

“To recognize that antisemitism is not a sideshow to racism within White nationalist thought is important for at least two reasons. First, it allows us to identify the fuel that White nationalist ideology uses to power its anti-Black racism, its contempt for other people of color, and its xenophobia—as well as the misogyny and other forms of hatred it holds dear....

Antisemitism, I discovered, is a particular and potent form of racism so central to White supremacy that Black people would not win our freedom without tearing it down.”



instagram@1312.press
1312press@riseup.net

SKIN IN THE GAME

How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism
by Eric K. Ward



One September weekend in 1995, a few thousand people met at a convention center in Seattle to prepare for an apocalyptic standoff with the federal government. At the expo, you could sign up to defend yourself from the coming “political and economic collapse,” stock up on beef jerky, learn strategies for tax evasion, and browse titles by writers like Eustace Mullins, whose White nationalist classics include *The Secrets of the Federal Reserve*, published in 1952, and—from 1967—*The Biological Jew*.

The sixth annual Preparedness Expo made national papers that year because it served as a clearinghouse for the militia movement, a decentralized right-wing movement of armed, local, anti-government paramilitaries that had recently sparked its most notorious act of terror, the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal courthouse by White nationalists Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. A series of speakers told expo attendees the real story: the attack had been perpetrated by the government itself as an excuse to take citizens’ guns away.

Not a lot of Black folks show up at gatherings like the Preparedness Expo, one site in an extensive right-wing counterculture in which White nationalism is a constant, explosive presence. White nationalists argue that Whites are a biologically defined people and that, once the White revolutionary spirit awakens, they will take down the federal government, remove people of color, and build a state (maybe or maybe not still called the United States of America, depending on who you ask) of their own. As a Black man, I am regarded by White nationalists as a subhuman, dangerous beast. In the 1990s, I was the field organizer for the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment, a six-state coalition working to reduce hate crimes and violence in the Pacific Northwest and Mountain States region. We did a lot of primary research, often undercover. A cardinal rule of organizing is that you can’t ask people to do anything you haven’t done yourself; so I spent that weekend as I spent many—among people plotting to remove me from their ethnostate.

It helped that, despite its blood-curdling anti-Black racism, at least

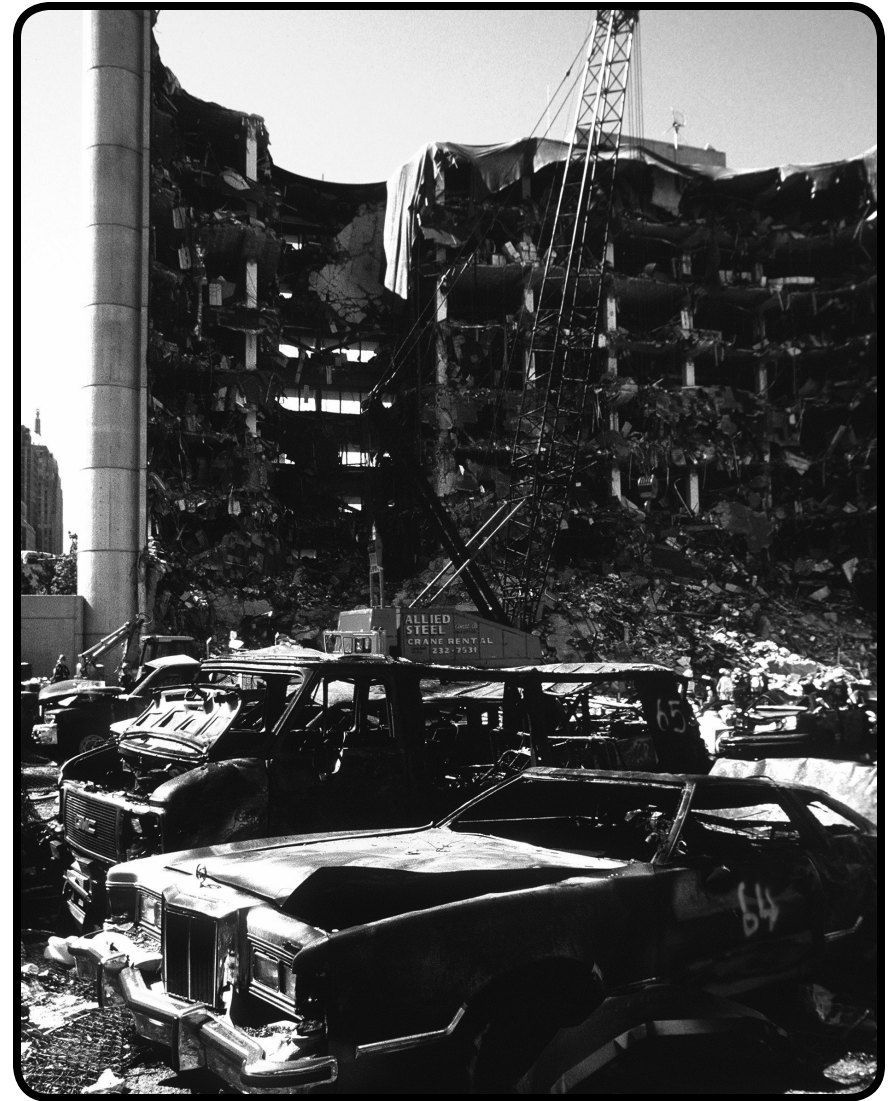
some factions of the White nationalist movement saw me as a potential ally against their true archenemy. At the expo that year, a guy warily asked me about myself. I told him that I had come on behalf of a few brothers in the city. We needed to resist the federal government and we were there to get educated. I said I hoped he wouldn't take it personally, but I didn't shake hands with White people. He smiled; he totally understood. "Brother McLamb," he concurred, "says we have to start building broad coalitions." Together we went to hear Jack McLamb, a retired Phoenix cop who ran an organization called Police Against the New World Order, make a case for temporary alliances with "the Blacks, the Mexicans, the Orientals" against the real enemy, the federal government controlled by an international conspiracy. He didn't have to say who ran this conspiracy because it was obvious to all in attendance. And despite the widespread tendency to dismiss antisemitism, notwithstanding its daily presence across the country and the world, it is obvious to you, too.

From the time I documented my first White nationalist rally in 1990 until today, the movement has made its way from the margins of American political life to its center, and I've moved from doing antiracist organizing in small northwestern communities to fighting for inclusive democracy on a national level, as the Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Justice program officer at the Ford Foundation until recently, and now as a senior fellow at the Southern Poverty Law Center. Yet if I had to give a basic definition of the movement—something I've often been asked to do, formally and informally, by folks who've spent less time hanging out with Nazis than I have—my response today would not be much different than it was when I began to do this work nearly thirty years ago. American White nationalism, which emerged in the wake of the 1960s civil rights struggle and descends from White supremacism, is a revolutionary social movement committed to building a Whites-only nation, and antisemitism forms its theoretical core.

That last part—antisemitism forms the theoretical core of White nationalism—bears repeating. Let me explain.

revelation or been drawn to the Jewish community through some mysterious pull of identification. It's true that back in Long Beach, on days I opted out of middle school, the man at the corner deli would call me over and give me blueberry blintzes. He was the first person I knew was Jewish. I didn't know what that meant, but the blintzes were good, and when you don't have a lot of food, they are even better. But I also remember the delicious sushi a local Japanese restaurant gave me. I still love sushi, and blintzes, but neither helped me to understand racism or social change. There was no kumbaya experience, no light bulb, no moment where I became Paul on the road to Damascus. It was just common sense to study my enemy, White nationalism. And like any worthwhile research project, it has taken time.

A central insistence of antiracist thought over the past several decades is that, as with any social category produced by regimes of power, you don't choose race, power chooses it for you; it names you. This is why all the well-meaning identification in the world does not make a White person Black. Likewise, as much as I draw inspiration from the Jewish community, and as much as I adore my Jewish partner and friends, it was my organizing against antisemitism as a Black antiracist that first pulled me to the Jewish community, not the other way around. I developed an analysis of antisemitism because I wanted to smash White supremacy; because I wanted to be free. If we acknowledge that White nationalism clearly and forcefully names Jews as non-white, and did so in the very fiber of its emergence as a post-civil rights right-wing revolutionary movement, then we are forced to recognize our own ignorance about the country we thought we lived in. It is time to have that conversation.



The bombing of the Oklahoma City federal courthouse by White nationalists Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols was painted as a conspiracy by the government itself as an excuse to take citizens' guns away.

The meteoric rise of White nationalism within national discourse over the course of Donald Trump's presidential campaign and freshman administration—through Trump's barely coded speech at fascist-style rallies, his support from the internet-based "Alt Right," and his placement of White nationalist popularizers in top positions—has produced a shock of revelation for people across a wide swath of the political spectrum. This shock, in turn, has been a source of frustration within communities of color and leftist circles, where White liberals are often accused of having kept their heads in the sand while more vulnerable populations sounded the alarm about the toll of economic crisis, mass incarceration, police violence, deportation, environmental devastation, and—despite and in reaction to the election of Barack Obama—the unending blare of everyday hate. This is an understandable reaction. It's one I've often shared. But the fact that many of us have long recognized that the country we live in is not the one we are told exists doesn't mean we always understand the one that does. Within social and economic justice movements committed to equality, we have not yet collectively come to terms with the centrality of antisemitism to White nationalist ideology, and until we do we will fail to understand this virulent form of racism rapidly growing in the U.S. today.

To recognize that antisemitism is not a sideshow to racism within White nationalist thought is important for at least two reasons. First, it allows us to identify the fuel that White nationalist ideology uses to power its anti-Black racism, its contempt for other people of color, and its xenophobia—as well as the misogyny and other forms of hatred it holds dear. White nationalists in the United States perceive the country as having plunged into unending crisis since the social ruptures of the 1960s supposedly dispossessed White people of their very nation. The successes of the civil rights movement created a terrible problem for White supremacist ideology. White supremacism—inscribed *de jure* by the Jim Crow regime and upheld *de facto* outside the South—had been the law of the land, and a Black-led social movement had toppled the political regime that supported it. How could a race of inferiors have unseated this power structure through organizing alone? For that matter, how

feeling less so over these recent months as the candidate-turned-president seemed reluctant to disavow his endorsement by David Duke, the most notorious White supremacist in America. Meanwhile, Jewish cemeteries are desecrated even as the administration directs the FBI to double down on the surveillance of Muslims and focus less on the White supremacists who constitute the principal domestic terrorist threat in the United States. Jewish thought leaders and journalists are being harassed on social media. Just last week, White House press secretary Sean Spicer caused a furor by favorably comparing Adolph Hitler to Bashar al-Assad of Syria in remarks that, whether intentionally or not, echoed the apologetics of Holocaust deniers.

We do not yet know where Trump's coalition will land on the question of White nationalism. That Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner is Jewish should not in itself be of comfort; there were Jews who worked with Hitler, too, and Blacks in the Confederate army. But it is important to note that the White nationalist faction of the administration led by Stephen Bannon—now ousted from his position in the National Security Council—is just one of several warring parties and currently appears to be losing ground. In other words, we do not yet have a fully activated White nationalist administration. (If we did, we'd know.) At the same time, the fact that this remains an open question at all likely invites more than a few ostensibly "White" Jews to contemplate the provisional nature of their Whiteness, their privilege. Privilege, after all, is not the same as power. Privilege can be revoked. And this means too that progressive movements and social change organizations must come to understand that all social movements have influence, including those that seek to construct a society based on exclusion and terror.

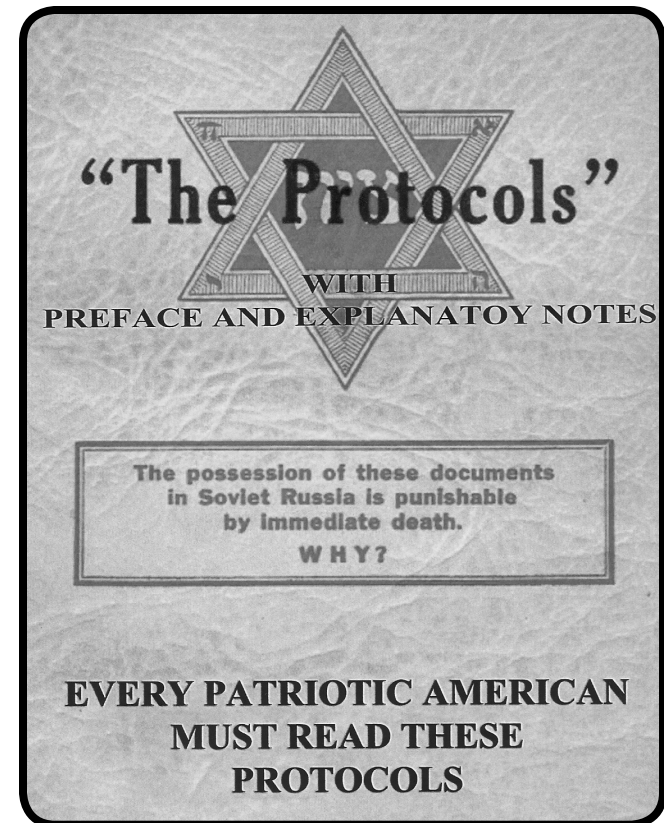
Sometimes I wish I had a better story to tell about how I arrived at this analysis—a story more dramatic or more heartwarming, somehow more about me. If I live and work, as I do, in the kind of daily, intimate Black-Jewish coalitions that were a mainstay of the civil rights movement but are now supposed to be fraught with mutual suspicion, I must have experienced a historically uncanny

posited as an exception—should regard themselves as White allies of people of color, eschewing any identity as a racialized people with their own skins at risk in the fight against White supremacy? Why, when Jews are safe and claims to the contrary serve to justify rather than to challenge racial and other oppressions, like conservative commentator Alan Dershowitz’s cynical recent attempt to discredit antiracist and anticolonial struggles by declaring intersectionality an antisemitic concept? Why, when Jews of European descent are supposedly “White,” have long been, will ever be?

I can answer this question as I have been doing and will continue to do: antisemitism fuels White nationalism, a genocidal movement now enthroned in the highest seats of American power, and fighting antisemitism cuts off that fuel for the sake of all marginalized communities under siege from the Trump regime and the social movement that helped raise it up. To refuse to deal with any ideology of domination, moreover, is to abet it. Contemporary social justice movements are quite clear that to refuse antiracism is an act of racism; to refuse feminism is an act of sexism. To refuse opposition to antisemitism, likewise, is an act of antisemitism. Arguably, not much more should need to be said than that. But I suspect that much more does need to be said. To the hovering question, why should we be talking about antisemitism, I reply, what is it we are afraid we will find out if we do? What historic and contemporary conflicts will be laid bare? And if we recognize that White privilege really is privilege, what will it mean for Jewish antiracists to give up the fantasy that they ever really had it to begin with?

And yet this impasse seems finally to be breaking down. It has long been the case that at moments when the left has suffered another devastating and seemingly inexplicable political loss, my phone rings more often; now that the White nationalist movement has come to national power, it is ringing off the hook. The public and private discussions I’ve had just in the past month suggest a hunger to understand antisemitism—within and outside the Jewish community—the likes of which I have never witnessed before. Certainly many American Jews who regard themselves as White are

could feminists and LGBTQ people have upended traditional gender relations, leftists mounted a challenge to global capitalism, Muslims won billions of converts to Islam? How do you explain the boundary-crossing allure of hip hop? The election of a Black president? Some secret cabal, some mythological power, must be manipulating the social order behind the scenes. This diabolical evil must control television, banking, entertainment, education, and even Washington, D.C. It must be brainwashing White people, rendering them racially unconscious.



“The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion,” first circulated by Czarist secret police in Russia in 1903, established the blueprint of antisemitic ideology in its modern form.

What is this arch-nemesis of the White race, whose machinations have prevented the natural and inevitable imposition of white supremacy? It is, of course, the Jews. Jews function for today's White nationalists as they often have for antisemites through the centuries: as the demons stirring an otherwise changing and heterogeneous pot of lesser evils. At the turn of the twentieth century, "The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion"—a forgery, first circulated by Czarist secret police in Russia in 1903, that purports to represent the minutes of a meeting of the international Jewish conspiracy—established the blueprint of antisemitic ideology in its modern form. It did this by recasting the shape-shifting, money-grubbing caricature of the Jew from a religious caricature to a racialized one. Upper-class Jews in Europe might have been assimilating and changing their names, but under the new regime of antisemitic thought, even a Jew who converted to Christianity would still be a Jew.

In 1920, Henry Ford brought the "Protocols" to the United States, printing half a million copies of an adaptation called "The International Jew," and the text has had a presence in American life ever since. (Walmart stocked copies on its shelves and for a time refused calls to take them down—in 2004.) But it is over the past fifty years, not coincidentally the first period in U.S. history in which most American Jews have regarded themselves as White, that antisemitism has become integral to the architecture of American racism. Because modern antisemitic ideology traffics in fantasies of invisible power, it thrives precisely when its target would seem to be least vulnerable. Thus, in places where Jews were most assimilated—France at the time of the Dreyfus affair, Germany before Hitler came to power—they have functioned as a magic bullet to account for unaccountable contradictions at moments of national crisis. White supremacism through the collapse of Jim Crow was a conservative movement centered on a state-sanctioned anti-Blackness that sought to maintain a racist status quo. The White nationalist movement that evolved from it in the 1970s was a revolutionary movement that saw itself as the vanguard of a new, whites-only state. This latter movement, then and now, positions Jews as the absolute other, the driving force of white dispossession—which means the other

as Phineas Priests. Like the Phineas Priesthood, one small formation that might stand in for the whole, contemporary White nationalism has no clear center. Yet it does have a deadly commitment to revolutionary violence against racial others, and to the state apparatus perceived to do their bidding. And like the Priesthood, it rests upon a tortuous racial cosmology in which Jews form a monstrous, all-powerful cabal that uses subhuman others, including Blacks and immigrants, as pawns to destroy White nationhood.

Over years of speaking about White nationalism in the 1990s and early 2000s in the Northwest and then the Midwest and South, I found that audiences—whether white or of color, at synagogues or churches, universities or police trainings—generally had a relationship to white nationalism that, at least in one basic sense, was like my own. They knew the scope and seriousness of the movement from personal experience, and—if they didn't take this for granted to begin with—they were not shocked to discover its antisemitic emphasis. The resistance I have encountered when I address antisemitism has primarily come since I moved to the Northeast seven years ago, and from the most established progressive antiracist leaders, organizations, coalitions, and foundations around the country. It is here that a well-meaning but counterproductive thicket of discourse has grown up insisting that Jews—of Ashkenazi descent, at least—are uncontestably White, and that to challenge this is to deny the workings of White privilege. In other words, when I'm asked, "Where is the antisemitism?," what I am often really being asked is, "Why should we be talking about antisemitism?"

And indeed—why? Why, when the president of the United States appears bent on removing as many dark-skinned immigrants from the U.S. as he can, and when men who look like me are shot in the street or tortured to death in prison with impunity? Why, when the leadership of some mainstream Jewish communal organizations level false charges of antisemitism in order to silence critique—whether by Jews or non-Jews—of Israeli government policies? Why, after decades of soul-searching by Jewish antiracists has established a seeming consensus that Jews—with Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews

synagogue bombings in Washington state and murdered a Jewish radio talk show host in Denver; to evangelical leaders like Pat Robertson who denounced antisemitism but used its popularity among their followers to promote an implicitly White supremacist “Christian nationalism”; to the contemporary Alt Right named by White nationalist Richard Spencer, which has brought antisemitic thought and imagery to new audiences on the internet—and now at White House press conferences.

Doing primary research on hate groups revealed the contours of the movement’s antisemitism in even more intricate detail. At a time when many larger social justice organizations refused to take White nationalism seriously, regional groups like Communities Against Hate, Coalition for Human Dignity, Montana Human Rights Network, Rural Organizing Project, and dozens of others did much of the groundwork documenting its theories, strategies, and warring currents. That’s why in 1990, for instance, antiracist activists were itching to get our hands on a copy of *Vigilantes of Christendom*, a self-published book by a writer named Richard Kelly Hoskins influential on the Christian Identity circuit. (I scored a copy by marching into a book vending tent at a White supremacist rally and marketing it to passersby as a life-changing volume I had read at the behest of a White friend.) We learned that Hoskins’s book appropriated the Old Testament story of Phineas, a prominent Israelite who marries outside the faith and is punished for his transgression by a rogue member of the tribe who kills him and his bride with a spear. Historically unpopular within the rabbinic tradition for appearing to endorse this lawless act, Hoskins’s work celebrated the tale. To join the Priesthood, he wrote, an Aryan must act as a latter-day Phineas by perpetrating lone-wolf attacks against inferior races and their White apologists.

The Phineas Priesthood does not, in an organizational sense, appear to actually exist. But for decades, domestic terrorists—like Eric Rudolph, a Christian Identity acolyte who killed people in a string of bombing attacks at Southern gay bars, abortion clinics, and the 1996 summer Olympics in Atlanta—have allegedly seen themselves

channels of its hatred cannot be intercepted without directly taking on antisemitism.

This brings me to the second reason that White nationalist antisemitism must not be dismissed: at the bedrock of the movement is an explicit claim that Jews are a race of their own, and that their ostensible position as White folks in the U.S. represents the greatest trick the devil ever played. The bible for generations of White nationalists is *The Turner Diaries*, a 1978 dystopian novel by the White supremacist leader William Pierce, published under the pseudonym Andrew Macdonald. The novel takes place in a near-future in which Jews have unleashed Blacks and other undesirables into the center of American public life, and follows the triumph of a clandestine White supremacist organization that snaps into revolutionary action, blowing up both Israel and New York City. Its narrator, a soldier in the White revolutionary army, insists that “trying to distinguish the ‘good’ Jews from the bad ones” is as absurd as the way “some of our thicker-skulled ‘good ol’ boys’ still insist on trying, separating the ‘good niggers’ from the rest of their race.” Contemporary antisemitism, then, does not just enable racism, it also is racism, for in the White nationalist imaginary Jews are a race—the race—that presents an existential threat to Whiteness. Moreover, if antisemitism exists in glaring form at the extreme edge of political discourse, it does not exist in a vacuum; as with every form of hateful ideology, what is explicit on the margins is implicit in the center, in ways we have not yet begun to unpack. This means the notion that Jews long ago and uncontestedly became White folks in the U.S.—became, in effect, post-racial—is a myth that we must dispel.

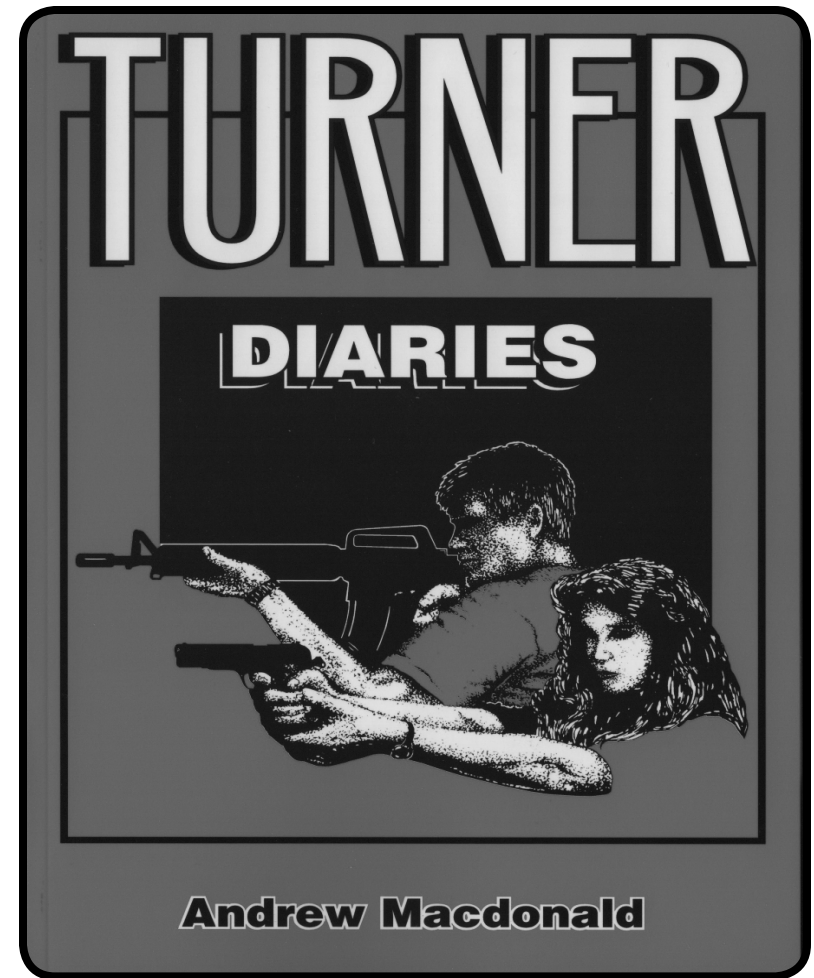
I’ve been terrorized by structural racism and White nationalist activism all my life. Contrary to a popular image of White nationalists living exclusively off the grid, far from people of color—who are imagined to live exclusively on it—White nationalists are our neighbors. As a kid in Southern California and as a young adult in Oregon, deep in a West Coast punk scene that in some ways looked a lot like the U.S. in 2017, they were literally mine. Because I grew

up Black in a city and a scene where people of color were under attack by White nationalists, the immediacy of the movement's threat and its hatred of dark-skinned people like my family and friends is something I have always known. I thought I understood what motivated them, and I thought their motivation always looked like me. What I learned when I got to Oregon, as I began to log untold hours trying to understand White nationalists and their ideas, was that antisemitism was the lynchpin of the White nationalist belief system. That within this ideological matrix, Jews—despite and indeed because of the fact that they often read as White—are a different, unassimilable, enemy race that must be exposed, defeated, and ultimately eliminated. Antisemitism, I discovered, is a particular and potent form of racism so central to White supremacy that Black people would not win our freedom without tearing it down.

...

Long Beach, California is planted on the line that locals call the Orange Curtain, the border between the working-class and immigrant neighborhoods of southern Los Angeles County and the White conservative suburbs of Orange County. By the time my mom and I moved down from L.A. in 1976, when I was in sixth grade, this endless sprawl of White flight was increasingly interrupted by people of color looking for affordable housing in safe neighborhoods. The civil rights and radical social movements of the 1960s and early Seventies had already been smashed by the state or self-destructed. White nationalism, on the other hand, was part of the scenery. Just down the street from one of our Long Beach apartments was an outpost of the John Birch Society, the foremost right-wing anticommunist organization during the Cold War—now having a Trump-era revival—which officially disavowed White supremacy and antisemitism but fought the civil rights movement and described the communist menace as an international cabal.

I was bussed to school in middle-class suburbs through the fanciest neighborhoods I'd ever seen, where White people rolled down their car windows to call us monkeys or tell us to go back to Africa. At



The Turner Diaries, a 1978 dystopian novel by the White supremacist leader William Pierce, takes place in a near-future in which Jews have unleashed Blacks and other undesirables into the center of American public life.

often disagree with each other about basic questions of theory and practice. The movement does not take a single, unified position on the Jewish question. But antisemitism has been a throughline from the Posse Comitatus, which set itself against “anti-Christ Jewry”; to David Duke’s refurbished Ku Klux Klan, which abandoned anti-Catholicism in the 1970s in order to focus on “Jewish supremacy”; to the neonazi group The Order, inspired by *The Turner Diaries*, which in the mid-1980s went on a rampage of robberies and

audience of neonazis had begun turning up at their shows. Fugazi would stop playing, give the neonazis five dollars, and refuse to start up again until they left. A venue in Eugene cancelled a scheduled appearance when rumors spread that skinheads were planning to disrupt the show, and the community erupted in anger. By that time, I was a student and an activist. I had stumbled into student of color politics while attending community college and now co-directed the Black Student Union and Students Against Apartheid at the University of Oregon. I spent a semester in France and while I was away, a 28-year-old Ethiopian international student named Mulugeta Seraw was beaten to death by White supremacists on a Portland street. I returned to a community deeply shaken and in mourning. But it was in the wake of the cancelled show that I founded an organization, Communities Against Hate, in the way these things often happen: no one else wanted to do it. We created a zine called *The Race Mixer* (“Miscegenation At Its Finest”), reporting on the activity of hate groups in the Northwest; during the standoff at Ruby Ridge, we stood outside the Portland City Hall dressed as Klan members to warn against the spread of the militia movement. Two years later, in Eugene, Communities Against Hate got Fugazi to come back and play.

...

When folks ask me, skeptically, where the antisemitism in the White nationalist movement lies, it can feel like being asked to point out a large elephant in a small room. From the outset of my research on White nationalism all those years ago, it was clear that antisemitism in the movement is everywhere, and it is not hidden. “Life is uglier and uglier these days, more and more Jewish,” William Pierce wrote in *The Turner Diaries*. “No matter how long it takes us and no matter to what lengths we must go, we’ll demand a final settlement of the account between our two races,” the narrator promises at the book’s conclusion. “If the Organization survives this contest, no Jew will—anywhere. We’ll go to the uttermost ends of the earth to hunt down the last of Satan’s spawn.” White nationalism is a fractious countercultural social movement, and its factions

school, White kids initialed SWP on their desks: Supreme White Power. One of our local celebrities was Wally George, a public access television star whose show, “The Hot Seat,” was a forerunner to the hate radio of shock jocks like Rush Limbaugh and Tucker Carson. As teenagers we’d get stoned and watch his show for laughs. But there was fear, too, beneath the laughter. Neonazis, a kid on the bus told us one morning, were marching in a nearby park. I’ve avoided that park to this day.

The L.A. punk scene of the late 1970s brought me into constant, unavoidable contact with proto-White nationalist youth. The scene was utopian and dystopian, thrilling and violent, gave me friends for life—Black, White, and Filipino, U.S.-born and undocumented—and killed some of them. The scene attracted the brightest minds and the burgeoning sociopaths from across lines of race and class. Chaos broke out at shows and kids formed gangs. There were racist and antiracist skinheads. Someone wearing a swastika armband might be a neonazi or might just be fucking around. The cops stationed outside shows terrorized everyone present. We didn’t expect to make it far into adulthood and we had fun, until the war on drugs intensified and we knew it was a war on us.

When I was twenty-one, working minimum-wage jobs and playing in a garage band called Sloppy 2nds, some friends announced they’d be starting college at the University of Oregon and asked me to come with them. When I imagined anything north of San Francisco and south of Seattle, all I conjured were endless stands of trees. I said no. But working one night shift, pumping gas at the Union 76 station, the Specials song “Do Nothing” came on—“Nothing ever change, oh no/Nothing ever change”—and I knew that if I didn’t leave southern California I would die soon. So I moved with a multiracial group of L.A. punks to the remote college town of Eugene, Oregon and we bunkered down in a house we called Camp Iceberg because we never turned on the heat. Sloppy 2nds disbanded and when it later reformed without me, it became Sublime, the most famous Long Beach band of all time.



White liberals have long imagined Oregon as a kind of haven. Portland has now largely replaced San Francisco as the destination of choice for White youth with West Coast dreams of alternative living. But it is also where the White liberal imagination becomes a libertarian one: implicitly, it imagines a place free of people of color and therefore pregnant with the possibility of social harmony. But Oregon's Whiteness—and, particularly, its non-Blackness—was the product of deliberate, violent exclusion; founded by White supremacists before the Civil War, by the 1920s the state boasted the largest Klan membership west of the Mississippi. Klan campaigns often chose Catholics as their immediate targets, because Blacks were not allowed to reside in Oregon until 1926.

The White nationalist movement that emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century grew across the country. But it was Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming that neonazis in the 1980s carved out as the territorial boundaries of their future Whites-only state, a region that self-identified “Aryans” from around the country began to colonize with nothing short of White national sovereignty as their goal. “Ourselves alone willing,” declared White

nationalist leader and Aryan Nations organizer Robert Miles, “we shall begin to form the new nation even while in the suffocating embrace of the ZOG.” In White nationalist parlance, the United States is the ZOG, or Zionist Occupied Government. It was in the Northwest that the nascent militia movement—notorious in the 1990s after standoffs between White nationalist compounds and the FBI in Ruby Ridge, Idaho and Waco, Texas—declared war on their country loudly enough they could no longer be ignored.

Ironically, then, if I had moved to Oregon to get away from the unpromising life expectancy for a Black male punk in southern California, the people who had decimated urban life in my home state had gotten there first. In 1978, California's White conservative voters passed the infamous Proposition 13, which cut taxes and slashed social services, turning the state into a laboratory for the Reagan revolution. Poverty and drug crime increased, and the same White folks who had gutted Californian cities in their flight to the suburbs after World War II now fled up the coast. I arrived in liberal Eugene in 1986, walked into workplace after workplace, and despite my resume, my smile, and my charm—funny, but no one was hiring. I didn't understand Oregon yet; I thought it was just me.

Meanwhile, the growing clashes between racist and antiracist skinheads in the punk scene that had made life in Long Beach dangerous were a fact of life in Oregon as well, and often took place beyond the reach of the law. As part of their nation-building project in the Pacific Northwest, White supremacists were establishing their own common law courts, their own religions, and their own paramilitaries. They attacked and sometimes killed cops, and the local authorities, cowed, turned a blind eye. So when gangs of neonazi punks terrorized people of color and other vulnerable groups in Portland, it was coalitions of the communities under attack that struck back and eventually beat them off the streets.

In the end, I began to fight white nationalism because my world, my scene, my friends, and my music were under neonazi attack. The great postpunk band Fugazi was on a national tour, and an unwanted