

Critical thinking, homeland security, and domestic terrorism



Critical thinking is lacking in modern society. Modern society has become the age of social media and ten second media clips. Many wait to be told what to think, feel, or believe, instead of participating in their own life interactions and reactions. This includes events that would fall under the jurisdiction of Homeland Security. Many in society believe that only a very specific type of person engages in activities that would involve Homeland Security. However, Homeland Security has failed in their use of critical thinking because they were unable to foresee the rise of white nationalism and the effects it would have on the United States of America.

Far-right white nationalisms version of terrorism has gained a foothold in America over the course of the last two decades, after being relatively dormant for years. The application of critical thinking could have helped those who work in Homeland Security to foresee the rise and quite possibly could have aided in determining a solution that would have prevented the rise all together. In recent years a major issue concerning domestic terrorism contains a large blind spot in regards to recognition in the eyes of law enforcement and the American society in general, and that is the rise of white men committing acts of violence in hopes of changing politics or policy, or in other words engaging in terroristic behavior.

If the citizens of the United States would have examined their reactions to an event such as the event that occurred on October 27, 2018, using critical thinking perhaps more would have been done to prevent it from occurring again. " Eleven people [were] murdered and seven injured after 46-year-old suspect Robert Gregory Bowers storm[ed] the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with several semi-automatic weapons and

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shout[ed] “ All Jews must die”” (SPLC, 2019). Bowers was a white male who identified as a Republican and a Christian. He was a conspiracy theorist and a white supremacist.

Bowers believed something they refer to as a ‘ white genocide’ is occurring. He blamed Jewish people for this ‘ genocide’ and for helping to resettle refugees in the United States that were not Caucasian. Due to his beliefs, and his actions, he would be classically described as a terrorist. The media, society, and politicians would have been quick to describe him as a terrorist had he been of Middle Eastern descent instead of a Caucasian man or had he been Muslim instead of Christian.

The majority of the population in the United States is white Christians (although those numbers are changing). Because people who identify with the largest population group within the United States instead of a minority group, critical thinking should be applied in order to fully understand the situation and to develop solutions for those problems. In this case the right questions must be asked by society as a whole, they must examine themselves introspectively so that they fully understand their own mindsets and viewpoints before attempting to understand the actions of domestic terrorists who are white and Christian.

There is a lot of cognitive dissonance in regards to white nationalism and the terror they inflict on others. No one wants to be lumped into a category such as ‘ terrorists’. To acknowledge the white nationalism terrorists as terrorists it would mean that every white Christian to perform self-evaluation. The denial of the actions of these people is doing more harm than good for the

United States and its citizens. One of the ways self-evaluation can occur is through identification of any fallacies being utilized in the argument.

In this specific case the fallacy of hasty generalization is utilized by the Caucasian community. Hasty generalization is being used in order to look the other way in terms of the community not acknowledging how dangerous the white nationalism movement is. Because many citizens share race and religion with those participating in the white nationalism movement they have a difficult time believing that others who share their race and religion would be terrorists. It is an incorrect and dangerous assumption.

The Caucasian community needs to ask itself the right questions. Are Caucasian Christians all peaceful because I believe it? Are Caucasian Christians all peaceful because we believe it? Are Caucasian Christians all peaceful because I want to believe it? Are Caucasian Christians all peaceful because I have always believed it? Are Caucasian Christians all peaceful because it is in my interest to believe it? An honest self reflection would mean that a clearer understanding that would help Homeland Security address the issue.

The honest answer is that believing all Caucasian Christians are peaceful is a belief rooted in self-preservation of their viewpoints, both the viewpoint they have of themselves and the viewpoints they have of others. The truth of the matter is that white nationalists have engaged in terrorism. The media and politicians have done wonders on the American psyche to have Muslims be the ones to come to mind when one thinks of the word 'terrorism'. By only

using that label one group of people, the others who are engaging in similar or identical behaviors seem to get away with it.

Christianity is the most prevalent religion in the United States. Therefore, it is the most understood faith in the United States. It is widely understood that Christianity is a peaceful religion, therefore when people commit terrorism in the name of Christianity it is easier to label those people as mentally ill. Their actions do not result in every Caucasian person being labeled as a terrorist or every Christian being labeled as a terrorist.

It is in the interest of every person who identifies as a Caucasian Christian to believe that white nationalists are merely mentally ill and not in any way terrorists. If they accepted that these people are indeed a terrorist that means the narrative of religion and terrorism would have to be changed. Changing the narrative is exactly what Homeland Security needs to do in order to address and curb white nationalism. Changing the narrative is needed to inform and educate the public, specifically those who identify as Caucasian Christians.

Much like how the narrative was changed in order to educate the public and Muslims about the rise of radical Islam, the same conversation is needed to educate the public about the rise of radical Christianity, namely white nationalism. Much like Homeland Security asked Muslims to police their own communities and Mosques, the same could be asked from the Christian/Caucasian community once citizens are educated and well-informed. Success cannot and will not occur if people remain closed off to

the idea that terrorists are not only the 'other' but amongst their own as well.

"White supremacists and other far-right extremists have killed far more people since Sept. 11, 2001, than any other category of domestic extremist" (Reitman, 2018). This is something that is not widely broadcasted so that the American people know. It adds to lack of critical thinking being done by the American people because they are not being given all of the information which has resulted in an incomplete understanding. In addition, this incomplete understanding has fueled the white nationalism movements' hatred towards others of different races and faiths.

"The federal government does not generate an official and public list of domestic terrorist organizations or individuals" (Bjelopera, 2017). This means that the general public is left to decide who terrorists are, on their own, or with guidance from the media. When a terrorist action is committed by a white nationalist they are often portrayed as a lone wolf or mentally ill. Critical thinking would help the public to determine that that is inaccurate. However, the main issue is that critical thinking skills are not widely utilized in an effective manner in the United States.

"It is all well and good to label left- and right-wing violence at home as terrorism, but what if the U. S. government went beyond rhetoric and truly treated these groups as it treats Americans suspected of being involved with jihadist organizations like ISIS?" (Byman, 2017). There is no wiggle room for people who have decided to become involved with well-known terrorist organizations like ISIS. However, there is, seemingly, wiggle room for those

who are involved with the white nationalism movement. Even the President of the United States was quoted as saying there were “ very fine people on both sides” in regards to a protest and violence that occurred at the hands of white nationalists.

The way the media and politicians speak about white nationalism matters to how the public views it. One could make an argument that politicians and members of the media are not engaging in critical thinking before they speak about white nationalism and terrorism, however, one could also make the argument that the connection is being deliberately avoided because of the self-actualization that would occur. To admit that these members of the white nationalism movement are indeed terrorists, one would need to acknowledge that their own beliefs and even race are being utilized to commit terrorist acts. It all comes back to asking the right questions.

In addition, one could also apply the elements of thought to the handling of the white nationalism movement. Not only could Homeland Security work to understand the reasoning behind the terrorist actions they could use it to determine why this specific group of people are not received by the general public in the same manner their Muslim counterparts are. That understanding could be used as a springboard to make comprehensive and necessary changes. One such change could and should include the immediate labeling of terrorist behavior as exactly that, terrorist behavior.

“ Of particular concern are white supremacists and anti-government extremists, such as militia groups and so-called sovereign citizens interested in plotting attacks against government, racial, religious, and political targets

in the United States” (Jones, 2018). White nationalism has been around for decades and it will not fade away into the annals of history on its own. However, society needs to understand the aspects of what it means to be a white nationalist. This understanding would provide encouragement for people to turn in relatives and friends they hear making plans to do harm to others, instead of encouraging people to dismiss what they hear because it's just 'talk'.

There must be a return to education, information, and critical thinking if the threat of white nationalism is going to be taken seriously and addressed in the same manner that other terrorist organizations are handled. It is no longer acceptable to ignore people who make threats or spout hate about certain groups of people. In the larger picture one must remember these people are murdering and attacking people everywhere, from protests to their houses of worship. There are people at risk daily from white nationalists because white nationalism is not getting the attention it should as a terrorist organization.

If the American people were given all of the facts, they would be able to use their critical thinking skills to understand the problem and identify ways to combat it. The issue is that information is not being given out in a manner that would allow people to be fully informed about the situation. That is the first step to combat white nationalism, to have a well-informed populace. Once average citizens are well-informed the next step would be to train and inform authorities.

Authorities range from small town police forces to the FBI and even Homeland Security. Anyone who is employed by any of those agencies are members of the American society and therefore subject to the same lack of information or even spread of misinformation. They need to know what white nationalism is and who is at risk for joining the movement. They also need to be aware of who the victims usually are of this terrorist organization so they know who they need to protect. This would involve critical thinking, especially if, for example, a small town police force knows their town has some white nationalists that may harm other members of the town who would be considered minorities.

A third and much more difficult step would be to educate those people who are in the white nationalist movements. There needs to be information given to them so that they do not have the need to seek out information on their own, information that is often times rooted in conspiracy. Taking away misinformation and providing accurate information may stem the flow of at least some violence. The long standing approach to any terrorist organization is to attempt to dismantle it, and white nationalism is no different.

Whether one wants to use the right questions or the elements of thought, or any other critical thinking theory they choose, critical thinking must be utilized. In instances like white nationalism many need to do self-evaluation, group evaluation, and community evaluation. They must ask themselves the difficult questions and be prepared for the honest answers. Honest answers are the only way true changes are going to occur. Critical thinking is useless without honesty. Homeland Security has failed in their use of critical thinking <https://assignbuster.com/critical-thinking-homeland-security-and-domestic-terrorism/>

because they were unable to foresee the rise of white nationalism and the effects it would have on the United States of America. It is easy to say only Arabs are terrorists or only Muslims are terrorists. However, the truth is that no one holds the claim to terrorism, anyone of any faith can become a terrorist. Actions define terrorism, not race and not religion. In order to combat it, one must utilize critical thinking.

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