

Hiding in Plain Sight: Domestic Terrorism and the American Far Right

[00:01 – 05:01]

Noelle: What uuuup!

Miranda: Welcome to The Unpacked Project.

Noelle: We're your hosts, I'm Noelle.

Miranda: And I'm Miranda.

Noelle: We're here to explore all things social justice. It is through casual conversations, interviews and storytelling that we hope to inspire others to take action towards a more compassionate and equitable world.

Miranda: Because honestly, it kind of sucks here sometimes.

Noelle: For real, we can do better people.

Miranda: Alright, let's start unpacking.

Noelle: Dr. Mark Pitcavage is one of the leading experts on domestic terrorism and right-wing extremism in the United States, having authored many reports and studies on these subjects and trained nearly eighteen thousand police officers and government officials. Since 2000, Dr. Pitcavage has been employed by the anti-defamation league where he is currently senior research fellow at ADL Center on Extremism. In the past, Dr. Pitcavage has served as the

Director of the Center on Extremism. Prior to joining ADL, Dr. Pitcavage was the Research Director and a Lead Trainer with the Justice Department State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training Program.

Miranda: Thank you so much for being here and welcome to the show. How are you today?

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: I am great. Thank you so much for having me.

Miranda: Yeah, most definitely. So, we're so excited to have you here today. You know, aside from that brief introduction that Noelle shared, you have this wealth of experience. You know, we talked to you briefly during the intake session. Can you just share with us and listeners a little bit more about yourself?

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Sure. I am basically an expert on terrorism, extremism and terrorism in the United States. Primarily, right-wing extremism. I have been actually studying the subject since... well, for more than 25 years since 1994 really. So, that sort of puts me among the sort of the veteran observers of the far right in the United States.

Noelle: Yeah. And, you know, for us, this is a really new area for Miranda and I. After the attack on the Capitol, it was something that we wanted to explore and learn more about, so like Miranda said, thank you so much for being here today. Part of what we have learned as we have been doing our research is that not all extremist groups are created equal. So, you know, there are different types of groups such as far right, white supremacists and anti-government, so let us just start with far-right groups. Can you tell us some of the main belief systems that shape this movement?

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Well, the far right in the United States is actually a sort of a constellation of different movements that kind of may overlap or share some beliefs to different degrees but may have... may be very different in other respects. The best way to describe most of the extreme right in the United States is to sort of think of two slightly overlapping spheres. In one sphere, you have white supremacist movements and depending upon how you slice them, they are around six or seven main white supremacist movements. In the other sphere, which is

sometimes collectively known as the 'patriot movement', you have anti-government extremist movements. Movements like the militia movement or the sovereign citizen movement. And they overlap slightly with white supremacists but not that much. Back in the 70s and 80s, there was a lot more overlap. And then in addition to the white supremacists and the anti-government extremists, there are also far right-wing single-issue movements and these are often the... these are often the extreme wing of more mainstream movements. And so, for example, if you think of people opposed to abortion, there are millions of people opposed to abortion in the United States but there are only so few whose views on that are so extreme that they might be willing to try to assassinate a physician at a clinic or to burn down a clinic or to engage in some other violence. And there are a handful of single issue movements that are connected to the far right, just like there are other single issue movements connected to the far left. And so, you know, most of the far-right movements sort of fall into one of these three categories. There are a couple oddballs but most fall into that and so, you know, really, again, depending upon how you divide things, you know, they are actually 14 to 16 or so different state movements within the far right and so, it is not a monolithic thing. And in fact, you know, there could be some people in one far-right movement who might oppose people in another far-right movement for one reason or another.

Miranda: Can I ask, so you just mentioned that like, in the 80s, there was more overlap between some of these groups, what happened since then for there to not be as much overlap anymore?

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Well, the main reason why there was overlap in the first place was because of a particular segment of the white supremacist movement called 'Christian identity'.

[05:02 – 10:02]

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Christian identity is-which most people in America do not know about but in the 70s, 80s, 90s and even early 2000s, it was a really significant part of the far right in the United States and responsible for a lot of violence. And it is actually a religious sect. It is a racist anti-Semitic religious sect and the main tenet of which is that white people, people of European descent are actually descended from the lost tribes of Israel, they are actually descended from the ancient Israelites. They are God's chosen people. The Bible was written only for white people and non-whites were created in a different creation than Adam and Eve. They were created when God created the beasts of the field. And for many Christian identity believers, Jews are actually satanic, being descendants of a liaison between Eve and the serpent. And so, it is a particularly, you know, it is a strange and particularly pernicious variant of Christianity that is centered around racism and anti-Semitism. However, for whatever reasons, a lot of Christian identity inheritors were also extremely anti-government. And they... many of them became pioneers in the different anti-government extremist movements that emerged. Especially, first the tax protest movement, the right-wing tax protest movement which began to emerge in the

1960s and then the sovereign citizen movement which arose in its earliest, most primitive form in the 1970s as a group called 'the posse comitatus' and then later, some were also in the militia movement as well. And so, you do not... you know, it is rare to see other types of white supremacists in these anti-government extremist groups, just Christian identity. But what has happened is that, you know, between the... you know, the 70s and 80s and now is that more and more people who were not Christian identity join these movements and so, chris... the proportion of Christian identity adherence became smaller and smaller and smaller over time. And then, moreover, over the past 20 years in particular, Christian identity itself has been in decline as many of its early pioneers and leaders of the sort of second generation of Christian identity have died of old age and the people who replaced them have not been as capable and so, they have... the Christian identity has sort of declined in activity and numbers over the past 20 years, which has decreased the number of white supremacists in the anti-government extremist movements even more. I should also note that for some of the movements like, especially the sovereign citizen movement, that is a movement that has many people of Color in it. Tens of thousands of people of Color in the sovereign citizen movement. The others, the tax protest movement and the militia movement have very small numbers of people of Color.

Miranda: That's interesting. I know as we learn and speak to folks, it is like there is so much that I just want to look up and research. It is just... I mean, it really is so interesting. So, in regards to this anti-gov... the anti-government extremists, you know, they also play a prevalent... they're prevalent within far-right extremism as well. So, is there an overlap between them and white supremacists or do they have separate motives and agendas entirely?

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Well, like I said, there is a small amount of overlap between white supremacists and anti-government extremists. But whereas the... like the... for most white supremacist movements, the core belief of white supremacists today is that the white race itself is in danger of extinction, that it is in danger of essentially being overwhelmed by a rising tide of non-white peoples who are being controlled and manipulated by Jews to hurt the white race and that if they do not do something about it, the white race will go extinct. That is the core belief for white supremacists. The core belief for anti-government extremists which differs depending upon the movement but the one thing they all share is a core belief that all or part of our government was some time ago infiltrated by a conspiracy which has essentially either replaced the government or rendered it illegitimate. And so, the government that you and I think of as a legitimate government, that we owe allegiance to, that we give allegiance to, is for them not actually a legitimate government. And many of them want to restore government as they thought it used to be before the conspiracy got to it. So, you notice, the focus for those

movements is all about the government. The focus for white supremacists is all about the white race.

[10:03 – 15:06]

Noelle: So, when we think of the Capitol attack, I am just curious of what your opinion or if there has been research on this? I feel like in the media, a lot of it gets portrayed as these were anti-government or like, white nationalists, I mean they were there protesting that Trump had the election stolen but then there were so many images of white supremacy, we think of the noose and so many things that seemed like it was a white supremacist type of situation. So, what is your opinion about what happened at the Capitol?

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: When you analyze the backgrounds of the people who have been arrested related to Capitol storming, which is over 200 now, or when you look at the different signs and emblems and stickers and patches and so forth that they all, you know, they had in the video and photographs that emanated from the Capitol storming, it is clear that white supremacists were a distinct minority of the people who were there. You can certainly find white supremacists who were there. But there... you know, what there really was a concept that there was a... sort of a convergence of a number of different fringe or other sort of other type of extreme groups and among those were a small number of white supremacists, a number of anti-government extremists primarily from the militia movement. So, other right-wing extremist groups like 'the proud boys' who played a prominent role in the storming of the Capitol. A variety of conspiracy theorists, especially QAnon conspiracy theorists. And then probably the majority of the people did not have ties to what you might call traditional extremist groups at all, had probably previously had no associations with them but were part of a relatively new phenomenon that you could essentially call 'extreme Trump supporter'. I am sure at some point, someone will come up with a pithy name for that but what I am describing are not just people who like Donald Trump or even more hardcore Trump supporters but people who became so wrapped up in the cult of personality around Donald Trump and believed, deeply believed the lies and conspiracy theories promulgated by Trump and many of his lieutenants about the election and about other matters to the point where they were actually willing to put Trump above party, Trump above country and, you know, engage in, you know, shocking violence. And this is a... you know, this is a new type, this is a new phenomenon, this sort of extremism over a cult of personality that is not very common in the United States. It is more common in some other countries. And what will happen now that Trump is out of office and that he's been partially de-platformed, you know, what will happen to these guys going forward, I don't know. For right now, they are still around, they are still angry and they theoretically could be mobilized

in the future but they also could just gradually kind of fade away or get involved with other things and so, you know, exactly what is going to happen with that mass of people really depends upon circumstances that we... you know, that we do not know yet. And I am not quite sure how that is going to work itself out but the protest, the 'Stop the Steal protests' in DC on 1/6 brought all these people together and, you know, the fire brands among them, you know, were the ones who actually participated in the storming of the Capitol.

Noelle: Okay. Thank you for that. You know, we find that there are various kind of theories of thought when it comes to extremism. So, within the most common theory, the far right and far left are on opposite sides of this sort of linear political continuum, meaning that they are very far in likeness but then there is also the horseshoe model with the far right and far left at the ends of the horseshoe being more closely associated with each other than previously thought, and then there is even the four quadrant political spectrum with the X and Y axis, so there is definitely a lot out there in terms of conceptualizing. You prefer a different model. Can you expand on that for us and why you prefer it?

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Well, I... you know, there are a lot of different ways that you can sort of try to conceptualize, you know, any movement or set of movements, right? So, you know, you mentioned like with... you know, you mentioned first of all sort of a line, like, the line between right and left where you could look at left-wing extremism on one end and right-wing extremism on the other end because they have so many different beliefs or policies that are, you know, almost polar opposites of each other. And that, you know, that, even as simple as that one axis sort of analysis is it tells us a lot about those different movements. Now, some people have looked, you know, at that and seen like, in the far left and they think of Stalinism and the far right, they think of Nazism.

[15:07 – 20:07]

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Both are authoritarian in nature. And so, they look at those authoritarian qualities of those states, like Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany and they see similarities with the authoritarianism and that is where you get the horseshoe theory. The idea that the far right and the far left kind of loop back and sort of meet. Here is the far right here is the far left. But really that is... they still have all those different policies and ideas. It is just that some people in the far right are authoritarian and some people in the far left are authoritarian. Of course, there are also some people on the far left. Like anarchists for example, who are anti-authoritarian. And some people on the far right like the sovereign citizen movement that are anti-authoritarian. So, the horseshoe model does not... it is sort of built on a misunderstanding of... you know, is a failure to distinguish between ideology and authoritarianism. And that is where the libertarian model comes in and that is an X, Y axis where one axis is the left right axis that we are all familiar with, and the other axis ranges from authoritarianism on one hand to, you know,

essentially, anarchism on the other hand. And so, you can plot any particular group or movement, you know, in two dimensions. So, the militia movement is pretty far right and pretty anti-authoritarian. The alt-right is pretty far right but pretty authoritarian in nature. And you can look at different left-wing movements the same way. To what degree or to how far left are they and to what degree are they authoritarian or anti-authoritarian in nature. And so, that gives us a much, you know, more nuanced understanding. And that is... you know, that is a basic model that I actually like. It is... I sometimes say it is the only good thing that ever came out of the libertarian party. But you can actually, if you want to, you can even add a Z-axis and make it a three-dimensional axis if there is some other quality that you would also like to plot. So, it makes it a little harder to visualize because you are trying to visualize something in three dimensions rather than two dimensions but for example, just to give you one type of thing you can plot, you can have a Z-axis that ranges from elitism on one hand to populism on the other hand. Because there are some... you know, some movements like some monarchist movements that are quite elitist, other movements both left-wing and right-wing that are very populist in nature, right? Trump's movement was essentially a populist movement, but Bernie Sander's was a left-leaning populist. And so, you know, if you wanted to have that in there, you could plot along the traditional left-right axis, an authoritarian to anarchist axis and then also an elitist to populist axis right? Or, you know, you might be able to think of some other axis that might be more useful or helpful to you that you might want to put in there instead. But the idea is, you know, because movements have different qualities, you do not have to just lump everything into one bucket. You can sort of look at different buckets of qualities that any movement or group might have and compare those same qualities to some other group or movement, you know, and see how they work out relatively.

Noelle: Mm-hmm. Are there any... Sorry. I just had a question about that. Are there any that tend to be more violent than others, like, when you look at kind of all the different overlaps?

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Any of those, you know, if they are extreme enough, have the potential to be violent. I mean, obviously, centrist groups do not tend to be very violent. They tend to be status quo, right? You do not really hear people say, you know, I am an outraged moderate, we have to violently maintain the system, you know.

Miranda: True.

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: But, you know, there are certainly, you know, authoritarian far-left violence, like with Stalinist violence. Anarchists have been extremely violent at different periods in US history and in European history as well. And of course, on the far right, the sovereign citizen movement, the militia movement which are anti-authoritarian movements on the far right are very violent but white supremacists who tend to be authoritarian are also very violent. So, anybody in the fringes have the potential to be violent if there are other, you know, if their

ideology or subculture promotes the use of violence, sanctions the use of violence if they feel threatened or if they feel desperate or, you know, or certain other factors apply. Whether or not a movement is violent is actually you might even think that is maybe another possible axis from pacifistic to violent, that you might be able to track for a particular group or movement.

[20:08 – 25:00]

Noelle: Yeah.

Miranda: Yeah.

Noelle: No, and I am just going to say, I think it is so important to think of these groups... to not think of these groups as simply being able to just categorize them by one thing, right? I think that is kind of dangerous in our thinking. And it is what a lot of folks do, right? So, thank you for touching on that.

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Yeah, it is really common. Like, it is really common for people on the left in the United States to categorize all people on the far right as fascists. And they make no distinction between white supremacists and militia or sovereign citizens. To them, they are just all fascists. And people on the right tend to do the same thing with people on the left. And when you do that, when you sort of ignore shades of gray or nuances or even stark differences, not only, you know, do you fail to understand them but it makes it more difficult for you to deal with them because you are not necessarily addressing the reasons why they exist or how they can recruit or what their goals are. And so, having a more nuanced understanding of these different fringe movements and groups, you know, really helps us deal with it better.

Miranda: I know we are going to be interviewing Lisa Shirk next and she does a lot of peace building with extremists and so, you know, that's what it reminds me of is just need... the need to understand how these groups function and, you know, what their qualities are, to be able to move forward and work with them. You know, so we have all of these groups, right? But then there is also this concept of the lone wolf terrorist or this idea of someone working in silo and it has been studied over recent decades. So, an analysis of several dozen incidents of apparent lone wolf violence including killings reveals some patterns and similarities among these offenders, so what were some of your findings in your analysis of these individuals?

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Well, I have looked at lone wolf violence in the United States and this is a subject that especially for the past 20 years, people have been interested in. And I should note that the... I should note to begin with that, you know, when people think of, for example, when people think of terrorism, and this is true both of the general public, this is often true for the

media, this is often true for law enforcement. There is a real tendency to think in terms of groups. Because like, if you think of it, if I were to ask you, well, I will ask you like, name a terrorist group.

Miranda: KKK, proud boys. I mean, yeah.

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Them, Al-Qaeda, ISIS. You know, if you think of terrorists, you tend to think of terrorist groups rather than... a lot more likely than an individual like Timothy McVeigh or Ted Kaczynski or something like that. And of course, you know, for a lot of, you know, the history of terrorism, most of it was done by organized groups. But as... you know, especially in societies with a strong rule of law, as the authorities began to get a better grasp of how to deal with terrorism, it became much more difficult for groups acting as terrorist groups to actually function in those societies unless they could find some sort of enclave to hide in, often an ethnic or religious enclave. So, think of the IRA seeking shelter in the North within the Catholic community in Northern Ireland or think of the Basque terrorists taking refuge in Basque territory in Spain. But barring that, you know, these days, the terrorist groups, the big organized terrorist groups that exist, exist primarily in lawless or semi-lawless areas like Somalia, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen. Places where there is no strong rule of law that can thwart these groups, their operations, their growth, their recruitment. But in the United States, we have a strong rule of law and there is... since the end of the Jim Crow south, there have not really been any racial or religious enclaves for people to hide in very much. And so, as a result, it is very hard for terrorist groups as groups to exist or to last in the United States. Often they get dismantled before they can ever carry out a single act. If they are able to carry out a single act, they typically will get dismantled before they can do a second one or, you know, certainly the shelf life that they have is very small. So, as a result, if you look at, for example, right-wing terrorist incidents in the United States or let's say the past 25 years, the majority of them were not committed by organized groups acting as groups but rather either by individuals or by small informal cells or groups of people.

[25:01 – 30:15]

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Two people, three people-think Terry Nichols and Timothy McVeigh or, you know, a handful of people. And even though some of them might have ties to extremist groups, they were not doing these particular acts at the orders or behest of or as part of those groups. In fact, sometimes they would break away from organized groups because they were frustrated that those organized groups did not want to do anything. They get tired of the meet, eat and retreat crowd and they want to go off and blow something up or kill somebody or do

something, right? And so, lone wolves are part of that phenomenon where one individual who feels so strongly that something has to be done that they take it in and on themselves to do something. And what I did in my study a few years ago was I wanted to look at the lone wolves who had actually successfully killed someone and analyze what they were like, because rather than someone who just may have thought about doing something but then get caught by the police before they could really carry something out, I wanted to look at the most dedicated one. So, I put together a list of them and started analyzing them and, you know, certainly, you know, it is... you have to be careful because you are working with such a small data pool, right? Such a small pool of individuals, a couple dozen, right? But nevertheless, you can sort of see some... you can begin to see some patterns or similarities. First of all, you know, these were individuals who were generally part of an extremist movement, whatever movement it might be. But they tended to be, most of them tended to be on the periphery of it, where most of them were not, you know, movers or shakers within the movement or members of groups or leaders of groups. They may have been totally isolated and just sort of self-radicalizing online or they may have had, you know, limited action, interactions online or in the real world. But we are not socially immersed with the rest of the movement. And so, when they decided to do something, just as they had been radicalizing alone, they decide to act alone. In other cases, you know, in analyzing them, discovered that like, one of the theories behind lone wolves like, people say like, 'well, violence is so dangerous' is because if this is not someone known to the law enforcement or known to the general public, right? That they can do this and get away with it and, you know, and maybe do it again and again, right? And so, it becomes harder to deal with, or for the authorities. What I found was that it was certainly harder for authorities to identify these people ahead of time but that when they did their act, there were extremely few of them who were ever able to commit, to get away and commit a second act. That almost all of them were either killed during their first act or shortly thereafter or committed suicide or were arrested, caught and arrested. And the few exceptions were actually serial bombers. People like Ted Kaczynski or Eric Rudolph who didn't sort of try to shoot anybody up in person but would, you know, mail a bomb in the case of UNA bomber or place a bomb, you know, like, at night in the case of Eric Rudolph and it took years for those people to finally be caught but they were the exception rather than the rule. So, you know, one thing that I discovered was that, you know, as a tactic, you know, if you want to commit a single act of lone wolf violence, it may be a viable tactic but if your idea is you're gonna be... you know, you're gonna be someone who... some sort of caped extremist crusader who goes out and repeatedly commits extremist violence as a lone wolf, you are likely to be doomed to disappointment because it is not likely to happen.

Noelle: Well, thank goodness I guess. I mean that is... I mean I am really relieved to hear that they cannot continually do this.

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Another point worth pointing out is that, you know, there is sometimes an assumption by people that local violence is something that is automatically accepted by these extremist movements or promoted by these extremist movements and that is actually not necessarily the case. So, for example, if you look at the white supremacist movement, you know, over the past 20, 25 years or so, there definitely have been voices that have urged or promoted white supremacist violence... lone wolf violence. But at the same time, there have been other voices saying no, this is the last thing we actually want, that random acts of killing does nothing to “save the white race”, all it does is bring law enforcement down on us and causes increased investigation, increased scrutiny, it may get more people arrested, it may make it harder to recruit people or to get hearts and minds.

[30:16 – 35:04]

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: And so, you know, the white supremacist movement is by no means united on whether lone wolf violence is even a good tactic to do in the first place.

Noelle: Interesting. So, I mentioned earlier, you know, one of the reasons why we wanted to talk about extremism this season is obviously because of the Capitol attack. You know, recognizing that Trump is out of office but it does not mean that white supremacists or anti-government or any of these extremists are gone and, you know, you mentioned earlier the phenomenon of these new Trump extremists and they’re still here and they’re still angry. And we’ve read in some of your writings that some of these radical groups may actually grow in 2021 and find sort of new energy. Is the new energy the Trump movement? Are there other things happening? Can you just tell us more about this? Like, what do you think is most concerning about it?

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Sure. Now, I should note, I want to preface anything that I say by noting that as a historian, I am much better at predicting the past than I am predicting the future. So, I just want that... I just want that out there. I am no [Inaudible 31:23] But I will say, you know, there are certain movements that are theoretically poised for possible expansion due to the current situation, which I will explain. But there are a lot of balls in the air and there is no guarantee that anything's going to fall any particular way. One thing that I was saying before... a year ago, even half a year ago is that if Trump were to lose the election, which of course he eventually did, the militia movement might be poised for a resurgence or expansion. And the reason is the militia movement is a movement that historically has gotten most of its energy out of opposing the federal government. The core belief of the militia movement is, you know, historically has been that the rest of the world has essentially been taken over by a tyrannical globalist conspiracy. They often refer to it as the new world order. The United States is the last bastion of freedom, but our own country has been collaborating with the new world order to slowly strip us of our rights and freedoms starting with our right to keep and bear arms, and once we lose that right to become defenseless, we too will be absorbed into the new world

order. And so, the militia movement, you know, focuses hostility on the new world order and its counterpart in the federal government. That is until Trump came around and the militia movement actually came out and supported Trump as a candidate and then as a president very strongly. The first mainstream, the first major party presidential candidate, a nominee that the militia movement had ever supported. They opposed Obama, they opposed George W. Bush, they opposed Clinton. They did not like George H.W Bush either but Trump, they loved for a variety of reasons and that made their... they had to mute essentially their hostility to the federal government because how can you be so angry at the federal government if someone you love is at the head of it, right? And so, you know, much of the past four years for the militia movement has been trying to find other enemies to pay attention to other than the federal government. But now that Biden has replaced Trump, they can go back to hating the federal government with a passion. And in fact, you know, when Obama replaced George W. Bush, there was a huge expansion of the militia movement as a result of that. They were not... it is not like they liked George W. Bush. They did not like him, but with a democratic president, it is just so much easier to focus your conspiracy theories on a democratic president. And they did that with the vengeance with Obama. And, you know, the militia movement had a big expansion when Obama replaced a republican president and now we have a situation where another democratic president replaced a republican president who was actually popular with the militia movement. And so, we could definitely expect the militia movement to once again focus its hostility on the federal government, revive its conspiracy theories about the federal government and try and mobilize itself and recruit on that basis. So, you know, theoretically, you know, we could see the number of militia groups grow, we can see militia related violence grow but everything gets a little more complicated. One big difference between the resurgence of 10 years ago and right now is 10 years ago, much of that resurgence was done by the militia movement was done over social media.

[35:05 – 40:02]

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: First on Myspace and then on Facebook and YouTube. And social media really played an important role in the expansion of the militia movement. But what has happened this past year is that for the first time in its history, the militia movement has suffered significant de-platforming from Facebook, from Discord, from Zello, from other platforms and apps that they did not particularly like to use. And as a result of that, even though they might, you know, otherwise be poised for some sort of expansion or resurgence, their lack of platforms right now can make it more difficult for them to get their message out, more difficult to recruit, more difficult to spread. And so, what might otherwise have been a significant resurgence might possibly now be a very mild resurgence or even no resurgence at all. We do not know, we do not have... we are going to have to wait to see how this plays out. We do not have any sort of past historical incident to compare this to. And so, you know, and similar things exist for a

couple other extremist movements where, you know, some may be poised for some sort of growth because of recent developments but there are other factors you have to take into account as well. I will just give one example. A number of extremist groups have been feeling the heat from the backlash to the storming of the Capitol. You know, initially, there were a whole bunch of people who were exultant, you know, about the storming the capital and, you know, 'we sure showed them' and that quickly changed to dismay and even panic in some cases as there was a strong public reaction from both sides of the aisle, not from president Trump but from republicans in Congress and from democrats and independents and people, you know, a huge aggressive law enforcement investigation that even, you know, still to this day is resulting in people almost every day continuing to get arrested for their role in storming the Capitol. I haven't checked the news today but I am sure someone was arrested yesterday in connection with the storming the Capitol because it has pretty much happened every day since 1/6. And people have gotten fired, people have had their girlfriends report them to the FBI. All sorts of things like this. And so, what initially was sort of, you know, a feeling of exultance, you know, has now changed to feeling pressure and feeling scrutiny and feeling bad negative attention and that has a dampening effect as well. And we saw that with the white supremacist movement for three and a half years ago after Charlottesville. The big white, unite the white... excuse me, Unite the Right white supremacist gathering in Charlottesville in August 2017 brought around 600 white supremacists together, which is very large for white supremacy. And initially, they were really exultant and they thought what they have done was a huge big success but of course, you know, white supremacists killed a woman, Heather Heyer at Charlottesville and there was other violence as well and this brought about huge waves of condemnation and investigations and lawsuits and again, that the backlash to Charlottesville was huge and it really hurt the white supremacist movement. And so, similarly, the backlash to the storming of the Capitol could hurt, you know, any of the, you know, participating groups or movements, you know, that took part there too. So, there... you know, right now, it is just too soon to know how a lot of this is going to work out. There are just too many balls in the air. There are factors that might promote expansion of some of these movements but also factors that might inhibit expansion of some of these movements, including maybe some of the same ones.

Miranda: You know, so as we kind of wrap up, we always like to ask and... while we may be ways from it, if you could re-imagine a world without domestic terrorism, what would it take to get there and where do we even start?

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Well, that is really hard because we have consistently had domestic terrorism in the United States, essentially since the 1950s of one sort or another. Sometimes we had more, sometimes we've had less. The problem is, you know, we have 330 million people in this country. We're a huge country. So, even the fringe of the fringe is still a lot of folks and it does not take very many people to cause a whole lot of problems, extremist lives, right?

[40:03 – 45:30]

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: You know, one person can do a shooting that can kill two dozen people, one person can blow up a building. So, even small numbers of extremists can still cause problems disproportionate to their numbers. I think the main thing we can do to minimize that, I do not know if we could ever eradicate that, so I am going to kind of... I am going to kind of try to elude your question about imagining a world without it entirely but I can imagine the world in which it is minimized, right? And to get there, we have to first of all, like, you know, acknowledge that this is an ongoing problem, right? A long term problem. And put the resources and attention necessary to deal with it. And also, not to try and minimize it. I mean, people on the right, this is a psychological thing. People on the right have a tendency to not want to address violence or problems coming from the far right and people on the left have the same sort of tendency about violence or problems coming from the far left. Although in recent years, there has been far less coming from the far left than from the far right but we have to be honest and acknowledge that, you know, when we find a problem, no matter where it comes from, to acknowledge it and deal with it, not try to minimize it, apologize for it, rationalize it, ignore it. And then we also have to make sure that, you know, because we are talking about domestic terrorism as a criminal matter, we also have to make sure that law enforcement is armed with the knowledge and the capabilities to deal with it as well because I will say, a couple of years ago, I did a study of right-wing terrorists in the United States over the past 25 years, I looked at 150 different incidents. Most of those incidents were actually prevented, they were stopped before they could be carried out, right? So, they were plots or conspiracies rather than successful attacks. And, you know, it was primarily because, you know, due to law enforcement. Sometimes they would just screw up, they would mess up but mostly it was because of good law enforcement work. And, you know, that is what we need. We need to make sure that of course, you know, law enforcement has so many things on the table, right? From domestic violence to street violence to, you know, drug-related violence. All sorts of crime. White collar crime too. But we have to make sure that the extremist-related violence whether it manifests itself in hate crimes or with domestic terrorism is also something they pay attention to and that they know how to deal with.

Noelle: Okay. Well, thank you so much for being here today. We... I have learned so much. You are just such an expert and super informative, so thank you. What kinds of other platforms can we find you on or can people find you on? Are there any other organizations or individuals doing this work that we should be paying attention to and keeping eyes and ears open?

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: I would most want to let people know that I do not do what I do in isolation, that I am a Senior Research Fellow with the Anti-Defamation League Center on Extremism and this is a part of ADL which is dedicated to monitoring and combating extremism. And I have a ton of brilliant colleagues who, you know, are also experts in areas related to

extremism and extremist violence and do a tremendous amount of good work. And so, you know, on our website: ADL.org our center regularly publishes articles and reports and blogs about extremist related things. We have tremendous other types of resources too. We have a hate symbols database. We have an interactive map in the United States that we call the heat map that tracks anti-Semitic incidents, terrorist incidents, white supremacist propaganda incidents, shootouts with police and extremists and a couple other categories. And so, you know, the Anti-Defamation League is just a wealth of resources for anybody concerned about hate, racism, extremism, anti-Semitism, terrorism in the United States and I urge people to check those out and use them.

Miranda: Definitely. Yeah, we will link to that in our show notes and on our transcription on our website and with the podcast as we always do. So, thank you for that. Alright. Well, next week, we are joined by Lisa Shirk as we discuss how extremism has become mainstream, the role and effects of social media on the movement and the need for peace building as a way forward.

Noelle: Thanks for joining us today. Bye.

Dr. Mark Pitcavage: Thank you so much for having me.

Noelle: Show the Unpacked project some love and be sure to like, subscribe and review our podcast. You can also check us out on Instagram @the_unpackedproject.

Miranda: And if you enjoyed today's episode, visit our website at theunpackedproject.com where you can make a donation that supports the research, production and operating costs of this work.

Noelle: Shout out to all of our listeners who unpacked with us today.

Miranda: See you next week.

Noelle: Peace.