

# PEACEMAKERS

## AN ERA OF MASS SHOOTINGS



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 **LIFE AFTER HATE**

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# AN ERA OF MASS SHOOTINGS

This has been a difficult time for all of us. In just one week, 35 people were killed and dozens more were injured in three separate mass shootings across the U.S.

Like many of you, we felt stuck in the aftermath of these deadly attacks.

The suspect who killed 22 people and injured 24 others in El Paso called the attack “a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas.” Motives in the shooting in Dayton and the shooting in California one week earlier were less clear.

What we do know however is that domestic terrorism is real and its main mechanism is hate.

Radicalization to extremism begins and ends with scapegoating “others.” Vulnerable people are adopting hateful and dehumanizing ideology as an escape. They enter an echo chamber and seek any form of validation, and will accept any prompt that incites. They need our help to sort through this manipulation, and we must come together to reject those adding fuel to the fire.

Ultimately, perpetrators of political manipulation exploit this country’s inability to address these problems as one voice, one people. Despite our individual efforts, too many of us are not coming

together in unison long enough to make a dent in the issues confronting us everyday, including the proliferation of white supremacy ideology, domestic terrorism, gun access, and hate speech on social media.

Where are the tech companies?  
Where is the mass of civil society?  
Where are the researchers?  
Where are the academics?  
Where are our national leaders?  
I can tell you where they are not. They are not sitting together under one roof talking to each other. This is the toxic atmosphere of the era of mass shootings.

The only way we can become unstuck in moments like these is to commit to action before the violence. And to never waver.

Together or nowhere.

In pursuit of social evolution,



**Sammy Rangel**

Co-Founder, Executive Director





## LIFE AFTER HATE TO CONGRESS:

“WHITE SUPREMACIST IDEOLOGY INEVITABLY EXPRESSES ITSELF IN MURDER”



Life After Hate was the only group of formers invited to testify before Congress during its hearings on white supremacy.

**Life After Hate's Tony McAleer testified on June 4 before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties during its hearing: "On Confronting White Supremacy (Part II): Adequacy of the Federal Response." McAleer, one of the cofounders of Life After Hate and currently its board chairman, delivered the following oral remarks in addition to his written testimony.**

Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Roy, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

Life After Hate was founded in the summer of 2011 by former members of violent white supremacist groups. Our goal is to help people caught up in the destructive cycle of hate from which we were able to free ourselves.

Within a year of our founding, a former U.S. Army soldier with ties to white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups, killed six innocent people and injured four others at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

A little less than three years later, in 2015, another white supremacist walked into the AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina with the same goal. He was armed and primed for murder, and killed nine people that day.

That same year, Life After Hate answered a call from a troubled veteran. He'd done tours to Iraq and Afghanistan and was becoming preoccupied with his local Muslim community.

Thankfully, he reached out to us. Within 24 hours, two of our team members were on a flight to meet with him. They spent the next 72 hours together, culminating in a powerful meeting with the Imam of the local Muslim center.

To this day, the vet is still engaged with his local Muslim community — a community that is safer as a result.

Our team prides itself on our ability to assess, and where necessary, respond quickly to situations where delays can prove costly.

Fast forward to August 2017 — a white supremacy rally draws a who's who of violent extremist groups to Charlottesville, Virginia. Attended by the KKK, white nationalists and neo-Nazis — the subsequent violence claimed a young woman's life, and was broadcast to a national television audience.

We saw it again in October 2018 at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh with nine more people being senselessly murdered. In April this year, at the Chabad of Poway in California. We saw another innocent person murdered by a violent white supremacist.

And we are not alone. In March, a white supremacist attacked two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, killing 51 innocent people.

The expert team at Life After Hate are often referred to as formers — meaning former violent extremists. Just as important as our unique, firsthand experience within violent extremist groups is our collective professional training and experience. Collectively, the Life After Hate team has worked with hundreds of men and women who were able to successfully exit the white power movement and build more positive lives.

Our founding group has undergone extensive personal and professional development, and today, the Life After Hate team has three decades of professional counseling experience between them.

There is no other organization that's able to perform the unique work that Life After Hate does, that has the credibility to encourage members of violent extremist groups to reach out to them and, just as importantly to work at scale.

Life After Hate has built a successful model that combines our unique experiences, professional training, and evidence-based practices.

We're now teaching the model.

This in-person training empowers local professionals (law enforcement, mental health and social services) to recognize emerging threats in their community and to effectively engage that person or group.

The outcome of this first contact from local professionals can define success or failure, so it's vitally important they receive specialized training.

Since Charlottesville, Life After Hate has received more than 240 requests for help from individuals and families.

This is almost two-and-a-half times the number of people we helped in the six years prior. In the last three months alone we have opened 45 new cases.

Life After Hate is committed to continuing our work, and to sharing the unique understanding and knowledge we've developed in assisting nearly 400 members of white supremacist groups to leave the movement.

I come before you today to urge the government to recognize that if left unchecked, white supremacist ideology inevitably expresses itself in murder.

This ideology is deadly and, fueled by social media, the threat to society is growing exponentially.

Thank you.



# ONLINE RADICALIZATION

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# ONLINE RADICALIZATION:

## WHAT WE KNOW AND WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

Less than 24 hours after John Earnest opened fire at a San Diego-area synagogue killing one person and injuring three others, the focus of the developing story shifted to his digital life.

News outlets reported that Earnest “posted an anti-Jewish screed online about an hour before the attack” and “praised the suspects accused of carrying out deadly attacks on mosques in New Zealand and at Pittsburgh’s Tree of Life synagogue.”

This is the new reporting on far-right terrorist attacks. Once it is clear the perpetrator has a connection to the violent far-right, reporters proceed directly to their digital footprint.

These connections help establish a motive, an explanation for brutal acts of violence. But the correlation inevitably leads to a far more complex question: Is the internet radicalizing people to violence?

The answer is anything but clear, and that makes many of the stories you’re likely to read about online radicalization patchy.

In part because of the relative novelty of the internet and social media, in part because of the lack of research on the issue, and in part because of a tendency to decouple people’s lives online and offline — the public’s understanding of online radicalization is very often incomplete.

“Everyone wants to draw a direct line from online radicalization to violence, and it’s not that simple,” said Brad Galloway, a former neo-Nazi who currently studies criminology and volunteers at Life After Hate.

### DEFINING ONLINE RADICALIZATION

In June, the New York Times published a lengthy report on a young man who said he became radicalized into the far-right after watching thousands of YouTube videos.

This steady diet of algorithm-driven content “convinced him that Western civilization was under threat from Muslim immigrants and cultural Marxists, that innate I.Q. differences explained racial disparities, and that feminism was a dangerous ideology.”

“I just kept falling deeper and deeper into this, and it appealed to me because it made me feel a sense of belonging,” Caleb Cain told the newspaper. “I was brainwashed.”

But there was an important asterisk attached to the story: “The radicalization of young men is driven by a complex stew of emotional, economic and political elements, many having nothing to do with social media.”

According to researcher Ryan Scrivens, an assistant professor of criminal justice at Michigan State University, this is an element that requires greater scrutiny.

“We don’t know what else is going on in the background,” Scrivens says. “There is a connection, we just don’t know the strength of the connection relative to people’s offline activities.”

“In order to make sense of this online, we have to make sense of this offline,” he adds.



Robert Bowers, who killed 11 people in a synagogue in Pittsburgh in October, was well-known and active on Gab, a Twitter alternative popular with white supremacists.



## A THREAT NOT ENTIRELY UNDERSTOOD

Particularly since the March terrorist attacks in New Zealand, the national conversation is centered around online radicalization. It figured prominently during a congressional hearing in June on domestic terrorism.

Michael C. McGarrity, the assistant director of the FBI's counterterrorism division, told Congress that "the ease of online self-radicalization to violence and the corresponding lack of direct connections between known terrorists or FTOs (foreign terrorist organizations) and unknown radicalized violent extremists" was making it harder for the FBI to "identify and disrupt an individual before that individual decides to act."

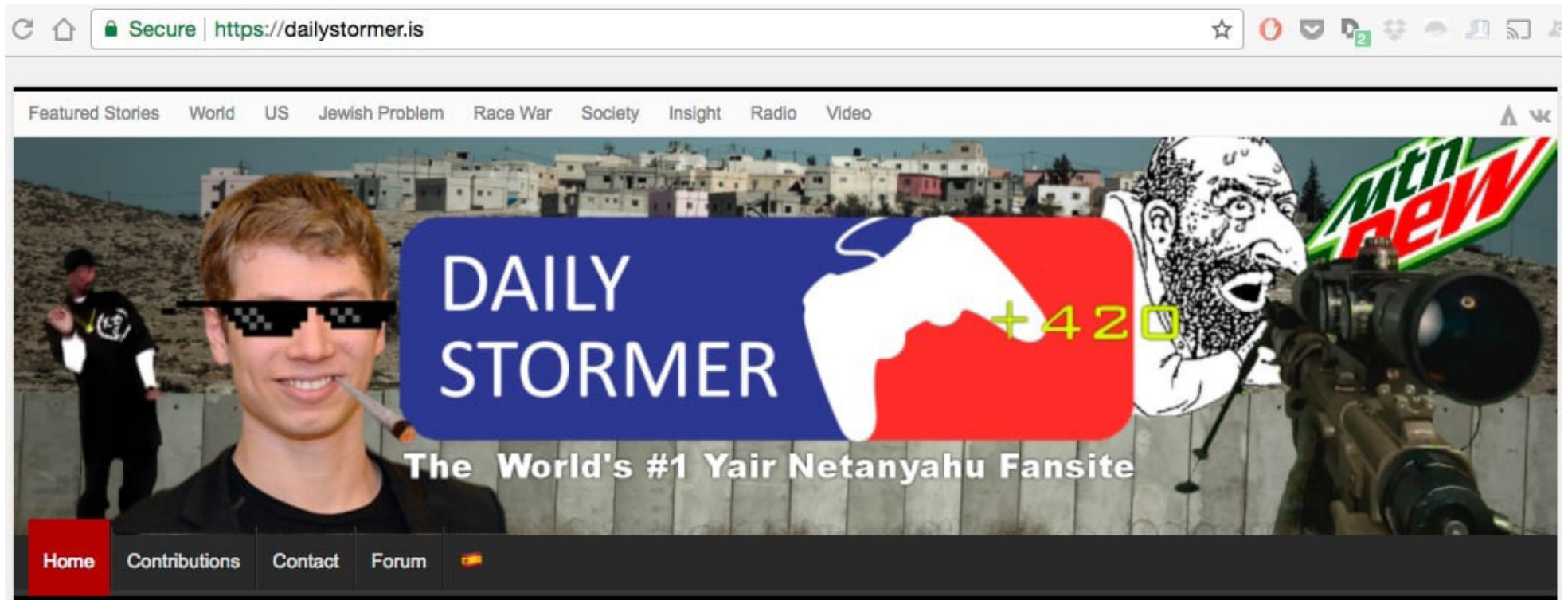
Likewise, Elizabeth Neumann, the assistant secretary for threat prevention and security policy at the Department of Homeland Security, said online radicalization — borrowed from "the ISIS playbook" — was shortening the window between radicalization and violence.

"We know the rise in violent white supremacy is partly fueled by their use of social media platforms that connect like-minded individuals who are geographically isolated to share hate-filled, violent material," Neumann said. But what is the link between online hate and real-world violence?

That's something that Galloway, who eventually became a neo-Nazi recruiter, said was the primary goal when he used the then-nascent internet to find potential recruits in Vancouver.

"The idea was to move people from the online world to the real world," he said. "That socialization piece is important. These platforms have really enhanced the echo chamber of the socialization process, both online and offline. It's about trust relationships."

*Radicalization to extremism occurs when a person adopts one group's negative view of another group to the point of promoting violence against it. The process is nonlinear, and with the advent of the internet, people have more opportunities to search for and consume content that reinforces their grievances — the perception that a person, or group, has been treated unfairly.*



The Daily Stormer, a neo-Nazi website that was booted from the web in 2017 after Charlottesville only to reappear with a different domain name, was averaging 2.72 million unique monthly visitors in 2018.

## ‘WHAT I’VE LEARNED HERE IS PRICELESS’

Earnest, the 19-year-old shooter at the synagogue in Poway, California, was a model student.

Two days after the shooting, the Associated Press reported that as a high schooler, Earnest “had stellar grades, swam on the varsity team and basked in applause of classmates for his piano solos at talent shows.”

His radicalization, the story noted, occurred sometime in the last two years and included forays into 8chan, a message board where most of the content is extreme, racist, and violent.

“I’ve only been lurking here for a year and half, yet what I’ve learned here is priceless. It’s been an honor,” Earnest reportedly wrote in one post.

Beyond that, however, we know very little about the connections between Earnest’s online presence and offline life. Little else on this connection is known publicly.

## HATE IS MORE POPULAR THAN EVER ONLINE

It’s impossible to ignore evidence that extreme, racist, and violent content proliferates today.

Stormfront, a white supremacist website founded by a Klansman in the mid-1990s, grew to 300,000 members by 2017.

The Daily Stormer, a neo-Nazi website that was booted from the web in 2017 after Charlottesville only to reappear with a different domain name, was averaging 2.72 million unique monthly visitors in 2018.

*According to J.M. Berger, author of “Extremism,” group and individual radicalization typically involves a series of steps. First, there must be a defined in-group, whether detailed or vague. That group must then define an out-group. Extremism occurs when the out-group is blamed for some sort of perceived crisis and the in-group develops a solution to that threat, e.g. segregation or genocide.*



*Human beings often fear what they don't know, and the internet and social media platforms are effective tools for misinformation. Still, they can also be used to enlighten people seeking out hateful content. The question is, how can we effectively promote alternative narratives and accurate information over content that feeds into grievances—real or perceived—and ignites fear?*

4chan, another forum where extreme content proliferates, saw a fivefold increase in the number of times the N-word appeared on the site, to 115,000 in January 2018.

Robert Bowers, who killed 11 people in a synagogue in Pittsburgh in October, was well-known and active on Gab, a Twitter alternative popular with white supremacists.

Before the attacks, he used his account to link to racist and anti-Semitic YouTube videos more than 70 times.

### **'METASTASIZED INTO WHITE NATIONALISM'**

Two weeks after the Oct. 27 mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette published a lengthy investigation into Bowers past.

The 3,000-word story was based on “accounts from Mr. Bowers’ coworkers of two decades ago, and an analysis of his social media posts in the weeks prior to the massacre.”

“First fascinated with conservative radio host Jim Quinn, he later became a follower of aggressive online provocateurs of the right wing’s fringe,” the Post- Gazette reported.

Faced with a lack of direct knowledge of Bowers’ past, uncooperative family members, and an incomplete dossier of Bowers’ digital footprint, the newspaper drew two important conclusions:

First, “while the vast majority of people with fractured family lives and early exits from formal education don’t radicalize, research shows that the bulk of violent extremists come from such backgrounds.”

Additionally, and speaking with Peter Simi, a professor of sociology at Chapman University in California, the reporters made another important distinction.

The vast majority of people who consume radicalizing content never move on to become violent extremists.

Galloway calls this “the will to want to get involved with violence.” This is a key ingredient in rooting out potential violent extremists. And that element is missing entirely from the investigative piece into Bowers.

## INSPIRING VIOLENCE ONLINE

Moonshot CVE, a London-based tech company that aims to disrupt and counter violence online, found that incidents of violence very often correlate with an increase in searches for violent content.

In the aftermath of the Tree of Life shooting, for example, searches for violent far-right content increased 92 percent.

Searches indicating a desire to contact the Ku Klux Klan increased nearly 300 percent. And searches indicating a desire to kill Jewish Americans went up 3,327 percent, including 1,005 searches for “Kill Jews” in the four days after the attack.

In a separate report, Moonshot analyzed search data on harmful content centered on the UK’s surge in knife attacks.

In a 16-day period from April into May, Moonshot says it tallied 2.5 million views of YouTube videos that directly incited or encouraged violence. More specifically, the number of searches increased around a cluster of four murders.

One of the key recommendations the group made after this pilot study was a call for more research. “It is widely recognized that the online space plays a significant role in encouraging and propagating violence in the UK,” Moonshot said in that report. “Social media platforms have been used to document, encourage, and glamorise violence.”

Still, “there has been little research focused on the role of the internet and social media platforms in facilitating the spread of violent narratives, and how we might use those same platforms to devise and deploy effective counter-violence strategies.”

## RADICALIZATION OFFERS COMMUNITY

As we continue to attempt to understand the link between online content and offline violence, it’s important to recall one of the most important aspects of radicalization into extremism.

At its core, radicalization exploits people’s grievances — the perception that a person, or group, has been treated unfairly — whether those grievances are real or perceived.

Extremist content can often make people feel a sense of belonging, identity, and self-worth, says Galloway, the former neo-Nazi recruiter. Finally, they are accepted into an in-group.

That’s how he himself was recruited.

“I was just looking for an identity,” he says. “It could have been anything.”

# MY LOST YEARS: A TESTIMONIAL

Since 2015, Life After Hate has corresponded with more than 30 incarcerated individuals as they experience some part of the process of disengaging from hate groups. Disengagement is no easy task; it's even more difficult in prison, where race is highly weaponized, and where inmates often lack the support they need to heal, reform their identity, and make amends.

Today, our staff and volunteers correspond with 20 inmates spread across 14 institutions. We offer personal insight, mentoring, moral support, and access to a support network and potential volunteer opportunities, among other things, upon release. We are filled with immense gratitude to have the opportunity to engage with those who now walk the same paths our team once walked. Please note that these letters do not necessarily reflect our values or positions. They are raw and unedited. By sharing them we hope to offer a glimpse into the reality many incarcerated people face.

"Why do some people put such value on race? Is it out of fear, a need for acceptance, or maybe comfort? I wonder, where in the world is racism not prevalent, or who has not in some way experienced it?"

“I know from being a prisoner in California, with over two decades in the system, that every person that enters the California penal system experiences racism. When I first came to prison I was young, uneducated, impressionable and taught, by force, that my race was more valuable than another. This was after I smoked a cigarette after another inmate.





“The man I smoked with? He was black. I was assaulted on three different occasions over this one incident. So, I quickly learned on this day that you stick to your own not only for comfort, but survival. I craved acceptance. I was more susceptible to peer pressure at this time and the beliefs of those who were older than me. I thought they knew better. This was 18 years ago. For 14 of those years I held onto these beliefs because I received what I thought I needed at that time, acceptance, comfort, and safety. These were what I refer to as my lost years.

“Since then I have positioned myself into a safe environment by removing myself from that whole culture. I have found that in order to live a better quality of life, even in prison, I had to challenged and get over the idea that one’s race is more valuable than others.

“I lost, and we all lose many meaningful experiences when we concern ourselves with the notion that only race somehow lays an important factor in life. I have found that it’s okay to celebrate cultural differences, take part in traditions, and embrace heritage, whatever heritage that may be. But these things are not and should not be used in a way that discriminate against others or segregate ourselves from the people around us. Imagine all that we would lose if we relied only on the achievements made by people of the same skin color as our own? What a drab world that would be. So little innovation, so little music, so little art. The variety we enjoy in life would disappear in the blink of an eye. Think of something as simple as the food you enjoy every day. What would it be like if you could no longer enjoy a bowl of pasta, a street taco, or a rice bowl, this is just one example.

“We don’t want to live in a world like this so we must do what we can to avoid creating a world like that. Devaluing another person’s dignity is beneath us as humans.

“The best way to challenge this sort of thinking, I have found, is to embrace a set of values that prevent it. Like tolerance, which allows us to live together even if we are not quite ready to accept another person for one way or another. Or education and patience, which gives us the tools and the time needed to understand others who are not like us. Or empathy, which lets us walk a mile in another person’s shoes, and understand what it’s like to be them. There are countless opportunities for personal growth. If only we’re able and willing to take them. I know if I was able to find them in prison so you can in the free world. I hope Life After Hate can be one of those opportunities, and allow you to find a better mindset.”

**Dustin Jeffries**  
2019

### GET HELP

If you're ready to leave hate and violence behind, we're here to support you.

### GIVE

Your gift helps us disrupt violent hate through outreach, research and education.

### SHOP

Browse our online shop for gifts for you and your family, friends and colleagues.

