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### Dick Lehr Profile

Sitting in a small office speaking in subdued tones with a student, Professor Dick Lehr showed no indication that his new book, *White Hot Hate*, had been released only fourteen hours earlier.

An author of eight works of nonfiction and one young adult novel, Lehr worked at the *Boston Globe* from 1985-2003 as a member of the Spotlight investigative reporting team. *Black Mass*, the book he co-authored with fellow *Globe* reporter Gerard O'Neill, was adapted for film in 2015 starring Johnny Depp. In 2003, Lehr began teaching journalism at Boston University.

"I've always, I think, gravitated to in-depth stuff involving criminal justice, the courts. That's the kind of journalism that I find most satisfying," said Lehr.

Mitchell Zuckoff was on the Spotlight team, co-wrote *Judgment Ridge* with Lehr, and now works at BU alongside him. "Dick Lehr is one of the most remarkable journalists I've ever encountered," said Zuckoff.

*White Hot Hate*, published by Houghton Mifflin on November 30, follows the actions of a small militia group in Kansas, their plans to bomb an apartment building, and Dan Day, the Kansan who infiltrated them.

The FBI became aware of the militia group's plan when Day, a civilian, contacted them with concerns that some members may become violent. Agents Amy Kuhn and Robin Smith recruited Day as an informant, and he began secretly recording phone calls and meetings of the group.

Lehr discovered the subject matter when his neighbor came over, saying he had some guests Lehr should meet. One of those guests was Day. "Right away, I realized, this is a book. It took time, but Dan Day was ready to tell his story for the first time," said Lehr.

Since the 9/11 attacks by terrorist group al-Qaeda, the U.S. government and citizens have focused on the threat of terrorism, specifically from Middle Eastern extremist groups. This fear has incited a generalized hatred, especially in rural communities, for Muslims.

"I think domestic terrorism is becoming a greater and greater issue," said Joseph Wippl, International Relations professor at Boston University.

According to the FBI Department of Homeland Security, approximately 229 people were charged with domestic terrorism in 2016. The law differentiates domestic terrorism from international terrorism as an act of violence that is planned and executed primarily within U.S. borders.

A major challenge for American authorities in the future will be "to infiltrate these groups and to make sure they cannot engage in any violent activity," said Wippl.

The apartment complex where the attack was planned housed mainly Somalian refugees looking for work in the nearby slaughterhouse. According to a 2015 study by Pew Research

Center, about 7% of the world's Somali migrant population lives in the U.S., making it the fourth most popular destination for Somalian refugees.

Lehr said that his book helps people understand “what's in the mix when these types of people get together. They really see Somali immigrants and refugees, every one of them, as ISIS or something, and they have to be killed.”

Another focus of the book, besides domestic terrorism, is the cultural importance of guns in the U.S. Firearms are omnipresent within the militia group, and one scene at a cookout describes Day telling a man off for being reckless with a loaded firearm.

“A lot of people are into this culture of guns and weapons who would never engage in any kind of violence towards anything,” said Wippl.

The difference between Day and the men he exposed, according to Lehr, is his upbringing. “Dan loves guns, too, but he attributes it to his father. His father drilled into him gun responsibility and gun safety and a perspective about guns,” said Lehr.

Lehr was in a good place to begin the writing process when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, but if he had been any earlier in development, he may have had to wait to begin work. “I needed to interview people and develop relationships, and I wouldn't have been able to do that,” said Lehr.

While working at the *Hartford Courant* in 1979, Lehr covered a trial while the *Courant's* court reporter was on vacation. Legal languages and procedure were foreign to him: “I didn't like that feeling of being overwhelmed and incompetent,” said Lehr.

The *Courant* had a continuing education benefit, which he took advantage of by getting his Juris Doctor in Law from the University of Connecticut. This education had “a huge impact on where my journalism career and interest went,” said Lehr.

Lehr’s career has focused largely on stories based out of New England and Boston, such as the police beating of Michael Cox and the Dartmouth Murders. He was working on the *Globe*’s Spotlight team when they revealed that crime boss Whitey Bulger was working with the Boston FBI as an informant.

“It was 1988, and at the time, in real time, Whitey Bulger was really active, he was the most powerful gangster,” Lehr said.

Lehr’s work on the Spotlight team introduced him to both O’Neill and Zuckoff. “When it came to writing a book with each one of those guys, we knew the partnership worked,” said Lehr.

“I know I felt like he was the only person I could co-write a book with. I would never even consider anybody else,” said Zuckoff. He and Lehr met in 1985 in Providence, RI while covering the same trial, Zuckoff for the *Associated Press* and Lehr for the *Globe*.

O’Neill died in 2019, but he and Lehr made a cameo in the *Black Mass* film. “I’ve come to realize that if you’re going to let someone, a director, adapt a book into a film, you really got to let it go,” said Lehr.

Lehr decided to make the transition to BU from the *Globe* because of his passion for writing books. He taught as an adjunct professor for a semester at Emerson College prior to taking a position at BU, and knew he enjoyed teaching.

“There are reporters who are good reporters. And then there are some who are good writers. Dick is both,” Zuckoff said.

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