

THE EXTREMISTS

CJ Hopkins

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THE EXTREMISTS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CJ Hopkins is an expatriate American playwright, and occasional stage director, based in Berlin. His early plays and experimental stage-texts were first produced during the 1990s in New York City by HERE Arts Center, The Present Company, Monkey Wrench Theater, Soho Think Tank/Ohio Theater, Manhattan Theater Source, and the Knitting Factory, among other companies, and regionally by Amaryllis Theater, Philadelphia, and Alchymia Theater, Chicago. While in New York, Hopkins received playwriting fellowships from the Drama League of New York and Jerome Foundation and was a 1995 Resident Artist at Mabou Mines/Suite. In 2002, the U K premiere of Hopkins' best-known play, HORSE COUNTRY, was presented at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The production, directed by John Clancy, received universal acclaim and won several awards including a Scotsman "Fringe First" for new writing, and, ultimately, the most prestigious writing award of the Festival, the Scotsman "First of the Fringe Firsts". HORSE COUNTRY went on to tour and be produced internationally, and was published by Methuen Drama in 2004. In 2005, the world premiere of Hopkins' SCREWMACHINE/EYECANDY, OR: HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE BIG BOB was produced at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival by Scamp Theatre Ltd. The production, again directed by Clancy, received

broad critical acclaim, and Hopkins was awarded his second Scotsman 'Fringe First' for innovation and outstanding new writing. The U S premiere of SCREWMACHINE/EYECANDY followed in 2006, at 59E59 Theaters, and the play was published in 2007 by Broadway Play Publishing Inc. Since 2007 Hopkins has received further play and video commissions, in both English and German, including a 2006 site-specific piece commissioned by the Freie Universität Berlin and performed in the Norman Foster-designed FU Philological Library, the "Berlin Brain", and the 2009 commission of THE EXTREMISTS by 7 Stages. CJ Hopkins is represented by Ronald Gwiazda, Abrams Artists Agency, New York.

THE EXTREMISTS was commissioned by 7 Stages, Atlanta. The world premiere was produced by 7 Stages, English Theatre Berlin and PushPush Theater at F40, Berlin, in February 2009. The cast and creative team were as follows:

NORMAN KRIEGER.....Del Hamilton
DICK HEDGEROW..... Tim Habeger
Director Walter D Asmus
Stage manager..... Shelby Hofer
Assistant stage manager Katie Pfohl
Set & costumes.....Faye Allen
Lighting Design Ralf Arndt

The U S A premiere was produced by 7 Stages, Atlanta, in March/ April 2009. The cast and creative team were as follows:

NORMAN KRIEGER.....Del Hamilton
DICK HEDGEROW..... Tim Habeger
Director Walter D Asmus
Stage manager.....Heidi S Howard
Set & costumes.....Faye Allen
Lighting design Jessica Coale

CHARACTERS & SETTING

NORMAN KRIEGER, *a poetic terrorist, posing as an anti-terrorism expert*

DICK HEDGEROW, *another poetic terrorist, posing as a TV journalist*

Whatever THE EXTREMISTS is, it is certainly not a representational drama. Formally, it is more akin to vaudeville than anything resembling naturalism. Most of the dialog should be delivered straight out, into the house, in the direction of the spectators, but not directly to the spectators, at least not until the final few minutes.

THE EXTREMISTS is to be performed with no intermission. No late seating should be allowed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Del Hamilton, Walter D Asmus, Tim Habeger, Faye Allen, Shelby Hofer, Günther Grosser, Bernd Hoffmeister, Ralf Arndt, Katie Pfohl, Sydney Ellis, Heidi Howard, Antje Grabenhorst, Inka-Charlotte Palm, Russ Vick, Peter Ehrentraut, Eva van Dok, Fred Backus, Dan Hope, Jason Howard, Manhattan Theatre Source, Nicole Poole, Dan Berkey, Julia Lee Barclay, Josh Taylor, Goethe Zentrum Atlanta, Helena Prince, Clayton Nemrow, Julia Horvath, Jeffrey Mittleman, Jean-Theo Jost, Andy Snelling, Ron Gwiazda, Amy Wagner, Martin Denton, Julie Blumenthal, Thomas Diecks

DICK: Good evening, and welcome to Issues in Focus. I'm Dick Hedgerow, your host, in Washington. Tonight we're devoting the entire program to an in-depth discussion of the threat of extremism, both here, at home, and throughout the world. To help us do that, we have with us tonight one of the foremost experts in the field, Norman Krieger, a senior analyst and co-founder of the Center for Advanced Strategic Studies.

In addition to his work at the CASS, Mister Krieger is the author of the recent best-seller, *Extremism in the 21st Century and Beyond*. Mister Krieger, welcome to Issues in Focus.

NORM: Call me Norm, Dick. Pleasure to be here.

DICK: Your book is focused on the psychology, is it not? The extremist mindset?

NORM: That's right, Dick.

DICK: Their psychological motivation. What they want. What makes them tick.

NORM: That, yes, and how they spread their views.

DICK: Good. So let's set the scene a little, shall we?

NORM: Sure.

DICK: O K. So...here we are.

NORM: Yes.

DICK: Dawn of a new millennium.

NORM: Mm hmm...

DICK: Single super-power world.

NORM: Sure.

DICK: Communism...dead and buried.

NORM: Right.

DICK: Extremism...number one threat?
Number one threat the world is facing?

NORM: There is no greater threat, Dick.

DICK: In your book, you call it "the final threat".

NORM: It's going to be with us for some time to come.

DICK:

And we need to get used to living with the threat.
Get to know it. Understand it.

NORM: We don't really have much choice in the matter.

DICK: It's not going away.

NORM: No. It isn't.

DICK: The current threat level is orange, is it not?

NORM: Actually, I think it's yellow today.

DICK: Yellow? I'm sorry. I thought it was orange.

NORM: It's definitely one or the other, Dick.

DICK: Yellow or orange.

NORM: Unless something changed.

DICK: Which is possible, right?

NORM: Right. Sure.

DICK: In any event, the threat is still there.

NORM: We have to operate on that assumption, yes.

DICK: And what are we doing about the threat?

NORM: Well, Dick, we're doing all we possibly can.

DICK: Is it enough?

NORM: Well, it is and isn't.

DICK: Is and isn't.

NORM: That's right, Dick.

We can't eliminate the threat entirely.

But we can certainly do what we're doing, and then some.

DICK: To keep it to an acceptable level.

NORM: Exactly, Dick. A manageable level.

That's the goal we have to strive for.

DICK: Manageability.

NORM: Absolutely.

But look, having said that, I want to emphasize, that any level is unacceptable.

The goal remains elimination.

DICK: Complete and total elimination.

NORM: Yes, but we have to be realistic.

DICK: About what's possible.

NORM: Achievable, right.

We don't want to foster a false sense of security or sell anybody a bill of goods.

At the same time, we don't want to alarm the public unnecessarily, unless we have to.

DICK: By painting the picture as scarier than it is.

NORM: We can't afford to let down our guard.

It's important that we all maintain our vigilance.

Just not to the point where it becomes disruptive or changes how we live our lives.

We need people to go about their normal lives, keeping in mind that the next attack could happen anywhere at any time.

DICK: With no warning at all.

NORM: I'm afraid so, Dick.

DICK: So is there cause for heightened concern at the moment?

NORM: I wouldn't want to frame it in exactly those words. The threat is there. No question, it's there. But to what degree on any given day—

DICK: We can't let the threat take over our lives, is what you're saying.

NORM: That's what they want.

DICK: The extremists.

NORM: Right.

DICK: To scare us.

NORM: Yes.

DICK: To disrupt our lives. Make us feel vulnerable. Out of control. Scared. Confused. Which there's no cause to feel, is what you're saying.

NORM: No. On the contrary, if people understood the level of surveillance and pre-emptive monitoring—

DICK: Of extremist groups?

NORM: It's around the clock.

DICK: I guess we don't hear about all the thwarted attacks.

NORM: Not all of them, no.

DICK: For security reasons.

NORM: A lot of these are ongoing operations. But I can tell you this much. The number is high.

DICK: The number of thwarts.

NORM: We've thwarted a few.

DICK: Are we talking double digits?

NORM: I really can't comment.

DICK: But a meaningful number.

NORM: Definitely, Dick.

And when you add to that groups that may have just formed

or were only in the early conceptual stages—

DICK: Of planning an attack?

NORM: Potentially, yes.

Potentially planning. Or in the pre-planning phase.

Displaying tendencies in any event.

DICK: Tendencies.

NORM: Typical extremist tendencies.

Patterns. It's all about patterns of chatter.

Conversations. Words people use.

DICK: Profiling.

NORM: Yes. That, and surveillance.

DICK: Pre-emptive measures.

NORM: Wherever possible.

Look, what your viewers, and the public at large,

needs to understand and bear in mind

is the fluid and slippery nature of this threat

and thus, by extension, the nature of our response.

DICK: Which needs to be fluid as well, I take it.

NORM: It does, Dick, yes, if we expect to be effective.

Now granted, that makes things a bit fuzzy at times.

DICK: For the public?

NORM: For people. Yes. That's right.

DICK: To take it all in, all the ins and outs.

The ups and downs from day to day.

Or just to keep track of all the players involved.

The names—

NORM: Yes, a lot of them are hard to pronounce.

DICK: Not to mention all the different departments and agencies.

All those acronyms. Letters. Numbers.

NORM: It's too much for any one mind to track.

DICK: Clearly.

NORM: The point is not to become preoccupied.

DICK: With every little twist and turn.

NORM: Exactly. You can drive yourself crazy that way.

DICK: Trying to actually understand what's happening.

NORM: It's unknown territory we're into here, Dick.

DICK: Unknowable territory?

NORM: Hard to say.

DICK: In any event, the old rules don't apply?

NORM: Some of them, Dick. Some still do.

DICK: And others don't.

NORM: No. That's right.

Or they do, at the moment—

DICK: And then later they don't.

NORM: Right, and then later—

DICK: They do again?

NORM: Not really. No. But sometimes they do.

And sometimes, we need to say they do.

DICK: Even though they don't.

NORM: In reality, no.

DICK:

You address this in the book. This shifting reality.

NORM: It's more our perspective than reality, really.

DICK: How we view this war. Against extremism.
Or terror. Or whatever we're calling it now.

NORM: It doesn't really matter what we call it, Dick.
They're just words, names, which refer to the thing—

DICK: The thing we mean...whatever we call it.
The facts. The reality. That the words refer to.

NORM: Yes, that's critically important, Dick.
We need to keep our eye on the ball here
and not get distracted by what it all means.

DICK: But, whatever it is, it is a *war*.
A war on *something*.

NORM: Right. Sure.

DICK: Call it what you want, the facts don't change.

NORM: No. Of course not.

DICK: That's the reality.

NORM: Right. Look, what we've got here, Dick,
regardless of what words or labels we use,
and what they do or do not mean,
is a fundamental clash of values.

DICK: An irreconcilable clash of values?

NORM: Compromise is out of the question.

DICK: So no room for diplomacy or negotiation.

NORM:
I'm afraid not, Dick. There's just no common ground.
It's us or them.

DICK: The extremists.

NORM: Yes.

DICK: The final threat.

NORM: There is no other threat.

DICK: None?

NORM: O K, there are threats. Sure.
There are always threats. But nothing on the scale—

DICK: Manageable threats. Nothing we can't handle.

NORM: Nothing that rises to this level, no.
Look, we're in a different situation now—

DICK: It's a new world, isn't it?

NORM: Absolutely.
The world we knew, of major conflicts,
World War One, Two, Three—

DICK: The Cold War.

NORM: Right, and all the others,
the whole idea of wars between nations,
the concept of nations and peoples itself,
extending back five thousand years—

DICK: Five thousand years?

NORM: To Ancient Sumer.

DICK: So the entire history of western civilization.

NORM: Pretty much. Yeah. That world is gone.

DICK: Gone?

NORM: Gone.

DICK: Over.

NORM: Done.
We're talking total paradigm shift here.

DICK: The end of history?

NORM: Well, I don't know about that.
Look, I don't want to get too academic
and bore your viewers completely to death.
Let's just say it's a whole new ballgame,
which calls for a whole new set of assumptions.

DICK: So we need to adjust people's expectations.

NORM: It's one of the main reasons I wrote the book.

DICK: To help people adjust the way they see things.

NORM: It's absolutely paramount, Dick.
Folks need to know what they're up against.

DICK: And not just in terms of a terrorist attack,
but the psychological aspects as well?

NORM: We need folks to be able to protect themselves,
and their families, of course, in these uncertain times.

DICK: And you believe the public is prepared to
accept—

NORM: I do, Dick. I believe that strongly.
I'm absolutely convinced of that fact.
We have to start treating the public like adults.
Level with people. Tell them the truth.

DICK: The truth.

NORM: Right. Within limits, of course.

DICK: Knowing that some secrets will need to remain—

NORM: Secret. Sure. Look, we all want transparency,
full disclosure, accountability—

DICK: Just not at the expense of security concerns.

NORM: Right. No. And people get that.
They're not children. They understand.
The American public doesn't need to know,
or necessarily even *want* to know,
every little detail of what we're doing.
Who is being detained where
on suspicion of what, on the orders of whom.

DICK: But people do want to be told what's happening.

NORM: Of course. Yes. In a general way.

DICK: Just not the details.

NORM: Exactly, no.
Listen, the last thing we want to do
is confuse the public even more than it is.

DICK: O K—

NORM: And, Dick, I can assure your viewers, that every resource we have at our disposal is being brought directly to bear.

DICK: Good to hear. So there are hopeful signs.

NORM: Well...I wouldn't want to go that far.

DICK: No?

NORM: No. I mean, we're not out of the woods here.

DICK: We're not?

NORM: No. Not by a long shot.

DICK: O K. So...where does that leave us?

NORM: Pardon?

DICK: You just said, we're not out of the woods.

NORM: Right. I just said that.

DICK: Right. So...
if we're not out of the woods, where *are* we then?

NORM: Well, obviously, we're still *in* the woods, Dick.

DICK: O K, but—

NORM: I mean, you're either somewhere or you're not.

DICK: Of course.

NORM: See, Dick, there are certain stages, certain clearly definable stages that every crisis passes through.

DICK: O K—

NORM: And at the moment, we're between two of those stages.

DICK: Between two stages.

NORM: That's where we are.

DICK: So in a state of readiness...anticipation.

DICK: It's common sense. Self-evident.

NORM: Right.

DICK: And that's true regardless of one's political leanings.

NORM: Makes absolutely no difference at all.

DICK: Whether you come at it from the left or the right.

NORM: No.

DICK: Or whatever political perspective. I mean, your organization, the CASS, is considered by many, to be, well, rather conservative, is it not?

NORM: We think of ourselves as centrist, actually.

DICK: But more center right, then left, right?

NORM: It really depends on the issue, Dick. We try to take a pragmatic approach.

DICK: Common sense, as opposed to ideology.

NORM: Frankly, Dick, I think these distinctions are somewhat less than helpful at this point.

DICK: Really?

NORM: Yes, I think we've moved beyond them.

DICK: Beyond the traditional ideological labels?

NORM: Except in the most superficial sense.

DICK: I guess they don't really mean much, do they? Beyond the horse race. The competition.

NORM: Now, that's not to say there's no daylight at all.

DICK: Between the parties?

NORM: Right. I mean, there *are* still those issues where we *do* disagree. I wouldn't want your viewers to get the wrong impression.

It's essential that we still maintain the two parties.
The two points of view. You know what I mean.

DICK: Conservative and Liberal.

NORM: Left and Right.

DICK: So folks can identify, with one or the other,
and root for their party.

NORM: Absolutely.

I mean, it wouldn't be much of a democracy, would it,
if there were just one party, with no opposition?

DICK: True.

NORM: Or, you know, if there were still the two
parties,
but the difference between them was virtually
cosmetic—

DICK: Because they all represented the same big
interests.

NORM: Right. Rather than the people themselves.

DICK: Like they do. In reality.

NORM: In America. Right.

DICK: Thank God.

NORM: Yes, thank God, Dick.

DICK: So American democracy is alive and well then?

NORM: No question, Dick. No doubt about it.

No, America may have its problems.

But it's still the most powerful democracy on earth.

DICK: Regardless of whatever minor disagreements
or differences of opinion between the two parties.

NORM:

No, on the contrary, it's precisely those differences
that keep our democracy flourishing, Dick.

I mean, look at the Senate. Look at the House.

There's real democratic debate going on.
 O K, so they all play golf together
 and they all raise money from the same corporations.
 But that doesn't mean there isn't real opposition—

DICK: On social policy. Abortion. Race.
 Immigration. That kind of thing.

NORM: Yes. It's just that all those other issues,
 important though they are, pale in comparison
 and become irrelevant—

DICK: In comparison to the threat.

NORM: Exactly, Dick. And rightfully so.
 I mean, that's the beauty and strength of our
 democracy.

We can fight all day over the little things,
 healthcare, education and all,
 but, you know, when the chips are really down,
 we come together, to face, well,
 whatever it is we happen to be facing.

DICK: And that's true of any democracy, isn't it?

NORM: Yes, it is. It's a hallmark, actually.
 You see it throughout history. Rome, for example.
 And you see it now. Around this issue.
 Throughout the world. There's no real dissent.
 The world is united. It's marching in lockstep.
 It's quite historic, when you think about it.
 All of the major democracies in the world
 working together, like one big machine,
 to face this enemy—

DICK: Extremism.

NORM: Yes.

DICK:
 It's in all of our interests, is the point you're making.
 What with global markets and communications—

NORM: Yes, it's one big global network now.
One seamless system. There's no escape.
It's finally, truly, the Age of Democracy.

DICK: That's quite a statement.

NORM: We are on the brink.
All the dominoes are falling our way.

DICK: Except for the extremists.

NORM: Except for the extremists.

DICK: This is what you mean by the "final threat."
The final threat to a democratic world,
united, at last, under a single system,
with no remaining outside opposition.

NORM: That's the vision. That's the dream.

DICK: Democracy reigning unopposed.

NORM: Throughout the world. For a thousand years.
It's so close, Dick. I don't think people realize
how close we are to achieving that dream.

DICK: This is the focus of the first half of your book.
This moment of danger on the brink of victory.
This last desperate gasp of resistance,
which has no chance of succeeding, you propose.

NORM: No, not in the long run. No.
The writing is on the wall, Dick.

DICK: It's destiny then.

NORM: Destiny. Right.
Democracy is destiny. Always was.
Always will be.

DICK: Beautiful vision.

NORM: To us, yes. To freedom-loving people.

DICK: But not to the extremists?

NORM: No. On the contrary.
They're terrified of it.

DICK: Of democracy?

NORM: Yes.
These folks are not blind. They see what's coming.
They know it signals the end for them.

DICK: Their power, values—

NORM: Their whole way of life.

DICK: Fundamentalism?

NORM: Radicalism.
Opposition. In all its forms.

DICK: But not dissent, or peaceful protest.

NORM: No, of course not. Dissent is fine.
People can protest till they're blue in the face,
blow off steam, get it out of their systems,
express their opinions—

DICK: But that's different, right?
Because it poses no threat.

NORM: No, it's completely harmless.

DICK: It has absolutely no potential
to threaten the system or change anything.

NORM: No. Just the opposite, in fact.
Symbolic protest, self-expression,
walking around all day with signs,
chanting slogans...that empowers people.

DICK: And it's pretty good cardiovascular exercise.

NORM: Sure, marching, working those puppets—

DICK: Aren't those great, those giant puppets?

NORM: Some of those protesters are real artists.

DICK: But again, they pose no tangible threat.

NORM: No. Those things are like concerts, Dick.
They set up stages. There are speeches, music.
Folks make a day of it, bring the kids.
You march around town for a couple hours,
go home, look for yourself on the news.
Come Monday morning, it's back to work.

DICK: Which, I guess, brings us back to violence then,
back to the willingness to use violence.

NORM: That's what's really at the core of it, Dick.
That is what's absolutely unacceptable.

DICK: The whole idea of using violence,
sabotage, these guerilla tactics.

NORM: Or even just putting the question out there.

DICK: I'm not sure I follow.

NORM: See, that's how it starts.
They put these questions out there, you know,
as if they merited consideration.

DICK: Rather than there being a foregone conclusion.

NORM: It conflates the two opposing sides.

DICK: As if there were actually something to discuss.

NORM: Right.

DICK: Which there isn't.

NORM: No, of course not.
Their goal is not to *answer* the question.
Their goal is to get the question out there.

DICK: Out there into people's minds,
to get them thinking.

NORM: To *frame* their thinking.

DICK: According to the terms of the question posed.

NORM: Sure, because once you admit the question, once you allow it to enter your mind, see, they've got you.

DICK: The extremists.

NORM: Yes.
They've sucked you into their twisted logic.

DICK: They have?

NORM: Sure.

DICK: Because you're asking their question?

NORM: You're doubting yourself. You're getting confused.

DICK: You're thinking too much.

NORM: You're over-thinking.
You're complicating something essentially simple.

DICK: For example?

NORM: Well, O K, for example, you might start looking back at history and, you know, asking yourself, "What government, or system, was ever fundamentally changed by anything *other* than violence, ever?"

DICK: Wow. That *is* a dangerous question.

NORM: That's why we don't even want to formulate it, Dick. We don't even want to put it into words.

DICK: Because we'd just be playing into their hands, you mean, opening up a Pandora's Box?

NORM: We'd be opening up a whole can of worms.

DICK: Letting the genie out of the bottle.

NORM: That's right, Dick. And as we all know,
once you let that genie out,
you're never going to get it back in there, are you?

DICK: No.

NORM: No. And then they've got you.
You're lost in their game. Your head starts going.

DICK:
You start thinking all these complicated thoughts,
asking questions that lead you nowhere.

NORM: Right, they just lead you around in circles,
round and round, round and round,
until your head is so full of all these ideas
you can't tell your ass from a hole in the ground.

DICK: So the goal is, don't let the genie out.
Never open that can of worms.

NORM: Keep things simple. Stick to the facts.

DICK: O K. Good. So...what are the facts?