



What We Believe

We share our vision and the 6 key components that drive our work

Developing a Statewide Learning Community in Media Literacy to Counter Extremist Violence

We are living in a time when domestic terrorism is becoming all too familiar. Hate and violence are becoming too normal in American life, where the pace of mass shootings has escalated since 2019. The regularity of mass shootings is heightening our stress and dulling our compassion. You remember the headlines: 11 killed at a dance hall in Monterey, California. 19 children and two teachers killed at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas. Five people dead at an LGBTQ club in Colorado Springs. A teen gunman in Memphis who livestreamed his murder of four people. Six people killed at a Walmart in Virginia.

Even Rhode Island, with our long history of tolerance of nonconformists, individual liberty and the separation of church and state—we, along with every other state in the nation, have our share of problems with political extremism, rage, and anti-government theories that can lead to targeted violence and domestic terrorism. Hateful ideologies are evident in gang violence in Rhode Island urban communities, in neo-Nazi and KKK recruitment messages in our suburbs and rural areas, and even in our local political campaigns. Hate speech, conspiracy theories, violence have become mainstream in the USA.

What Can I Do?

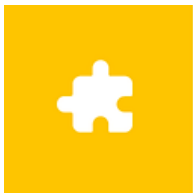
We believe that we are not helpless, and that we cannot stand back and wait for law enforcement to protect us. We must face a difficult truth—domestic terrorists are not strangers, they are our relatives, partners, friends and



We know that this will not be easy—Courageous RI aims to mobilize RI residents with the skills to counteract the societal forces inciting intolerance, hate and violence. We can mitigate the appeal and impact of hateful expression that exploit us-vs-them paradigms to oversimplify ideas and information, activate strong emotions, and attack opponents. Courageous RI is launching a process to develop a coalition of RI residents who have learned and practiced a set of skills to

- Critically analyze news, information, digital media, and popular culture
- Understand how hate is cultivated
- Truly listen to what our angry neighbors are saying (deep listening)
- Ask critical questions and dialogue about difficult issues, and
- Share skills and resources for recognizing and resisting messages designed to manipulate and enrage (media literacy).

Through education, active listening, dialogue and messaging, we intend to limit the dangers of domestic extremism through the power of prevention. Courageous RI will start with a series of 60-minute interactive community dialogues that center on strategies to develop community capacity to reduce the hate that leads to violence. We'll be addressing topics including:



Inequality and Polarization

We are living with the normalization of hate and the growing prevalence of violence in American life, where the pace of mass shootings has escalated since 2019. The regularity of mass shootings is heightening our stress and dulling our compassion. Protests and political rallies have been co-opted by both far-left and far-right extremists. Violent extremists have targeted elected officials, military, and police as well as private individuals they see as “different” based on race, gender, national origin and other factors. Hateful ideologies are evident in gang violence in Rhode Island urban communities, in neo-Nazi and KKK recruitment messages, and even in our local political campaigns.



Mass shootings, antisemitic and other hate crimes in the United States reached an all-time high in the United States in 2021. Those who perpetuate extremist violence are motivated by ideologies, specific issues, or political causes. Today, social media and online forums are used to influence public opinion and spread violent extremist narratives and activity. Politicians and media personalities have promoted a race war, demonized those who are different from them, and justified civil disorder and violence. We can no longer see this as a random outbursts from disturbed or hateful individuals. It feels like the culture is changing.

Everywhere you look, it seems, intolerance has gone mainstream. Racial disparities in policing induce fear, as Black suspects are three times more likely to be killed by police than are persons of other racial or ethnic groups. Anti-Black and anti-Jewish (as well as anti-LGTBQ, anti-women, and anti-Muslim) sentiments are amplified by “conflict entrepreneurs,” who exploit hate for profit using the power of social media. Reports of discrimination in American schools also doubled in the 2021 – 2022 school year, according to the U.S. Department of Education, with reports of racial harassment and attacks on students with disabilities. While some parent groups urge more attention to diversity and inclusion efforts, others believe that identity politics has created a backlash of resentment. LGBTQ+ rights advocates point out how transgender rights have become a battleground in some schools and communities, fueling more harassment. Educators themselves feel increasingly anxious about the increasingly politicized school climate.

Wherever an “us-vs.-them” paradigm is deployed, it cultivates hate, as one group gets blamed for problems in society. Members of online social networks share forms of digital media that arouse strong emotions, including hatred and fear of others. It doesn’t matter whether the enemy is seen as woke liberal professors, government bureaucrats, immigrants crossing the border, racist cops, lying media personalities, or antigovernment militia groups- or even people who hold certain beliefs or associations. Even more frightening is the reality that the mere categorization of people into groups is enough to produce hostilities. And history has shown that when resources are scarce, people are more likely to feel hostility toward members of an out group.

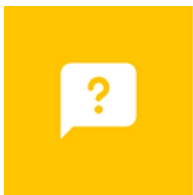


**21st Century
Information Ecosystem**



look like news offer false and inflammatory rhetoric on a wide range of controversial topics. Plus, when hateful propaganda and disinformation are delivered through forms of entertainment like memes, pop music, and videos, its appeal can lead people to bypass critical thinking. Algorithms align content with our pre-existing beliefs, attitudes, and values. Ironically, when faced with an abundance of content, people's information ecosystems have actually narrowed, making it less likely for them to encounter unfamiliar or new ideas. For all these reasons, many people are not well-equipped with the skills necessary to navigate this environment.

Social media platforms now play an increasingly prominent role in the radicalization of extremists, who search, consume, and spread harmful content with like-minded individuals online. Many people are calling for digital platforms to take greater responsibility by moderating user-generated content to protect the public from misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories, hate speech, and graphic violence online. But this is a complex issue. If digital platforms are regulated to increase accountability and transparency, could their regulation of content harm freedom of expression and technological innovation? When does content moderation infringe on First Amendment rights? Widespread public knowledge about the information ecosystem and the shared responsibilities of consumers and creators is essential.



Critical Questions

Critical thinking about media helps people recognize and resist harmful propaganda, conspiracy theories, and disinformation that may take the form of memes, news, activism, websites, videos, and social media posts. It's a form of education that aims to improve how we consume, create, and share information, entertainment, and persuasion. The term media literacy is often used as a shorthand for critical thinking about media—and includes several specific competencies, such as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate media messages in a variety of forms. By learning to consider the motivations of those who disseminate information, we can learn which information to trust— and what to mistrust. This approach to media is now essential for work, life, and citizenship.



Center for Educational Equity at Teachers College at Columbia University, effective instruction in media literacy is still not provided in most Rhode Island schools. Survey research from the Media Education Lab found that only 2 of 16 instructional practices of media literacy are common in Rhode Island schools. Most classroom teachers in Rhode Island have had no training in teaching media literacy skills and most schools in Rhode Island do not have on staff a sufficient number of skilled library media specialists. Most teachers report in surveys that they are not adequately prepared to implement instruction to advance these competencies. Fortunately, political action is underway in Rhode Island to redress these challenges. In September 2021, the Civic Literacy Act was passed. The law mandates that all public school districts shall provide not less than one student-led civics project for students during either middle or high school. To accomplish this goal, a substantial statewide effort in teacher education will be required.



Many Rhode islanders have experienced strained relationships with friends, family members, neighbors, or co-workers because of increased political polarization. These disruptions are exacerbated by widespread dissemination of falsehoods and inflammatory propaganda happening and impacting us in the workplace, the community, the school, and in family life. Even those of us who don't have direct contact with members of neo-Nazi, alt-right, Antifa, or militia groups, may feel helpless to address the situation. We end up in an avoid-and-deny stance which provides temporary respite but also interferes with the building of the social consensus that is essential for our society. Wouldn't it be better if we were able to listen, establish a basis of respect, and share our perspectives from a place of connection?

We will deploy the powerful tool of deep listening in our contact with individuals we might not have been able to listen to without this resource. Deep listening is a way to allocate our attention so that we are fully present with what is happening in the moment without trying to control it or judge it. Listening with respect requires an open, calm, and curious mind. It's a highly active process that can be cultivated through instruction and practice. When you are engaged in deep listening, you witness your thoughts and emotions while maintaining focused attention on what the other person is saying. Deep listening encourages us to abandon the tendency to plan a response or interrupt the speaker.



Speaking and listening are inseparable. The generation of young people who are destined to inherit this country can learn to become responsible communicators through an approach that is sometimes called creative contributory contests (CCC). In it, ordinary individuals contribute creative resources towards the public good. In these programs, a panel of judges evaluates submissions, and finalist entries are publicly disseminated and celebrated. Such contests have been shown to produce solutions better, or at least equivalent to that of experts, and have designed solutions for biomedicine, teenage sexual health, HIV testing programs, and other health topics.

JOIN US!

Courageous RI is launching now, and we are inviting citizens from all walks of life to join us for a series of workshops and conversations to learn how to address political extremism, rage, and anti-government fantasies that can lead to targeted violence and domestic terrorism. We believe that a motivated cadre of citizens can step beyond an us-vs-them mentality, work to develop a common understanding of pressing social problems, share the skills to critically analyze media messages, defuse hate, and prevent extremist violence. It is our intention to create a state-wide model that can be adopted in other localities. We invite you to join us now.

Join our Mailing List

Receive the latest news from our community right in your inbox.

Accept The Invitation

COURAGEOUS RI is an initiative of the [Media Education Lab](#) and the [University of Rhode Island](#)

protected by reCAPTCHA
Privacy - Terms

