE OF EXTREMISM by Christian Picciolini is an outstanding research study that brings together personal accounts of extremists, scientific content, and a practitioner's





first-hand and vicarious experience in disengagement from a psychological and social point of view. In terrorism studies, some specialists believe that practitioners have a good intention to work, but their knowledge remains rudimentary. Again, many counter-terrorism practitioners underestimate the value of scientific research and its applicability in reality.

BREAKING HATE is a great nexus for practitioners and researchers to enhance understanding of extremism and improve the outcomes of de-radicalization. Again, BREAKING HATE is based on the author's personal experiences in adopting extremism in the past and disengagement from extremism (deradicalization); the book has a high value in scientific research, theories and associated insights. It provides a prime example of the integration of scientific research with practical experience, as it combines two different approaches into one research.

Equally important, BREAKING HATE addresses the threats of online extremism, the vulnerability of war veterans to slip into radicalization and recruitment, the link between homegrown extremism and hostile foreign actors, and the metamorphosis of white extremists. The author's use of personal narratives inspired by the author's experiences when he was an extremist humanizes the subject-matter under research. It reminds the target readership that the issues discussed are still important to all people. This is necessary because it allows the target readership to see extremism in which humanity is instrumentalized. This encourages individuals for further disengagement from extremism to further restore their normal lives and reintegrate into society.

The nature of anecdotal stories based on personal experiences is a reliable reference for practitioners and researchers. This helps them to test their theories, understand how individuals are radicalized and how they are deradicalized.

Finally, BREAKING HATE is a reference for understanding extremism in trends, organizations and societies. Such extremism allures individuals because of their everyday life problems. Psychological trauma, lack of community and identity, and positive skills of resilience and adaptability increase the risk of an individual becoming an extremist.

BREAKING HATE also provides an approach to combating extremism, facilitating disengagement, solving everyday life problems of individuals. The author provides a seven-step approach to disengage from extremism, while citing anecdotal stories of the extremists whom he helped to disengage and liberate from extremism. Most of the extremists cited in the book are white supremacists, while some extremists belonging to other faith groups, such as Omar, a former ISIS member, and Cassandra in her communication with ISIS before she became a white supremacist. Therefore, the author's disengagement approach is applicable to different beliefs, making it a seminal and helpful reference.

BREAKING HATE combines difficult and easy cases, supporting various categories of people, including experts and the general public, regardless of their relationship to extremism. The book helps the target readership to better understand one of the most pressing issues of our time, the modern culture of extremism.



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