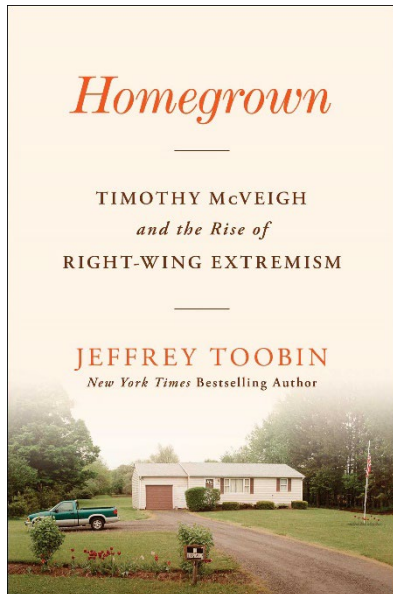


HOMEGROWN:
Timothy McVeigh and the Rise of Right-Wing Extremism
By Jeffrey Toobin

A STUDY GUIDE FROM THE MEDIA EDUCATION LAB



There's never been a more important time to read and discuss *Homegrown* by Jeffrey Toobin. Violence and threats of violence have become commonplace in American public life. Targeted violence and anti-government activism are on the rise, and a growing number of citizens across America now believe violence is needed to address the grievances that are polarizing society.

Violent extremism is not limited to any one political ideology or party in the United States. Extremist ideologies and acts of violence are associated with various political, ideological, and religious beliefs, and they can emerge from both the right and left ends of the political spectrum.

There have been instances of violent extremism associated with right-wing ideologies, such as white supremacy, anti-government extremism, and militia movements. A New York Times news story reported that at an Idaho political rally in 2021, a young man stepped up to a microphone to ask when he could start killing Democrats. "How many elections are they going to steal before we kill these people?" The local state representative, a Republican, later called it a "fair" question. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/12/us/politics/republican-violent-rhetoric.html>

While much less prevalent, extremist violence has been associated with left-wing ideologies. Individuals seeking to achieve political or social change have used violent intimidation to challenge those with whom they disagree. For example, in March 2023, hundreds of anti-police activists breached the site of a proposed new police and fire training center in Atlanta, Georgia. They burned construction vehicles and threw rocks, bricks, and Molotov cocktails at police. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/35-detained-after-violence-at-protest-at-site-of-new-atlanta-police-training-center>

Most Americans reject violence. The vast majority of Americans, regardless of their political beliefs, engage in peaceful political discourse and activism. They do not believe that violence is a viable means to achieve political goals. Addressing the issue of violent extremism in the United States requires a comprehensive and nonpartisan approach that focuses on promoting tolerance, understanding, and the rule of law while safeguarding freedom of speech and peaceful political expression.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Homegrown: Timothy McVeigh and the Rise of Right-Wing Extremism

By Jeffrey Toobin

It was the worst act of homegrown terrorism in the nation's history: 168 people—men, women, and children—were murdered in an explosion in Oklahoma City. Fifteen victims were preschoolers who had just started their morning at the day-care center on the second floor of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City. Hundreds more were injured. More than three hundred nearby buildings were damaged or destroyed in the blast that sheared off one-third of the building.

This book tells the story of Timothy McVeigh, a decorated veteran of Operation Desert Storm who was inspired by a 1978 novel by a neo-Nazi who described a lurid fantasy—an American race war. Tim McVeigh wasn't just some lone-wolf drifter or survivalist oddball. He was motivated by a political movement. He had paid close attention to the events at Ruby Ridge and Waco, where federal law enforcement officials were drawn into a standoff with anti-government groups that led to the death of men, women, and children. He believed that only through violent action could he inspire people to rise up against their government.

Written by Jeffrey Toobin, a lawyer, author, blogger, and legal analyst, *Homegrown* also documents the federal government's prosecution of the case, where investigators conducted 28,000 interviews, searched through 13.2 million hotel registration records, and collected more than 3 tons of evidence. Merrick Garland, who currently serves as the Attorney General of the United States, was the U.S. Department of Justice official who prosecuted the case.

By revealing the beliefs and attitudes that Timothy McVeigh used to justify his violent actions, this book invites readers to consider the connections between the past, the present, and the future of violent extremism in the United States.

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

Book club discussions bring together groups of people who often have very different expectations. Some people aim to keep the conversation focused on the book, while others use the topic of the book as a vehicle for social interaction and sharing. Everyone will have an opinion on the topic of violent extremism in the United States. Whichever way you focus your group's attention, it will be wise to set the stage for a Courageous Conversation by beginning your book club discussion with these guidelines:

1. Speak for yourself and out of your own experience while recognizing that your words have an impact. Be respectful.
2. Allow others to do the same.

3. Share the time—allow others to finish speaking; take turns. Consider waiting for others to contribute before speaking a second or third time.
4. Stay curious—ask honest questions when you need clarification.
5. Pause—take time for reflection. Allow for silence.
6. Practice active listening and listen for understanding. Assume good intentions, and notice what feelings arise in you when others are speaking.
7. When possible, please close any unnecessary programs, applications, and notifications, and put your phone on silent so you can be fully present.

SOME KEY THEMES

Readers of *Homegrown* by Jeffrey Toobin will find many parallels between the story of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the rise of anti-government extremism revealed in the January 6, 2021, insurrection. Explore six themes by reviewing selected quotes from the book before discussing the questions below:

- Patriots Who Love Their Country But Detest Everything About It
- A Community of Freedom Lovers
- How Media Amplifies Extremist Voices
- Dog Whistles for Revolutionaries
- How Politicians Exploit Grievances
- Violent Extremists in the Military

Reading aloud the quotes provided for each theme can be particularly useful to inspire discussion for participants who are still reading or who have not read the book.



Patriots Who Love Their Country But Detest Everything About It

Readers learn about why Timothy McVeigh was inspired to take violent action and how he considered the ideology of violent extremism as a type of patriotism.

There were, then, three powerful ideological motivations for McVeigh’s decision to bomb the Murrah building: the obsession with gun rights; the perceived approval of the Founding Fathers; and the belief in the value and power of violence. These feelings were replicated, with extraordinary precision, in the

rioters on January 6 as well as many of the other right-wing extremists who have flourished in the quarter century since the bombing. (Toobin, p. 6)

There was a paradox in McVeigh's patriotism, just as there is among his ideological successors. They profess to love their country, but detest nearly everything about the contemporary United States. For McVeigh, Ruby Ridge, Waco, Clinton, and guns were just the start. (Toobin, p. 6)

There is, in McVeigh's absence of planning for a next act, a similarity to the attitudes of many rioters in the Capitol on January 6, 2021. Rather, to the extent the rioters could articulate it, the mission—the fight—was the end in itself. (Toobin, pp. 127–128)

According to an *Economist*/YouGov poll in the summer of 2022, 43 percent of Americans believe it's at least somewhat "likely" that "there will be a U.S. civil war within the next decade." More than half of Republicans feel that way, and 21 percent of "strong Republicans" believe a civil war is "very likely." McVeigh's extremism had spread to much of the contemporary Republican Party. (Toobin, pp. 317–318)

For Discussion:

- What did McVeigh love about his country? What was most deeply troubling to him?
- What do you love most about your country?
- What deeply troubles you about your country? What do you do about the things that trouble you?
- Was the purpose of the January 6 insurrection primarily a symbolic act of protest?
- What are some examples of acts of protest that were not violent?
- Do you think a future civil war is likely? Why or why not?



A Community of Freedom Lovers

Readers learn about the shift in interpretation of the Second Amendment as the conversation shifted from a state's right to have a militia to an individual's right to possess any firearm. Gun shows created a place for like-minded people to gather as a community of freedom lovers.

As with many right-wing extremists, especially in recent history, McVeigh's concept of "freedom," like Earl Turner's, centered on guns—their belief that they should have the right to buy any kind of firearm at any time. (Toobin, pp. 20–23)

Gun shows were also cultural events as much as commercial enterprises. They were celebrations of the gun as both a weapon and a symbol of political allegiance. Attendees were welcome to bring their own guns, though the weapons were supposed to be unloaded. (Toobin, p. 86).

But he was not a survivalist, or even a loner. He belonged to a community—the one he found on the gun show circuit. The gun shows were often major events, some with thousands of attendees. McVeigh never made much money, selling books, bumper stickers, and even guns and ammunition when he could find them. But he mingled, talked, listened, and proselytized. He was with like-minded people who were committed to a rising political movement. (Toobin, p. 9)

McVeigh understood the potential of his right-wing compatriots for joining him in violent action. "I believe there is an army out there, ready to rise up, even though I never found it," McVeigh told his attorney Jones. But that doesn't mean his army wasn't there. (Toobin, p. 11)

For Discussion:

- What was the role of gun shows in the development of Timothy McVeigh's political activism?
- Besides gun shows, in what other ways do extremists gather as a community?



How Media Amplifies Extremist Voices

Readers learn that, in the pre-internet days, magazines and radio programs provided information that reinforced McVeigh's core beliefs that violence against the government was necessary. G. Gordon Liddy, the Watergate felon who became a national radio talk show host, encouraged listeners to kill government agents. Timothy McVeigh read books like *The Poor Man's James Bond* and *The Anarchist Cookbook* and devoured magazines like *Soldier of Fortune* and the now-defunct newspaper, *The Spotlight*. He listened to Rush Limbaugh during the

day and William Cooper at night. But *The Turner Diaries* remained his blueprint for action.

There was a page photocopied from *The Turner Diaries*, which McVeigh had marked with a yellow highlighter: “The real value of our attacks today lies in the psychological impact, not in the immediate casualties. More important, though, is what we taught the politicians and the bureaucrats. They learned this afternoon that not one of them is beyond our reach.” (Toobin, pp. 145–146)

McVeigh failed to find his army because he had no efficient way to locate and mobilize potential allies; in other words, McVeigh didn’t have the internet, in particular social media. As it turned out, there was an army of McVeigh’s heirs out there, but it took the invention of cyberspace for the soldiers to find one another. (Toobin, p. 11).

Social media allowed like-minded extremists to gather and scheme in a way that made the peddling of gun show rumors look archaic by comparison. The right-wing mass shooters of recent years drew from many of the same sources and connected over many of the same websites.... Nor did extremists in later years have to search out obscure corners of the internet to see their ideas in circulation. (Toobin, pp. 227–228)

For Discussion:

- Today’s extremists are exposed to a variety of different radical ideas online. What radical ideas have you encountered online?
- What are some similarities and differences between McVeigh’s experiences with media and what people may encounter today?



Dog Whistles for Revolutionaries

Readers gain insight on the many symbols of our shared history that are used to motivate and reinforce the ideology of violent extremism. The phrase “1776” is used to remind people of the victory over a much more powerful British enemy, reflecting the belief that violence is inevitable and freedom is worth dying for.

They settled one goal right from the outset. The bombing would take place on April 19, 1995. That would be exactly two years after the Waco conflagration as well as the anniversary of the Battles of Lexington and Concord in 1775. (Toobin, p. 104)

[Describing a T-shirt] On the front was a drawing of Abraham Lincoln, with the words “*Sic semper tyrannis*”—which was what John Wilkes Booth yelled after he shot the president, meaning “Thus always to tyrants.” On the back of the shirt was a drawing of a tree, and a quotation from Thomas Jefferson: “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.” (Toobin, p. 143)

Alex Jones, Congresswoman Lauren Boebert, and the leaders of the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers all invoked the American Revolution as justification for their actions. As with McVeigh, this rhetoric was based less on actual knowledge of the issues in 1776 than on the convenient use of certain words—like “rebellion,” “tyranny,” and “1776” itself—that suited contemporary obsessions. For both McVeigh and his heirs, the invocation of 1776 was based not on any real insight about or even knowledge of the causes of the American Revolution. Rather, the Revolution simply supplied useful buzzwords and, more important, a rationale for the use of violence. (Toobin, pp. 273–274)

For Discussion:

- Which symbolic political words are most important to you? Why?
- What are some of the “dog whistle” words and phrases that are used today as a type of secret code?
- How do symbolic words and phrases activate the fear and hate that leads to violence?



How Politicians Exploit Grievances

Toobin demonstrates that while politicians condemn violence they also refuse to acknowledge their role in motivating and inspiring others to violence. By acknowledging and honoring people’s feelings of grievance and resentment, they cultivate loyalty among voters.

Whether it was the Oklahoma City bombing, mass shootings, other violence by right-wing extremists, or the January 6, 2021, insurrection, Limbaugh, Gingrich, and their allies always responded the same way. They made dutiful condemnations of the attacks themselves, accompanied by refusals to accept any responsibility for inspiring them. (Toobin, p. 194)

McVeigh was making the point that a lot of right-wingers in the United States believed that violence was an appropriate response to political grievances. He had a lot of company in that view. Donald Trump made the same point in a tweet late in the day on January 6, 2021, following the riot at the Capitol: “These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long.” (Toobin, p. 208)

For Discussion:

- Which political grievances are most salient among Americans today?
- What are the political benefits and risks of building loyalty through grievances?
- What are the core values of mainstream conservatism in America today?
- How is Timothy McVeigh regarded among extremists today?
- Rush Limbaugh responded to the Oklahoma City bombing by saying, “There is absolutely no connection between these nuts and mainstream conservatism in America today.” Do you agree or disagree?



Violent Extremists in the Military

Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols were stationed together as members of the U.S. Army. Toobin wonders why some veterans are drawn to violent extremism and suggests that some people believe that the military has gotten soft and needs to be “restored” to a true fighting force.

The prevalence of veterans among the extremists raised the question of whether the military attracted those predisposed to violent political action or whether service in the armed forces radicalized those who might not otherwise turn to terror. (Toobin, pp. 29–30)

For Discussion:

- What core values of the American military make them susceptible to extremist discourses?
- What factors might explain why some members of the U.S. military find anti-government activism appealing?

MORE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The story of Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City bombing provide a fine starting point for informed and constructive discussions on how to address and mitigate the problem of violent extremism. But some discussion participants will respond to more general questions about the rise of right-wing extremism in the United States. Use these questions to open up discussion on topics that invite participants to share their opinions and points of view:

- **What is driving the rise of homegrown domestic terrorism in the United States?**
 - What socioeconomic factors, cultural influences, or other underlying issues make some individuals susceptible to extremist ideologies?
 - How does humiliation and grievance play a role in radicalization to violence?

- **What is the role of social media and online platforms in radicalization?**
 - How do people form communities and get support for their extremist beliefs?
 - What can be done to counter online radicalization without infringing on free speech?

- **What is the role of gun control in the problem of extremist violence?**
 - How does easy access to firearms contribute to the threat of domestic terrorism?
 - What legislative and regulatory measures can be implemented to address this issue?

- **What is the role of mental health and social services in preventing domestic terrorism?**
 - How can mental health support and social programs help individuals who are at risk of radicalization?
 - What opportunities are available to identify and assist individuals before they become radicalized?

- **What should be the government's role in preventing domestic terrorism?**
 - What legal and policy tools are available to combat domestic extremism?
 - How can law enforcement agencies balance the need for security with civil liberties?

- **What strategies can help to counter extremist narratives and ideologies?**
 - Why are education and awareness programs considered to be effective in combatting radicalization?

- What role can religious and community leaders play in countering extremism?
- What can be done to promote community engagement and early intervention?
- **What are the challenges in prosecuting domestic terrorism cases, and how can they be overcome?**
 - Are there legal gaps or obstacles in prosecuting domestic terrorists?
 - What resources are needed to strengthen law enforcement's ability to address this issue?

In discussing these questions, people will have differing insights on the complex issue of homegrown domestic terrorism in the United States. Demonstrate active listening and remind people that they do not have to agree with one another to have a productive discussion.

KEY VOCABULARY

Dog Whistle - Words or phrases used by hate groups that could mean something innocent but that fellow hate group members understand to be a call to action.

“Leaderless Resistance” - The title of an essay by Louis Ray Beam Jr. to explain how white supremacist groups need to have leaderless groups of extremists so that no one person could topple the hierarchy of the whole group.

Gun Show Loophole - A term used to explain the loophole that private sales of firearms at gun shows do not require state or federal background checks, waiting periods, or record of sales. This is sometimes called the “private sale exemption.”

The Day of the Rope - In the book *The Turner Diaries*, the day of the rope was the day that politicians were hanged from lampposts throughout the city.

The Cohen Act - The name given to the law passed in *The Turner Diaries* that outlawed guns. Also used by extremists to refer to the Federal Assault Weapons Ban was signed into law by President Clinton in 1994, anti-government extremists took notice.

Alt-Right - The Alternative Right, commonly known as the “alt-right,” is a set of far-right ideologies, groups, and individuals whose core belief is that “white identity” is under attack by multicultural forces using “political correctness” and “social justice” to undermine white people and “their” civilization. (SPLC definition)

False Flag - Originally a naval term for when a ship displays the wrong country of origin to intentionally mislead or confuse who is the real antagonist.

1776 - A term used to reference freedom and the righteous fight for liberty. Although used to overthrow a government, it is meant to restore a more pure form if government is corrupted.

Infographic

The History of Anti-Government Activism

Learn more about the history of anti-government activism in the United States by reviewing this visual timeline created by Renee Hobbs and Charles D. Morgan.

<https://www.sutori.com/en/story/anti-government-extremism-in-the-u-s--NwrT5t2cDuTDwosBe6PZBCn8>

THE TURNER DIARIES
Andrew Macdonald

1978 - The Turner Diaries was written by William Luther Pierce (and published under the name Andrew MacDonald). The novel depicts a right-wing assault on the Capitol and it has influenced anti-government activists for decades.

The standoff at Ruby Ridge, 1992

The Ruby Ridge standoff was a 1992 confrontation between the federal government and the Weaver family in Ruby Ridge, Idaho. Randy Weaver and his family held anti-government beliefs and had become associated with white supremacist groups. The standoff began when federal agents attempted to arrest Weaver for firearms violations. A standoff ensued, lasting 11 days and resulting in the deaths of a U.S. Marshal, Randy Weaver's son, and his wife.

13 Supremacists Are Not Guilty Of Conspiracies

The Fort Smith sedition trial was a 1988 trial of fourteen white supremacists¹² accused of plotting to overthrow the United States federal government¹³ and conspiring to assassinate federal officials. The fourteen defendants were acquitted after a two-month trial. One of the jurors later married one of the defendants.

The 1993 World Trade Center bombing was a terrorist attack that occurred when a van bomb detonated below the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. Six people were killed in this attack, which was planned by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, a Pakistani terrorist and former head of propaganda for Al-Qaeda.

EXTREMIST GROUPS TODAY

From the Anti-Defamation League:

Three Percenters

The name itself refers to the erroneous belief that only 3 percent of colonists fought against the British during the Revolutionary War. Three Percenters believe that they are engaged in a similar battle against the tyranny of the federal government.

Boogaloo Movement

The Boogaloo movement formed in 2019 based around the term "boogaloo," a slang reference to a future civil war that members eagerly anticipate. While there are ideological differences among members, the movement is primarily anti-government, anti-gun control, and anti-police.

Proud Boys

The Proud Boys are a right-wing extremist group with a violent agenda. The group frequently participates in right-wing events to provide "security" and often clashes violently with counter-protesters. Their ideology is primarily misogynistic, Islamophobic, transphobic, and anti-immigrant. Members of the Proud Boys account for one of the highest number of extremist arrestees in relation to the January 6 Capitol insurrection.

Oath Keepers

The Oath Keepers are a loosely organized group of right-wing anti-government extremists within the larger militia movement. While they allow anyone to join, the Oath Keepers explicitly focus on recruiting current and former military, law enforcement, and first responder personnel. The Oath Keepers gained notoriety for its armed participation in disputes between ranchers or miners and federal agencies in 2014 and 2015.

White Nationalism

White nationalism is a term that originated among white supremacists as a euphemism for white supremacy. Eventually, some white supremacists tried to distinguish it further by using it to refer to a form of white supremacy that emphasizes defining a country or region by white racial identity and that seeks to promote the interests of whites exclusively, typically at the expense of people of other backgrounds.

American Militia Movement

The militia movement is a right-wing extremist movement consisting primarily of armed paramilitary groups possessing an anti-government, conspiracy-oriented ideology. The movement was originally formed in 1993–1994 in reaction to federal gun control measures and to deadly standoffs between civilians and federal agents. Militia supporters traditionally believe that the federal government is collaborating with a shadowy conspiracy (often referred to as the "New World Order") to strip Americans of

their rights in order to ultimately enslave them. The militia movement experienced two major surges in growth, one in the mid-1990s and another during the period 2008–2011.

LEARN MORE

***Breaking Hate: Confronting the New Culture of Extremism* by Christian Picciolini**

Told with startling honesty and intimacy, *Breaking Hate* is both the inside story of how extremists lure the unwitting to their causes and a guide for how everyday Americans can win them—and our civil democracy—back. Former extremist Christian Picciolini unravels this sobering narrative from the frontlines, where he has worked for two decades as a peace advocate and “hate breaker.” He draws from the firsthand experiences of extremists he has helped to disengage, revealing how violent movements target the vulnerable and exploit their essential human desires, and how the right interventions can save lives.

***Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* by Kathleen Belew**

The white power movement in America wants a revolution. Its soldiers are not lone wolves but highly organized cadres motivated by a coherent and deeply troubling worldview made up of white supremacy, virulent anticommunism, and apocalyptic faith. In *Bring the War Home*, Kathleen Belew gives us the history of a movement that consolidated in the 1970s and 1980s around a potent sense of betrayal in the Vietnam War, made tragic headlines in Waco and Ruby Ridge and with the Oklahoma City bombing, and is resurgent under former President Trump.

***The Chaos Machine: The Inside Story of How Social Media Rewired Our Minds and Our World* by Max Fisher**

We all have a vague sense that social media is bad for our minds, for our children, and for our democracies. But the truth is that its reach and impact run far deeper than we have understood. Building on years of international reporting, Max Fisher tells the gripping and galling inside story of how Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social network preyed on psychological frailties to create the algorithms that drive everyday users to extreme opinions and, increasingly, extreme actions. As Fisher demonstrates, the companies’ founding tenets, combined with a blinkered focus on maximizing engagement, have led to a destabilized world for everyone.

***Culture Warlords: My Journey Into the Dark Web of White Supremacy* by Talia Lavin**

Culture Warlords is the story of how Lavin, a frequent target of extremist trolls (including those at Fox News), dove into a byzantine online culture of hate and learned the intricacies of how white supremacy proliferates online. Within these pages, she reveals the extremists hiding in plain sight online: Incels. White nationalists. White supremacists. National socialists. Proud Boys. Christian extremists. In order to

showcase them in their natural habitat, Talia assumes a range of identities, going undercover as a blonde Nazi babe, a forlorn incel, and a violent Aryan femme fatale.

***Dying of Whiteness: How the Politics of Racial Resentment Is Killing America's Heartland* by Jonathan M. Metzl**

In election after election, conservative white Americans have embraced politicians who pledge to make their lives great again. But as physician Jonathan M. Metzl shows in *Dying of Whiteness*, the policies that result actually place white Americans at ever-greater risk of sickness and death. Interviewing a range of everyday Americans, Metzl examines how racial resentment has fueled progun laws in Missouri, resistance to the Affordable Care Act in Tennessee, and cuts to schools and social services in Kansas. He shows these policies' costs: increasing deaths by gun suicide, falling life expectancies, and rising dropout rates.

***Extremism* By J. M. Berger**

A rising tide of extremist movements threaten to destabilize civil societies around the globe. It has never been more important to understand extremism, yet the dictionary definition—a logical starting point in a search for understanding—tells us only that extremism is “the quality or state of being extreme.” In this volume in the MIT Press Essential Knowledge series, J. M. Berger offers a nuanced introduction to extremist movements, explaining what extremism is, how extremist ideologies are constructed, and why extremism can escalate into violence. Berger shows that although the ideological content of extremist movements varies widely, there are common structural elements.

***Freedom's Dominion: A Saga of White Resistance to Federal Power* by Jefferson Cowie**

In *Freedom's Dominion*, historian Jefferson Cowie focuses on a quintessentially American place: Barbour County, Alabama, the ancestral home of political firebrand George Wallace. In a land shaped by settler colonialism and chattel slavery, white people weaponized freedom to seize Native lands, champion secession, overthrow Reconstruction, question the New Deal, and fight against the civil rights movement. A riveting history of the long-running clash between white people and federal authority, this book radically shifts our understanding of what freedom means in America.

***Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right* by Cynthia Miller-Idriss**

Hate crimes. Misinformation and conspiracy theories. Foiled white-supremacist plots. The signs of growing far-right extremism are all around us, and communities across America and around the globe are struggling to understand how so many people are being radicalized and why they are increasingly attracted to violent movements. *Hate in the Homeland* shows how tomorrow's far-right nationalists are being recruited in surprising places, from college campuses and mixed martial arts gyms to clothing stores, online gaming chat rooms, and YouTube cooking channels.

***It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* by Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein**

Acrimony and hyperpartisanship have seeped into every part of the political process. Congress is deadlocked and its approval ratings are at record lows. America's two main political parties have given up their traditions of compromise, endangering our very system of constitutional democracy. And one of these parties has taken on the role of insurgent outlier: the Republicans have become ideologically extreme, scornful of compromise, and ardently opposed to the established social and economic policy regime. In *It's Even Worse Than It Looks*, congressional scholars Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein identify two overriding problems that have led Congress—and the United States—to the brink of institutional collapse.

***Misbelief: What Makes Rational People Believe Irrational Things* by Dan Ariely**

In *Misbelief*, preeminent social scientist Dan Ariely argues that to understand the irrational appeal of misinformation, we must first understand the behavior of “misbelief”—the psychological and social journey that leads people to mistrust accepted truths, entertain alternative facts, and even embrace full-blown conspiracy theories. Misinformation, it turns out, appeals to something innate in all of us—on the right and the left—and it is only by understanding this psychology that we can blunt its effects. Grounded in years of study as well as Ariely's own experience as a target of disinformation, *Misbelief* is an eye-opening and comprehensive analysis of the psychological drivers that cause otherwise rational people to adopt deeply irrational beliefs.

***Myth America: Historians Take On the Biggest Legends and Lies About Our Past* by Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer**

In *Myth America*, Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer have assembled an all-star team of fellow historians to push back against misinformation. The contributors debunk narratives that portray the New Deal and Great Society as failures, immigrants as hostile invaders, and feminists as anti-family warriors—among numerous other partisan lies. Based on a firm foundation of historical scholarship, their findings revitalize our understanding of American history.

***Rising Out of Hatred: The Awakening of a Former White Nationalist* by Eli Saslow**

Rising Out of Hatred tells the story of how white supremacist ideas migrated from the far-right fringe to the White House through the intensely personal saga of one man who eventually disavowed everything he was taught to believe, at tremendous personal cost. With great empathy and narrative verve, Eli Saslow asks what Derek Black's story can tell us about America's increasingly divided nature.

***The Storm Is Here: An American Crucible* by Luke Mogelson**

After years of living abroad and covering the Global War on Terrorism, Luke Mogelson went home in early 2020 to report on the social discord that the pandemic was bringing to the fore across the U.S. An assignment that began with right-wing militias in Michigan soon took him to an uprising for racial justice in Minneapolis, then to antifascist clashes in the streets of Portland, and ultimately to an attempted insurrection in Washington, D.C. His dispatches for *The New Yorker* revealed a larger story with ominous implications for America. They were only the beginning.

***Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* by Sebastian Junger**

Decades before the American Revolution, Benjamin Franklin lamented that English settlers were constantly fleeing over to the Indians, but Indians almost never did the same. Tribal society has been exerting an almost gravitational pull on Westerners for hundreds of years, and the reason lies deep in our evolutionary past as a communal species. The most recent example of that attraction is combat veterans who come home to find themselves missing the incredibly intimate bonds of platoon life. The loss of closeness that comes at the end of deployment may explain the high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by military veterans today.

***We Are Proud Boys: How a Right-Wing Street Gang Ushered in a New Era of American Extremism* by Andy B. Campbell**

From leading extremism reporter Andy Campbell, *We Are Proud Boys* is the definitive narrative exploration of this notorious street gang and all the far-right movements they're connected to. Through groundbreaking new reporting, Campbell delivers the untold story of a gang of blundering, punch-happy goons who grew to become the centerpiece of American extremism and positioned themselves as the unofficial enforcement arm of the GOP.

***White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America* by Anthea Butler**

The American political scene today is poisonously divided, and the vast majority of white evangelicals play a strikingly unified, powerful role in the disunion. These evangelicals raise a starkly consequential question for electoral politics: Why do they claim morality while supporting politicians who act immorally by most Christian measures? In this clear-eyed, hard-hitting chronicle of American religion and politics, Anthea Butler answers that racism is at the core of conservative evangelical activism and power.

***White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* by Carol Anderson**

Since 1865 and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, every time African Americans have made advances towards full participation in our democracy, white reaction has fueled a deliberate and relentless rollback of their gains. The end of the Civil War and Reconstruction was greeted with the Black Codes and Jim Crow; the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was met with the shutting down of public schools throughout the South while taxpayer dollars

financed segregated white private schools; the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 triggered a coded but powerful response, the so-called Southern Strategy and the War on Drugs that disenfranchised millions of African Americans while propelling presidents Nixon and Reagan into the White House, and then the election of America's first black president led to the expression of white rage that has been as relentless as it has been brutal.

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