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Longshoreman Philosopher: Where is Eric Hoffer Now?

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Abstract

By most accounts, Eric Hoffer was a significant philosopher of his time and place—in his personal profile and life story; in his reading, thinking and writing; and in the recognition of his work. He led a long and highly interesting life, is the author of at least nine books, and enjoyed attention as a prominent social analyst and critic. The question of this paper is: where is Eric Hoffer now? What does his body of work—if we determine that we can refer to his writing and speaking as a cohesive body of work—speak to today? How are his name, his fame, and his words used today?

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Introduction

Eric Hoffer was a significant philosopher of his time and place. He was well-known for his unusual life, his personal profile, and his life story. He made a name for himself through his reading, thinking, and writing in both books and newspaper columns as well as in interviews. And there was recognition of his work even after his death, as biographies have been written and he has a presence in research and online. That said, given the trajectory of his life, his work and his fame, where is Eric Hoffer now? What does his body of work—if we determine that we can refer to his writing and speaking as a cohesive body of work—speak to today? How are his name, his fame, and his words used today?

Eric Hoffer: the man and his work

There have been two biographies of Eric Hoffer: *American Iconoclast: The Life and Times of Eric Hoffer*, written by Tom Shachtman and published in 2011, and *Eric Hoffer: The Longshoreman Philosopher*, written by Tom Bethell and published in 2012. For our purposes here, the story begins with Hoffer's birth in 1898 in New York. As a child, he suffered from loss of sight, with his vision returning as a teenager. It is said that this experience prompted him to read as much as he could, out of fear of losing his sight again. Through his life, he was a wanderer—a vagrant, but one that read and wrote while

working at odd jobs. He was a migrant worker with a library card, a gold prospector who read Montaigne, a longshoreman who filled 130-plus notebooks that now fill 23 meters of shelf space at the Hoover Institution Archives. Still, given that Hoffer's life is characterized by complexity and contradiction, little of what has been offered about the man has been verified. Indeed, Bethell expressed doubt about the account of early life offered by Hoffer (Bethell, 2013).

Hoffer gained public attention with his first book in 1951, titled *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*. In it Hoffer analyzes revolutionary parties, nationalistic movements and religious crusades, summarizing his ideas as follows: "A movement is pioneered by men of words, materialized by fanatics and consolidated by men of actions" (Hoffer, 1966). The work was praised by Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. as a brilliant and original inquiry into the nature of mass movements that makes genuine contribution to social thought (Hoffer, 1966). Hoffer is known as well for holding strong opinions on the major issues of his time. He argued that social discontent plaguing Asia at the time originated in a craving for pride, rather than corruption in government, communist agitation or colonial oppression and exploitation (Hoffer, 1954; 1963). That aside, his feelings about the Vietnam War were complex: he objected the idea that the war was necessary for peace but was critical of the antiwar movement as well. Furthermore, he was continually skeptical of American interventionism as foreign policy, which laid the basis for his book *The Temper of Our Time* (Hoffer, 1967). Following on this were more books which considered such diverse themes as the meaning of civilization and the nature of humankind, the meaning of life for individuals as they pursue happiness against debilitating feelings of self-doubt, as well as questions about automation, the environment, and learning. Hoffer has also received numerous awards and accolades: an honorary doctorate degree from both Stonehill College and Michigan Technological University in 1971, the Presidential Medal of Freedom awarded by President Ronald Reagan in 1983, a bust by sculptor Jonathan Hirschfeld in Oklahoma in 1978, and a San Francisco waterfront work of art dubbed Skygate that came with a dedication speech by Eric Sevareid.

There have, of course, been many summaries and appraisals of Hoffer's life and writing, both at the book level and in shorter forms. Historian and social analyst Tom Shachtman is credited in *American Iconoclast: The Life and Times of Eric Hoffer* with offering one of the most detailed examinations of Hoffer's life and work while Tom Bethell, author of *Eric Hoffer: The Longshoreman Philosopher*, is praised for being able to balance sympathy with many of Hoffer's conservative opinions while still offering a thoughtful, objective and highly readable portrait of the man. Daniel Flynn (2012), in a review of Bethell's work, characterized Hoffer's life, and work, as a mix of confusing contradictions and crystal clear thinking. He was an anti-communist thinker and writer who served loyally in a union that was led by the Communist activist Harry Bridges. He was an ordinary working man who loved America fiercely who became a self-taught writer and fierce social critic, eventually finding a sinecure at the University of California-Berkeley, the West Coast-epicenter of all Hoffer railed against in the 1960s. Despite, or perhaps due to, the confusion and contradiction of his own life, Hoffer thought deeply about what made us happy, offering that the tension of doubt and praise is a key element: self-doubt is an inherent part of our humanness, but that the praise we earn through our actions enables us to reconcile this doubt and move toward a meaningful life (Dirda, 2012).

As for his works, there are at least eight and as many as 12 books that he either authored outright or consist of his quotations and writing that was carried in the press. As above, his first and most notable work was *The True Believer*:

Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements, published in 1951. This was followed by *The Passionate State of Mind, and Other Aphorisms*, a collection of timeless aphorisms on mankind that was published in 1955. *The Ordeal of Change*, published in 1963, consisted of essays on the duality and essentiality of change in the progress of humankind and civilization throughout history. In 1967 came *The Temper of Our Time*, which included essays on automation, the black revolution, the return to nature movement, intellectualism versus the nature of learning, and a range of other social issues, and in 1969, *Working and Thinking on the Waterfront*, which was part diary and part a glimpse into Hoffer's thought process and life patterns. The 1970s brought publication of *First Things, Last Things* in 1971, which outlined a large-scale view of the trajectory of civilization, highlighting at various points the unique and transformative characteristics that constitute humankind. *Reflections on the Human Condition*, published in 1973, is similar to *The Passionate State of Mind*, in that it is largely a collection of aphorisms. *In Our Time*, published in 1976, offered 32 themes over 90 pages on such topics as "Dull Work," "New Schools," "A Learning Society," "The Trend Toward Anarchy," and "A Country That Cannot Change." *Before the Sabbath* is Hoffer's final written work, published in 1979, in which he reflects on history, democracy, love, and, apropos to his situation, aging. *The Syndicated News Articles*, published in the late 1960s, presented some of the weekly news columns that appeared in hundreds of newspapers across the country when Hoffer was at the height of his popularity in the 1960s. Finally, published in 1983 is *Truth Imagined*, a book of Hoffer's reminiscences of his life. Hoffer was also very good in a discussion format, revealed in a twelve-part television interview titled *Conversations with Eric Hoffer* in 1963, and a 1967 interview titled *Eric Hoffer: The Passionate State of Mind* and a 1969 interview titled *The Savage Heart: A Conversation with Eric Hoffer*, both conducted by Eric Sevareid of CBS News.

Flynn (2012) contrasted Hoffer's life with his writing: whereas his life was highly mysterious, if not perplexing, his writing didn't give much space for interpretation: it was clear, efficient, and offered up his ideas without tedious hedges or qualifiers. Although his writing was based on voluminous reading, his style tended to short paragraphs in short sections in short books, all of which portrayed a weariness of academics and intellectuals who tried to change society through complex arguments and long-winded monographs. That said, most saw his work as reactive, in trains of thought that either built on or contradicted observations and assertions of earlier thinkers and writers. He was accused of thinking that was imprecise, exaggerated, cynical, and used *ad hominem* argument on the one hand, all while seen as bringing originality rather than conventionality and insight more than solution on the other. Still, Dirda (2012) notes that *The True Believer* has become a modern classic, a work which is periodically rediscovered as time and events continue on, but also a book which received much attention in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York. Thus, given the noteworthy trajectory of his life and works, it is worth considering the question of this paper: what happened to Eric Hoffer? How has time treated the man and his works? In what sense is the work of Eric Hoffer being used today?

Eric Hoffer 'Referenced' in Academic Writing

Put *Eric Hoffer Philosopher* into Google Scholar and set a time range from the late 2010's to the present (as I did: June 2023), and the first ten pages that come up reveal how Hoffer emerges in contemporary academic research and writing.

As should be expected, one can find Hoffer's work used in research related to political philosophy. We find that while Colin

Beck (2015), in his book *Radicals, Revolutionaries, and Terrorists* and reviewed by Pilon (2020), justifiably attributes the idea of the interchangeability of mass movement to Hoffer, he ultimately expands his focus from Hoffer's cases of Nazism and communism to consider transformational collective action regardless of time and place. Likewise, Cassam (2021), in his book *Extremism: A Philosophical Analysis*, begins his analysis in the similarities he finds in Hoffer's classic *The True Believer*, before moving on from Hoffer's focus on fanatics to a wider consideration of extremism in various operational forms and with various concrete objectives.

Any distinction in Hoffer's work between philosophy and psychology is faint and overlap between the two themes in his writing is common; thus, academic references to his work in the field of psychology is also evident. Walle (2023), in a book that borrows part of Hoffer's most famous title in his work—*True Believers and the Great Replacement: Understanding Anomie and Alienation*—draws on Hoffer, whom he describes as a laborer turned social psychologist and moral philosopher, to position and expand toward his thesis. From the book *The Philosophy and Psychology of Ambivalence: Being of Two Minds*, edited by Brogaard and Gatzia (2021), we find in a chapter on Cognitive Dissonance and the Logic of Racism the following use of Hoffer (p. 237):

... As Hoffer puts it in his book *True Believer*:

There is perhaps no surer way of infecting ourselves with virulent hatred toward a person than by doing him a grave injustice ... To wrong those we hate is to add fuel to our hatred. Conversely, to treat an enemy with magnanimity is to blunt our hatred for him. The most effective way to silence our guilty conscience is to convince ourselves and other that those we have sinned against are indeed depraved creatures, deserving every punishment, even extermination. We cannot pity those we have wronged, nor can we be indifferent toward them. We must hate and persecute them or else leave the door open to self-contempt. (1951, 69-70).

Bergquist and Weitz (undated), writing on the Library of Professional Psychology website, include Hoffer among their informants in a paper titled *The Authoritarian Personality: Preliminary Perspectives and Studies*. Hoffer's work is used here, along with Eric Fromm and Jean Paul Sartre, to describe a third significant authoritarian personality—the fanatic—the individual who will accept any cause, and if necessary, sacrifice his life for that cause. Another 'psychology-related' connection to Hoffer's work can be found in Simone's (2009) original text on "Eric Hoffer & the 1960s," offered in *Oncology Times*. Hoffer was a writer that Simone discovered during the 1960s and the message taken from reading his work staked out a non-Freudian view of American psychology, focusing on self-esteem and the catalytic effect of work on promoting maturation.

In another example, Professor Dr. Faiza Kazi (2022), a histopathologist writing an editorial titled *Living in the Contemporary Diagnostic Era; Pathologist's Perspective*, uses Hoffer in his concluding statement (p. 2):

... A renowned American social philosopher, Eric Hoffer, once said "In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists". Let us

not be so learned that our ability to live in the new world is compromised.

In an example from leadership studies, Kaplan (2020) uses a Hoffer quote to open his paper *Defining a New Leadership Model to Stay Relevant in Healthcare*:

... To quote philosopher Eric Hoffer, "In times of change, learners inherit the earth while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists."

Another example shows how Hoffer's work highlights the dark side of leadership: authors English and Ehrich (2020) include reference to Hoffer's *The True Believer* in a passage alluding to identity, certitude, uncertainty and doubt (pp. 18-19):

... In this respect, Eric Hoffer (1951) quoted Ernest Rohm, a leader in Hitler's brown shirts, who asserted that he could turn "... the reddest communist into a glowing nationalist (Nazi) in four weeks" (p. 26).

Hoffer's work made it into research in other areas as well. In the book *Opioids in South Africa: Towards a Policy of Harm Reduction*, a chapter by Guy du Plessis (2019) titled 'Incompatible knots' in harm reduction: A philosophical analysis,' likewise uses a long quote from Hoffer's *True Believer* (p. 140):

... As Eric Hoffer, author of The True Believer, reminds us:

The burning conviction that we have a holy duty toward other 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. (1951: 23)

This connection to religious research and writing is found elsewhere as well. We find Simmons (2019), in a chapter titled *The Strategies of Christian Philosophy*, attributing to Hoffer the claim that "mass movements can rise and spread without belief in a God, but never without belief in a devil" (Hoffer 1951, section 65). This passage is also used by Cycleback (2022) in an essay titled *Antisemitism in the Unitarian Universalist Association*.

Finally, Hoffer quotes appear in two recent academic dissertations: one on system dynamics modeling in career pathways and one in a dissertation on music theory. First, in a dissertation titled *Stasis and Motion Explored in Three of my Musical Compositions*, author Chardan Howe (2019) uses Hoffer in the opening section of the thesis—Definitions, Ideas, and Philosophy—to speak to the description and analysis of music, specifically in a passage taken from an out-of-service English Teacher's Network:

As the American philosopher Eric Hoffer notes, “It is the stretched soul that makes music, and **souls are stretched by the pull of opposites** [emphasis mine] – opposite bents, tastes, yearnings, loyalties”.

And in the second, in the introduction to a thesis on understanding the constantly evolving set of skills required in the contemporary workplace, Appel (2022: 3) turns to the eloquent summing up of ‘learning’ used by Kaplan above: “*In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.*”

We do thus see Eric Hoffer’s work, primarily in the form of references to the ideas he expressed in *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, not only in political philosophy, but also in psychology, leadership, and religious studies and as well as a means of positioning research in its opening and initial steps.

Eric Hoffer as ‘Found’ on the Internet

As an alternative to consideration of Hoffer’s presence in academic research writing is his place in the more diverse formats that can be found on websites on the Internet. Many of the cases of Internet use involve the use of Hoffer’s quotes—either in one of his short and pithy one sentence offerings or in something a bit longer. These quotes, along with the longer texts that also appear on websites, are put into service either for the purposes of framing or advocating an organizational or ideological viewpoint or expounding on a particular theme specific to the objectives of the site. Other than such ideological framing of the purpose of a website or use of his interesting life more than his work and ideas—there is little about anything substantial from his work. Of course, this can partly be explained by the fact that Hoffer promoted himself on the basis of such quotes, most notably under the title of *The Passionate State of Mind and Other Aphorisms* but also in *Reflections on the Human Condition* and in the short two- and three-page offerings that were very much ‘to the point’ in *In Our Time*. Indeed, such an abundance of Hoffer quotes being put to such wide use may also be less a reading of Hoffer’s work than the reality that there are many easy-to-find websites dedicated to ‘Hoffer Quotes.’

The Table below presents 24 websites that ‘use’ Hoffer as either subject or in the form of quotes offered toward connecting or presenting some website-relevant opinion, position or content. I limited the sites used to those that had references to Hoffer post-2012, when the two biographical books on Hoffer would have brought him and his work to wider audiences and in wider thematic associations. The table includes the website creator and the title of the Hoffer material, the article date, author and any other descriptive information about the content: type, number of words, reading time, etc. In addition, I have included a ‘best-effort’ attempt at providing the background, motivation, or ideological perspective of the website.

Eric Hoffer Website – Data N=24

Website / “Title”	Article Details	Website Ideological Perspective

Hoover Institution "Eric Hoffer, Genius—And Enigma"	April 6, 2012 Tom Bethell Reading time: 5 min.	... a public policy think tank that seeks to improve the human condition by advancing ideas that promote economic opportunity and prosperity, while securing and safeguarding peace for America and all mankind. ... promotes personal and economic liberty, free enterprise, and limited government.
The Russel Kirk Center "Longshoreman, Philosopher, Mystery"	May 20, 2012 Daniel J. Flynn Book Review; 1,900 words	<i>Strengthening America's Tradition of Order, Justice & Freedom</i> The Russell Kirk Center for Cultural Renewal aims to recover, conserve, and enliven those enduring norms and principles that Russell Kirk (1918-1994) called the Permanent Things.
Marginal Revolution "Eric Hoffer: The Longshoreman Philosopher"	June 12, 2012 Tyler Cowen 440 words	Marginal Revolution is the blog of Tyler Cowen and Alex Tabarrok, both of whom teach at George Mason University. ... Marginal Revolution has consistently been ranked as the best or one of the best economic blogs on the web, but it is more (and less) than that, also representing the quirks of its authors.
American Enterprise Institute "Eric Hoffer: Longshoreman Philosopher"	May 26, 2013 Tom Bethell Profile 2,600 words 1 of 8 articles featuring Hoffer	The American Enterprise Institute is a center-right public policy think tank dedicated to defending human dignity, expanding human potential, and building a freer and safer world. The work of our scholars and staff advances ideas rooted in our belief in democracy, free enterprise, American strength and global leadership, solidarity with those at the periphery of our society, and a pluralistic, entrepreneurial culture.
FoundSF San Francisco digital history archive "Eric Hoffer: The Right's Working Class Philosopher"	Historical Essay Peter Cole, originally published in <i>Jacobin</i> , September 2014	FoundSF is a participatory website inviting historians, writers, activists, and curious San Francisco citizens of all kinds to share their unique stories, images, and videos from past and present. Originally published in <i>Jacobin</i> , a print quarterly offering socialist perspectives on politics and economics
RETREE TIMES	January 17, 2017 June 10, 2014 August 29, 2011	"Concerning the work of artist GC Myers" Reflective use of Hoffer's writing in three essays
Reason and Meaning "Eric Hoffer's The True Believer and Trump"	September 8, 2017 440 words	John Messerly, Ph.D. was a member of the faculty of both the philosophy and computer science departments ... at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of books on ethics, evolutionary philosophy, philosophy of human nature, and the meaning of life, as well as over a hundred articles on philosophical, psychological, social, political, and transhumanism
Foundation for Economic Education "The Wisdom of Eric Hoffer-Part 1/II"	July 17, 2018 Lawrence W. Reed 1,675 words	Foundation for Economic Education's mission is to inspire, educate, and connect future leaders with the economic, ethical, and legal principles of a free society. These principles include: individual liberty, free-market economics, entrepreneurship, private property, high moral character, and limited government. Key words to the article: Politics, Philosophy, Collectivism, Fanaticism, Intellectualism, Egalitarianism

<p>The Prison Toolkit</p> <p>"Eric Hoffer – Philosopher, Dock Worker"</p>	<p>April 30, 2019</p> <p>3,490 words</p> <p>13 minute read</p>	<p>A website to prepare people for incarceration.</p>
<p>Public Seminar</p> <p>"The One Who Writes Books: Eric Hoffer and the Perks of Being Self-taught"</p>	<p>May 1, 2019</p> <p>Marius Stan</p> <p>1,940 words</p>	<p>Public Seminar is dedicated to informing debate about the pressing issues of our times and creating a global-intellectual commons. An independent project of The New School Publishing Initiative, Public Seminar is produced by New School faculty, students, and staff ... Public Seminar is, above all things, dedicated to the intellectual and cultural work of democracy, and is open to a range of perspectives.</p>
<p>Inc. Magazine</p>	<p>October 28, 2019</p> <p>Geoffrey James, Contributing Editor</p>	<p>Article Title: "In 1951, America's Greatest Philosopher Predicted Where We'd Be in 2019"</p> <p>Includes 24 Eric Hoffer quotes.</p>
<p>Kalungi</p> <p>"Eric Hoffer, The 'Longshoreman Philosopher', On Writing"</p>	<p>January 30, 2020</p> <p>Stijn Hendrikse</p> <p>544 words</p>	<p>Outsourced marketing agency for early-stage B2B SaaS companies. "We combine a proven playbook with an instant marketing team to help software companies build and launch their go to market motions." "When you struggle writing marketing content, think of Hoffer's advice:" "Here are some great Hoffer quotes to fill the page:"</p>
<p>Xenia Daily Gazetteer</p> <p>"Are we seeing a True Believer phenomenon?"</p>	<p>July 22, 2020</p> <p>Bill Taylor</p> <p>Online Newspaper</p> <p>750 words</p>	<p>The Xenia Daily Gazette is a Pulitzer Prize-winning American daily newspaper published daily except Sunday in Xenia, Ohio. It is owned by AIM Media based in McAllen Texas.</p>
<p>The Stansbury Forum</p> <p>"Remembering Eric Hoffer, working class philosopher"</p>	<p>August 24, 2020</p> <p>Howard Isaac Williams</p> <p>584 words</p>	<p>The Stansbury Forum is a website for discussion by writers, activists and scholars on labor, politics, immigration, the environment, and world affairs.</p>
<p>Head Butler</p> <p>"Eric Hoffer: The True Believer"</p>	<p>January 6, 2021</p> <p>Jess Kornbluth</p> <p>Book Review</p> <p>980 words+3 vids</p>	<p>"Welcome. I'm Jesse Kornbluth, and I'd like to be your Head Butler — your cultural concierge. My mission: to guide smart, busy people through the thicket of mediocre New Stuff and into the clearing of Great Stuff.</p>
<p>The Imaginative Conservative</p> <p>"Eric Hoffer: The True Believer"</p>	<p>January 27, 2021</p> <p>Pedro Gonzalez</p>	<p><i>The Imaginative Conservative</i> is an on-line journal for those who seek the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. We address culture, liberal learning, politics, political economy, literature, the arts and the American Republic in the tradition of ... and other conservative leaders. <i>The Imaginative Conservative</i> offers to our families, our</p>

Longshoreman Philosopher's Thoughts and Work"	3,550 words	communities, and the Republic, a conservatism of hope, grace, charity, gratitude and prayer.
Voegelin View "Eric Hoffer: The Longshoreman Philosopher's Thought and Work"	September 21, 2021 Pedro Blas Gonzalez Academic Article; 3,550 words	VOEGELINVIEW is the online arts and humanities journal of the Eric Voegelin Society , dedicated to the thoughts of Eric Voegelin Eric Voegelin (1901-85) was a German-American political philosopher who fled Europe in 1938 when the Nazi entered Austria. Voegelin abhorred the political violence of the twentieth century, and he wrote about the need of constitutionalism, responsible citizenship, and political and economic freedom as antidotes.
Cal Matters "Eric Hoffer warned us about 'true believers'"	February 6, 2022 Dan Walters Commentary	CalMatters is a nonpartisan and nonprofit news organization bringing Californians stories that probe, explain and explore solutions to quality of life issues while holding our leaders accountable. We are the only journalism outlet dedicated to covering America's biggest state, 39 million Californians and the world's fifth largest economy.
The Library of Economics and Liberty "Work Hard and Read Hoffer" Keywords: Communism, Donald Trump, mass movements, populism.	July 15, 2022 Alberto Mingardi Essay; 980 words; 1 of 8 articles featuring Hoffer	The Library of Economics and Liberty (Econlib) is dedicated to advancing the study of economics, markets, and liberty. The website is provided by Liberty Fund, Inc., a private, educational foundation established to encourage the study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals. The Foundation develops, supervises, and finances its own educational activities, with the goal of fostering discussion and thought on enduring topics pertaining to the creation and maintenance of such a society.
Kidadl Inspire Your Kids Today "For All Ages: 100 Best Eric Hoffer Quotes From The American Moral and Social Philosopher"	April 5, 2023 As the title states, 100 Eric Hoffer Quotes from various books: 2,300 words; "12 minutes to read"	The Problem We Are Solving As time-poor, stressed parents, we are all suffering from information overwhelm online. Finding the right information to help educate and entertain our children can be hard work and time-consuming. The Kidadl Solution Kidadl was founded as the digital home of family entertainment, helping parents educate and entertain their kids with trusted, personalized, curated content designed for families ...
Farman Street Media "Eric Hoffer and the Creation of Fanatical Mass Movements"	No date Outline of the book <i>True Believer</i> ; Reading time: 10 minutes	About Farnam Street Helping you master the best of what other people have already figured out.
The Soul of Enterprise "Episode #220: Memorable Mentors: Eric Hoffer"	No date Ron Baker & Ed Kless 1,940 words;	The Soul of Enterprise website presents podcasts with intellectuals and about intellectuals together with accompanying texts.
The Attic "The Longshoreman and the Masses"	No date No author Text and many photos about Hoffer; 800 words	Your actions, your votes, your lives matter, but The Attic believes none of these will thrive without hope. Hence these stories of a kinder, cooler America. Dreamers. Wonderers. Wits. Rebels. Teachers. Builders... Feel good stuff? Head in the sand? Nope, just one ex-reporter's answer to The Doomsday Project.

Growth "The True Believer Summary: 8 Best Lessons from Eric Hoffer"	No date Derek Wydra Founder, Growth.me	More health, happiness, growth, knowledge, success in less time. ... And that's where our book summaries can help. Understand the best lesson from the best books... in minutes, not hours. Quote: The True Believer shows how the same human frustrations drive all mass movements—whether social, political or religious. People join mass movements to escape their ineffectual and helpless individual self. Eric Hoffer wrote this book 70 years ago, but its still frighteningly relevant today. I read all 194 pages and the 8 lessons are:
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In the broadest representation of contemporary website use of the work and words of Eric Hoffer, the fields that 'borrow' are similar to those in academia: political philosophy, psychology, leadership, education, and motivation. However, looking at the combination of website orientation and objectives together with a closer reading of the 'Hoffer content,' the following finely-grained uses can be discerned.

There were book review formats that functioned as conduits to inform and educate readers about Eric Hoffer and his work; examples here are from the websites *Marginal Revolution*, *Head Butler*, and *Growth*. These websites function broadly as educational sites and Hoffer constitutes one point in the educational content of the site. Extending this format are those that approached Hoffer from an educational research premise, in an effort to offer to readers Hoffer's ideas on learning, education and motivation in education. Examples of websites using Hoffer in this manner included *Kidadl*, *Public Seminar*, *The Soul of Enterprise*, and *The Stansbury Forum*. In terms of more specific uses, *The Attic*, *Kalungi*, and *REDTREE TIMES* offered Hoffer, by turns, as a source of inspiration in these confusing mass-mediated times, as a tool through which one can improve job performance, and as an important step in a journey toward greater self-intellectualism. There are many websites that used Hoffer and his writing—largely in the form of extensive quotes—as a warning about our times: *Inc. Magazine*, *CAL Matters*, *Farnam Street Media*, *Reason and Meaning*, and the *Xenia Daily Gazette* all present Hoffer's pessimistic view of the future—his future which is our present. From *Inc. Magazine*: "Eric Hoffer saw exactly where the U.S. was headed and tried his best to warn us away from it." From *CAL Matters*: "The 'true believers' that philosopher Eric Hoffer defined seven decades ago threaten to undermine civic and political life." From *Reason and Meaning*: "Naturally, the question arises as to the similarities between Trump supporters in the USA and Hoffer's true believers."

Including the five that used Hoffer to offer warnings about the state of society at present, there was an even split of a dozen or so websites that divided along ideological lines, spanning the spectrum from progressivism to conservatism. *Inc. Magazine*, *CAL Matters*, *Farnam Street Media*, *Reason and Meaning*, and the *Xenia Daily Gazette* can be viewed as either left-leaning or outright progressive. As an example, *FoundSF*—a participatory website inviting historians, writers, activists, and San Franciscans to share their unique stories—organized Hoffer's story as a historical essay that offered a political philosophy: the opening sentence highlighted the inescapable contradiction of his life and work, noting that Hoffer was a conservative who only had the time to write because he was represented as a laborer by a powerful leftist union. The last two sentences continue with this view, concluding: "Scholars of Hoffer (generally conservatives themselves) inevitably note his working-class bonafides, but they don't mention or analyze the irony of his membership in the leftist ILWU. In that way, they're similar to all those, Hoffer included, who forgot that the labor movement brought us the weekend and much

more.”

On the other side are the *American Enterprise Institute*, the *Foundation for Economic Education*, the *Hoover Institution*, *The Imaginative Conservative*, the *Russel Kirk Center*, the *Library of Economics and Liberty* and the *Voegelin View*, all of which, whether through biographical profile, inspirational parable, ideological propagandizing, or intellectual posturing, offer Hoffer as the embodiment of the conservative ideal. *The American Enterprise Institute* is “a center-right public policy think tank”; the *Hoover Institution* “promotes personal and economic liberty, free enterprise, and limited government”; the *Russel Kirk Center* “aims to recover, conserve, and enliven those enduring norms ...”; the principles of the *Foundation for Economic Education* include “individual liberty, free-market economics, entrepreneurship, private property, high moral character and limited government”; the *Imaginative Conservative* “offers to our families, our communities, and the Republic, a conservatism of hope, grace, charity, gratitude and prayer”; *The Library of Economics and Liberty* encourages “the study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals”. For these websites, Hoffer’s life story and the message of much of his writing combine to yield a folk hero of their ideological perspective.

So, How is Hoffer Used Today?

The conclusion to this journey from Hoffer’s origins and life’s work and onto how his work and words are used today is, like his life, one of complexity and contradiction. In terms of academic research, his work is perhaps, and charitably stated, under-used in political philosophy, but finds itself as a philosophical base in some shades of psychology, leadership and religious research. One can also note Hoffer ‘speaking’ to researchers themselves, providing a likely, much-needed encouraging voice for young scholars. As for what can be found ‘on the web,’ we find Hoffer’s presence in uses that are motivational, educational, ideological and idealistic.

Appendix

Website addresses

- American Enterprise Institute: <https://www.aei.org/articles/eric-hoffer-longshoreman-philosopher/>
- The Attic: <https://www.theattic.space/home-page-blogs/2019/6/19/the-working-mans-philosopher>
- CAL Matters: <https://calmatters.org/commentary/2022/02/eric-hoffer-warned-us-about-true-believers/>
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