

THE BOOGALOO BALLAD OF HENRY GRAVES



EDUCATION GUIDE

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THE PROJECT

Support for the “Boogaloo” is one example of how the deliberate spread of false information can create a dangerous grassroots extremist movement. This is a potential threat, both as a source of political violence, but also as a threat more broadly to democracy, as disinformation stokes division and undermines trust in democratic institutions.

The video that this educational guide accompanies seeks to educate viewers about the activities of the Boogaloo scene, whose anti-government supporters are exploiting fear and uncertainty around COVID-19 to sow distrust of the government and to spread misinformation. The video shows how Boogaloo groups attract supporters through online social media and facilitate the spread of misinformation. It tells the fictionalized story of the radicalization of Henry Graves, a US veteran living in Ohio who stumbles onto Boogaloo groups online and engages with them. Graves is misled by misinformation the groups are promoting about the government "coming to take" everyone's guns, and then, later, rumors and disinformation about COVID-19 and threats of the military shutting down cities and enlisting other extreme measures to stop the spread of the virus. The 11-minute video depicts the movement's opposition to COVID-19 health and safety measures, and how Boogaloo supporters have protested in U.S. state capitols against mask-wearing and social distancing.

The goal of sharing Henry's story and the outcome of his escalating engagement is to help the public better recognize the threat of misinformation and disinformation, especially related to COVID-19, acts of militia resistance and calls for a second civil war.



THE BOOGALOO MOVEMENT



Boogaloo supporters are primarily an anti-government, anti-law enforcement extremist movement who believe a second civil war is coming in the United States. Supporters of Boogaloo beliefs, who sometimes refer to themselves as Boogaloo Bois, want a second civil war to occur. There is no coordinated leadership or structure to this movement. Individuals connect online and then communicate with those in their area to discuss possible rallies or events to attend.

According to the nonpartisan watchdog group Tech Transparency Project, tens of thousands of users on Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, the Chans, and other social media sites, have joined scores of online groups that promote the "Boogaloo". People affiliated with Boogaloo scenes have been arrested for allegedly murdering law enforcement officers, and plotting bombings and other attacks, while others have tried to provoke violence at Black Lives Matter protests.

What is the Boogaloo?

Boogaloo is a long-standing internet joke referring to the 1984 movie, *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo*, and "Boogaloo" was just shortened code for a sequel or follow up to anything.

In this context, the Boogaloo is the second civil war.



What do they believe?

Boogaloo enthusiasts generally believe that the government plans to severely limit or take away citizens' Second Amendment rights to own firearms. They believe that the government wants to take away those rights so that citizens will not have the power to fight back against the government.

Most supporters of the Boogaloo are also anti-law enforcement as they believe officers, particularly federal law enforcement, will be implementing any new restrictions on firearms and will be the ones trying to confiscate weapons from citizens.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting stay-at-home orders and mask requirements have been seen by many Boogaloo supporters as more examples of the government trying to take away people's rights which will then lead to their primary concern, firearms confiscations.

The Boogaloo scene has attracted people who also believe in a variety of other ideologies – this includes some white supremacists and paramilitary militia groups.

Both white supremacists and paramilitary militia movements in the US generally share the Boogaloo supporters' anti-government viewpoint. And when members of these other movements join the Boogaloo scene, they bring their own misinformation/disinformation, conspiracy theories, and perspectives on the use of political violence to the Boogaloo Bois.

Why are they a concern?

Boogaloo supporters not only believe a second civil war is coming, but that they need to actively prepare for an armed battle against law enforcement and anyone else they perceive as threatening their rights, particularly their right to bear arms. There has already been violence and even murder committed by Boogaloo supporters.

The Boogaloo Movement is based on anti-government conspiracy theories and its supporters spread disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda via many media platforms, encouraging others to join their cause. This leads to more people becoming radicalized which increases the potential for violence.

Because of the ongoing pandemic, many people are spending more time online. They are doing so in conditions where social and economic security is increasingly uncertain, while political dysfunction and hostility spread far and wide. This increases the possibility that they may come across Boogaloo propaganda or other sources of conspiracies and disinformation while also potentially in an emotionally vulnerable state.

The FBI office in Dallas, Texas recently issued an internal report warning of the potential threat of violence by Boogaloo supporters in the months leading up to the November election and presidential inauguration in January 2021.

Support for the Boogaloo is just one example of how misinformation, disinformation and propaganda can lead to violence. Boogaloo supporters and the violence they have committed also help illustrate the dangers that the spread of disinformation can have on communities and democracy more broadly.

What can you do about it?

- Learn about the dangers of conspiracy theories, misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda.
- Verify what you see and read. Learn how to tell the difference between facts and opinion and practice your “lateral reading” skills (studying a topic from multiple sources).
- Be cautious about your sources of information. Even people close to you, like family and friends, may accidentally spread misinformation.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. What sorts of economic issues have made life difficult for Henry?
2. What is the Boogaloo? What do Boogaloo supporters want?
3. Do you think Henry's military experience plays a role in his interest in the Boogaloo Movement—why or why not?
4. What rumors helped spur the Boogaloo supporters into action?
5. How did COVID-19 combine with people's internet habits to fuel the expansion of Boogaloo groups?
6. Which factors from Henry's past experiences led him to join the Boogaloo Movement? Which factors were a result of the current environment?
7. What caused Henry to question what he had learned and dig deeper?
8. Why do you think Henry made the choice to walk away?
9. Why is the Boogaloo Movement something to be cautious of, despite their claims to patriotism and their jokes, memes, and casual clothes?
10. What is the meaning of the final scene of the video, featuring a young man scrolling on his phone? What signals is the filmmaker sending?
11. What do you think are the reasons why someone would circulate rumors, misinformation?
12. Who benefits from the spread of disinformation?
13. How can people be more aware of misinformation and the role of false stories, rumors, false videos, images, and memes in mobilizing people to action?

EXERCISES

1. Ask students if they have ever heard that one of their favorite stars (music, sports, actors, etc.) has died and then found out later that it was a hoax.

Have them “fact check” one of the conspiracy theories listed below:

- Paul McCartney was killed in a car accident in 1967 and replaced by an actor.
- The Apollo 11 moon landing (and all others) were faked by Hollywood. We never actually went to the moon.
- Tupac faked his death and now lives in Cuba.
- Bob Marley was killed by the CIA.
- Justin Bieber is a shape-shifting lizard.
- The earth is flat
- Birds aren't real - they are all drones.

2. Find examples of misleading headlines or social media posts and have students discuss how they could (safely) investigate the information. Note, have good options for “fact checking” websites to suggest.

3. Come up with a list of ways that rumors or disinformation can have a negative impact on a community. Then come up with a list of how this might apply to democracy, or the whole country.



BOOGALOO

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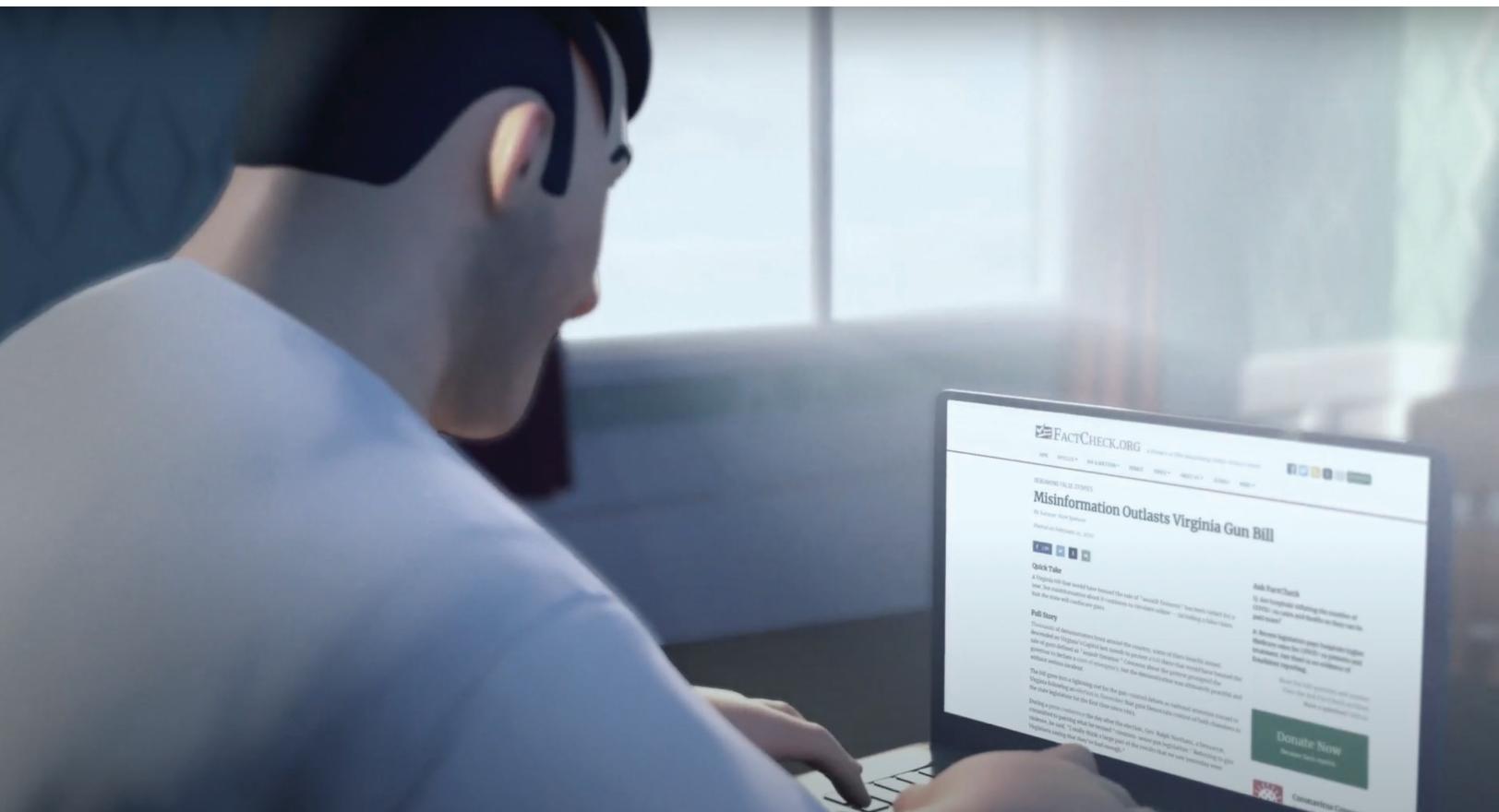
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GLOSSARY

Boogaloo Scene

an anti-government, anti-law enforcement grassroots movement. Sometimes also referred to as “the boog,” “Big Igloo,” or “Big Luau.”

Boogaloo Bois

self-identified members of the Boogaloo Movement.

Conspiracy Theory

a belief that a secret group/organization is responsible for some circumstance or event.

Disinformation

deliberately misleading or false information that is intentionally spread. Disinformation is the deliberate spreading of misinformation (see below).

Extremist Movement

a group of people who believe in an “us versus them” ideology AND believe that in order to protect their own group (the “in group”) they must engage in violence against those that threaten the in-group (the “out group”).

Grassroots Movement

a type of movement or campaign originating outside the established political power structure, which attempts to mobilize individuals to take some action to influence an outcome, often of a political nature.

Militia

a group that uses paramilitary weapons, training, and activism in articulation of local sovereignty and in opposition to the federal government. Not neutral. Sometimes, but not always, affiliated with overtly racist activism.

Misinformation

term for incorrect or false information.

Paramilitary

the appearance of military-style things (weapons, uniforms, language, tactics, and violence) outside of the military.

Propaganda

information, particularly of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view.

Radicalization

a process by which an individual (or group) holds increasingly negative views about other individuals/groups and encourages hostile or violent action against those people/groups.

Revolutionary

an actor that uses radical or violent mechanisms AGAINST systemic power and/or to overthrow the state.

Vigilante

a member of a self-appointed group of citizens who undertake law enforcement in their community without legal authority, typically because the legal agencies are perceived to be inadequate.

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