

THE ROOT

Vanilla ISIS: The Quiet Radicalization of America's New al-Qaida

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In an effort to battle terrorism, Twitter maintains a team dedicated to fighting groups that advocate extremism. Since 2015, Twitter has banned more than 125,000 accounts linked to ISIS, or the Islamic State group, [The Guardian reports](#). Both Google and Facebook employ various tools to counter terrorist activities on their platforms. The FBI wants the authority to shut down Islamic extremist sites, and senators recently asked the Federal Communications Commission why it can't do more to eliminate the online entities that radicalize people over the internet.

Amid all this hullabaloo, one group is never mentioned. Politicians, law-enforcement agencies and media outlets rarely talk about the American terrorists radicalized on the internet who go out and commit heinous acts. They point out the ones with Muslim names, brown skin and Middle Eastern backgrounds. They single out the "thugs" and "gangbangers," who, they contend, are seduced by music videos and rap songs, but ignore the growing number of violent extremists who have been brainwashed on social media and popular websites, even though they are responsible for the bulk of domestic acts of terror.

There is a growing group of radical extremists in this country. They are young. They are impressionable. They are the new breed of homegrown terrorists. They are white, and they *will kill you*.

This racist media narrative around mass violence falls apart with the Charleston church shooting.

Hasan killed 13 people on Fort Hood Army base in Texas in 2009, investigators [were already tracking his communications with radical Yemeni cleric Anwar al-Awlaki](#), whose blog reportedly also inspired at least 10 other terrorist incidents. Under pressure from U.S. officials, the website was eventually taken down by its host, and Awlaki was eventually killed in a targeted drone strike in 2011.

Prosecutors say that when Dylann Roof slithered out of Charleston, S.C.'s Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015 after killing nine parishioners at a prayer meeting, he had been self-radicalized by sites like the [Council for Conservative Citizens](#) and the [Daily Stormer](#). James Harris Jackson—the man who allegedly prepared for a mass murder of minorities by stabbing a black man in New York City's Times Square in March—subscribed to several “alt-right” YouTube channels, according to the [Daily Beast](#). Sean Urbanski, who is charged with murdering Richard Collins III just days before the Army lieutenant was scheduled to graduate from Bowie State, was a member of at least one white supremacist Facebook group, [CNN reports](#).

Conservatives would have you believe that there are a large number of Muslims secretly plotting to kill us all, but the numbers don't show that. If you remove the Sept. 11 attacks from the casualty count, foreign-born terrorists have committed 25 murders in the last 25 years. In fact, the chance of an American being killed by a foreign-born terrorist is [1 in 3,609,709](#) (pdf), say researchers at the Cato Institute.

But since 1993, right-wing extremists have been responsible for 255 deaths and have injured more than 600 more. According to a [new report by the Anti-Defamation League](#), the vast majority of these acts of terror have been committed by white supremacists; people who were anti-immigrant, anti-government extremists; or a combination. On Monday the ADL released “[A Dark & Constant Rage](#)” (pdf)—a comprehensive report cataloging 150 incidents of right-wing extremism over the past 25 years.

Yes, you are seven times more likely to be killed by a right-wing extremist than by a Muslim terrorist. White extremists are far more dangerous than jihadists. Every study shows it. Statistics bear it out. But here's the problem:

It is not that no one *knows* it. They just won't *say it*. The [FBI knows it](#). [Local law-enforcement agencies](#) worry about it. [Media entities are aware](#). Even the Department of Homeland Security recognizes the threat.

But they won't do or say anything because this brand of terrorist kills black and brown people. Because it is unthinkable to profile young white men as violent thugs, but acceptable when America does it to Muslims, Mexicans and black people.

Because white privilege.

The Alt Reich: Nation group that Sean Urbanski visited is still taking members on Facebook. The Daily Stormer, [the website that Dylann Roof may have posted on](#), is still up and running. Just recently, a black student at American University needed police protection after a neo-Nazi site's founder [sent the site's readers after her](#). He's still on Twitter. The Council of Conservative Citizens is open for business. Everything is still cool.

Perhaps tomorrow, or next week, another white male will open fire in a crowded theater because of propaganda he read online, as white supremacist [John Russell Houser](#) did in July 2015. Maybe

next week, a lone wolf will go to a Black Lives Matter protest and empty his gun's magazine, as [Allen Scarsella did in November 2015](#).

Or next year, someone might walk into another temple and spray bullets the way white nationalist Wade Michael Page did [in a Sikh temple](#) in 2012. All three of these men were "radicalized" by groups that exist openly, without any fear of being arrested for fueling violence or making terrorist threats.

Of course, there are some who worry about the "slippery slope" that leads to the government control of free speech. Ask Lt. Collins' family if his life was worth less than a Facebook group's existence. Inquire about freedom of speech from the people whose bodies still have bullet fragments from Scarsella's weapon. Better yet, ask the members of Emanuel AME if they'd trade the right of neo-Nazis to spread hate in exchange for the lives of Cynthia, Susie, Ethel, Depayne, Clementa, Tywanza, Daniel, Sharonda and Myra.

Go ahead ... I'll wait.

In 1919, in a unanimous decision by the Supreme Court, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote that even "the most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theater and causing a panic." The phrase is meant to explain that there are limits to the First Amendment. When a person's speech causes harm or injury to someone else, it is reasonable that a society would stop that person.

But in America, if the person screaming "fire" is white and the theater is filled with black or brown people, he can yell all he wants.