

Hate Groups

Is extremism on the rise in the United States?

National crises create opportunities for extremists. Today the global economic crisis now wreaking havoc on millions of American households is hitting while the first black president is in the White House and the national debate over illegal immigration remains unresolved. Already, some far-right extremists are proclaiming that their moment is arriving. Indeed, an annual tally by the Southern Poverty Law Center shows 926 hate groups operating in 2008, a 50 percent increase over the number in 2000. And the Department of Homeland Security concludes that conditions may favor far-right recruitment. But a mix of conservatives and liberal free-speech activists warn that despite concerns about extremism, the administration of Barack Obama should not be intruding on constitutionally protected political debate. Some extremism-monitoring groups say Obama's election showed far-right power is waning, not strengthening. But that equation may change if the economic crisis deepens, the experts caution.



Followers of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Movement demonstrate at the opening of the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie, Ill., on April 19, 2009.

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Hate Groups

BY PETER KATEL

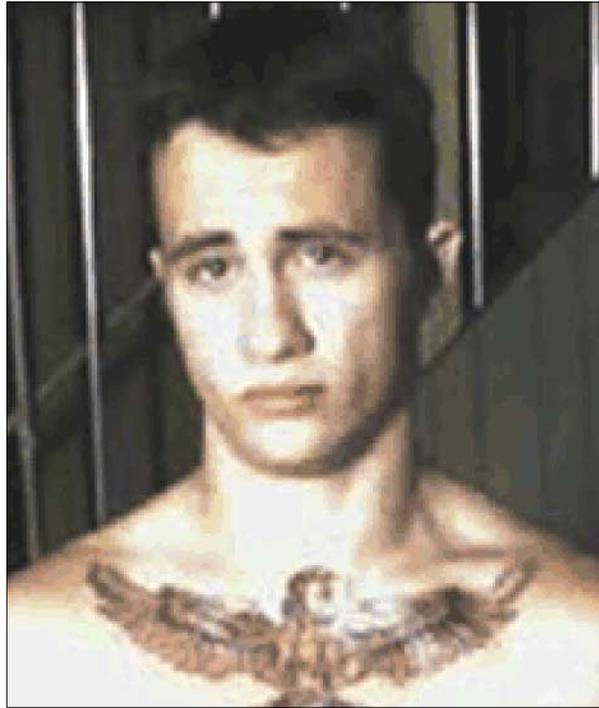
THE ISSUES

Two police officers drove up to a brick house in the middle-class Pittsburgh neighborhood of Stanton Heights on April 4, responding to an emergency call from a woman about her 22-year-old son. “I want him gone,” Margaret Poplawski told a 911 operator.¹

She also said that he had weapons, but the operator failed to share that crucial information with the police, who apparently took no special precautions in responding. Seconds after officers Stephen J. Mayhle and Paul J. Sciuлло walked into the house, Richard Poplawski opened fire, killing both men. He then shot and killed Eric Kelly, a policeman outside the house. After a four-hour standoff, Poplawski surrendered.² Hours after that, the Anti-Defamation League and a *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reporter traced a March 13 Web post by Poplawski to the neo-Nazi Web site Stormfront.

“The federal government, mainstream media and banking system in these United States are strongly under the influence of — if not completely controlled by — Zionist interest,” the post said. “An economic collapse of the financial system is inevitable, bringing with it some degree of civil unrest if not outright balkanization of the continental U.S., civil/revolutionary/racial war. . . . This collapse is likely engineered by the elite Jewish powers that be in order to make for a power and asset grab.”³

Obsessions with Jewish conspiracy, racial conflict and looming collapse of the political and social order



Richard Poplawski, 22, faces murder charges in Pittsburgh after allegedly shooting and killing three police officers on April 4, 2009. Three weeks earlier, Poplawski, who tattooed on his chest what he reportedly described as an “Americanized” Nazi eagle, apparently posted an anti-Semitic message on Stormfront, a neo-Nazi Web site. The number of active hate groups in the nation has jumped to 926 groups — a 50 percent increase — since 2000.

have long festered in the extreme outposts of U.S. political culture. While extremists typically become active in times of social and economic stress, Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, struck in 1995 during a relatively tranquil, prosperous time. (See “Background,” p. 435.)

Now, law enforcement officials warn, dire conditions throughout the country have created a perfect storm of provocations for right-wing extremists. In the midst of fighting two wars, the country is suffering an economic crisis in which more than 5 million people have lost their jobs, while the hypercharged debate over immigration — and the presence of about 12 million illegal immigrants — continues unresolved.⁴

“This is the formula — the formula for hate,” says James Cavanaugh, special agent in charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) Nashville, Tenn., division and a veteran investigator of far-right extremists. “Everything’s aligning for them for hate.”

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) drew a similar conclusion in early April, adding a concern over the apparent rekindling of extremist interest in recruiting disaffected military veterans.

“The consequences of a prolonged economic downturn . . . could create a fertile recruiting environment for right-wing extremists and even result in confrontations between such groups and government authorities,” the DHS said.⁵

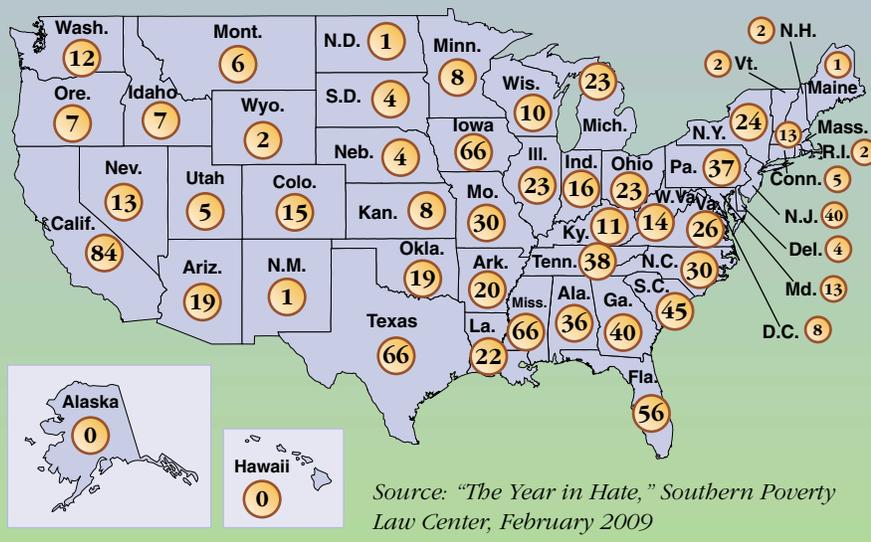
The election of Barack Obama as the nation’s first African-American president also could prompt an extremist backlash. “Obama is going to be the spark that arouses the white movement,” the Detroit-based National Socialist Movement* — considered a leading neo-Nazi organization — announced on its Web site.⁶

But the Obama effect will be negligible among hardcore, violent extremists, says an ex-FBI agent who worked undercover in right-wing terrorist cells in the early 1990s. “They’re in an alternative universe,” says Mike German, author of the 2007 book *Thinking Like a Terrorist*, and now a policy counselor to the American Civil Liberties Union on national-security issues. “When you believe the American

* “Nazi” is the German-language contraction of “National Socialist.”

Hate Groups Active in All But Two States

Hate groups were active in all the states except Hawaii and Alaska in 2008, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. Iowa, California, Texas and Mississippi had the largest concentrations of groups.



government is the puppet of Israel, whether Obama is the face of the government instead of George W. Bush makes little difference."

Indeed, says Columbia University historian Robert O. Paxton, the Obama victory demonstrated that the country's worrisome conditions haven't sparked widespread rejection of the political system — the classic catalyst for major upsurges of extremism. "Sure, we have a black president, but if the Right were really at the door, we wouldn't have elected him," says Paxton, a leading scholar of European fascism. (See sidebar, p. 434.)

Still, Paxton and others caution that the sociopolitical effects of the economic crisis may take a while to hit. The Montgomery, Ala.-based Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), which tracks the Ku Klux Klan and other "hate groups," reports activity by 926 such groups in 2008, a 50 percent increase over the number in 2000. ⁷ "That is a real and a significant rise," says Mark Potok, director of the cen-

ter's Intelligence Project. Despite the increased activity, the center says there's nothing approaching a mass movement. Moreover, drawing connections between extremist organizations and hate crimes can be complicated.

"Most hate crimes are not committed by members of organized hate groups," says Chip Berlet, senior analyst for Political Research Associates of Somerville, Mass., who has been writing about the far right for a quarter-century. "These groups help promote violence through their aggressive rhetoric. But you're more likely to be victim of hate crime from a neighbor."

For example, three young men from Staten Island, N.Y., charged with beating a 17-year-old Liberian immigrant into a coma on presidential election night last year were not accused of membership in anything more than a neighborhood gang. Their victim, who also lives on Staten Island, said his attackers, one of them Hispanic, yelled "Obama" as they set on him. ⁸

Mental health problems also may play a role in such violence, not all of which is inspired by hate rhetoric. In the single deadliest attack on immigrants in memory, Jiverly Wong is charged with killing 13 people (and then himself) at an immigrants' service center in Binghamton, N.Y., one day before Poplawski's alleged killings in Pittsburgh. Eleven of Wong's victims were immigrants, like Wong, a native of Vietnam. Wong left a note in which he complained of his limited English-speaking ability and depicted himself as a victim of police persecution. ⁹

But in other recent cases in which immigrants were targeted, the alleged shooters did invoke far-right views. Keith Luke, 22, who lived with his mother in the Boston suburb of Brockton, was charged in January with killing a young woman, shooting and raping her sister and killing a 72-year-old man — all immigrants from Cape Verde. His planned next stop, police said, was a synagogue. Luke, whom one law enforcement source described as a "recluse," allegedly told police he was "fighting extinction" of white people. ¹⁰

A similar motive was expressed by a 60-year-old Destin, Fla., man charged with killing two Chilean students and wounding three others, all visiting Florida as part of a cultural-exchange program. Shortly before the killings, Dannie Roy Baker had asked a neighbor, "Are you ready for the revolution?" And last summer, he had sent e-mails to Walton County Republican Party officials — who forwarded them to the sheriff's office. One said, in part, "The Washington D.C. Dictators have already confessed to rigging elections in our States for their recruiting dictators to overthrow us with foreign illegals here." ¹¹

Some immigrant advocates say such comments indicate that extremists are exploiting resentment of immigrants in the hope of stirring up more attacks.

“It is the perfect vehicle, particularly with the decline of the economy,” says Eric Ward, national field director of the Chicago-based Center for New Community, which works with immigrants. “With American anxiety building, they hope that they can use immigrants as scapegoats to build their movement.”

“Illegals are turning America into a third-world slum,” says one of a series of leaflets distributed in the New Haven, Conn., area in early March by North-East White Pride (NEWP). “They come for welfare, or to take our jobs and bring with them drugs, crime and disease.”

The NEWP Web site carries the cryptic slogan, “Support your local 1488.” In neo-Nazi code, “88” represents “Heil Hitler,” words that begin with the eighth letter in the alphabet. And “14” stands for an infamous, 14-word racist dictum: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.” Its author was the late David Lane, a member of the violent neo-Nazi organization, The Order, who died in prison in 2007.¹²

The Order, whose crimes included the murder of a Jewish radio talk-show host in Denver in 1984, sprang from the far-right milieu, as did Oklahoma City bomber McVeigh. And a source of inspiration in both cases was a novel glorifying genocide of Jews and blacks, *The Turner Diaries*, authored by the late William Pierce, founder of the neo-Nazi National Alliance, based in West Virginia.¹³

Pierce’s death from cancer in 2002 was one of a series of developments that left a high-level leadership vacuum in the extremist movement. One of those trying to fill it is Billy Roper, 37, chairman of White Revolution, a group based in Russellville, Ark. Roper predicts that racial-ethnic tensions will explode when nonstop immigration from Latin America forces the violent breakup of the United States.

Dozens of Extremist Events Planned This Summer

More than two dozen gatherings of white extremists will be held around the nation this summer, according to the Anti-Defamation League. Many are being held in traditional Ku Klux Klan (KKK) strongholds in the South and Midwest by groups such as the KKK, National Socialist Movement and Christian Identity organizations.

Upcoming Extremist Events in the United States

(Partial list, May-October)

Location	Event
Russelville, Ala.	Courthouse rally organized by Church of the National Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.
Odessa, Mo.	Paramilitary training organized by the Missouri Militia.
Phoenix, Ariz.	Gathering organized by neo-Nazi Nationalist Coalition Arizona with invitations to members of Stormfront, a hate Web site.
York County, Pa.	Open meeting of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Movement for current and interested members.
Marshall, Texas	KKK cookout on private property organized by the United White Knights.
Las Vegas, Nev.	Workshop organized by Paper Advantage, a sovereign citizen group advocating right-wing anarchy.
Champaign County, Ohio	Paramilitary training with the Unorganized Militia of Champaign County.
Burlington, N.C.	Conference organized by the neo-Confederate North Carolina Chapter of League of the South.
New Albany, Miss.	KKK rally at county courthouse followed by a gathering and cross-burning on private property.
Dawson Springs, Ky.	Annual Nordic Fest white power rally organized by the Imperial Klans of America.
Oceana and Muskegon counties, Mich.	Camping trip organized by the white-supremacist forum White Pride Michigan.
Schell City, Mo.	National youth conference organized by Church of Israel, whose followers practice Christian Identity, a racist and anti-Semitic religion.
Jackson, Miss.	Annual national conference of racist group Council of Conservative Citizens.
Sandpoint, Idaho	Weekend conference organized by America’s Promise Ministries, practitioners of Christian Identity.
Pulaski, Tenn.	Weekend gathering commemorating the birthday of Nathan Bedford Forrest — the first KKK leader — including a march, cross-burning and fellowship.

Source: Anti-Defamation League

HATE GROUPS

“We’re at a pre-revolutionary stage, where it’s too late to seek recompense through the political process, and too early to start shooting,” Roper says.

As police and scholars monitor extremist groups, here are some of the key questions they are asking:

Could the election of a black president and the nation’s economic crisis spark a resurgence of far-right political activity or violence?

The precedent-shattering nature of Obama’s presidency could provide enough of a spark for racist reaction, some extremism experts argue. Others question whether that’s enough to propel significant numbers of people into outright rejection of the political system, even amid the nation’s economic turbulence. They note that organized racist violence against African-Americans was already fading by the late 1960s, after civil rights had become the law of the land.

Nonetheless, at least some members of the far right are reacting. Shortly before the presidential election last year, federal agents charged an 18-year-old from Arkansas and a 20-year-old from Tennessee with plotting to kill Obama after first killing 88 black people, beheading 14 of them — apparent references to the “88” and “14” codes. The father of one of the young men said the alleged plans were no more than “a lot of talk.” According to the SPLC, the 20-year-old, Daniel Cowart, had been a probationary member of a new and active skinhead organiza-

tion, Supreme White Alliance, though the organization said he’d been expelled before the alleged murder plot was conceived.¹⁴

Michael Barkun, a professor of political science at Syracuse University,



Members of the World Order of the Ku Klux Klan, one of scores of Klan groups in the United States, rally on Sept. 2, 2006, at Gettysburg National Military Park, site of a decisive Civil War battle.

AP Photo/Bradley C. Bower

says older extremists may see Obama’s election as a big favor to their movement. “They tend to think of it as a great recruiting tool,” says Barkun, who specializes in political and religious extremism. “My sense is that from their point of view, they would see it as a continuation of what they regard as the marginalization of the white population: ‘See, we were right all along.’ ”

But extremists may be disappointed, Barkun adds, given how the election itself showed the extent to which racism has weakened.

Still, the economic crisis offers recruiting possibilities to extremists, because millions of people are suffering its effects. “I would be surprised if the economic crisis did not produce some very nasty side effects,” he says, citing the pseudo-constitutional interpretations adopted by the “Posse Comitatus” movement that flourished in the 1980s. “Certainly some of the fringe legal doctrines on the far right lend themselves to exploitation here.” *

Yet for a segment of U.S. society, Obama’s election is already stoking the fires of rage, says another veteran observer of the far right. Michael Pitcavage, investigative research director for the Anti-Defamation League, says that immediately after the election, extremists with MySpace pages started including the slogan, “I have no president.”

These are anecdotal signs, Pitcavage acknowledges. But he notes that at least one president in the recent past did prompt an extreme reaction on the far right. “The election of Bill

Clinton, I would call one of the secondary causes of the resurgence of right-wing extremism in the 1990s,” he says. Clinton’s Vietnam War draft avoidance and his evasive acknowledgement of past drug use aroused enormous anger among extremists (as among mainstream conservatives), Pitcavage

* Posse Comitatus means “power of the county,” a phrase that adherents used to denote the supposed illegitimacy of the federal government. The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 was passed to remove the U.S. Army from domestic law enforcement activities.

says — sentiments that expanded into conspiracist views after a violent confrontation between federal law enforcement officers and a heavily armed religious group in Waco, Texas.

But at least one right-wing writer on racial issues says that in his circles Obama's presidency has had little effect. "We have always had sophisticated readers whose views of the world are not going to be knocked askew by some unforeseen political event," says Jared Taylor, editor of *American Renaissance*, a magazine based in Oakton, Va., a Washington suburb. "Though I don't wish to detract at all from the symbolic importance of a non-white American president, it's very much part of a predictable sequence. Readers of *American Renaissance* don't necessarily approve of the idea of a black president, but it's not something that wakes them up to something they weren't aware of before." Taylor greeted Obama's election with an article headlined, "Transition to Black Rule?"¹⁵

Taylor's magazine opposes all anti-discrimination and affirmative-action laws but doesn't espouse violence. However, attendees at the magazine's annual conference in 2006 included well-known extremists, including David Duke. When the former Louisiana Klan leader raised the issue of Jewish influence, a Jewish attendee walked out. Taylor later wrote that he would never exclude Jews, adding, "Some people in the [*American Renaissance*] community believe Jewish influence was decisive in destroying the traditional American consensus on race. Others disagree."¹⁶

As for the ailing economy, Taylor says it hasn't been helping his publication. "We haven't seen any sort of sudden leap in subscribers," he says. "If anything, the economic conditions are bad for us because we're a non-profit organization. We depend on contributions; people have less to contribute."

Still, the sociopolitical consequences of the economic crisis transcend financial problems at individual outposts of right-wing opinion.

Cavanaugh, the longtime ATF official, is one of many who sees the global economic meltdown as an echo of the crisis in Germany's Weimar Republic in the 1920s and early '30s, which enabled Hitler's National Socialist Party to come to power.

"This is how they recruited," says Cavanaugh. "Nazism was founded on blaming the Jewish people for the economic crisis." In today's United States, Cavanaugh hypothesizes, extremists could try to make immigrants the group responsible for the crisis.

But Cavanaugh doubts that Obama's presidency, per se, appeals to extremists. Many of them view the conventional political system as the "Zionist Occupation Government," or ZOG. "The president has done more to unite the country — you can feel it," he says. "That doesn't help hate groups get stronger. They can rail against any president, and they have. Any president to them is the head of ZOG."

Are immigrants in danger from extremist violence?

Black Americans have been far and away the major targets of 20th-century extremist violence.

But organized racist violence, from cross-burning to bombings, lynching and assassinations of black community leaders or white civil rights supporters, has faded from the scene, despite episodic hate crimes that sometimes target Jews as well as blacks.

Obama's election demonstrated the extent to which the black-white divide in American life has narrowed. Indeed, when it comes to arousing political passion, race has been replaced by illegal immigrants, who number an estimated 12 million in the United States.¹⁷

"Black people are here, and no one is talking about deporting them," says Taylor of *American Renaissance*. "Im-

migration is a current and constant flow that is, in my view, only building up problems and conflict for the future, and that's a process that could be stopped. That is why it is much more a subject of political interest."

Bipartisan congressional legislation to provide a "path to citizenship" — restrictionists prefer the term "amnesty" — for illegal immigrants" stalled during the George W. Bush administration.

Aside from mainstream political debate over the solution to illegal immigration, immigrant advocates say they're worried that violence against Latinos — or brown-skinned people thought to be immigrants — is on the rise. According to the most recent FBI statistics, there were 830 attacks of various kinds on Hispanics in 2007. By comparison, 1,087 attacks were made on homosexuals, who are also frequent targets of hate speech.¹⁸ In 2000, there were 557 reported attacks on Hispanics compared to 1,075 attacks against homosexuals.¹⁹

But both conservatives and liberals take a dim view of those FBI statistics. Marcus Epstein, a conservative anti-immigration activist who draws a line between his views and those of extremists, criticizes the FBI categorization scheme for using the ethnic term "Hispanic" only for crime victims. Offenders, by contrast, are listed only by race, so "Hispanic" doesn't appear. The result, he argues, is that statistics are skewed so that any Hispanic hate-crime perpetrators are statistically invisible. (The FBI says that the agency "does not agree" that its categories "render the data invalid for statistical purposes.")

Epstein, executive director of The American Cause, a conservative organization founded by political commentator and immigration restrictionist Pat Buchanan, is particularly concerned about illegal immigrants with criminal records committing further crimes. He cites the case of Manuel Cazares, who turned himself in to

police in Hannibal, Mo., in March, saying he'd killed an ex-girlfriend and a male friend of hers. Cazares, a Mexican citizen, was in the United States illegally, but police hadn't checked his status, although federal immigration authorities said his name wasn't in their database.²⁰ "Illegal immigrants kill American citizens — that greatly outweighs the number of crimes committed by right-wing white Americans against immigrants," Epstein says.

He cites a statistical analysis by Edwin S. Rubinstein, an economic consultant in Indianapolis and former senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank. Writing on the VDare Web site, which opposes immigration except by white people, Rubinstein, while acknowledging that national data on crime and ethnicity are thin, extrapolated from California and national figures to estimate that in any given year illegal immigrants "could kill 2.6 persons per day across the U.S."²¹

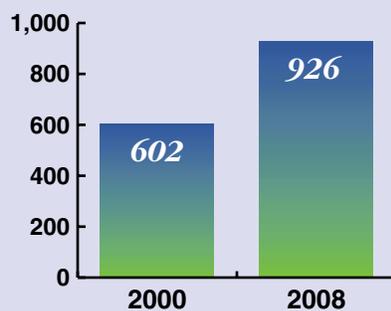
The vast majority of violent crimes fall within city and state jurisdictions, not all of which collect data on ethnicity. Mark Hugo Lopez, associate director of the Pew Hispanic Center, and co-author of a recent report on Hispanics and federal crime, says. "The reason that we used federal statistics is that those are the cleanest data." The Pew study showed that 70 percent of Latino offenders were non-citizens, and that 3.1 percent of all Latino convicts were sentenced for crimes of violence, including murder.²²

Others warn that hate crime statistics aren't reliable where immigrants are concerned. "One of the difficulties we have is getting certain communities to report hate crime," said Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino. Illegal immigrants are especially reluctant, says Levin, in a widely shared observation.²³

Hate Groups Increased by 50 Percent

The number of hate groups active in the United States — including skinheads, Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis — increased more than a 50 percent from 2000 to 2008.

Hate Groups in the U.S.



Source: "The Year in Hate," Southern Poverty Law Center, February 2009

In any event, supercharged rhetoric from extremists has ratcheted up fear among immigrants and their advocates. Ward of the Center for New Community says that recent episodes of violence targeting immigrants reflect a general hostility toward immigrants that he's sensing on the street. For example, he says, following an organizational meeting in Wilmer, Minn., a town in the meat-processing factory belt of the upper Midwest, "A woman pulls up behind a car of our field people and starts screaming racial epithets."

Though of little significance by itself, Ward says it reflects an atmosphere that reminds him of "things I saw in the 1980s and '90s during the rise of the neo-Nazi movement." He adds, "These kinds of incidents, I would call an early warning of what will be the backlash."

Immigration restrictionists argue that their political foes are whipping up passions in an effort to create the appearance that Latinos in general and immigrants in particular face growing danger.

"All hate crimes are abominable, and any decent person would oppose them no matter who the target is," says Ira Mehlman, national media director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), which advocates restricting immigration. "But they are hyping the statistics on hate crimes. Hate crimes against Hispanics are much fewer in actual number than attacks against gays or Jews, who represent much smaller percentages of the population."

Hard-core extremists still rank Jews as their No. 1 enemy, says Pitcavage at the Anti-Defamation League, which was formed in 1913 to combat anti-Semitism.

Some of the most horrific hate crimes are committed by "mission offenders," or mentally ill people who hear voices that command them to rid the world of a particular set of evildoers, Pitcavage says.²⁴ While they may target Jews — and those are often some of the most horrific crimes — "racial/ ethnic targets" — including Latinos and immigrants in general — do run a risk from hate crime because they're "more visually identifiable and thus better targets of opportunity," he says.

Is right-wing and extremist speech encouraging hate crimes?

The killings of three Pittsburgh police officers intensified the ongoing debate over free speech and its consequences. Some liberal and left-wing commentators saw Richard Poplawski's horrific crime as an outgrowth, at least in part, of the far-right conspiracy culture that had influenced him, judging by his Web posts. In addition, they say, his rage had been stoked by conservative commentators. Still, the Pittsburgh reporter who helped trace those posts argues in the online magazine *Slate* that the writings reveal more inner torment than ideology.

Journalist Dennis B. Roddy wrote that Poplawski also posted to a non-racist conspiracist site — Infowars, which describes its politics as libertarian. There,

the alleged cop-killer “seemed to find . . . a bridge from the near-mainstream to a level of paranoid obsession in search of an explanation for his life’s failures. For that, one does not need an ideology, just an inclination.”²⁵

Nevertheless, Roddy acknowledges that Poplawski complained on Infowars that the site neglected race. Other commentators insisted that Poplawski’s posts follow a clear pattern. “Poplawski’s black-helicopter and anti-Semitic ravings put him at the outer edge of the right,” wrote Gary Kamiya, executive editor of *Salon*, a liberal online magazine. “But his paranoid fear that Obama was going to take away his AK-47 is mainstream among conservatives . . . fomented by the NRA and echoed by right-wing commentators from Lou Dobbs to Limbaugh.”²⁶

Kamiya doesn’t propose limiting free-speech rights, but he does argue that extreme anti-Obama and gun-rights rhetoric is bound to produce more episodes like the Pittsburgh shootings.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that even hate-filled racist speechmaking is protected by the First Amendment. In 1969, the court overturned the terrorism-advocacy conviction of an Ohio Ku Klux Klan leader who’d given a speech including a call to “send the Jews back to Israel,” and to “bury the niggers.” The court ruled unanimously that the government may not “forbid or proscribe advocacy of the use of force or of law violation except where such advocacy

is directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action.”²⁷

Worries about the effects of vicious and hyperbolic speech haven’t only come from the left. In 2005, Freedom House, a human-rights advocacy organization then headed by former CIA director James Woolsey, a neo-conservative, issued a report accusing the government of Saudi Arabia of disseminating “hate propaganda” — targeting Christians, Jews and converts from Islam — in religious publications sent to mosques.²⁸



Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, a neo-Nazi Army veteran, was executed in 2001 for killing 168 people, including 19 children, at the Murrah Federal Building. While extremists typically become active in times of social and economic stress, McVeigh struck in 1995 during a period of relative tranquility.

In late March, an American writer of Arab descent wrote on a conservative Web site that American Muslims who get their news on satellite TV from the Middle East are, in effect, being brainwashed into a pro-jihadist outlook. “We must never underestimate the power of hate propaganda,” Nonie Darwish wrote, “because, quite simply, it works. Believe it or not, if

you grow up hearing ‘holy’ cursing day in and day out, it can feel and sound normal, justified and even good.” Darwish didn’t call for banning the transmissions.²⁹

But the more explosive recent disputes over speech arise from the immigration conflict. At the center of the controversy are radio and cable TV commentators like Glenn Beck, of Fox News. In June 2007 (before he had joined Fox), Beck read on his radio program a fake commercial for “Mexinol” — a fuel

produced from the bodies of illegal immigrants from Mexico.³⁰

“We have a butt load of illegal aliens in our country,” said the fake ad, which was ascribed to Evil Conservative Industries. “With Mexinol, your raw materials come to you in a seemingly never-ending stream.” Beck tried to put some distance between himself and the ad’s authors, though in a lighthearted tone. “I don’t even know if that’s conservative,” he said, chuckling. “That would be . . . psychotic, perhaps?”³¹

Last year, Janet Murguía, president of the National Council of La Raza, a leading Hispanic organization, cited the segment in calling

for cable channels to “to clean up the rhetoric of their own commentators or take them out of their chairs.” She argued that much of the commentary by the hosts and some of their guests spurred anti-immigrant violence. “When free speech transforms into hate speech, we’ve got to draw that line.”³²

Epstein of The American Cause argues that Murguía is trying to

AFP/Getty Images/Bob D'Ammerich

“muzzle” free speech. The painful reality of the nation’s economic crisis, not anti-immigrant rhetoric — explains more about anti-Hispanic violence, he says.

“People should not hold an individual Hispanic responsible for the fact that wages are being depressed, and they can’t get a job, or that schools are overcrowded, that there’s an increase in crime in the community,” he says. “But that’s the reason these people are lashing out. In the few cases of [violence], they’re responding to the problems that immigration causes.”

Epstein argues that mainstream anti-immigration groups like FAIR provide a legitimate channel for citizens who favor limiting immigration to express their views. “If there was no one actually speaking for Americans, they’re going to turn to more radical groups,” he says. Epstein posts his writings on the VDare Web site but says he doesn’t agree with all the views expressed on the site, some of them virulently racist.

A recent post by one contributor argued that hiring people of South Asian Indian ancestry guaranteed “corruption and ethnocentric discrimination”; another opined that hiring better public school teachers and firing less competent ones means “on net, firing blacks and hiring whites.” And another contributor attacked “the cultural pollution of our ‘entertainment industry,’ which promotes diversity, multiculturalism and white demoralization.”³³

Cavanaugh of the ATF says he’s aware that a constellation of legal organizations provide moral backing even for violent actions. In the civil rights days, such groups were known as the “white-collar Klan,” he says. “They support people who will go out and do those things.”

But, he says, free speech is free speech. “Is it illegal?” he asks rhetorically. “It’s awful, but I can’t do much about awful, and I shouldn’t be able to.” ■

BACKGROUND

Building Movements

Extreme-right political movements reached their peak in the 1930s in the United States and abroad. Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933. Benito Mussolini, originator of the term “fascism,” who began his rule of Italy in 1922, soon forged an alliance with Hitler. Other far-right movements triumphed in Central Europe. The United States, of course, never succumbed to totalitarian rule. But the American extreme right did command a sizable sector of public opinion.³⁴

As in Germany and elsewhere (though not to a major extent in Italy), hatred of Jews played a key role in the American right-wing mobilization, with communists and socialists close behind on the enemies list.

Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Co., actively spread anti-Semitism in the 1920s, using a newspaper that he owned, the *Dearborn Independent*, to publish vast amounts of propaganda about a Jewish plot for world domination.³⁵

After Ford withdrew from public anti-Semitic activity under pressure from Jewish organizations and the U.S. government, other leaders emerged. Gerald L. K. Smith, a minister and failed political candidate allied with hate-mongers, denounced President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) and African-Americans as well as Jews. William Dudley Pelley led the fascist Silver Legion — the “Silver Shirts” — which dedicated itself mainly to marches and other publicity-seeking events expressing hatred of Jews, blacks and all minorities.

The Rev. Charles Coughlin, a Roman Catholic priest, known as “Father Coughlin,” soared to national prominence and influence through radio broadcasts from his church outside Detroit.

At first a Roosevelt supporter, the “radio priest” by 1934 was raging against FDR and the Jews, on whom he blamed the Great Depression.

After the United States entered World War II, the Catholic Church and the federal government forced Coughlin off the air. Pelley was convicted in 1942 of sedition and intent to cause insurrection in the military and was sentenced to 15 years in prison.³⁶

By war’s end, American fascism as a mass movement had ended. But a core of committed activists kept the far right alive, spurred on by the Cold War against the Soviet Union and the first stirrings of the civil rights movement.³⁷

As public opposition to communism grew, Smith preached that Jews and communists were one and the same and that the Holocaust never occurred.

The founding of the John Birch Society in 1958 marked the reemergence of conspiratorial, far-right views — minus the anti-Semitism — in respectable society. Birch Society doctrine viewed the United Nations as a communist organization. Founder Robert Welch, an executive in his brother’s candy company, went further, calling President Dwight D. Eisenhower “a dedicated, conscious agent of the communist conspiracy.”³⁸

Welch’s wild accusation stoked outrage in the political mainstream. President Harry S Truman reportedly called the Birch Society “the Ku Klux Klan, without nightshirts.”³⁹

By the mid-1960s, the Klan — established in 1866 in Pulaski, Tenn. — had become the center of extremist resistance to the civil rights movement. Members and ex-members of the secret organization carried out some of the most notorious crimes of the era, including the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., in which four young girls were killed; the assassination of civil rights leader Medgar Evers in

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Chronology

1930s-1960s

Attempts to create U.S. versions of European fascism fail, but far-right activists build smaller organizations after World War II.

1934

The Rev. Charles Coughlin ("Father Coughlin") gains a nationwide following for denouncing President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Jews.

1941-1942

Coughlin is forced off the air and another far-right leader, William Dudley Pelley, is sent to prison for sedition.

1952

Anti-Semite Gerald L.K. Smith fails to persuade the Republican Party to link communism and Jews.

1958

John Birch Society is founded.

1963

Ku Klux Klan members bomb a black church in Birmingham, Ala., killing four young girls.

1967

American neo-Nazi leader George Lincoln Rockwell is killed by an embittered ex-aide.

1969

U.S. Supreme Court rules that a Ku Klux Klan leader's denunciations of blacks and Jews are constitutionally protected speech.

1970s-1980s

Anti-government and anti-Jewish organizations turn to violence, most often against police officers, who are seen as agents of the "Zionist Occupation Government."

1971

Anti-Semitic, Christian Identity activist William Potter Gale formulates the doctrine underlying the radically anti-government Posse Comitatus movement, which by 1976 has at least 12,000 members, according to the FBI.

1978

The Turner Diaries, a genocide fantasy by neo-Nazi William Pierce (pseudonym: Andrew Macdonald), is published.

1983

Posse Comitatus leader Gordon Kahl kills two federal marshals in North Dakota, later dies in a shootout with federal agents in Arkansas.

1984

The Order, a small extremist group inspired by *The Turner Diaries*, murders a Jewish talk-show host in Denver who had denounced racism. . . . The group's founder is killed later in a shootout in Washington state.

1988

A federal jury in Arkansas acquits 14 right-wing extremists, including five members of The Order, on sedition and other charges.

1990s

Extremist violence climaxes in armed confrontations with federal officers.

1992

An attempt to arrest survivalist and Christian Identity proponent Randy Weaver in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, ends with the deaths of a marshal and Weaver's wife and young son.

1993

Extremist leaders gather in Estes

Park, Colo., to plan cooperation with less-threatening groups. . . . Federal siege of the Branch Davidian religious-cult compound in Waco, Texas, leads to deaths of more than 80 people. . . . Extremists depict Ruby Ridge and Waco as examples of government ruthlessness. . . . Outrage at government helps build "patriot militia" movement.

1995

Timothy McVeigh, an extremist military veteran inspired by *The Turner Diaries*, detonates truck bomb outside Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people. . . . Militia membership declines.

2000s

Extremist movement erodes further following 9/11 attacks and the removal of major figures by death and imprisonment, but economic crisis ignites fears of a resurgence.

2001

McVeigh executed by lethal injection.

2004

Richard Butler, influential leader of Idaho-based "Aryan Nations," dies of natural causes.

2005

Up-and-coming extremist leader Matthew Hale, founder of World Church of the Creator, is sentenced to 40 years for conspiracy to commit murder.

2009

Homeland Security Department warns extremists could exploit economic crisis as a recruiting opportunity; critics blast department for focusing on ideology rather than criminal acts.

Concern About Extremism Rising in Europe

Czech Republic expels ex-Klan leader David Duke.

Memories of the horrific consequences of far-right extremism remain strong in Europe. Yet nearly 65 years after the Nazi Holocaust, the extreme right has been gaining ground in parts of the continent, prompting worries that ultranationalism is on the upswing.

“The possibilities for a rise of the far right in the light of the financial and economic crisis are there,” Anton Pelinka, a professor of politics at Central European University in Budapest, Hungary, told *The Guardian*, a leading British newspaper.¹

So far, the European far right is advancing further — at the polls and in the expansion of illegal neo-Nazi organizations — than in the United States. But the gains by European extremists give heart to their U.S. counterparts, who have long maintained ties to Europe, though some European governments do their best to disrupt the relationships. In April, the Czech Republic expelled ex-Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke, a neo-Nazi, who had been invited by an extremist Czech group to lecture in Prague and Brno.

And the British government announced in early May that it had barred — among others — Don Black, founder of the Stormfront Web site, from entering Britain.

Duke’s aborted visit notwithstanding, transatlantic ties may have frayed somewhat following the 2002 death of William Pierce. The American neo-Nazi leader had been traveling regularly to Europe for meetings, says Mark Potok, Intelligence Project director at the Southern Poverty Law Center, in Birmingham, Ala. But even if Duke fails to take Pierce’s place as emissary to the Old World, American far-right Web sites commonly post links to extremist Web sites and news from Europe.²

The news is plentiful. In Austria, the country’s two far-right parties together won 29 percent of the vote in national parliamentary elections last year. One of the parties had been found-

ed by Jörg Haider, who died in a car crash shortly after the vote. Haider made his brand of politics a major force by combining salesmanship, xenophobic opposition to immigration and appeals to the Nazi heritage of Adolf Hitler’s country of birth.

Haider had been forced to quit as a provincial governor in 1991 (he was reelected in 1999) after praising Hitler’s “orderly employment program.” And in 1995 he praised Waffen SS veterans as “decent men of character who remained faithful to their ideals.”³

Indicators of the growing strength of extremism extend into Germany and Britain as well as parts of the former Soviet bloc. In Russia, where ultranationalist groups, including neo-Nazis, are part of the political landscape, there were at least 85 systematic killings of migrant workers from Central Asia, as well as others seen as ethnically non-Slavic, in 2008, according to the Sova Center, a Moscow-based hate crime-monitoring group. The victims included a migrant worker from Tajikistan who was beheaded. Human-rights advocates who denounce these killings have been threatened with death themselves.⁴

Violence isn’t limited to Russia. In late 2008, the police chief of Passau, a Bavarian town with a strong neo-Nazi presence, was stabbed following his 2008 order to open the grave of a former Nazi who had been buried with an illegal Swastika flag.⁵

The attack took place against a backdrop of increasing violence by German neo-Nazi organizations. A German newspaper reported that violent crimes originating in the extremist right increased by 15 percent during the first 10 months of 2008. And a government research institute reported that a greater segment of male teenagers — 5 percent — were involved in neo-Nazi groups than in mainstream politics in 2007-2008. In formerly communist-ruled eastern Germany, nearly 10 percent of youths participated in far-right groups.⁶

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Jackson, Miss., that same year; the murder of three civil rights workers in 1964 in Neshoba County, Miss.; and the killing of another civil rights worker in Alabama in 1965.⁴⁰

Anti-civil rights violence ebbed after enactment of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. From then on, the extremist right became steadily more influenced by neo-Nazism. George Lincoln Rockwell, founder of the American Nazi Party, pioneered the white-nationalist trend. The former Navy pilot and World War II veteran was shot and killed by a dismissed follower in 1967.⁴¹

Rockwell had been a mentor to William Pierce, a former university physics professor who in 1974 founded the National Alliance, which became a major influence in the extremist right. Pierce became nationally notorious in the 1990s as author of *The Turner Diaries*, which laid out a scenario for white genocide of blacks, Jews and “race traitors” — a process led by a secret brotherhood known as The Order, which sets events in motion by blowing up FBI headquarters with a truck bomb.

The first open sign of a Klan-Nazi nexus was the 1979 killing in broad day-

light of five Communist Workers Party members who were starting an anti-Klan march in Greensboro, N.C., in 1979.

Fighting and Killing

Less visibly, another trend was under way. An extreme anti-government and anti-Jewish movement founded in 1971 by William Potter Gale began growing, especially in the West and Midwest. Posse Comitatus (“Power of the County”) held that the federal government was constitutionally illegitimate. For example, county justices of

Throughout Western Europe, the enormous growth of immigrant populations, especially from Muslim countries, has provided the biggest boost to right-wing parties — from traditional conservative groups to neo-Nazis — over the past two decades.

However, the European far right's growth isn't uniform. In France, Jean-Marie Le Pen, an apologist for Nazism who was one of the pioneers of the post-World War II extreme right, saw his National Front party win only 4.3 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections in 2007.⁷ Analysts said that President Nicolas Sarkozy effectively co-opted Le Pen's anti-immigration politics, though without the ethnic and religious extremism. In 2002, Le Pen had finished second in the first round of the presidential race.⁸

Le Pen's counterparts across the English Channel are showing more success. The British National Party (BNP) is seen by some British politicians as likely to win the most votes in an election in June to choose European Parliament representatives. BNP leaders portray their party as defending the country against non-white immigrants. Pro-immigrant policies "have made white Britons second-class citizens," the party says.⁹

Meanwhile, the BNP is trying to play down its historic anti-Semitism. Party leader Nick Griffin wrote in 2007 that taking an "Islamophobic" stance "is going to produce on average much better media coverage than . . . banging on about 'Jewish power.'"¹⁰

That purely tactical shift notwithstanding, others in the European political world argue that old-school anti-Semitism is flourishing — on the left as well as the right — often disguised as opposition to Israeli policies.

"The extravagant rhetoric of the demagogic left and right is gaining ground, and the most obvious manifestation is the return of anti-Semitism as an organizing ideology," Dennis MacShane, a Labor Party member of Parliament, wrote in late 2008.

"As jobs are lost and welfare becomes meaner and leaner, the politics of blaming the outsider can only grow."¹¹

¹ Quoted in Kate Connolly, "Haider is our Lady Di," *The Guardian*, Oct. 18, 2008, p. A29. For background, see Sarah Glazer, "Anti-Semitism in Europe," *CQ Global Researcher*, June 2008, pp. 149-181.

² For example, see "Stormfront forum, international," www.stormfront.org/forum/forumdisplay.php?f=18; Kinism.net — Occidental Christianity, <http://kinism.net/>; The French Connection, <http://iamthewitness.com/>; League of American Patriots, http://leagueap.org/wordpress/?page_id=17.

³ Quoted in Matt Schudel, "Jörg Haider; Politician Made Far-Right Party a Force in Austria," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 12, 2008, p. C8.

⁴ Michael Schwartz, "Migrant Worker Decapitated in Russia," *The New York Times*, Dec. 13, 2008; Luke Harding, "Putin's worst nightmare: Their mission is to cleanse Russia of its ethnic 'occupiers,'" *The Observer* magazine (U.K.), Feb. 8, 2009, p. 32; "Neo-Nazis threaten to murder journalists in Russia," Committee to Protect Journalists, Feb. 11, 2009, <http://cpj.org/2009/02/neo-nazis-threaten-to-murder-journalists-in-russia.php>.

⁵ Nicholas Kulish, "Ancient City's Nazi Past Seeps Out After Stabbing," *The New York Times*, Feb. 12, 2009, p. A18; "Police Chief Long Reviled by NPD Leadership," *Spiegel Online International*, Dec. 19, 2008, www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,597645,00.html.

⁶ *Ibid.*; and "German teens drawn to neo-Nazi groups — study," Reuters, March 17, 2009, <http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-38554620090317>.

⁷ In 2008, Le Pen was fined 10,000 Euros for having called the Nazi occupation of France "not especially inhumane, even if there were a number of blunders." Quoted in "Le Pen fined over war comments," *The Irish Times* (Reuters), Feb. 9, 2008, p. A10.

⁸ Adam Sage, "Hard-up National Front sells office to immigrants," *The Times* (London), Aug. 13, 2008, p. A37.

⁹ "Immigration — time to say ENOUGH!" British National Party, undated, <http://bnp.org.uk/policies-2/immigration>. Also see Andrew Grice, "The BNP are now a bigger threat than ever," *The Independent* (London), April 10, 2009, p. A12.

¹⁰ Quoted in Matthew Taylor, "BNP seeks to bury antisemitism and gain Jewish votes in Islamophobic campaign," *The Guardian* (London), April 10, 2008, p. A17.

¹¹ Denis MacShane, "Europe's Jewish Problem," *Newsweek*, International Edition, Dec. 15, 2008, p. 0.

the peace held legal supremacy over the U.S. Supreme Court, according to Posse ideology, and federal currency was invalid.⁴²

Posse alienation went far deeper. An anti-Semitic religious doctrine known as "Christian Identity" exerted deep influence on many Posse leaders and members, including Gale (despite his own definitively proved Jewish descent, which he denied). The doctrine — rejected by all mainstream Christian denominations — holds that white people are the genuine descendants of the Biblical Hebrews. That is, they're God's chosen people, and Jews and blacks are the devil's

spawn. By 1976, the FBI estimated Posse membership at 12,000 to 50,000, not including sympathizers.

Posse Comitatus played a major role in raising the level of far-right extremism to a fever pitch in the last two decades of the 20th century. In the early 1980s, economic crisis gripped the Farm Belt, bringing a wave of foreclosures. The Posse launched a major recruiting drive, preaching that Jewish bankers were to blame for the falling grain prices and land values that brought many farmers to ruin.

One Posse tactic was to flood the federal court system with amateur lawsuits to cancel farmers' loan oblig-

ations, on the grounds that the loans were illegal. When authorities enforced foreclosure orders, trouble sometimes erupted.

In 1983, Gordon Kahl, a Christian Identity Posse activist who had served a prison term for tax evasion, killed two federal marshals following a meeting to recruit members in North Dakota. Kahl fled and was killed three months later in a gunfight with federal agents in Arkansas. Kahl became a martyr in extremist circles.

An almost identical episode took place the next year near Cairo, Neb., when a Posse sympathizer, Arthur Kirk, was killed in a shootout with

state police officers serving foreclosure papers. Before the shooting started, Kirk denounced Jews, bankers and the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, to officers trying to get him to surrender.⁴³

Ideology aside, some farmers who accepted help from the Posse were trying to survive financial crisis. Another group formed in the 1980s dedicated itself purely to violence.

The Order (its name borrowed from *The Turner Diaries*) vowed to strike the “Zionist Occupation Government” in defense of “White America.” Robert Mathews founded the small group with eight other men in the early 1980s. By 1983, The Order had begun committing armed robberies to raise money. In 1984, the group assassinated a Denver radio talk-show host, Alan Berg, who was Jewish, and had argued with racists on the air. Later that same year, the group robbed an armored car of \$3.6 million.

Mathews died in a shootout with federal agents on Whidbey Island, near Seattle, in December 1984.

In 1985, 23 surviving members of the group went to trial or pleaded guilty to racketeering charges, with most receiving sentences of 40 to 100 years. David Lane later was sentenced to 150 years in a separate trial for participating in Berg’s murder.⁴⁴

Federal prosecutors in Fort Smith, Ark., failed, however to convict Lane and 13 other extremists of sedition in 1988. They’d been charged with plotting to overthrow the government and set up a separate white nation in the Pacific Northwest.⁴⁵

That same year, in that very region, an upsurge of anti-minority violence by skinheads claimed the life of Ethiopian immigrant Mulugeta Seraw, who was bludgeoned to death with a baseball bat by the East Side White Pride gang. Three years later, Tom Metzger, an infamous San Diego extremist, was found responsible for the death, along with others, on the grounds that his

White Aryan Resistance group had incited the group who killed Seraw. The verdict, in a civil suit brought by the SPLC, required Metzger and his codefendants to pay \$12.5 million to Seraw’s family.⁴⁶

Explosion and Aftermath

The violence that marked the 1980s intensified in the ‘90s, sparked by the botched 1992 arrest of survivalist and Christian Identity adherent Randy Weaver for failing to appear in court on a gun-law charge. (He’d been given the wrong court date.) Weaver had holed up with his family in remote Ruby Ridge, in northern Idaho, which had become a center for the extreme right and was home to Christian Identity leader Richard Butler.⁴⁷

When federal marshals attempted to arrest Weaver, who had not been involved in previous violence, a gunfight broke out in which Weaver’s son and a marshal were killed; later, during a siege of the family’s cabin, an FBI sniper killed Weaver’s wife. Weaver surrendered and was sentenced to 18 months in prison.⁴⁸

FBI handling of the case was widely considered a fiasco, and worse. But on the far right, a more ominous view prevailed: Ruby Ridge seemed to validate conspiracist fears of government violence against gun owners and opponents of the “New World Order” — far-right code for U.N.-controlled global government.

Months after Ruby Ridge, Christian Identity preacher Peter Peters organized a meeting of about 150 extremists at Estes Park, Colo. In a keynote speech, Louis Beam, a former leader of the Texas Klan and one of those acquitted in the Arkansas sedition case, outlined a strategy of “leaderless resistance” — formation of small cells of committed activists without central direction. A Vietnam veteran, Beam also spoke of the need

for “camouflage” — the ability to blend in the public’s eye the more committed groups of resistance “with mainstream ‘kosher’ associations that are generally seen as harmless.”⁴⁹

Similarly, others at the meeting advocated uniting with less extreme groups to form a broad anti-government movement.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, a related development had just shocked the mainstream political establishment. David Duke, a former Klan leader who hadn’t renounced his anti-black or anti-Jewish views, won the 1991 Republican primary for Louisiana governor. (He went on to lose the general election.)⁵¹

Following the Estes Park conclave, “militias” sprang up around the country, especially in the rural Midwest and West. Ideas animating the movement included survivalism, gun-rights defense and — among many members, but not all — far-right conspiracy theories. Among those who passed through militia circles was a U.S. Army veteran of the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War, Timothy McVeigh.

But before McVeigh’s name hit the headlines, a series of events near Waco, Texas, would seize national attention and electrify the far right. Members of the Branch Davidian religious cult, led by a fiery preacher named David Koresh, fired on ATF agents attempting to search for guns and ammunition believed to be stored at the Davidians’ compound; four agents were killed. On April 19, 1993, after a 51-day siege, FBI agents moved on the compound with tanks. In the conflagration that resulted, Koresh and about 80 other Davidians died, including many children.

A widespread suspicion that FBI teargas canisters started the fire became a certainty on the far right. In those circles, Waco stood as evidence of government ruthlessness. Koresh, who had followed the Weaver case closely, probably wouldn’t have been surprised. “Koresh spoke to me

frequently on the phone about Ruby Ridge,” says Special Agent Cavanaugh of the ATF, who negotiated with the Branch Davidian leader during the siege. Koresh and his top aide “were well-versed in everything that happened there and were spitting out ‘New World Order’ crackpot conspiracy theories.”

In 2000, an outside counsel to the Justice Department concluded that the canisters hadn’t started the fire but that Davidians themselves ignited it.⁵²

But by then, April 19 had become notorious for another reason. On April 19, 1995, McVeigh detonated a bomb in a rented truck he parked in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people, including 19 children. Arrested hours later after a traffic stop, McVeigh was later often described as a lone wolf. But, among other activities, he had sold *The Turner Diaries* at gun shows, which were popular with militia members and with extremists in general.

“McVeigh was not a lone extremist; instead, he was trained to make himself look like a lone extremist,” wrote former FBI agent German. “It’s a right-wing terrorism technique that comes complete with written instruction manuals.”⁵³

The bombing — for which McVeigh was executed in 2001 — made *Turner Diaries* author Pierce and his National Alliance notorious. But the bombing also saw a steep decline in militia membership, as those without a high level of commitment to extremist politics dropped away.

More blows followed. Pierce died of cancer in 2002. Two years later Butler died; earlier he had lost his Idaho compound after losing a civil lawsuit filed by the Southern Poverty Law Center.⁵⁴

Then, in 2005, Matthew Hale, 33, considered an up-and-coming extremist leader as head of the World Church of the Creator, was sentenced to 40 years in federal prison for conspiring

to kill a federal judge. Since his imprisonment, extremist-watchers say, no charismatic leader has emerged from the extremist world. ■

CURRENT SITUATION

Hate in April

Hitler was born in April, which marks the beginning of the public rally season for right-wing extremists, and for opponents who mount counterdemonstrations.⁵⁵

This year promises to be a busy one for haters. In April alone, 32 conferences, celebrations, militia training sessions and other events were planned by neo-Nazi, Klan, Christian Identity and related organizations in 22 states, according to the Anti-Defamation League; dozens more events are scheduled into October.⁵⁶

The list includes Hitler birthday commemorations in Illinois and North Carolina and a march by robed Klan members in Pulaski, Tenn., where Confederate veterans founded the Klan.

Counterdemonstrators showed for an NSM rally of about 70 members the day before at the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, Mo. No one was arrested, but the two groups yelled at each other and traded “Heil Hitler” salutes and raised-middle-finger retorts. A second group of counterdemonstrators organized by the ADL held a “rally for respect” at a nearby site.⁵⁷

Commenting on the NSM rally, Lewis Reed, president of the St. Louis Board of Aldermen, said, “It’s sad that there are still people today, in 2009, that only want to divide the races and breed hate.”⁵⁸

Yet neo-Nazi rallies, at least in major metropolitan areas, typically don’t draw big crowds of extremists. In Skokie, Ill., a Chicago suburb with a large Jewish population — including Holocaust survivors — the opening of a state Holocaust museum in April drew a neo-Nazi demonstration — of seven people. Twelve thousand people attended the opening ceremony, where former President Bill Clinton spoke.⁵⁹

This year’s rally season began with a snag. “East Coast White Unity” and “Volksfront” (“Peoples’ Front” in German) had planned to meet in Boston over the April 11 weekend. But after the Boston Anti-Racist Coalition told the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) about the nature of the “Patriot’s Day” rally, the VFW withdrew permission to use their hall. Instead, the event was held at an American Legion Hall in Loudon, N.H.⁶⁰

“These racist speakers, bands and their supporters will always have to walk on egg shells and face the very real prospect of their events being exposed to the general public, wherever and whenever they rear their ugly heads,” the coalition said in a post on an anarchist Web site.⁶¹

But Roper of White Revolution replied, “Because a venue, or two, or three, has cancelled on us due to the efforts of anti-white, communist and Jewish activists, the event has not been cancelled and will go on,” he said. “We plan for such eventualities in depth.”⁶²

For its part, One People’s Project, an anti-supremacist organization, says it infiltrates neo-Nazi and Klan groups to find out about planned events in time to organize countermobilizations. “We can’t keep on allowing groups like the Klan, Aryan Nations, National Alliance, National Vanguard and the National Socialist Movement to hold society at-large hostage,” Daryle Lamont Jenkins of One People’s Project said.⁶³

'Fascism' Label Comes in Handy for Critics

But respected writers say it's a legitimate — if unlikely — concern.

Accompanying today's worries about an extremist resurgence are fears that the United States could, if economic conditions worsen, embrace fascism — the totalitarian ideology that modern hate groups champion.

But the concern focuses on the federal government itself, not fringe, neo-Nazi organizations. Indeed, some of President Barack Obama's foes are calling him a fascist, the same label some had applied to President George W. Bush.

The labeling would seem to show once again that "fascist" is one of the most loosely applied — and handy — terms in the political lexicon. Nevertheless, fascism isn't foreign to the United States, even though the word comes from 1920s Italy. Italian dictator Benito Mussolini coined "fascismo" to name the violence-glorifying, socialist-hating and ultranationalist movement he formed after World War I, appropriating a term then used for militant political groups of all stripes.¹

Notwithstanding those Italian roots, Robert Paxton, one of the leading historians of the European far right, wrote that the first fascist group in history may have been the Ku Klux Klan. "By adopting a uniform . . . as well as by their techniques of intimidation and their conviction that violence was justified in the cause of their group's destiny," wrote Paxton, a Virginia native, "the first version of the Klan in the defeated American South was arguably a remarkable preview of the way fascist movements were to function in interwar Europe."²

But Paxton, an emeritus professor of social science at Columbia University, dismisses the attempt to label Obama fascist as a desperation move. "When there's a popular figure and you can't get a grip on opposing him, you call him a fascist," he says. "As opposed to Hitler and Mussolini in uniform, shrieking into microphones and juicing up the nationalism of crowds, Obama is a calm, reasonable person whose basic drives have all been toward bolstering democracy and the rule of law."

Obama's extreme critics insist otherwise. Obama heads a "Gestapo government," conservative blogger David Limbaugh (brother of radio commentator Rush Limbaugh) told a radio interviewer. And *The American Spectator*, a conservative magazine, likened Obama's economic policies to those of Mussolini.³

The author of the *Spectator* piece, senior editor Quinn Hillyer, added that he wouldn't go so far as to compare Obama's administration to that of Adolf Hitler, whose version of fascism turned out far deadlier than the Italian original. Still, he wrote, "The comparison of today's situation to that of Italian fascism is no mere scare tactic but a serious concern."⁴

In calling Obama a fascist, critics may simply be hoping for better results than they got when they tried pinning the "socialist" label on him during and after the 2008 presidential campaign. "We've so overused the word 'socialism' that it no longer has the negative connotation it had 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago," Sal Anuzis, former chairman of the Michigan Republican Party, told *The New York Times*. "Fascism — everybody still thinks that's a bad thing."⁵

To be sure, only a small minority accepts "fascist" as a compliment. But aiming it at a politician after first denouncing him as a leftist seems an odd tactic, given fascists' historic hatred of socialists.⁶

But that seemed to bother Obama's foes as little as the fact that they were borrowing from the vocabulary that some critics of the Bush administration used in 2001-2008.

The liberal group MoveOn.org, for instance, created an ad in 2004 that tried to connect Bush to Hitler, intoning: "A nation warped by lies. Lies fuel fear. Fear fuels aggression. Invasion. Occupation. What were war crimes in 1945 is foreign policy in 2003."⁷

Liberal author Naomi Wolf made a similar case in her book *The End of America*, published toward the end of the Bush administration.⁸

On April 19, 2008, 30 to 40 members of the National Socialist Movement (NSM) rallied in Washington for an anti-immigration march from the National Mall to the U.S. Capitol. They were greeted by raucous counterdemonstrators, five of whom were arrested for allegedly assaulting police officers with pepper spray and a pole.⁶⁴

White supremacist gatherings don't tend to be large affairs. Roper told a reporter by phone from the New Hampshire event that 200 people were par-

ticipating, making it one of the bigger events of its type. But no independent confirmation was available.

In 2005, Roper organized a protest demonstration outside an event in Boston commemorating the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Nazi death camps. Police and counterprotesters far outnumbered Roper and his dozen or so demonstrators.⁶⁵

However, on occasion, supremacists' crowds have been bigger, and violence has erupted. In 2002, about 60 supporters of the now-imprisoned

Matthew Hale's World Church of the Creator gathered in York, Pa., where a former mayor and eight others had been charged in the 1969 death of a black woman during a racially charged riot. Several hundred counterprotesters fought with Hale's supporters in the city streets, as police tried to separate the groups. Twenty-five people were arrested.⁶⁶

However, in April of that year, only about 30 to 40 neo-Nazis showed up in York for a Hitler's birthday celebration.⁶⁷

“The Nazis rose to power in a living, if battered, democracy,” Wolf wrote. “Dictators can rise in a weakened democracy even with a minority of popular support.”⁹

Drawing in part from Paxton’s most recent book on fascism, Wolf argued that erosions of civil liberties under the Bush administration paralleled events in Italy and Germany as Mussolini and Hitler moved toward totalitarian rule.

But these arguments leave out the widespread loss of faith in democracy, and the state of near-civil war that served as the backdrop to the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany, Paxton says.

By contrast, Americans opposed to Bush expressed their discontent within the system, by voting in Obama, Paxton notes. And the political climate even before that, when Wolf was writing, didn’t begin to approach the Italian and German precedents. “In the collection of pre-conditions, you need something worse,” he says. “A lost war, big-time national humiliation — we might get there, but we’re not quite there yet — and a sense that our existing way of doing politics isn’t working. And then power moving to the streets, with paramilitary organizations. I don’t see any of that.”

Paxton does agree that the detention and intelligence-gathering policies adopted after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks could be compared with early moves by Hitler upon



Followers of the neo-Nazi NPD party stand defiantly near a “Berlin against Nazis” poster during a demonstration in Berlin on May 1, 2009. Anti-immigration neo-Nazis and skinheads often clash with anti-fascists on May Day in Germany.

AFP/Getty Images/Axel Schmidt

winning election as chancellor in 1933. “You can draw some parallels — with care,” he says. “The focus should be on steps away from the rule of law.”

Still, Paxton discourages complacency. “In three years, if we’re not out of this mess, we could see something that would call itself the patriotic party or the minutemen, a symbol that has a nice nationalistic resonance,” he says. “It would sweep up all the discontented from the left and the right; it would be light on ideology. The immigration issue

would be a very plausible gathering point for some sort of movement like this.”

¹ Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004), pp. 4-5.

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³ Quinn Hillyer, “Il Duce, Redux?” *The American Spectator*, April 2, 2009, <http://spectator.org/archives/2009/04/02/il-duce-redux>. Limbaugh quoted in Carla Marinucci and Joe Garofoli, “Fascist? Socialist? Attacks on Obama take a shrill tone,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 9, 2009, p. A1.

⁴ Hillyer, *op. cit.*

⁵ Quoted in John Harwood, “But Can Obama Make the Trains Run on Time?” *The New York Times*, April 20, 2009, www.nytimes.com/2009/04/20/us/politics/20caucus.html?scp=1&sq=fascism&st=cse.

⁶ Paxton, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-67.

⁷ Marinucci and Garofoli, *op. cit.*

⁸ Naomi Wolf, *The End of America: Letters of Warning to a Young Patriot, A Citizen’s Call to Action* (2007).

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

Free Speech, Hate Speech

Some conservatives are attacking the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) examination of far-right extremism as a barely disguised attack on political foes of the Obama administration.

“One of the most embarrassingly shoddy pieces of propaganda I’d ever read out of DHS,” thundered conservative blogger Michelle Malkin. Others in the conservative blogosphere

shared her view that the report tried to tie conservatives to extremists.⁶⁸ Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano later responded that the agency is on “the lookout for criminal and terrorist activity but we do not — nor will we ever — monitor ideology or political beliefs.”⁶⁹

The report noted that extremists are especially interested in recruiting veterans, an observation that triggered angry criticism from some veterans’ organizations (see below). In essence the 14-page assessment holds that economic

turmoil, the election of a black president and a growing number of veterans — whom right-wing extremists have a documented interest in recruiting — are creating a climate in which far-right extremism could flourish again. Specifically, the report said the DHS “assesses that right-wing extremist groups’ frustration over a perceived lack of government action on illegal immigration has the potential to incite individuals or small groups toward violence.” But any such violence would likely be “isolated” and “small-scale.”⁷⁰

Though critics later said the DHS failed to distinguish between extremists and mainstream political advocates, the report did try to draw that line. Debates on gun rights and other constitutional issues are often intense — but perfectly legal, the report said. “Violent extremists,” it added, “may attempt to co-opt the debate and use the controversy as a radicalization tool.”⁷¹

But Berlet of Political Research Associates argues that the report itself crosses into the potentially unconstitutional territory of monitoring ideological trends.

“The government should not be in the business of undermining radical ideas,” he says. “As citizens we have a responsibility to challenge rhetoric that demonizes and scapegoats, but I don’t think the First Amendment allows the government to be in that battle.”

Despite attacks from the left as well as right, some commentators defended the report against its critics. “This DHS assessment was begun more than a year ago, before Barack Obama was even nominated,” blogger Charles Johnson — a political independent who had been popular with conservative critics of Islam — wrote on his influential “Little Green Footballs” site. “It was not done at the behest of the Obama administration. . . . The DHS report is not intended to target anyone but the most extreme elements of the far right, and it’s depressing to see so many bloggers jumping to totally unwarranted conclusions.”⁷²

Reaction to the document may have been especially intense because it followed closely on an uproar that greeted disclosure of a report on the “Modern Militia Movement” in Missouri. It was produced by a “fusion center,” one of 70 around the country that were set up by law enforcement agencies after Sept. 11 to ensure that intelligence is shared between federal, state and local officers. The report mostly summarized information

on extremist activities in the 1990s and outlined some ideas said to be circulating now on the far right.⁷³

But the report lumped together extremists and mainstream political activists with no violent inclinations. “Militia members most commonly associate with third-party political groups,” the report said, going on to name supporters of 2008 libertarian presidential candidate Bob Barr, Constitution Party candidate Chuck Baldwin and Rep. Ron Paul, R-Texas, who ran for the Republican Party presidential nomination.⁷⁴

“This smacks of totalitarian regimes of days gone by,” said Baldwin, one of many to react furiously to the document.⁷⁵

Within weeks, the Missouri State Highway Patrol had apologized to the three politicians and replaced the head of the fusion center.⁷⁶

Not all critics came from the right. “This is part of a national trend where intelligence reports are turning attention away from people who are actually doing bad things to people who are thinking thoughts that the government, for whatever reason, doesn’t like,” former FBI agent German told *The Associated Press*.⁷⁷

The ACLU, where German is now a policy counselor, noted that the North Central Texas Fusion System had produced a report in February that tied former Rep. Cynthia McKinney and former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark to “far left groups” that allegedly sympathize with the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militia of Lebanon and other armed movements in the Middle East.⁷⁸

Fusion centers, German said, are an “equal opportunity infringer” on civil rights of citizens on the right and the left.⁷⁹

Indeed, DHS says that it produced a report earlier this year on left-wing extremists. That report soon leaked out as well. The document forecast a rise in cyber-attacks aimed at businesses, especially those deemed to be violators of animal rights.⁸⁰

Extremism-watchers, for their part, greeted the DHS report as an echo of their own conclusions. “This Homeland Security report reinforces our view that the current political and economic climate in the United States is creating the right conditions for a rise in extremist activity,” said Potok of the SPLC.⁸¹

But one of the center’s most ferocious left-wing critics, writer Alexander Cockburn, ridiculed that reasoning, accusing the center of “fingering militiamen in a potato field in Idaho” instead of “attacking the roots of Southern poverty, and the system that sustains that poverty as expressed in the endless prisons and death rows across the South, disproportionately crammed with blacks and Hispanics.”⁸²

Fights are also continuing over broadcasters’ commentaries. In Boston, radio station WTKK-FM suspended right-wing radio talk-show host Jay Severin after he responded to the influenza outbreak with comments including: “So now, in addition to venereal disease and the other leading exports of Mexico — women with mustaches and VD — now we have swine flu.” Mexicans, he said, are “the world’s lowest of primitives.”⁸³

Franklin Soultis, a spokesman for Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, called Severin’s language “dehumanizing.”

Severin himself referred questions to his lawyer, George Tobia, who told the *Boston Globe* that he expected the broadcaster to be back on the air soon. “But I don’t know when.”⁸⁴

Recruiting Veterans

Discharged from the U.S. Marine Corps after being arrested for allegedly taking part in armed robberies at two hotels in Jacksonville, N.C., a former lance corporal now faces prosecution for allegedly threatening President Obama’s life.

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At Issue:

Is anti-immigration rhetoric provoking hate crimes against Latinos?



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WRITTEN FOR *CQ RESEARCHER*, APRIL 2009

across the board, nativist organizations in America have angrily denounced those who suggest that demonizing rhetoric leads to hate violence. One of them even recently issued a press release criticizing the “outrageous behavior” of groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center that propose such a link and “provide no proof whatsoever.”

Nativist organizations take the remarkable position that hate speech directed against Latino immigrants has no relationship at all to hate crime — not even the utterly false allegations that Latinos are secretly planning to hand the American Southwest over to Mexico, are far more criminal than others, are bringing dread diseases to the United States, and so on.

In addition to defying common sense, that head-in-the-sand approach completely ignores the statements that are typically made by hate criminals during their attacks.

Take the case of Marcelo Lucero, who was allegedly murdered by a gang of white teenagers in the Long Island town of Patchogue, N.Y., last November. Prosecutors say the suspects told detectives they regularly went “beaner jumping” — beating up Latinos — and that they used racial epithets during the attack. “Let’s go find some Mexicans to [expletive] up,” one said beforehand, according to *Newsday*.

Nativist groups use the fact that we don’t know precisely where the teens’ fury comes from to deny it was related to nativist demonization. But just because it’s not possible to pinpoint the exact source of their racial anger — rhetoric from nativist groups, their parents, local anti-immigrant politicians, or pundits — does not mean it magically popped into the assailants’ minds.

There is also hard evidence to back up the link between demonization and violence. According to FBI statistics, anti-Latino hate crimes went up 40 percent between 2003 and 2007 — the very same period that saw a remarkable proliferation of nativist rhetoric.

Experts agree that there is a link. “Racist rhetoric and dehumanizing images inspire violence perpetrated against innocent human beings,” says Jack Levin, a nationally known hate crime expert at Northeastern University. “It’s not just the most recent numbers. It’s the trend over a number of years that lends credibility to the notion that we’re seeing a very real and possibly dramatic rise in anti-Latino hate incidents.”

Ignoring the role that demonization plays in such violence is a surefire way to generate more of it. Marcelo Lucero’s murder is only the latest in a sad list of violent incidents inspired by ugly rhetoric that will certainly grow longer.



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WRITTEN FOR *CQ RESEARCHER*, APRIL 2009

Last year, Barack Obama accused broadcasters Lou Dobbs and Rush Limbaugh of “feeding a kind of xenophobia.” He added that their broadcasts were a “reason why hate crimes against Hispanic people doubled last year.”

Obama’s facts and logic are plain wrong. The FBI found only 745 anti-Latino hate crimes nationwide in 2007, down from 770 in 2006. In fact anti-Hispanic hate crimes per capita dropped 18 percent over the last decade.

Most of these hate crimes were for minor offenses, such as graffiti or name-calling, with only 145 aggravated assaults, two murders and no rapes in 2007. To put this in perspective, former Hudson Institute economist Ed Rubenstein estimates illegal aliens murder at least 949 people a year.

There is also no evidence that hate crimes are motivated by the immigration-control movement. Those who claim there’s a connection cannot point to a single, significant commentator or politician who has advocated violence against Latinos. Nor can they find a single hate crime committed by their followers.

Although whites are the vast majority of listeners of conservative talk radio and television, they committed only 52 percent of hate crimes against Latinos — a percentage well below their proportion of 66 percent of the population. Moreover, Los Angeles County classified 42 percent of black-on-Hispanic hate crimes as “gang related.” This is not to suggest that blacks cannot be racist, but that they are unlikely to be influenced by the purveyors of supposed anti-immigrant rhetoric.

The 2008 murder of José Osvaldo Sucuzhanay in Brooklyn by blacks who targeted him because they mistook him as gay was denounced as a significant anti-Hispanic, anti-immigrant hate crime by all New York politicians and by *The New York Times*. Even when they were at large, the race of the killers was rarely mentioned.

Groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center that perpetuate misconceptions about anti-Latino hate crimes make no secret of their goals. They want supporters of immigration control silenced because, in the words of La Raza president Janet Murguía, “We have to draw the line on freedom of speech, when freedom of speech becomes hate speech.”

These organizations run relentless smear campaigns accusing virtually all opponents of illegal immigration — no matter how nuanced or tempered — of hate speech that must not be allowed on the airwaves, in print, or in front of Congress.

Before we abandon our core democratic principles of free speech and open debate in the name of stopping hate crimes, we should at least get our facts straight.

HATE GROUPS

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Kody Brittingham, 20, who served in the 2nd Tank Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, was indicted in February for the alleged threat by a federal grand jury in Raleigh, N.C. An unnamed federal law enforcement official told the Jacksonville (N.C.) *Daily News* that the charge followed discovery of a journal in Brittingham's barracks at Camp Lejeune in which he laid out a plan to kill Obama, who at that point hadn't yet been inaugurated. Investigators reportedly also found white-supremacist literature among Brittingham's possessions.⁸⁵

How plausible the alleged assassination plans were is not clear. But the arrest did reawaken concerns about white-supremacist and neo-Nazi recruitment of men with military training, especially those with combat experience (Brittingham, however, had never served overseas).

Those concerns aren't limited to extremist-watchers from advocacy organizations. An FBI report last year counted 203 individuals with "confirmed or claimed" military experience who had been spotted in extremist groups since the Sept. 11 attacks, which effectively marked the beginning of a period in which hundreds of thousands of military personnel began acquiring battlefield experience.⁸⁶

Those 203 individuals represent a minuscule fraction of the country's 23.8 million veterans or 1.4 million active-duty personnel, the report acknowledged.⁸⁷

The recent DHS assessment discussed extremist groups' interest in

recruiting veterans, only to prompt outraged reaction from some veterans' organizations and some politicians. "To characterize men and women returning home after defending our country as potential terrorists is offensive and unacceptable," House Republican leader John Boehner of Ohio said in a press release. The Department of Homeland Security owes our veterans an apology."⁸⁸

In discussing extremists' interest in veterans, the FBI said that neo-Nazis were not discouraged by the small number of vets who might be responsive to recruiting pitches.



Members of the National Socialist Movement demonstrate on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol on April 19, 2008. Fifteen years earlier, on another April 19, a fire during an FBI siege at the Branch Davidian compound outside Waco, Texas, killed David Koresh and about 80 followers, including many children.

Getty Images/David S. Holloway

"The prestige which the extremist movement bestows upon members with military experience grants them the potential for influence beyond their numbers," said the report, which is marked "unclassified/for official use only/law enforcement sensitive." The report, now available online, has circulated among journalists and non-governmental specialists.⁸⁹

Among a handful of specific cases, the FBI noted that two privates in the elite Army 82nd Airborne Divi-

sion received six-year prison sentences for attempting to sell body armor and other equipment in 2007 to an undercover agent posing as a white-supremacist movement member. And in 2005, a former Army intelligence analyst who'd been convicted of a firearms violation founded a skinhead group that reportedly advocated training members in firearms, knife-fighting, close-quarters combat and "house sweeps."⁹⁰

The FBI intelligence assessment followed an investigation by the SPLC. In 2006 the center published a detailed report that quoted neo-Nazi

vets, a supremacist who had renounced the extremist cause, as well as a Defense Department investigator. Extremists "stretch across all branches of service, they are linking up across the branches once they're inside, and they are hardcore," investigator Scott Barfield told the SPLC. "We've got Aryan Nations graffiti in Baghdad."⁹¹

Worries about a neo-Nazi presence in the military had surfaced years before U.S. troops were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. The trigger was the random murder in 1995 of a black man and woman

in Fayetteville, N.C., by two soldiers in the elite Army 82nd Airborne Division, whose home base is nearby Fort Bragg. In the uproar that followed, 22 members of the 82nd — including those arrested for the killing — were found by the Army to have extremist ties.⁹²

But far-right efforts to penetrate the Armed Forces apparently continued. The SPLC published excerpts from a 1999 article in the *National Alliance* magazine by an Army Special

Forces veteran who urged young supremacists to sign up. “Light infantry is your branch of choice,” he wrote, “because the coming race war, and the ethnic cleansing to follow, will be very much an infantryman’s war. It will be house-to-house, neighborhood-by-neighborhood, until your town or city is cleared and the alien races are driven into the countryside where they can be hunted down and ‘cleansed.’ ” 93

Supremacists who enlisted were told to stay undercover: “Do not — I repeat, do not — seek out other skinheads. Do not listen to skinhead ‘music.’ Do not keep ‘racist’ or ‘White-supremacist tracts’ where you live. During your service you will be subjected to a constant barrage of equal opportunity drivel. . . . Keep your mouth shut.” 94 ■

OUTLOOK

Guns in Holsters

The possibility that far-right extremists will emerge from the margins is as uncertain as the course of today’s economic crisis, veteran analysts say.

For their part, extremists including Roper of White Revolution harbor no doubt that the medium-term future will see the outbreak of major racial and ethnic violence accompanying the breakup of the United States. “A lot of people might think it’s impossible, but if you had gone to those same people in 1980 and told them the Berlin Wall was going to fall and the Soviet Union was going to collapse without a single missile being launched, they would have thought that was impossible too,” Roper says.

Others would argue that U.S. society and government have firmer foundations than the Soviet system, which came to power in 1917 and sustained itself first by mass terror and then by mass repression.

In any event, the consensus among monitors of the far right is that extremist intensity hasn’t even reached the level of the 1990s — the point at which the extremist movement “goes from red-hot to white-hot,” as Pitcavage of the ADL puts it.

A key indicator of the latter stage is the discovery of major conspiracies or actual large-scale attacks, such as the Oklahoma City bombing. “In the 1980s and mid-’90s, a variety of white-supremacist or anti-government extremist groups had huge plots — start a white revolution, break off part of the country, hit military targets,” Pitcavage says. “What they shared was an elaborate large-scale conception, often far larger than actual capabilities. If we start seeing some more of these we will know that things are starting to go white-hot again.”

The present crisis is too new to suddenly spawn a new wave of high-intensity extremism, Pitcavage adds. “Movements don’t start overnight,” he says. “It takes a while for people to experience these things and form a reaction to them.”

But Barkun at Syracuse University says today’s conditions are far more alarming than those of the “white-hot” years. War and global economic crisis alone open the possibility of a new extremism paradigm, he says.

“We’re in an economic situation which is so dire and so long-lasting that it will have social and political effects,” Barkun says. “Things may develop along entirely novel lines that don’t necessarily arise out of pre-existing groups, or that can readily be placed along the right-wing continuum, where the extreme right and the extreme left come together.”

He adds that he hasn’t seen any evidence of this taking place. However, left-right extremes have met before, at least elsewhere. Mussolini’s early fascist movement took in former socialists like him. The “socialist” in Germany’s National Socialist (Nazi) Party did express some — short-lived — opposition to capitalism. Attempts by some European far-rightists to co-opt left-wing anarchists represent an attempt to revive that tradition.

Also up in the air, to Barkun and others, is whether America’s tradition of racial conflict will reassert itself in a country whose demography has been transformed from the old, white majority-black minority pattern.

One effect of the growing Latino political presence likely will be an accommodation by the Republican Party, where most support for tougher immigration control has centered, says Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center. The result would be that white, non-Hispanic voters alienated by demographic change fall away from the conventional political system. “When that happens, a lot of these people would just go home, but some percentage of them would go into that extremist world,” he speculates. “For them, there’s no way out of a multiracial system. So it’s ‘Let’s go off and start our own country.’ ”

On the organizational side, Potok theorizes, the absence of major, controlling figures, such as Pierce of the National Alliance and Butler of Aryan Nations may be a danger sign. “I understand that a lot of really scary people, like The Order, came out of the Alliance,” he says, adding that some extremist leaders have a history of depicting a need for violence only at some indefinite point in the future. “Leaders ultimately have the effect of holding people back: ‘We’re going to kill the Jews, but keep your guns in your holsters.’ ” ■

Notes

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