

PEACE MAKERS

VOLUME 1
ISSUE 2

SPRING
2019

IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 An international threat
- 3 They can't see the changed person
- 6 Violent far-right behind nearly all domestic extremist murders in 2018
- 7 Anti-hate speech surges after New Zealand terror attacks
- 8 Life After Hate working with Facebook to help individuals leave behind hate groups
- 9 Terrorism expert joins Life After Hate board

*This table of contents is interactive.
Click on a topic to jump to that page.*

 LIFEAFTERHATE

AN INTERNATIONAL THREAT

As the world continues to sort through the horrific mass shootings at two mosques in New Zealand on March 15 that killed 50 people and injured 50 others, we are asking for the public to consider two things.

First, we must recognize that white supremacy ideology is a global issue, and that its threat requires an international response. While nearly all domestic extremist murders in the United States last year were committed by the violent far-right, the reality is that nations across the world have come under attack by it. We can no longer approach this as a political anomaly.

Whatever discord we view at that level is really just a symptom of problems that have been festering for decades. The shootings underscore a host of issues that we as a nation, and as a world of nations, have been struggling to confront, including the proliferation of white supremacy ideology, domestic terrorism, gun access, and hate speech on social media.



Sammy Rangel

Co-Founder, Executive Director

Secondly, we urge the world to support the many men and women who have escaped lives of hatred and have successfully left behind hate groups. Research tells us that racist ideology is often not the only precursor to membership to a hate group. What that tells us is that many people join these groups, even tangentially, for a host of other reasons.

Formers today can help us untangle this complexity for others tomorrow.

There are people out here who care about this, who want to see this stop, who want to bring healing to these communities. And some of us are formers.

There is hope. People can change. Even from the darkest days. It's only through compassion and forgiveness that a former can become a former.



[ANTI-HATE SPEECH SURGES AFTER NEW ZEALAND TERROR ATTACKS \(page 7\)](#)

FEATURE STORY:

“THEY CAN’T SEE THE CHANGED PERSON” WHEN A NATION WON’T FORGIVE A FORMER NEO-NAZI

You may have seen Nick Cooper on social media last year when a photo he posted to Twitter went viral. Nick had just painted over a swastika and the accompanying racist rant that someone had scrawled on a bridge in his hometown of Chilliwack, Canada.

“Goodbye racist graffiti not in my town thank you,” he tweeted back on August 3rd. Within days, the post garnered more than 300,000 likes and was retweeted tens of thousands of times.

You may also have seen Nick a few months later when a petition made its way online seeking to stall his deportation from Canada, where he’d lived with his family for the last 13 years.

As it turned out, no amount of civil rights activism could erase the fact that Nick was once a member of Combat 18, a neo-Nazi hate group — at least not for Canadian immigration officials. Just before Christmas last year, Nick was deported back to the UK, underscoring a sobering reality that sometimes reformed members of hate groups can never completely atone for their past.

“No one goes through life without making mistakes. Some mistakes are small. Some mistakes are large,” Nick said in a recent interview.

“But I believe it’s about how you work those mistakes out that counts.”



Within days of tweeting about covering up racist graffiti in his hometown, Nick’s post went viral, garnering more than 300,000 likes and tens of thousands of retweets.

FEATURE STORY: BECOMING RADICALIZED

Nick was 15 when he joined The National Front, a far-right, fascist political party in the UK.

“On the surface of it all it looked, you know, like normal guys; they come around and introduced themselves in suits. It didn’t seem to have a thuggish element,” he said.

“But once I got involved I found out that underneath there was a lot of violence.”

In the early 1980s, the UK was besieged with race riots, and much like it is today, the country was grappling with extreme wealth inequality, poverty and anti-immigration fervor. By the early 1990s, Nick was at the center of the notorious neo-Nazi offshoot, Combat 18.

“There was lots of immigration in London and a lot of people had lost their job, including my father,” Nick said. “I felt like where I lived in the East End of London [in public housing] when refugees were coming over they went in front of the people who were living there for a long time. It made me really angry.”

But Nick sensed something just wasn’t right. The violence — which at that point still targeted anti-fascist groups — was becoming too much.

“In Britain we had Searchlight magazine, an anti-fascist magazine, and they would pick out right-wing people and they would put in their address, telephone numbers, and you would get attacked,” Nick said. “And Combat 18 started to do the same thing back to the Left, picking out left-wingers, and it got to the stage where we were going to people’s houses and attacking them, and that’s one of the reasons why I drew away from them, because I don’t agree with that at all.

“To me it was a mob-on-mob mentality.”

Nick began taking himself out of the planned attacks, showing up only for beers at the local pub. This went on for several years.

A WAY OUT

Finally, and like many other “formers,” Nick was inspired to a complete about-face when a person he least expected to show him compassion did just that. This was during the birth of his first child by emergency C- section. As it turned out, a Pakistani doctor saved the lives of Nick’s wife and newborn daughter.

“When I walked out of that room, I felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders,” Nick said. “I was a changed person. It was that quick for me. I realized that without these people, who I hated for no other reason than the color of their skin, they just saved my wife and daughter’s life.

“And it made me realize that everyone, no matter the color of their skin, has got a value in the world.”

Nick and his wife had two more children and they eventually settled in British Columbia. While very few people knew of Nick’s past, it wasn’t long before he became involved with a local human rights group, Inclusion Chilliwack, which focused on LGBTQ rights group and protecting kids from bullying in schools.

He also became an active member for Cycling4Diversity. And when he began opening up about his past, his friends urged him to speak publicly about his reformation.

FEATURE STORY: THE CHALLENGE OF REFORMING

Breaking away from a hate group often exposes the underlying trauma that made the person more vulnerable to joining the group in the first place.

[While data is hard to compile due to the extreme sensitivity of the issues, experts believe that racist ideology is often not a precursor to membership.](#)

Similar to other gangs, white supremacy groups offer its members inclusion and power. That sense of community, however misguided, is why people leaving far-right extremist groups need ample support to reintegrate economically and socially into a society that they once attacked; and the roadblocks can often feel insurmountable.

[By 2017, Nick met Tony McAleer of Life After Hate.](#) And suddenly, Nick no longer felt like a rogue former.

“It helped me realize I wasn’t alone with these feelings of guilt and anxiety,” he said. “Talking to Tony and listening to his story and how it impacts other people in the community was really good for me.”

According to a recent study conducted by RTI International — which Life After Hate contributed to — a large percentage of formers are grappling with childhood abuse. And among the experiences they shared were “adolescent maladjustment, childhood abuse, and family instability.”

This makes Life After Hate’s support group, ExitUSA™, increasingly vital.

Nick is hopeful he’ll be reunited with his wife and two daughters (his 13 year-old son is currently living with him in England). But he knows the odds aren’t good.



Nick Cooper with his family.

And it could be years before his case is even heard. While he’s a long way from that moment captured underneath that bridge in Chilliwack, paint can in hand, Nick would ask that we consider one more thought.

“Some people can only see the person who was involved in the hate group,” he said. *“They can’t see the changed person.”*

NEWS:

VIOLENT FAR-RIGHT BEHIND NEARLY ALL DOMESTIC EXTREMIST MURDERS IN 2018

Bookended by the attack on Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland in February and the shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue in October, 2018 was one of the deadliest years at the hands of domestic extremists.

And according to the Anti-Defamation League — which earlier this year released its [annual report on Murder and Extremism in the United States](#) — the violent far-right was responsible for nearly all of the 50 killings last year: Right-wing extremists were responsible for 49 (or 98%) of the 50 domestic extremist-related killings in 2018, with white supremacists alone accounting for 39 (or 78%) of those murders.

Ultimately, the ADL's report aligns with our own experiences as an organization, with what we are seeing and hearing all around the country from professionals, families, significant others and those seeking help from us. When we put our ear to the ground the message we deliver from that is attuned to what others are seeing, and that reminds us that we are a vital resource.

While not all of these attacks are considered “ideologically driven,” the ADL notes an important distinction in explaining its methodology.

“Extreme causes often attract adherents with violent tendencies— tendencies that are reflected not only in the violence that adherents commit for their cause, but also the violence they commit against others— including rivals, spouses, children and acquaintances.”

We agree. White supremacy and other far-right ideologies are always moving toward violence, and if left unchecked, these movements are certain to claim lives.

That 2018 was the fourth-deadliest since 1970 — behind only 1995 (which saw 184 lives lost, most because of the Oklahoma City bombing), 2016 (72 lives lost) and 2015 (70 lives lost) — should come as no surprise.

Warning signs are almost always there. Take for example October's deadly shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue where 11 people were killed. In the preceding years, anti-Semitism was on the rise, and the shooter himself, broadcast his intent on social media.

Our own data comports with the ADL's findings. Since August 2017 — punctuated by the lethal attack in Charlottesville — Life After Hate and its ExitUSA™ program opened more than 176 cases, including for both individuals and families, representing 30 states.

While we continue to help members of the violent far-right disengage and deradicalize and safely return to society, we recognize that our work needs the support of civil society as a whole.

We must become active bystanders when we see intolerance, and we must always protect the dignity of those being harmed.



NEWS:

ANTI-HATE SPEECH SURGES AFTER NEW ZEALAND TERROR ATTACKS

In the wake of the March 15 terrorist attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, that left 50 people dead and 50 others injured, our partners at #WeCounterHate saw a surge in anti-Muslim tweets and activity.

#WeCounterHate combats hate speech on Twitter using artificial intelligence to tag, and track tweets that use dehumanizing language to attack people.

Here's what we found in the tweets the AI reviewed:

- Anti-Muslim hate speech jumped nearly 8x in the three days following the shootings.
- Retweets of anti-Muslim hate speech jumped 91 percent.
- Likes of anti-Muslim hate speech jumped by more than 125 percent.
- There was a 62 percent increase in language that evokes polarization, which is the second highest-intensity form of hate speech on our scale. Polarization is one step behind explicitly inciting violence against a target group.
- There was also a 32 percent increase in “classification language.” In this case, white nationalists lamented a perceived double standard. Their claim: When a Muslim commits a violent attack, they (White Nationalists) aren't allowed to blame ALL Muslims. But when a White Nationalist commits a violent attack, ALL White Nationalists are blamed.



NEWS:

LIFE AFTER HATE WORKING WITH FACEBOOK TO HELP INDIVIDUALS LEAVE BEHIND HATE GROUPS

Beginning March 24, searching for keywords associated with the violent far-right on Facebook will include information on how individuals can get in touch with our team.

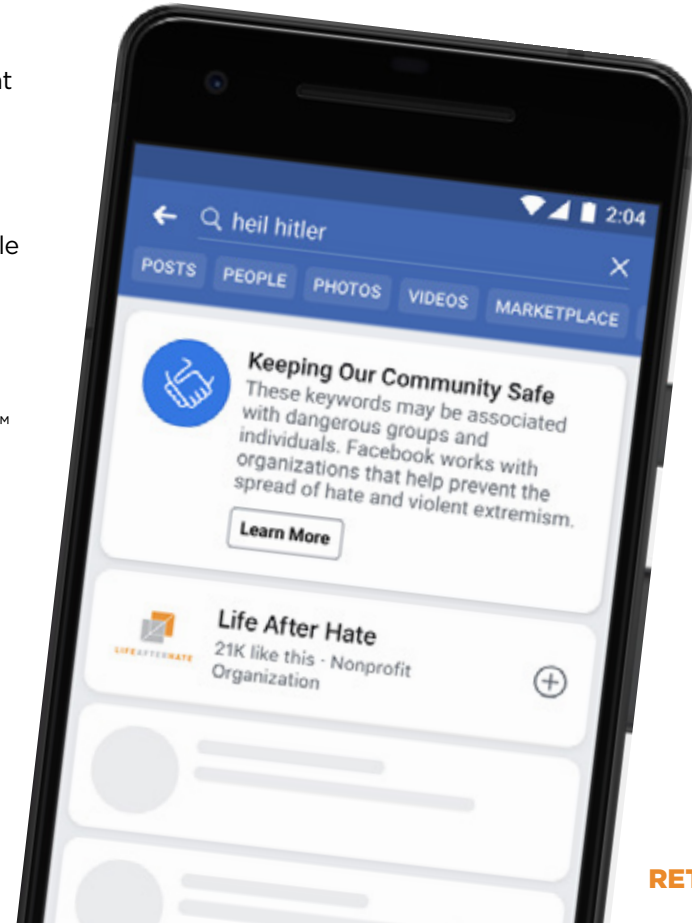
Online radicalization is a process, not an outcome. Our goal is to insert ourselves in that continuum, so that our voice is there for people to consider as they explore extremist ideologies online.

Radicalization doesn't begin with violence. It often begins with vulnerabilities and grievances. And we want people to know that we are here to listen to them. That simple gesture can create change.

People exiting far-right extremist groups need ample support to reintegrate into a society that they once attacked; and the roadblocks can often feel insurmountable.

Disengagement and deradicalization are complex, lifelong processes and our ExitUSA™ program provides individualized support, education and referral services that are not readily available in North America.

No judgment, just help.



TERRORISM EXPERT JOINS LIFE AFTER HATE BOARD

We welcome Brette Steele as the newest member of our board of directors.

Brette serves as the Director of Prevention and National Security at the McCain Institute for International Leadership. Prior to joining the McCain Institute, Brette served as the Regional Director of Strategic Engagement for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Terrorism Prevention Partnerships.

In that role she advised the State of California in the development of a statewide Preventing Violent Extremism Strategy and partnered with counties, cities, and nonprofit organizations to develop and implement Preventing Violent Extremism programs.

Brette established and served as Deputy Director of the U.S. Countering Violent Extremism Task Force, which coordinated all federal efforts to prevent violent extremism in the United States.

Prior to establishing the Countering Violent Extremism Task Force, Brette served as Senior Counsel to the Deputy Attorney General and coordinated the U.S. Department of Justice's terrorism prevention and forensic science reform initiatives.

Steele also chaired the U.S. Department of Justice Arab- and Muslim-American Engagement Advisory Committee and vice chaired the Attorney General's Advisory Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities.

Brette graduated with a B.A. from University of California, Berkeley, and a J.D. from UCLA School of Law.



“The only way we, as a society, will be able to move forward is to get to the heart of the hatred. Prejudice and violence will never be eradicated but there must be a rebalancing. There must be a shift within each American to see within the ‘other’ an echo of his/her and yes, even their own humanity.”

Debra D.

Life After Hate supporter

