

Summary of Eric Hoffer's, The True Believer September 4, Book Reviews - Politics, Politics - Tyranny John Messerly " Hatred is the most accessible and comprehensive of all the unifying agents .

Hoffer begins his book by recognizing that all mass movements have much in common: This book deals with some peculiarities common to all mass movements, be they religious movements, social revolutions or nationalist movements. It does not maintain that all movements are data call, but that they share certain essential care to restrict which give them a family likeness. There is more to the similarities, according to Hoffer. There is in us a tendency to locate the shaping forces of our existence outside ourselves. Other factors have to be present before discontent turns into disaffection. One of these is a sense of power. Fear of the future causes us to lean against and cling to the present, while faith in the future renders us receptive to change. The burning conviction that we have a holy duty toward others is often a way of attaching our drowning selves to a passing raft. What looks like giving a hand is often a holding on for dear life. Take away our holy duties and you leave our lives puny and meaningless. There is no doubt that in exchanging a self-centered for a selfless life we gain enormously in self-esteem. The vanity of the selfless, even those who practice utmost humility, is boundless. All mass movements are interchangeable. Poverty when coupled with creativeness is usually free of frustration. The sardonic remark that patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels has also a less derogatory meaning. Fervent patriotism as well as religious and revolutionary enthusiasm often serves as a refuge from a guilty conscience. It is a strange thing that both the injurer and the injured, the sinner and he who is sinned against, should find in the mass movement an escape from a blemished life. To our real naked selves there is not a thing on earth or in heaven worth dying for. It is only when we see ourselves as actors in a staged and therefore unreal performance that death loses its frightful mess and finality and becomes an act of make-believe in a theatrical gesture. It is one of the main tasks of a real leader to mask the grim reality of dying and killing by evoking in his followers the illusion that they are participating in a grandiose spectacle, a solemn or lighthearted dramatic performance. He cannot generate self-assurance out of his individual resources-out of his project itself-but finds it only by clinging passionately to whatever support he happens to embrace. It is the fanatic and the moderate who are poles apart and never meet. But they are neighbors and almost of one family.

Chapter 2 : Eric Hoffer: The True Believer - The Good Men Project

The True Believer: Thoughts On The Nature Of Mass Movements is a social psychology book by American writer Eric Hoffer, in which the author discusses the psychological causes of fanaticism.

Summary[edit] Part 1. The Appeal of Mass Movements[edit] Hoffer states that mass movements begin with a widespread "desire for change" from discontented people who place their locus of control outside their power and who also have no confidence in existing culture or traditions. Feeling their lives are "irredeemably spoiled" and believing there is no hope for advancement or satisfaction as an individual, true believers seek "self-renunciation". While mass movements are usually some blend of nationalist, political and religious ideas, Hoffer argues there are two important commonalities: Examples include the mass evictions of relatively prosperous tenants during the English Civil War of the s or the middle- and working-classes in Germany who passionately supported Hitler in the s after suffering years of economic hardship. In contrast, the "abjectly poor" on the verge of starvation make unlikely true believers as their daily struggle for existence takes pre-eminence over any other concern. Those who live traditionalist lifestyles tend to be content, but the partially assimilated feel alienated from both their forbearers and the mainstream culture "the orthodox Jew is less frustrated than the emancipated Jew" [4]. A variety of what Hoffer terms "misfits" are also found in mass movements. Examples include "chronically bored", the physically disabled or perpetually ill, the talentless, and criminals or "sinners". In all cases, Hoffer argues, these people feel as if their individual lives are meaningless and worthless. Mass movements demand a "total surrender of a distinct self". Hoffer identifies this communal sensibility as the reappearance of a "primitive state of being" common among pre-modern cultures. While mass movements idealize the past and glorify the future, the present world is denigrated: Mass movements aggressively promote the use of doctrines that elevate faith over reason and serve as "fact-proof screens between the faithful and the realities of the world". Examples include the Japanese holdouts , who refused to believe that the Second World War was over, or the staunch defenders of the Soviet Union , who rejected overwhelming evidence of Bolshevik atrocities. To spread and reinforce their doctrine, mass movements use persuasion, coercion, and proselytization. Persuasion is preferable but practical only with those already sympathetic to the mass movement. Moreover, persuasion must be thrilling enough to excite the listener yet vague enough to allow "the frustrated to Hatred unifies the true believers, and "the ideal devil is a foreigner" attributed with nearly supernatural powers of evil. The hatred of a true believer is actually a disguised self-loathing, as with the condemnation of capitalism by socialists while Russia under the Bolsheviks saw more intensive monopolization of the economy than any other nation in history. Without a devil to hate, mass movements often falter for example, Chiang Kai-shek effectively led millions of Chinese during the Japanese occupation of the s and the s but quickly fell out of favor once the Japanese were defeated. Fanaticism is encouraged in mass movements. Hoffer argues that "the fanatic is perpetually incomplete and insecure" [15] and thus uses uncompromising action and personal sacrifice to give meaning to his life. Beginning and End[edit] Hoffer identifies three main personality types as the leaders of mass movements, "men of words", "fanatics", and "practical men of action". No person falls exclusively into one category, and their predominant quality may shift over time. Mass movements begin with "men of words" or "fault-finding intellectuals" such as clergy, journalists, academics, and students who condemn the established social order such as Gandhi , Trotsky , Mohammed , and Lenin. The men of words feel unjustly excluded from or mocked and oppressed by the existing powers in society, and they relentlessly criticize or denigrate present institutions. Invariably speaking out in the name of disadvantaged commoners, the man of words is actually motivated by a deep personal grievance. The man of words relentlessly attempts to "discredit the prevailing creeds" and creates a "hunger for faith" which is then fed by "doctrines and slogans of the new faith". Eventually, the fanatic takes over leadership of the mass movement from the man of words. While the "creative man of words" finds satisfaction in his literature, philosophy or art, the "noncreative man of words" feels unrecognized or stifled and thus veers into an extremism against the social order. Though the man of words and the fanatic share a discontent with the world, the fanatic is distinguished by his viciousness and

urge to destroy. The fanatic feels fulfilled only in a perpetual struggle for power and change. The book also explores the behavior of mass movements once they become established as social institutions or leave the "active phase". With their collapse of a communal framework, people can no longer defeat their abiding feelings of insecurity and uncertainty by belonging to a compact whole. If the isolated individual lacks opportunities for personal advancement, development of talents, and action such as those found on a frontier, he will seek substitutes. The substitutes would be pride instead of self-confidence, memberships in a collective whole like a mass movement, absolute certainty instead of understanding. The movement at this stage still concerns itself with the frustrated "not to harness their discontent in a deadly struggle with the present, but to reconcile them with it; to make them patient and meek. Leadership uses an eclectic bricolage of ideological scraps to reinforce the doctrine, borrowing from whatever source is successful in holding the attention of true believers. For example, proto-Christians were fanatics, predicting the end of the world, condemning idolatry, demanding celibacy and sowing discontent between family members, yet from those roots grew Roman Catholicism, which mimicked the elaborate bureaucratic structure of the Roman Empire, canonized early Christians as saints, and borrowed pagan holidays and rites. Mass movements that succeed in causing radical change often exceed in brutality the former regime that the mass movement opposed. The Bolsheviks in Russia and the Jacobins in France ostensibly formed in reaction to the oppression of their respective monarchies but proved themselves far more vicious and brutal in oppressing their opponents. Hoffer does not take an exclusively negative view of "true believers" and the mass movements they begin. He gives examples of how the same forces that give rise to true believer mass movements can be channelled in more positive ways: There are, of course, rare leaders such as Lincoln, Gandhi, even F. They know that no one can be honorable unless he honors mankind". Mass movements with a specific goal tend to be shorter-lived and feature less terror and bloodshed such as the American Revolution. In contrast, an amorphous goal tends to result in a longer active phase of decades rather than months or years and also include substantially more bloodshed such as the Bolsheviks in Russia, National Socialism in Germany. In either case, Hoffer suggests that mass movements are accompanied by a dearth of creative innovation because so much energy is devoted to the mass movement. For example, in England, John Milton began a draft of his epic poem Paradise Lost in the 1630s before turning his literary talents to pamphleteering for the Commonwealth of England, only to finish the poem and his other major works after a change in government in 1660. Reception [edit] U. President Dwight Eisenhower read The True Believer in 1954, gave copies to friends, and recommended it to others. Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements. Harper Perennial Modern Classics.

Chapter 3 : Eric Hoffer - Christoph's Personal Wiki

Back in , Eric Hoffer wrote a brilliant book called The True Believer.. From the intro, here's what it's designed to explain: "This book deals with some of the peculiarities common to all mass movements, be they religious movements, social revolutions, or national movements.

His first book, *The True Believer*, published in , was widely recognized as a classic, receiving critical acclaim from both scholars and laymen, although Hoffer believed that his book *The Ordeal of Change* was his finest work. In , the Eric Hoffer Award was established in his honor with permission granted by the Eric Hoffer Estate in . By the age of five, he could read in both German and English. When Eric Hoffer was an American social writer and philosopher. When he was age five, his mother fell down a flight of stairs with Eric in her arms. Hoffer went blind for unknown medical reasons two years later, but later in life he said he thought it might have been due to trauma. Two years before, my mother and I fell down a flight of stairs. She did not recover and died in that second year after the fall. I lost my sight and for a time my memory". His eyesight inexplicably returned when he was . Fearing he would again go blind, he seized upon the opportunity to read as much as he could for as long as he could. His eyesight remained, and Hoffer never abandoned his habit of voracious reading. Hoffer was a young man when his father, a cabinetmaker, died. Sensing that warm Los Angeles was the best place for a poor man, Hoffer took a bus there in . On one such job, selling oranges door-to-door, he discovered he was a natural salesman and could easily make good money. Uncomfortable with this discovery, he quit after one day. In , he attempted suicide by drinking a solution of oxalic acid, but the attempt failed as he could not bring himself to swallow the poison. The experience gave him a new determination to live adventurously. It was then he left skid row and became a migrant worker. Following the harvests along the length of California, he collected library cards for each town near the fields where he worked and, living by preference, "between the books and the brothels. Snowed in for the winter, he read the *Essays* by Michel de Montaigne. He attempted to enlist in the Armed forces there in but was rejected because of a hernia. Wanting to contribute to the war effort, he found ample opportunity as a longshoreman on the docks of The Embarcadero. It was there he felt at home and finally settled down. He continued reading voraciously and soon began to write while earning a living loading and unloading ships. He continued this work until he retired at age . Hoffer considered his best work to be *The True Believer*, a landmark explanation of fanaticism and mass movements. *The Ordeal of Change* is also a literary favorite. Despite authoring 10 books and a newspaper column, in retirement Hoffer continued his robust life of the mind, thinking and writing alone, in an apartmen

Chapter 4 : Eric Hoffer - Wikipedia

Eric Hoffer was a San Francisco longshoreman who self-educated and left behind "The True Believer," an astonishingly insightful examination of the phenomenon of mass movements. Hoffer wrote the book in , when two of the most malignant mass movements in human history, those that produced the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, sprung up, and the.

Quotes There is no doubt that in exchanging a self-centered for a selfless life we gain enormously in self-esteem. The vanity of the selfless, even those who practice utmost humility, is boundless. When hopes and dreams are loose on the streets, it is well for the timid to lock doors, shutter windows, and lie low until the wrath has passed. For there is often a monstrous incongruity between the hopes, however noble and tender, and the action which follows them. Though ours is a Godless age, it is the very opposite of irreligious. The true believer is everywhere on the march, and both by converting and antagonizing he is shaping the world in his own image. Whether we line up with him or against him, it is well we should know all we can concerning his nature and potentialities. The True Believer Chapter 2 The Desire For Substitutes There is a fundamental difference between the appeal of a mass movement and the appeal of a practical organization. The practical organization offers opportunities for self-advancement, and its appeal is mainly to self-interest. On the other hand, a mass movement, particularly in its active, revivalist phase, appeals not to those intent on bolstering and advancing a cherished self, but to those who crave to be rid of an unwanted self. A mass movement attracts and holds a following not because it can satisfy the desire for self-advancement, but because it can satisfy the passion for self-renunciation. Of what avail is freedom to choose if the self be ineffectual? We join a mass movement to escape individual responsibility, or, in the words of the ardent young Nazi, "to be free from freedom. Where equality is real, freedom is the passion of a small minority. Section 29, The True Believer Failure in the management of practical affairs seems to be a qualification for success in the management of public affairs. Section 54, The True Believer It is startling to realize how much unbelief is necessary to make belief possible. What we know as blind faith is sustained by innumerable unbeliefs. Section 56, The True Believer The urge to escape our real self is also an urge to escape the rational and the obvious. The refusal to see ourselves as we are develops a distaste for facts and cold logic. There is no hope for the frustrated in the actual and the possible. Salvation can come to them only from the miraculous, which seeps through a crack in the iron wall of inexorable reality. They ask to be deceived. What Stresemann said of the Germans is true of the frustrated in general: They are easily persuaded and led. Section 59, The True Believer The opposite of the religious fanatic is not the fanatical atheist but the gentle cynic who cares not whether there is a god or not. Section 62, The True Believer Mass movements can rise and spread without belief in a God, but never without belief in a devil. Section 65, The True Believer Self-righteousness is a loud din raised to drown the voice of guilt within us. Section 69, The True Believer Passionate hatred can give meaning and purpose to an empty life. Thus people haunted by the purposelessness of their lives try to find a new content not only by dedicating themselves to a holy cause but also by nursing a fanatical grievance. A mass movement offers them unlimited opportunities for both. Section 75, The True Believer The frustrated follow a leader less because of their faith that he is leading them to a promised land than because of their immediate feeling that he is leading them away from their unwanted selves. Surrender to a leader is not a means to an end but a fulfillment. Whither they are led is of secondary importance. Section 94, The True Believer The awareness of their individual blemishes and shortcomings inclines the frustrated to detect ill will and meanness in their fellow men. Self-contempt, however vague, sharpens our eyes for the imperfections of others. We usually strive to reveal in others the blemishes we hide in ourselves. Section , The True Believer Collective unity is not the result of the brotherly love of the faithful for each other. The loyalty of the true believer is to the wholeâ€”the church, party, nationâ€”and not to his fellow true believer. True loyalty between individuals is possible only in a loose and relatively free society. Section , The True Believer The significant point is that people unfit for freedom--who cannot do much with it--are hungry for power. If Hitler had had the talents and the temperament of a genuine artist, if Stalin had had the capacity to become a first-rate theoretician, if

Napoleon had had the makings of a great poet or philosopher they would hardly have developed the all-consuming lust for absolute power. Freedom gives us a chance to realize our human and individual uniqueness. Absolute power can also bestow uniqueness: Absolute power achieves uniqueness by dehumanizing others. Those who lack the capacity to achieve much in an atmosphere of freedom will clamor for power. Working and Thinking on the Waterfront, March 28, There is in even the most selfish passion a large element of self-abnegation. It is startling to realize that what we call extreme self-seeking is actually self-renunciation. The miser, health addict, glory chaser and their like are not far behind the selfless in the exercise of self-sacrifice. But it is perhaps equally important to realize that weakness, too, corrupts. Power corrupts the few, while weakness corrupts the many. Hatred, malice, rudeness, intolerance, and suspicion are the faults of weakness. The resentment of the weak does not spring from any injustice done to them but from the sense of inadequacy and impotence. We cannot win the weak by sharing our wealth with them. They feel our generosity as oppression. Vincent De Paul cautioned his disciples to deport themselves so that the poor "will forgive them the bread you give them. There may even be a certain antagonism between love of humanity and love of neighbor; a low capacity for getting along with those near us often goes hand in hand with a high receptivity to the idea of the brotherhood of men. About a hundred years ago a Russian landowner by the name of Petrashevsky recorded a remarkable conclusion: The end of the experiment was sad, but what one might perhaps have expected: Some of the worst tyrannies of our day genuinely are "vowed" to the service of mankind, yet can function only by pitting neighbor against neighbor. The all-seeing eye of a totalitarian regime is usually the watchful eye of the next-door neighbor. In a Communist state love of neighbor may be classed as counter-revolutionary. To some extent, the present dominant role of the intellectual in the modernization of backward countries also militates against the prevalence of individual freedom. The intellectual "transforms the prosaic achievements of society into Promethean tasks, glorious defeats, tragic epics. The chances are that should an advanced country come into the keeping of the intellectual it would begin to show many of the hectic traits which seem to us characteristic of a backward country in the throes of awakening. It has neither accorded him a superior status to sustain his confidence nor made it easy for him to acquire an unquestioned sense of social usefulness. Any social order that can function with a minimum of leadership will be anathema to the intellectual. The intellectual craves a social order in which uncommon people perform uncommon tasks every day. He wants a society throbbing with dedication, reverence, and worship. He sees it as scandalous that the discoveries of science and the feats of heroes should have as their denouement the comfort and affluence of common folk. A social order run by and for the people is to him a mindless organism motivated by sheer physiologism. Harcourt Brace, , p. This army of scribes is clamoring for a society in which planning, regulation, and supervision are paramount and the prerogative of the educated. There is little doubt that the present trend in the new and renovated countries toward social regimentation stems partly from the need to create adequate employment for a large number of scribes. And since the tempo of the production of the literate is continually increasing, the prospect is of ever-swelling bureaucracies. Actually, it is the ability to give scope to the untalented that is most vital in maintaining social stability. For not only are the untalented more numerous but, since they cannot transmute their grievances into a creative effort, their disaffection will be more pronounced and explosive. Thus the most troublesome problem which confronts social engineering is how to provide for the untalented and, what is equally important, how to provide against them. For there is a tendency in the untalented to divert their energies from their own development into the management, manipulation, and probably frustration of others. They want to police, instruct, guide, and meddle. In an adequate social order, the untalented should be able to acquire a sense of usefulness and of growth without interfering with the development of talent around them. This requires, first, an abundance of opportunities for purposeful action and self advancement. Secondly, a wide diffusion of technical and social skills so that people will be able to work and manage their affairs with a minimum of tutelage. The scribe mentality is best neutralized by canalizing energies into purposeful and useful pursuits, and by raising the cultural level of the whole population so as to blur the dividing line between the educated and the uneducated. If such an arrangement lacks provisions for the encouragement of the talented it yet has the merit of not interfering with them. The corruption inherent in absolute power derives

from the fact that such power is never free from the tendency to turn man into a thing, and press him back into the matrix of nature from which he has risen. For the impulse of power is to turn every variable into a constant, and give to commands the inexorableness and relentlessness of laws of nature. Hence absolute power corrupts even when exercised for humane purposes. The benevolent despot who sees himself as a shepherd of the people still demands from others the submissiveness of sheep. The taint inherent in absolute power is not its inhumanity but its antihumanity. Their sublime deeds of faith, daring, and self-sacrifice usually spring from questionable motives. The weak hate not wickedness but weakness; and one instance of their hatred of weakness is hatred of self. All the passionate pursuits of the weak are in some degree a striving to escape, blur, or disguise an unwanted self. It is a striving shot through with malice, envy, self-deception, and a host of petty impulses; yet it often culminates in superb achievements. Thus we find that people who fail in everyday affairs often show a tendency to reach out for the impossible. They become responsive to grandiose schemes, and will display unequalled steadfastness, formidable energies and a special fitness in the performance of tasks which would stump superior people. It seems paradoxical that defeat in dealing with the possible should embolden people to attempt the impossible, but a familiarity with the mentality of the weak reveals that what seems a path of daring is actually an easy way out: It is to escape the responsibility for failure that the weak so eagerly throw themselves into grandiose undertakings. For when we fail in attaining the possible the blame is solely ours, but when we fail in attaining the impossible we are justified in attributing it to the magnitude of the task. There is never free from the tendency to turn man into a thing, and press him back into the matrix of nature from which he has risen.

Second Book Summary: The True Believer was written over 60 years ago, but it is still frighteningly relevant and accurate today. From Christianity to National Socialism, Eric Hoffer shows how all mass movements are similar.

A genuine one emerged at last--with a philosophical cast very different from what a proletarian was supposed to think. The literary shock could hardly have been greater. The required combination of brevity and profundity is exceptionally hard to maintain, in fact most authors only toss off a few good ones in their entire career. But interestingly enough, Eric Hoffer, a self educated field hand and longshoreman, is more than a match for him. There are so many quotable passages in this little book that you can seriously open to just about any page and find a sentence that will stop you in your tracks and make you ponder its implications. It is in no way possible to address all the ideas that he broaches, so let me just try a couple. Perhaps the most important insight in the book--and it is very hard to settle on just one--is that the members of mass movements, who ostensibly seek to better the lot of all mankind, are motivated not by altruism but by selfishness. They join such movements not because they believe in any particular ideals or goals but because they do not believe in themselves: Unless a man has the talents to make something of himself, freedom is an irksome burden. They considered themselves cheated and maligned when made to shoulder responsibility for obeying orders. Had they not joined the Nazi movement in order to be free from responsibility? With these startling thoughts, Eric Hoffer, one of the very proletarians for whom activist intellectuals always claim to be fighting, stood conventional wisdom on its collective head and threw down a challenge which has never been adequately answered. Traditionally folks have been willing to forgive coercive utopians for the catastrophic harm they have done to society because it was felt: Sure the Party was funded by Moscow and served Soviet ends and, of course, we realize now that Communism was not quite as beneficial to the workers of the world as it was supposed to be, but surely we can all agree that their motivations were noble, that they were thinking only of the downtrodden, right? Hoffer exploded that myth and forced us to consider that they were driven by feelings of personal inadequacy and the desire to tear others down. In fairness to Hoffer, let it be noted that he applied this logic to all mass movements, including Christianity, not just to Communism or Nazism. In addition, he differentiated amongst such movements, believing some to be more beneficial in the long term than others: The manner in which a mass movement starts out can also have an effect on the duration and mode of termination of the active phase of the movement. When we see the Reformation, the Puritan, American and French revolutions and many nationalist uprisings terminate, after a relatively short active phase, in a social order marked by increased individual liberty, we are witnessing the realization of moods and examples which characterized the earliest days of the movements. All of them started by defying and overthrowing a long-established authority. The more clear-cut this initial act of defiance and the more vivid its memory in the minds of the people, the more likely is the eventual emergence of individual liberty. Of course, this really boils down to the fact that those movements which had freedom as their ultimate goal were more likely than others to arrive there. For this reason, the French Revolution does not actually belong in this category, but serves to prove the point. It was less about liberty and more about equality, or at least placed equal emphasis on the two; but history has shown these to be incompatible goals and that, contrary to the kind of Rousseauian ideals of the French, equality does not occur naturally, and can only be imposed by government force. Thus, the French Revolution was fated to end in the Terror, while the American Revolution was destined to end in libertarian democracy. For Hoffer though, as I would assume for the rest of us these days, the free, or autonomous, man is real hero of society. Though activists of all ideological stripes tend to dismiss them as complacent and unmotivated, even characterless: Free men are aware of the imperfection inherent in human affairs, and they are willing to fight and die for that which is not perfect. They know that basic human problems can have no final solutions, that our freedom, justice, equality, etc. The rejection of approximations and the insistence on absolutes are the manifestation of a nihilism that loathes freedom, tolerance, and equity. But as experience has shown, at great cost in human life, the adherents of mass movements, cloaked though they are in the language of selflessness, are, as Hoffer says, all too eager to trade

the burden of freedom for the comfort of equality, however brutally attained and maintained. Though this insight has taken hold in the intervening fifty years, as academic Marxism, with its emphasis on economics, has been put to flight, Hoffer seems now to be largely forgotten. This seems to be partly a function of his own personality--worldly success made him uncomfortable, so he did not capitalize on his temporary fame as others might have. But it is undoubtedly also a function of the challenge his ideas pose to the academic Left. The intellectuals and the young, booted and spurred, feel themselves born to ride us. Of course, he never considered himself a professional philosopher, returning always to life as a longshoreman. This book is required reading for anyone trying to make sense of the 20th Century, and, unfortunately, will likely remain pertinent in the 21st. It is concise, lively, and thought provoking, a book you will return to again and again.

Chapter 6 : The True Believer by Eric Hoffer Summary & PDF: Top 10 Lessons

It is hard to believe Eric Hoffer's 'The True Believer' was published 50 years ago this year. It is a penetrating study of fanatics and mass movements. I pulled it out after September 11th and am rereading it.

Why do people join mass movements like Communism, Nationalism and Fascism? Why do people march in the streets for social, political and religious movements? Why do millions of people sometimes decide to follow a single leader fanatically? People wanted to understand why these movements sprang up and gripped millions of people, often with horrific results like the Holocaust. So why should you read this summary? Well, best-selling author Simon Sinek says: This will help you stand out in your career, manage a team and even create marketing that inspires people to buy your product and spread your message for you. Under the surface, all mass movements are driven by the same emotions, frustrations and motivations. But Eric Hoffer says that all big movements follow the same human patterns. This means under the surface all people who join mass movements have similar motivations. As we take a deeper look at why people join mass movements, you will start to see how they are similar. Hundreds of years ago, most of the big movements were religious. About a thousand years ago, the Pope was considered the most powerful person in Europe and probably the world. Later the movements became more nationalistic and social, and these movements were often good. Understand why people join one mass movement and you will understand why people join any mass movement. You will soon understand better how to motivate people to join your own teams and causes. People join mass movements to escape a powerless individual self. Why do people join mass movements? When someone feels frustrated and out of control of their life, they usually blame their surroundings. People blame things outside of themselves for their sad position in life. When people feel individually impotent, they want to join a mass movement or holy cause so they can feel they have some power in the world again. Someone who feels fulfilled and effective wants the world to mostly to stay the same or improve slowly. Most importantly, they believe they have the power to achieve their goals and improve their life through individual effort. Unless a man has the talents to make something of himself, freedom is an irksome burden. Of what avail is freedom to choose if the self be ineffectual? They are eager to barter their independence for relief from the burdens of willing, deciding and being responsible for inevitable failure. When people feel powerless and frustrated, the freedom they deeply ache for is a freedom from individual responsibility. Obeying orders and surrendering to a powerful leader feels like a relief to these people. Like taking a heavy load off their shoulders. This is our first glimpse into the mind of someone who joins a mass movement. Alone, they feel vulnerable and undefended against the dangers of life. At best, their life feels meaningless, like endless consumption and chasing pleasure. Now they have a direction. Now they feel part of something bigger than themselves. And best of all, they are not personally responsible if the movement fails, which lets them avoid feeling not good enough again. Their sense of self is safe now because it is lost inside the larger movement. As Eric Hoffer says: The desire to belong is partly a desire to lose oneself. Because they had joined the Nazi movement to be free from individual responsibility. Now they felt cheated when asked to accept responsibility for what they had done when obeying orders. Keep an eye out for groups of people who have lost faith in their own power to shape the world. These people will be the most willing to join a mass movement because they want to lose their powerless self. They want to follow orders and be free from the burden of personal decisions and blame. When we think of someone who feels powerless and frustrated, we usually imagine a poor person. We imagine someone living in poverty scared they will not have enough money to feed their kids next week. But Eric Hoffer says truly poor people do not often join mass movements. When you are really poor, then your life is energized with purpose. Let me explain: When someone is struggling every day to get food and shelter, then every small action they do is incredibly meaningful. Every one of their actions is keeping themselves and their family alive! So every small success like a full stomach in the evening fills a poor person with meaning. Their life is hard and difficult, but it is full of concrete and immediate goals that make them feel that their life is meaningful. The memory of better things is as fire in their veins. People who used to have more income, prestige or social standing and had it taken away from them feel the most frustrated. Were you

shocked when Donald Trump won the US election? Manufacturing jobs used to be great. They were some of the highest paying jobs in America. Yet now most manufacturing is done overseas. And all these blue-collar workers in America were seeing their jobs disappearing and being shipped overseas. They also saw nobody in the government was trying to do anything to help them and protect their future. In fact, most politicians were promoting more free trade. Then along comes Donald J Trump. Higher taxes on imports, stricter immigration and no more free trade agreements. Instead they now feel more frustrated because now they have a taste that life could be better. For example, the peasants of Russia lived in poverty for generations. Then social changes happened and they became more free, they had a taste of private ownership. Their improved conditions actually made them more sensitive to all the things in their lives that were still unsatisfactory. Maybe there would have been no Bolshevik Revolution in Russia if the peasants had remained very poor. By the way, I know almost nothing about Russian history, but this is a basic point that Eric Hoffer makes. Discontent is likely to be highest when misery is bearable; when conditions have so improved that an ideal state seems almost within reach. These are not the people struggling with the worst poverty. Rather, they are people who used to be doing well and now their social position is going down. Or they are people who used to have nothing and now their life condition has improved a little. But instead of feeling more satisfied, they now can see all the other bad things in their life that can still be improved. Now, you may be thinking: These people are more frustrated than most people which means they are motivated to find a solution to their problems. Your product could be one of those solutions. Check out my notes on the book. The most influential politicians know that strong emotions will motivate people to go out and vote for them. And every successful mass movement stirs up hate and anger towards someone, something or some group of people. Mass movements can rise and spread without belief in a God, but never without belief in a devil. When Hitler was asked whether he thought the Jew must be destroyed, he answered: It is essential to have a tangible enemy, not merely an abstract one. Lenin did it against the bourgeois, the middle-class people who owned property. Christianity has a devil sneaking around every corner, hiding between your ears, who wants you to burn and suffer forever. Remember that a True Believer joins a mass movement in the first place because they feel insufficient and powerless. So having an enemy allows them to redirect their attention. Instead of looking at their own shortcoming and failures which is very uncomfortable, they can instead channel anger against someone else. They can nurse an extreme outrage toward someone else. If you want to lead and unite a group of people, look for a common enemy. This enemy fires up their readers and surely helps sell a lot of books and supplements. In a nutshell, he says each movement is started by men of words, comes into being by fanatics and is stabilized by men of action. These are 3 different types of leaders that play an important role in creating huge movements. The man of words. The man of words is an intellectual. He criticizes established institutions and undermines the existing order. He casts doubt on old beliefs and belittles the people in power. The man of words plants seeds into the minds of people. Seeds that later will grow into mass movements. They only create the ideas that will later shape the movement. Jesus, Buddha and Karl Marx were all men of words.

Chapter 7 : Book Review: The True Believer – Thoughts on The Nature of Mass Movements | Scott Berk

Chapter Books; Column. The True Believer. by Eric Hoffer. We'd love you to buy this book, and hope you find this page convenient in locating a place of purchase.

Darin Swan The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Movements August 17, Author: Thoughts on the Nature of Movements Publisher: New York, Harper Collins, Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements, was published in and offered insight into the cultural phenomenon surrounding public movements and what dynamics bring people together for one common cause. Hoffer was known for his lack of formal education, being well read, and providing insightful writing on the human condition The Eric Hoffer Resource. Ultimately, The True Believer identifies factors, characteristics, or personas that create the perfect storm for a cultural movement to manifest itself, grow, and move towards an active state. One can tell from reading Hoffer that he has a great deal of respect for the Bible, as nearly every chapter has some type of reference to a chapter or verse. In the opening of this work, classics are mentioned, primarily focusing on sociological aspects of the nature of man i. Thoreau, De Tocqueville, the Bible. From this broad base, Hoffer provides context through modern works associated with Carr 5 , Polyani 10 , Hitler , and Rausching In essence, his focus begins with relatively recent mass movement phenomena, such as the Nazi, Communist and Fascist movements and also considers past movements, including those religious in nature. He, however, does tend to focus on classical works that focus on Western movements without much consideration for cross-cultural examples. Hoffer makes some unique assessments in his text and the continued citation by contemporary academics and experts in the social sciences provides some validation to his work. Political scientists, social scientists, academics, educators, military strategists, and psychologists should all be required to read The True Believer as Hoffer sheds light on how many movements, both good and bad, begin, gain momentum and move towards a state of activity. Most reviews of The True Believers tend to be favorable. Bibliography Arquilla, John and David Ronfeldt, eds. The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy. The True Believer by Eric Hoffer: Originally published in Sociological Analysis, , 38,2: Thoughts on the Nature of Movements. New York, Harper Collins: The True Believer Revisited. June 19, 19 Sivan, Social Movements and Contentious Politics. Cambridge University Press; 2 edition May 13, Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements.

Chapter 8 : True Believer Summary & Study Guide

Main Thesis: Eric Hoffer's seminal text, The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements, was published in and offered insight into the cultural phenomenon surrounding public movements and what dynamics bring people together for one common cause.

Supports gay rights, 2a, 1a, science, and other seemingly incongruous things. Books available on Amazon. In the era of Trump, voices of rationalism that call us out of the whirlwind for a moment are an increasingly necessary treatment, an oxygen mask that allows us to restore brain function so as to work out where we are headed and what can be done about it. This is true even when the person speaking to us from almost seventy years ago. I have in mind here a short book by a longshoreman writing in the off moments not loading freight: The True Believer is one among a handful of books that once read seem always and forever obvious, as if there was never a time before the reading. This is especially the case now after witnessing a mass movement sweep a failed businessman and reality TV star into the White House. When the old order begins to fall apart, many of the vociferous men of words, who prayed so long for the day, are in a funk. Not so the fanatic. Chaos is his element. When the old order begins to crack, he wades in with all his might and recklessness to blow the whole hated present to high heaven. He alone knows the innermost craving of the masses in action: He might as well have called them deplorables. Having no footing is exactly the experience of the middle class. Hoffer says that one group particularly susceptible to mass movements are the ones who have memories of success that has been lost. People who have always been poor do not see anything unusual in poverty, but, as with the French Revolution, when the poor are given a taste of rising standards of living, they realize what is possible, while seeing it denied to them. And then there is the Reagan Revolution. It has been an article of faith in the Republican Party, going back to arguments by William F. Unenlightened self-interest would make this a predictable position to advocate for by the rich, but cuts as a policy choice are increasingly accepted by ordinary Americans who are unlikely ever to benefit directly from reductions in the marginal tax rate. Social mobility, while possible, remains improbable, especially moving from the lowest fifth of the income distribution to the highest. The chances of doing that are less than ten percent. And the probability of moving to the top from the working class has been declining over time. The leaders reject the notion of a paradise to come, since that would suggest agency on the part of the people “something we build together through our own skills and drive” and the followers need the myth that they have been pulled away from the golden past that they deserve to return to. We are a nation that depends on a frontier. Our growth as a global power was the result. We also have taken our first steps into what Gene Roddenberry called the final frontier, along with great strides in the sciences generally. Sending human beings to Mars is hard to imagine for people who believe that they have been cheated out of their former greatness. While we may debate the merits of going to or inhabiting some place out there, the benefits of science extend far beyond any specific goal, but we have to keep the faith in our ability to improve our situation to be willing to explore new ideas. As Hoffer shows, mass movements, especially when they achieve power, have an interest in containing knowledge, not in making it available to all. In chapter fifteen, he writes, regarding the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages: But in the tenth century all learned men were priests, whereas in the fifteenth century, as the result of the introduction of printing and paper, learning had ceased to be a monopoly of the church. It was the nonclerical humanists who formed the vanguard of the Reformation. Perhaps Hoffer was not so prescient here, since the most people have access to the most information now in human history. Or rather, there is a more subtle truth in what he said. A volume of texts by itself does nothing, and if readers lack the capacity to sort facts from false claims and lack the skills of logic to draw valid conclusions, access is reminiscent of the raw recruit with a book of matches in a dark room. Here again, things are more complex. The numbers of American Idol votes did exceed votes for president in , but that was a result of changes in the voting methods and the fact that voting early and often was allowed. And as a writer, I am pleased to see that scripted programming is coming back, while reality TV has been declining in viewership. But in a mass movement, the fantasy of a noble past “the reign of Saturn, the Golden Age” and the image of wish fulfillment on television look a lot alike. Beeblebrox, the president

of the galaxy, was put into office as a distraction from the real power behind the curtain, to mix literary references. The fantasy keeps people from digging with too much enthusiasm. One necessary belief to set mass movements in motion, as mentioned before, is the failure of the present and the lack of agency on the part of any individual person to do anything about it. To accomplish that, a sure path is destroying education. Republicans have been denigrating educators for decades, calling us lazy, overpaid elitists who are more concerned with pushing a liberal agenda than with teaching critical thinking “by which they mean doubts about evolution or climate science. I have noted a decline in the preparation of students taking my composition and literature classes in the years since , and while it is good to be suspicious of anecdotes, the effect of constant testing that refuses to allow any sense of context with regard to the struggles of the schools and the students is more than just my personal observation. And it is hard not to believe in claims that there has been a Republican plan to destroy public education after reviewing the evidence. Lest I seem too biased, let me state here that I have no respect for the feckless Democrats who have allowed this to pass without comment” or even helping it along, in the case of Ted Kennedy and No Child Left Educated. The flaws in our educational system are troubling in a time when news sources are increasingly evaluated on the basis of ideology, rather than the facts. This is especially the case for people on the right wing. Almost half of respondents to a Pew survey who identified themselves as consistently conservative and a third of those who labeled themselves as mostly conservative named Fox News as their primary and often only source of news. Ideological sources of news is nothing new. Hoffer anticipates all of this in the thirteenth chapter of *The True Believer*. *The True Believer* also shows that mass movements are a cyclical phenomenon, rising in times of frustrated discontent to sweep away the present order, only to become the new order that will itself fail to satisfy the masses. The emptiness of mass movements, exposed once they have taken power, is akin to the emperor in the Hans Christian Andersen tale who is convinced that he has been given a marvelous suit of new clothes, while in fact being sent out to march naked before the people. But a movement such as the ones Hoffer analyzes must be all show. To provide actual progress would be once again to give the people a sense of agency and to ameliorate their frustrations, thereby sapping the drive of the movement. As Hoffer might say, a healthcare system that remains complicated and expensive, while giving enough people a taste of the benefits of coverage, and yet preserving uncertainty about how things will work out is exactly the kind of thing a mass movement needs. Regarding the potential of a mass movement in the United States, I have been told for years that an authoritarian at the head of a populist uprising could never distort the government into a tyranny. He put it this way: One cannot maintain with certitude that it would be impossible for a Hitler or a Stalin to rise in a country with an established tradition of freedom. What can be asserted with some plausibility is that in a traditionally free country a Hitler or a Stalin might not find it too difficult to gain power but extremely hard to maintain himself indefinitely. Any marked improvement in economic conditions would almost certainly activate the tradition of freedom which is a tradition of revolt. But in a traditionally free country the individual who pits himself against coercion does not feel an isolated human atom but one of a mighty race “his rebellious ancestors. But we are allowed some measure of hope in *The True Believer* for a rational response to mass movements. The top countries, you can see, have societies which are not at each others throats. But also they have high GDP per capita. It comes as no surprise to me that Bernie Sanders is leading the way, going out to the country to speak directly to voters “specifically to voters who supported Trump in . As Noah Millman, writing for *The Week* , observes, Jimmy Carter set the stage for Reagan by running as an outsider, while then failing to deliver to the masses. Carrying the message to Trump voters goes back to the need for the kind of mass movements that Hoffer criticizes to separate members from the facts. What Sanders has demonstrated is that presenting the case for progressive ideas works, even with an audience that saw Donald Trump as the answer only a few months before. To err is human, but to create a colossal mess requires slogans and uniforms and bands. The key element of such movements “the frustrations of their adherents who believe that their lives have been spoiled and are in need of a fantastical restoration” is broken when we restore genuine agency to people. The establishments of neither party, Republicans or Democrats, are willing to lead the way out of mass movements into individual and social fulfillment, and so it is up to each one of us to act. As I said at the start, *The True Believer* is the kind of inspiration to set readers into personal motion toward a better

answer. For more of my writing, go [here](#). Please support our independent journalism today so we can fight fake stories out there with real ones:

Chapter 9 : What Eric Hoffer tells us about "true believers" : Dangerous Intersection

What does a true "believer" look like? Skip navigation The 1st is in the 12th chapter of Revelation, and 2) The 2nd is in the 14th chapter of Revelation. Eric Hoffer: The True.

Eric Hoffer believed in short. Anything that needs to be said, he believed, could be said in words. Hoffer thought of himself as a writer of sentences, and his book is a collection of remarkable thoughts, simply and precisely expressed. He barely saw the inside of a school. He spent most of his working life as a longshoreman on the San Francisco docks. Almost every day, he took a three-mile walk. Along the way, thoughts formed. Later they became sentences, then books. Over the years, he wrote ten. For the Kindle edition, [click here](#). Though there are obvious differences between the fanatical Christian, the fanatical Mohammedan, the fanatical nationalists, the fanatical Communist and the fanatical Nazi, it is yet true that the fanaticism which animates them may be viewed and treated as one. However different the holy causes people die for, they perhaps die basically for the same thing. What Hoffer is saying: The zealots dreaming of bombing Planned Parenthood are "like all extremists" the spiritual brothers of the Nazis, of bin Laden, of Stalin, of the KKK. Why does Hoffer make such a blanket condemnation? All mass movements generate in their adherents a readiness to die and a proclivity for united action; all of them breed fanaticism, enthusiasm, fervent hope, hatred and intolerance; all of them are capable of releasing a powerful flow of activity in certain departments of life; all of them demand blind faith and single hearted allegiance. All movements, however different in doctrine and aspiration, draw their early adherents from the same types of humanity; they all appeal to the same types of mind. The answer is personal. Before they believed, Hoffer writes, they felt small, confused, destined for nothing. With belief, they feel strong, certain. Their fanaticism transforms them; losers become winners. Not according to Hoffer. In fact, Hoffer says, the harder it is to believe, the better. Forget your mind, trust your heart, the zealot says, and his followers do just that. Not so the members of mass movements. They know it all. Its doctrine is proclaimed as a key to that book. At home and abroad, he found devils.