

CENTER FOR
UNIVERSITY EXCELLENCE



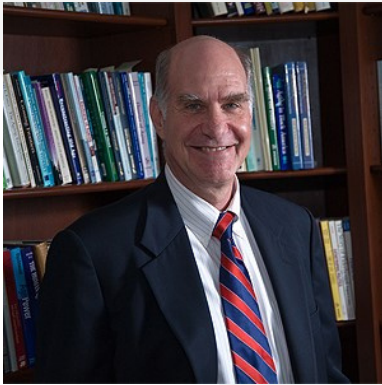
ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 2019-JUNE 2020



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Dr. Scott Bass
Executive Director



Dr. Cynthia Miller-Idriss
Director of Research
Director of PERIL

INTRODUCTION

The Center for University Excellence (CUE), authorized just last year, is among the first campus-wide research centers to be approved at AU in a decade.

The idea for the creation of CUE sprang from a deeply held certitude of our leaders, Dr. Scott Bass and Dr. Cynthia Miller-Idriss, that higher education was a tool that could be harnessed to work towards achieving a peaceful and productive society.

CUE was launched at a time of great challenges facing American higher education, including demographic shifts resulting in fewer numbers of eligible college students; rising costs of attendance and staggering student debt; flagging state support; challenges to the concept of expertise and scientific contributions; adjusting to a new generation of tech-savvy students – Generation Z; increased market competition for students; threats to the support of the liberal arts; and a sense of declining public support – not to mention the impact of a pandemic on campus communities and the unrest surrounding the public protests against racial injustice.

From the beginning, CUE found itself center stage against a backdrop of the international growth of far-right political movements; the growth of extremism in the US and abroad; use of the internet to spread conspiracy theories and serve as a magnet for radicalizing those susceptible; intensification of anti-Semitic activity; increased visibility and threats by armed militias. CUE possessed the expertise and the talent to respond immediately to these threats to a democratic society. As such, we are proud that the first laboratory to be created under the CUE umbrella is the Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL), which focuses on addressing the movements that create and build division and hate. Considerable resources and effort were directed toward the engagement of PERIL in this initial year.

However, we are even more proud of the team we have assembled to execute this important work each day. Our leaders, scholars, associates, fellows, and staff are all essential to the start-up work of the Center, and we look forward to the journey ahead together.

CURRENT FOCUS AREAS

For the next several years, CUE will examine three overarching areas of inquiry:

1. Extremism, Polarization, and Conflict in the U.S. and Globally
2. Undergraduate Student Progress, Academic Success, and Inclusive Diversity
3. Strengthening the Academic Infrastructure and the Use of Technology

This year's current events necessitated a focus on area number one. As opportunity arises, CUE will continue to take a phased approach into the other focus areas where there is the most leverage for sustainable impact.



Researching violent extremism, thinking about ways to counter harmful narratives, and exploring ideas on how to share this information with the wider public in an effective but not alarmist manner has been an incredibly fulfilling experience.

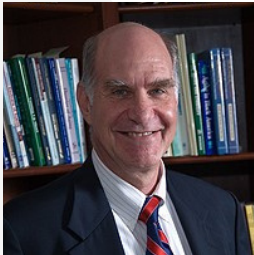
PERIL accomplishes the goal of translating academic research into actionable measures that will hopefully contribute towards making a positive impact and challenging narratives that seek to divide, oversimplify, and justify violence.

Meili Criezis

MISSION STATEMENT

The Center for University Excellence at American University cultivates new knowledge for the improvement of a learned society and the broader public good. CUE is an enabling institution that brings university research expertise to pressing problems in the public domain. We emphasize the critical role higher education plays in creating and sustaining inclusive, just, and democratic societies. Our focus is research, discourse, and public engagement with the most pressing questions facing society and higher education today.

MEET THE TEAM



Scott A. Bass, Exec. Director, CUE

Provost Emeritus and Professor of Public Administration and Policy in the School of Public Affairs at American University (AU).



Caleb Cain, Program Associate at PERIL

Caleb Cain runs the Youtube channel, Faradayspeaks, and works as a researcher investigating radicalization online related to the far right.



Meili Crezis, Program Associate at PERIL

Works as an analyst researching domestic & international violent extremism across ideologies, terrorist propaganda, and online extremist networks



Daisy Gebbia-Richards Research Assistant

May 2020 graduate from AU with a major in Psychology and double minors in Sociology and Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies.



Kathryn Grossman Graduate Assistant

Master's of Public Administration student interested in nonprofit management, state and local government, and higher education policy



Brian Hughes Associate Director

Doctoral Candidate and lecturer at American University. He is a Doctoral Fellow with the Center for Analysis of the Radical Right.



Cynthia Miller-Idriss Director of Research, Director of PERIL

Has a Ph.D. and M.A. in Sociology and a Masters in Public Policy, Univ. of Michigan, and a B.A. (magna cum laude) in Sociology and German Area Studies from Cornell University.



Emily Phipps Marketing Support

Recent graduate from the Kogod School of Business at American University, with an MBA focused on strategy and marketing.



Emily Pressman Undergraduate Intern

Emily is an undergraduate student at AU in the School of Public Affairs, currently majoring in political science.



Katie Spann Director of Operations

Has a bachelor's degree in Business Finance from Upsala College and an MBA from the University of Maryland, Global Campus.

GRADUATE STUDENT FELLOWS



Kesa White
Graduate Student
Fellow

Kesa is a graduate student in the School of Public Affairs, studying Terrorism and Homeland Security Policy.

RESEARCH & POLICY FELLOWS



Kurt Braddock
Research Fellow

Asst. Professor of Communication, American University,



William Delone
Research Fellow

Professor Emeritus of Information Technology, Kogod School of Business at American University.



Teresa M. Flannery
Policy Fellow

Former VP of Communication and Marketing, American University.



Seth Gershenson
Research Fellow

Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration and Policy, American University.



Sonja Grier
Policy Fellow

Chair, Marketing Department, Kogod School of Business, American University.



Jermain Griffin
Research Fellow

Ph.D. from Colorado State University and former Assoc. Dir. of the International Studies program at Fairfield University.



Daniel Koehler
Research Fellow

Holds a Ph.D. in social sciences, an M.P.S. in peace and security studies and a Magister Artium degree in comparative religion, political science and economics.



Dave Marcotte
Research Fellow

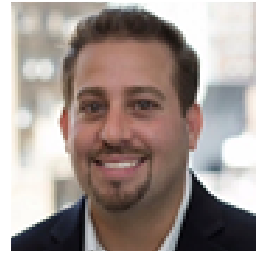
Professor and Chair, Dept. of Public Administration and Policy, American University; Director of the Washington Institute for Public Affairs Research.

RESEARCH & POLICY FELLOWS CONT.



Adam Ross Nelson
Research Fellow

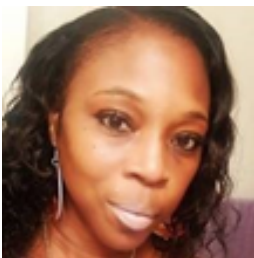
Holds a Ph.D. in social sciences, an M.P.S. in peace and security studies and a Magister Artium degree in comparative religion, political science and economics.



Oren Segel
Policy Fellow

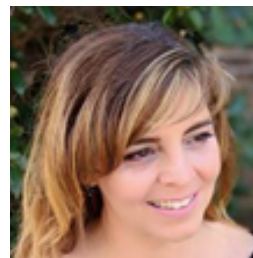
Vice President of the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism.

CUE CONSULTANTS



Akiko Cooks, Parenting Consultant at PERIL.

Works as a consultant advising schools and educators on preventing, intervening & responding to hate and extremist radicalization



Shannon Foley Martinez, Parenting Consultant at PERIL

Consultant, speaker, and educator in the prevention & disruption of targeted identity violence and ideologies

My favorite part of PERIL is the freedom to explore new ideas and the actionable nature of our work.

Caleb Cain



RESEARCH & SCHOLARLY ACTIVITIES

FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS

Southern Poverty Law Center. “Building Resilience & Confronting Risk in the COVID-19 Era: A Parents and Caregivers' Guide to Online Radicalization.”



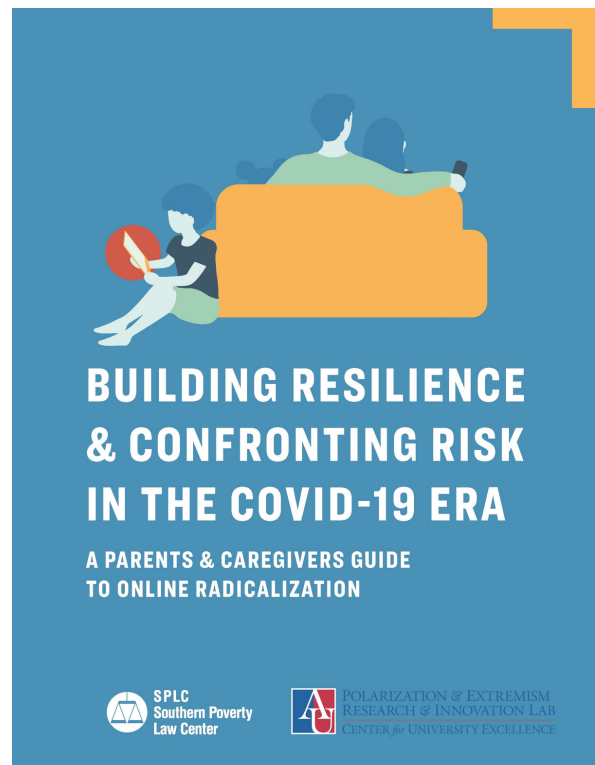
SPLC
Southern Poverty
Law Center

In collaboration with SPLC and with support from The Piper Fund, PERIL

PIPER FUND

developed this 17-page guide [the report's hyperlink: [Building Resilience & Confronting Risk in the COVID-19 Era](#)], which was released on June 30, 2020. The publication was combined with joint press releases from American University and SPLC, as well as a public webinar held the same day that featured deradicalization experts, along with four speaker-respondents representing parents, teachers/principals, victims' advocates, and adolescent therapists. This guide offers parents and caregivers strategies and tips to recognize the warning signs of youth radicalization, including the new risks of the COVID-19 era, and is designed to help them understand the drivers and grievances that create susceptibility to extremist rhetoric to allow them to intervene more effectively. Consultants Akiko Cooks and Shannon Foley Martinez worked with the

PERIL team to advise on the content that became the PDF-downloadable guide. A proposal is being submitted to SPLC for a follow-up impact study and additional guides for new audiences, including mental health counselors.



Download at: [Building Resilience & Confronting Risk in the COVID-19 Era.](#)

FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS cont.

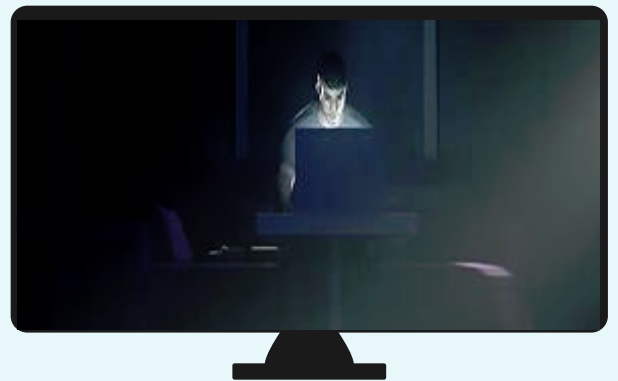
The Bertelsmann Foundation and the AU School of Public Affairs. Animated Video on Disinformation and Anti-Government Extremism



This 11-minute animated video, created in

partnership with the Bertelsmann Foundation, is part of the non-partisan Bertelsmann Foundation's democracy-strengthening work and tells the fictionalized story of a man who gets radicalized into a 'boogaloo' scene during the COVID-19 shutdown. The video will launch in August 2020 and is paired with an impact study of 250 participants, funded through an internal rapid-response-to-COVID-19 research competition in AU's School of Public Affairs. The impact study, led by Professors Cynthia Miller-Idriss and David Malet, will test whether a video-

"The Boogaloo Ballad of Henry Graves / Disinformation & Online Radicalization in the Age of Covid-19"



Screenshot from the video, The Boogaloo Ballad of Henry Graves

based intervention has an impact on the public's understanding of anti-government extremism and public health misinformation related to COVID-19. An education guide is also planned to accompany the video.

extremely

<https://www.adl.org/extremely>

ADL[®]



In Production

CUE and the American Defamation League

We are launching a joint podcast called 'extremely' to educate the public about a variety of issues related to extremism and education. Four episodes have already been recorded, and the podcast is currently in production.



©American University

FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS cont.

Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. Recognizing Radicalization - Rapid Response Campaign.

ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG

PERIL is partnering on a cross-national collaborative project to develop a rapid response campaign to prevent far-right online radicalization. This project will lay the essential groundwork for developing immediate responses and promising practices to inform parents, caregivers, and educators of the risks of online radicalization.

Inoculation Against Online Radicalization.

With support from a private external donor, PERIL is undertaking a major research project to test online interventions to combat race science and male supremacy. The project is slated to conclude in November 2020 and will produce a series of academic publications and public reports.

I'm honored to support such a talented team of colleagues who are passionate about the mission of CUE. Seeing the research come to fruition has been gratifying, and I look forward to seeing the positive impact that their work will continue to make.

Katie Spann, Director of Operations

FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS cont.

Documentary Film.

The Muslim Experience in New Zealand, One Year after the Christchurch Attack.

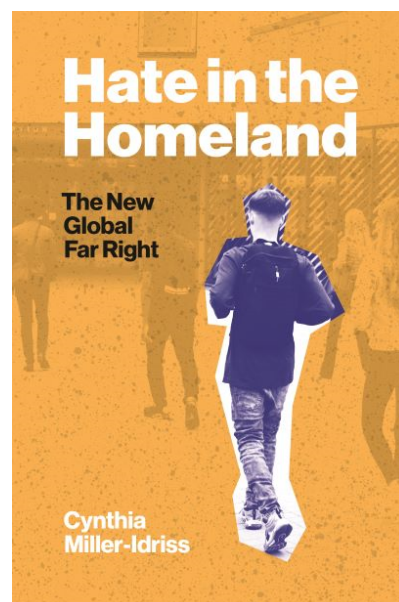
Program Associate Caleb Cain traveled to New Zealand in early March 2020 to meet with mosque leaders one year after the Christchurch terrorist attack. He was accompanied by a documentary team and although his meetings got off to a good start, his trip was cut short by an emergency evacuation from New Zealand due to the suspension of international travel for AU faculty and staff, and his mandated return to the U.S. due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



COMING SOON!

CYNTHIA MILLER-IDRISS

Publication date: October 27, 2020,
Princeton University Press.



PARTNERSHIPS

Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX).

PERIL was named a strategic partner for Norway's Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), one of the largest and most respected research centers on extremism globally.

Association of Education and Finance Policy.

CUE will offer an annual award for excellence in research at the annual meeting of the (AEFP). The competition for the award has been announced and will be given at the 2021 annual meeting.



United States Institute of Peace, RESOLVE Network.

PERIL was invited to join the RESOLVE Network as an organizational member.

German Institute for Radicalization and Deradicalization (GIRDS)

PERIL is in discussions with GIRDS to engage in a global repository project to translate and adapt existing German resources and toolkits related to combating and preventing extremism.

PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES

Miller-Idriss, Cynthia, Jonathan Friedman and Jennifer Auerbach. 2019. "Horizon Gazing, Jumping, and Arms Wide: Marketing Imagery and the Meaning of Study Abroad in the USA." *Higher Education* 78(6): 1091-1107.

Nasser, Ilham, **Cynthia Miller-Idriss** and Ahmed Alwani. 2019. "Reconceptualizing Education Research and Reform in Muslim Societies." *Journal of Education in Muslim Societies*. 1(1): 3-25.

Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. 2019. "The Global Dimensions of Nationalist Populism." *The International Spectator*, 54(2): 17-34.

Hughes, Brian. 2019. "Thriving From Exile: Toward a Materialist Analysis of the Alt-Right." *B2o: An Online Journal*, 4(2).

Hughes, Brian. 2020. "Theologians, Poets, and Lone Wolves: Modelling Medium-Specific Process of Radicalization." *International Journal of Communication* 14(2020): 1849-1867.

Criezis, Meili. 2020. "Online Deceptions: Renegotiating Gender Boundaries on ISIS Telegram." *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 14(1)67

Woods, Eric Taylor, Leah Greenfeld, Christopher Hughes, **Cynthia Miller-Idriss** and Robert Schertzer. In press. "COVID-19 and Nationalism: A scholarly exchange." *Nations and Nationalism*.

Guhin, Jeffrey, Jessica Calarco and **Cynthia Miller-Idriss**. Forthcoming. "Whatever Happened to Socialization?" *Annual Review of Sociology*.



BOOK CHAPTERS, OP-EDS & POPULAR MEDIA

BOOK CHAPTERS

Miller-Idriss, Cynthia and Annett Graefe-Geusch. "The Commercialization of Germany's Far-Right Culture." In Weisskircher, Manes, "From the streets to parliament? The fourth wave of far-right politics in Germany.

Hughes, Brian and **Cynthia Miller-Idriss**. Learning Hate: "Real" Men and Masculinity in White Supremacy and Islamist Extremism. Forthcoming in: Fergus, Edward, Lauren Wells, and Joseph D. Nelson. The Routledge Companion on Boyhood in the U.S.

"I love my work with PERIL. It's an organization with a strong sense of purpose, and a focus on helping. My colleagues are some of the most well-informed and insightful experts in the field of extremism work. Every day I know we have a chance to learn something new and to make the world a safer, more tolerant place. That's very rare."

Brian Hughes

Miller-Idriss, Cynthia and Annett Graefe-Geusch. "Studying the Peripheries: Iconography and Embodiment in Far Right Youth Subculture." Forthcoming in Ashe, Stephen, Joel Busher, Graham Macklin and Aaron Winter. Researching the far right: theory, method and practice. Routledge Studies in Fascism and the Far Right. Routledge.

Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. 2019. "How to Prevent Hate." Forthcoming in Leidig, Eviane, ed. CARR Yearbook 2019/20. Ibidem/Columbia University Press.

Hughes, Brian. 2019. "Brand of Brothers: Marketing the Islamic State." Pp. 145-166 in Krona, Michael and Rosemary Pennington ed. The Media World of ISIS. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Graefe-Geusch, Annett and **Cynthia Miller-Idriss**. "Bekleidung aus Mittenwalde: Die Marke Thor Steinar." Pp. 195-214 in Botsch, Gideon, Jan Raabe and Christoph Schulze. Rechtsrock: Aufstieg und Wandel neonazistischer Jugendkultur am Beispiel Brandenburgs. Berlin: Be.bra wissenschaft verlag GmbH.

Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. 2019. "The Rise of Fascist Fashion: Clothing helps the Far Right sell their violent message." Pp. 175-178 in Allchorn, William, ed. CARR Yearbook 2018/19. Ibidem/Columbia University Press.

Hughes, Brian. 2019. "Analyzing YouTube 'Rekt' Videos as a Vector for Radicalization." Pp. 369-372 in Allchorn, William, ed. CARR Yearbook 2018/19. Ibidem/Columbia University Press.

Hughes, Brian. 2019. "A Lone Wolf in the Hypertext: Radicalization Online." Pp. 29-32 in Kraidy, Marwan ed. CARGC Briefs Vol. 1: ISIS. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Scholarly Commons.

PUBLIC-SPEAKING, CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS & CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

Cynthia Miller-Idriss gave 21 talks between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2020. These included eight talks for policymakers and law enforcement, including the US State Department, US Department of Justice, Europol, intelligence agencies, embassies, and more; four book talks on *The Extreme Gone Mainstream* (at Harvard, Lafayette College, GWU, and AU SPA); eight invited Keynotes/lectures (at AAC&U's Presidents' Trust Forum, Rutgers University, the American Historical Association Annual Meeting, the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, SXSW EDU (moved online due to COVID-19), the Council for European Studies' Radicalism and Violence Network, the Social Science Research Council's College and University Fund for the Social Sciences Conference, and PEN America. Five additional planned talks in Denver; Reykjavik, Iceland; and Antwerp, Belgium, were postponed due to COVID-19.

Brian Hughes appeared on August 6, 2019, episode of Al Jazeera Inside Story (Al Jazeera English), "Can Web-Fueled Violence Be Stopped?"

RTM Higher Education CIO Congress, August 5, 2019. **Scott A. Bass** spoke on: "Disrupting Organizational Silos in an Increasingly Converged World: Can Higher Education Meet the Challenge?"

VOX-Pol & Swansea University Conference: Terrorism and Social Media, an International Conference, June 26, 2019. **Brian Hughes** presented his talk "'I Speak for the Trees': #PineTreeTwitter from Ecofascism to Xenofeminism."

American Association of Colleges and Universities, January 24, 2020. **Cynthia Miller-Idriss** presented to 140 University and College Presidents and Provosts about the challenges of polarization. In her talk, she identified proactive strategies to prepare for the impact of polarization and far-right extremism on college and university campuses.

Times Higher Education (THE) World Academic Summit, September 10-12, 2019. **Scott A. Bass** attended. Four hundred leaders from the world's best and most ambitious university and research-led institutions assembled to discuss the optimum conditions for human talent.

DC Economics of Education Working Group Meeting, October 18, 2019. CUE Leadership attended the meeting, which was held at George Washington University.

Council for European Studies, Madrid, Spain. July 2019. **Cynthia Miller-Idriss** gave two talks at the CES meetings in Madrid.

American Sociological Association, New York, NY, August 2019. **Cynthia Miller-Idriss** gave a talk at the ASA meetings in New York.

American Historical Association, New York, NY, January 2020. **Cynthia Miller-Idriss** gave a talk at the AHA meetings in New York.



MEDIA APPEARANCES

Cynthia Miller-Idriss had more than a dozen media appearances, including on *BBC Evening News*, *Deutsche Welle*, *Sky News*, Austrian public radio and more in the wake of the El Paso terror attack, August 5, 2019.



Cynthia Miller-Idriss was a guest on MSNBC's *Hardball with Chris Matthews* for discussion of white supremacist extremism, August 6, 2019.

Brian Hughes was a guest on Al Jazeera *Inside Story*, discussing the role of online communities in recent white supremacist terror attacks, August 6, 2019.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss was a guest on C-SPAN's *Washington Journal* for a discussion of white supremacist extremism, August 8, 2019.

Brian Hughes' essay, *Thriving from Exile: Toward a Materialist Analysis of the Alt-Right* was featured on *b2o*, an online community of the Boundary2 editorial collective, September 24, 2019.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss was interviewed and quoted in *The New York Times'* "OK Hand Sign is a Hate Symbol, Anti-Defamation League Says," by Neil MacFarquhar, September 26, 2019.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss was a guest on WNYC's *The Takeaway*, "A Growing Catalog of Hate Symbols," September 30, 2019.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss was interviewed by Joel Rose for NPR's *All Things Considered*, "Calls Grow for Stephen Miller to Leave White House After Leaked Emails," November 25, 2019.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss was a featured guest on BBC *World News* to discuss the Richmond, VA guns' rights rally and the rise of white supremacist extremism, January 20, 2020.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss was interviewed on BBC's *Newsnight* to discuss the attacks in Halle, Germany, on February 20, 2020.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss was interviewed by Thomas Roueché in *TANK Magazine* about the intersection of commercialization and far-right extremism, Spring/Summer 2020 issue.

MEDIA APPEARANCES cont.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss appeared on Al Jazeera's *UpFront with Mehdi Hasan* to discuss the one-year anniversary of the Christchurch attacks and the current state of white supremacist extremism, March 11, 2020.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss appeared on Al Jazeera's *UpFront with Mehdi Hasan* and Christian Picciolini to discuss "How big a threat is white nationalism?", March 14, 2020.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss interviewed by Jess McHugh for a *Fortune* story, "Migrants, refugees are the human cost of coronavirus politics, experts say," March 27, 2020.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss interviewed and quoted by Hannah Allam for *NPR* article, "'A Perfect Storm': Extremists look for ways to exploit Coronavirus pandemic," April 16, 2020.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss was interviewed for and cited in Neil MacFarquhar's *The New York Times* article, "Oklahoma City Marks 25 Years Since America's Deadliest Homegrown Attack.," April 19, 2020.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss appeared on NBC *Nightly News* with Lester Holt to talk about far-right organizing related to the nationwide protests about COVID-19 related shelter-in-place orders, April 20, 2020.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss was interviewed and quoted, Jacob Gallagher's *The Wall Street Journal* article, "Why the Extremist 'Boogaloo Boys' Wear Hawaiian Shirts." June 8, 2020.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss was interviewed and quoted, Emma Ellis' *WIRED* article, "The Meme-Fueled Rise of a Dangerous, Far-Right Militia." June 18, 2020.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss was interviewed and quoted, Nathan Taylor Pemberton's *The New York Times* article, "What Do You Do When Extremism Comes for the Hawaiian Shirt?" June 29, 2020.



Cynthia Miller-Idriss interviewed and quoted, Hannah Allam's *NPR* article, "Pandemic Blues or Signs of Extremism? New Guide Teaches Parents to Stay Alert." June 30, 2020.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss appeared on *NPR's Morning Edition* to discuss President Trump's retweeting of a video of a supporter shouting "White Power." July 1, 2020.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss interviewed and quoted in Rae Ellen Bichell's *KUNC/PBC* article, "With Threat Of Online Radicalization 'Bigger Than Ever,' Researchers Offer Guide For Parents." July 2, 2020.

ACTIVELY IN DEVELOPMENT

Looking ahead, and despite the challenges of 2020, we see great potential for growth in scholarship and intervention. We want CUE to be a place where innovation thrives and great ideas meet great opportunity. There is no shortage of complex issues facing society today, which CUE could address. Through expanding laboratories, cultivating new relationships, and investing in infrastructure, we will develop evidence-based solutions that move us forward in this important work.

New Lab Launch. CUE will soon be launching its second laboratory, CATALYST (Change in Academia Through Applied-research: Laboratory for Student Success) focused on college and university transformation designed for the benefit of a new generation of students. The lab project is in early discussions with a national non-profit that provides consulting services around student support and advising to colleges and universities under the umbrella of a large philanthropic organization. A pilot effort in development is a student success and well-being research project in collaboration with a partnering organization.

Expanding Partnerships. Each day, new collaboration and partnership opportunities surface globally. We find this an essential part of our DNA as a startup entity--to forge relationships greater than the sum of the parts.

We have the unique opportunity to bring both strong scholarship and research-backed interventions to the table. This is only enhanced through the process of collaboration with other sectors and industry leaders.

Capacity Building. As we exit our launch phase, the possibilities and promise of CUE continue to exceed expectations. Bringing together the breadth and depth of skills of a research university and located in the heart of our nation's capital, CUE's is ideally situated as a hub for innovation. We look forward to further building out both our internal and external networking infrastructures to create a supportive and solid foundation from which to carry out our vision alongside the best of the best.

We are grateful for the opportunities and successes of the past year, and we are hopeful and eager for the future of the Center for University Excellence!





Follow along with CUE or Stay Engaged...

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UNIVERSITY EXCELLENCE

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