

Neither Left Nor Right: The White Supremacist Movement as New Social Movement

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## **Abstract**

Until recently, many right-wing movements have not received much attention from sociologists. The study of movements on the right has focused on identifying them as reactions to social phenomenon; specifically, as countermovements to left-wing social gains or as functional adaptations to social changes and/or personal failures. Recent studies of white supremacist ideology have given some insight into the framing processes of the movement, but often do not paint a complete picture of the structure and operation of modern white supremacists. This paper argues that white supremacist movements make ideological, structural, and tactical adjustments to social phenomenon that are in many ways similar to their left-wing counterparts by comparing the white supremacist movement to New Social Movements. I will argue that white supremacist movements have characteristics that are similar to New Social Movements and should be analyzed in a similar manner.

## **Introduction**

There is a cliché among social movement scholars that sociologists study movements that they inherently agree with. Clearly, there are some practical reasons for the development of this pattern: sociologists often choose topics for study based on their personal interests, members of social movements may be unwilling to participate in research for a number of reasons, etc. This preference for movements that we agree with has led to a vast literature on progressive social movements such as the civil rights movement, anti-war/peace movements, student protest movements, women's movements, gay-rights movements, environmental movements, and a plethora of other social movements that are part of a broadly constituted left. By studying the left almost exclusively, social movement scholars have considerably problematized analysis of an entire sector of social movements, namely movements that fall on the right of the political spectrum. In comparison to movements on the left, there is a scant amount of research on right-

wing movements. However, over the previous decade a number of scholars have started to engage in serious scholarship of extreme right-wing movements in the United States focusing specifically on white supremacist movements.

Social movement theory began to study the right as a whole under the rubric of countermovements. This perspective saw movements on the right as a response to left-wing cultural and policy changes. By the early 1990s, a number of theoretical perspectives began to analyze the various movements of the right as unique social movements rather than responses to other social movements. Researchers began to study the white supremacist movement specifically, divorcing it from other movements on the right and focusing on it as unique because of its extremist qualities. These studies viewed the white supremacist movement as either a criminological problem resulting from strain or rapid cultural change leading to anomie or as unique social movements that actively construct their identity and meaning for the world in which they live. Recent developments in cultural constructionist and new social movements perspectives on social movements lend themselves to analysis of white supremacist movements in a manner that previous analyses have been lacking. I will argue that such an analysis is necessary in order to develop an accurate analysis of movements of the racist right.

### **Research on White Supremacist Movements**

Because social movement research “normalized” left-wing movements as the standard by which to judge all social movements, initial research into movements on the right categorized them as countermovements that arise in response to successes of left-wing movements (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996; Lo 1992; Zald & Useem 1990; Lo 1982; Mottl 1980). White supremacist movements were seen as extremist reactions to the advances of the civil rights movement of African-Americans. These movements sought to defend the status of white Americans against what they perceived to be a threat from desegregation, formal legal equality, and cultural

changes resulting from inclusion of African-Americans in mainstream society. The countermovement analysis of white supremacists views them as a strategic reaction to the development and success of left-wing movements for civil rights and racial equality. This view is the result of the rationalist bias within the countermovement analysis perspective that is derived from resource mobilization theory (Ferree & Miller 1994; Ferree 1992). It is assumed that white supremacist movements are rational responses by individuals who are directly threatened by the gains of the civil rights movements. Participants make a rational choice to become involved in white supremacy as a result of policy changes that threaten their status as whites in a society with a racial hierarchy (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996; Mottl 1980). The rationalist explanation of resource mobilization theory ignores the role of ideology and culture in social movements (Ferree & Miller 1994; Ferree 1992) which is particularly problematic in studying development of white supremacist movements given the fact that fascist and Nazi ideology guides many of the aspects of the movement's development.

As an alternative to the countermovement analysis, some social scientists have attempted to develop an analysis of the white supremacist movement as a construction based on social strain (Blazak 2001; Ezekiel 1995; Hamm 1994). Individuals who join white supremacist movements are likely to be people who have found themselves unable to achieve in mainstream American society. They are likely to be socially, politically, or economically marginal and join the movement as a means of coping with the strain this position has placed them in (Blazak 2001; Ezekiel 1995). For strained individuals, the movement provides a number of psychological benefits. It creates a sense of personal empowerment, gives individuals a group identity, and builds their self-esteem (Ezekiel 1995). Movement events not only allow individuals to feel empowered as active members of a social movement, but they give them a chance to publicly express taboo ideas (racial hatred) and emotions (anger, fear, etc.) in a context

where such behavior is not only acceptable but encouraged (Ezekiel 1995; Hamm 1994). The movement also provides a means to adapt to strain by giving its rank-and-file members a sense of belonging that goes far beyond a social movement. Membership in a white supremacist movement gives youth who are experiencing strain a social circle, a series of events to attend, a space to express their discontent with society, and a sense of safety in numbers because older, stronger members are often willing and eager to use violence (Blazak 2001; Ezekiel 1995; Hamm 1994). Studies based on a strain theory analysis of white supremacist movements have yielded a wealth of information on the motivations of individuals for membership and the processes of recruitment, but they do little to explain the internal workings of the movement. This is likely to be the result of the psychological and criminological biases of the researchers.

By the 1990s social movement scholars had developed a series of analyses of the white supremacist movement that placed it within the context of a broad right-wing countermovement but also viewed it as a unique movement with its own dynamics to be studied (Berlet 2004; Berlet & Lyons 2000). Studies that followed the unique patterns of white supremacist organization have focused on developing an analysis of two key issues in movement formation: framing (Berlet 2004; Arena & Arrigo 2000; Berbrier 1999; 1998a; 1998b) and identity construction (Blee 2004; Ferber 2004; Ferber & Kimmel 2004; Gardell 2003; Blee 2002; Dobratz 2000; Ferber 1998; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile 1997; Barkun 1994; Hamm 1994; Aho 1990). These works have brought to the fore an understanding of white supremacy as more than just a movement that has developed in opposition to civil, gay, and women's rights movements or a response to changing economic, political, and social conditions.

### *Framing*

Social movements engage in a constant pattern of message a meaning construction. This process of "framing" allows social movements to develop clear statements in regard to issues

that they believe are of importance. The framing process is an active process by movement members that involves a constant discourse within the movement and between movement members and opponents as well as the unaffiliated public. This discursive property of framing reflects the differences in target audiences for movement messages (Benford & Snow 2000; Snow & Benford 1992; 1988). Berlet (2004) has demonstrated that white supremacists tend to use four master frames in their recruitment and internal education of members: dualism, apocalypticism, populism, and conspiracism. Dualism is the idea that the world is divided into the forces of good and evil with no middle ground. For white supremacists these take the form of race with whites playing the role of good and all other races as evil. While various organizations have differing views on the reasons for the positioning of racial “others” as evil, their world view defines all non-white races as equally deviant<sup>1</sup>. The concept of apocalypticism is based on the idea that there is an approaching confrontation that will change the nature of the world, during which important hidden truths will be revealed. The apocalyptic vision of most white supremacists involves some form of conflict between the races. For groups based around the Christian Identity religion, this war is the result of biblical prophecy found in the book of Revelations and will accompany the return of Christ to earth (Dobratz 2000; Barkun 1994; Aho 1990). Other white supremacist groups have developed similarly apocalyptic visions of racial conflict with minor religious or secular variations. Populism focuses on the belief that “the people” have to rise up and overthrow the corrupt elites running the country. In white supremacist movements, there is generally a call for popular action to eliminate the politicians, bankers, and journalists who are seen as secretly controlled by powerful sinister forces. This is usually accompanied by dualistic and apocalyptic claims that people such as immigrants, Catholics, Jews, or gay people are out to destroy the country from within. (Berlet and Lyons

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<sup>1</sup> When pressed to discuss their understanding of non-white races, most leaders and hardcore members of white supremacist movements will claim that Jews are the most evil of races (Ezekiel, 1995).

2000; Stock 1997; Kazin 1995; Canovan 1981). Conspiracism is the idea that most major historic events have been shaped by vast, long-term, secret conspiracies that benefit elite groups and individuals. Stories explaining the alleged conspiracy are narratives about good and evil that select specific targeted groups, and justify aggression against them by combining dualism and apocalypticism with populist rhetoric calling for an uprising against the evil plotters (Barkun 2003; Berlet and Lyons 2000). These master frames are often strategically deployed by white supremacists through the use of more culturally resonant frames of ethnic identity and racial pluralism as a means of mainstreaming the movement in American society (Arena & Arrigo 2000; Berbrier 1999; 1998a; 1998b).

### *Identity Construction*

Social movements are in a constant process of identity formation. Movements often arise out of the collective identities of their participants, but social movements may also create an identity for members. For established organizations the process of identity construction is a reciprocal one. Members may join a movement because they identify with it, and as members they become active in constructing the movement's collective identity (Polletta & Jasper 2001; Jasper 1997). On the surface, white supremacist movements appear to be primarily based on the common racial identity of their members; however, recent work has found that these movements are crucial in constructing a number of gender (Blee 2004; Ferber 2004; Ferber & Kimmel 2004; Blee 2002; Ferber 1998; Daniels 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile 1997), religious (Gardell 2003; Dobratz 2000; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile 1997; Barkun 1994; Aho 1990), and youth cultural identities (Berlet & Vysotsky forthcoming; CNC; 2001; Hamm 1994).

White supremacist movements are also male supremacist movements. The ideology of these movements often has very clearly defined social roles for males and females. In her research on the white supremacist movement Daniels (1997) found that “[t]he highest duty and

honor of a White man, according to white supremacist discourse, is to preserve the white family and with it the hierarchy of race, gender, and sexuality” (39). The role of men in the white supremacist movement is predictably patriarchal. Movement propaganda consistently stresses that white men are hard workers, warriors, and protectors of white women’s sexual purity (Arena & Arrigo 2000; Kimmel & Ferber 2000; Ferber 1998; Daniels 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile 1997). White men are encouraged to be warriors for their race because the movement ideology is structured around the idea of racial conflict (Berbrier 1998a; 1998b; Daniels 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile 1997; Ezekiel 1995). This increases male members willingness to participate in a movement which counters what they perceive as threats to their social status (Levin 2002; Arena & Arrigo 2000; Daniels 1997; Ezekiel 1995;). In order to justify the white man’s identity as a white warrior, he must be given an enemy. In the case of white supremacist propaganda, the enemy becomes a social system which is pitted against the white male. “White men depict themselves as victims of racial discrimination, of class oppression, and as the special victims of race, gender, and class oppression at the hands of the racial state” (Daniels 1997, 37). The intelligent white man not only stays in a white supremacist movement because it is his role to be a warrior for his race and a protector of his family and heritage, but because the movement protects him in a world that is hostile towards him and his material and emotional interests.

For women, the white supremacist movement presents a very different view of gender identity. In most cases, women’s roles have traditionally been defined by their relationships to men in their lives. This is consistent with the propaganda of the white supremacist movement which espouses traditional, patriarchal relationships between men and women based on their “natural” sex differences. Women in the movement are also encouraged to have children as a duty of the movement. As Sherry, a neo-Nazi skinhead, points out, “There are eleven women in

our group and eight are pregnant. This is the most important way we can carry on with the white power tradition” (Hamm 1994, 183). This quote serves to reinforce the notions of male sexual dominance of women by reformulating the role of women in the movement as mothers of white children. In addition, the maternal identity of white women is also applied to their relationship with men in the movement. White women are encouraged to nurture men in the movement, to provide for their daily well being, to nurse them back to health when they are hurt in racial attacks, and to support them when they are imprisoned (Daniels 1997). Thus, the identity of women within the white supremacist movement is reduced to being an object of male sexual desire (to be protected from oversexed Blacks and sexual deviant Jews by strong, white racial warrior men), the mother of future white children, and the nurturer of Aryan warriors. For women who have a desire to maintain an extremely traditional, patriarchal relationship with men, the white supremacist movement serves as a location to both find the type of man who will fulfill this role, as previously discussed, and maintain their own understanding of “proper” roles for women. Therefore, it is only logical that women who hold such traditional values regarding their gender identity would find a place within the movement.

Women’s identities in the movement have changed greatly in the 1980s and 90s. The ideal of white women as mothers of the white race still holds true, but is supplemented with a new form of activist, almost feminist, white supremacist. These women are taking active roles in the movement and even beginning to take on leadership positions. In her research on women within the white supremacist movement, Kathleen Blee (2004; 2002) found that many new recruits to the white supremacist movement reflected a new trend of “feminist” white supremacists who are brought into the movement through aggressive recruitment campaigns targeted toward white women. Some researchers have claimed that women play a support role in white supremacist organizations to this day, but there is a clear trend toward active participation

by women in the daily activities of the movement. Rafael Ezekiel (1995) describes one active member of a neo-Nazi, Terri, who took an active role in the movement, “the group gave her a setting in which to be provocative, saying confrontational things in a nasty way; she could be a conspicuous rebel” (193). Terri’s involvement in the group is due in large part to her sense of adventure and her desire to feel empowered in a world where her friends are burdened by teenage pregnancy and unfulfilling relationships (Ezekiel 1995). Equally important is the role women play in leading groups. Both Hamm (1994) and Blee (2004; 2002) discuss the importance of women in leading skinhead, Klan, and neo-Nazi groups. Women who have grown up internalizing the values of feminism find a space within the movement to express their own desires for power and control of their lives through expressions of power and control over the lives of racial and ethnic minorities. As a marginalized movement, white supremacy must create space for women who can become strong leaders in order to increase its size and power. By appealing to certain feminist sensibilities the white supremacist movement can present a safe space for women to be both strong leaders and continue to hold on to “traditional” beliefs about gender identity.

As a traditionalist movement, white supremacy places a strong influence on religion. In addition, religious belief systems serve as framing structures for white supremacist beliefs (Arena & Arrigo 2000; Berbrier 1999; 1998a; 1998b; Daniels 1997). The religious beliefs of white supremacists can be categorized into three distinct forms: Christian Identity, Creativity, and Odinism (Gardell 2003; Dobratz 2000; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile 1997; Barkun 1994; Aho 1990). Christian Identity is a racialized version of Protestant fundamentalism that evolved from a mid 1800s theology called British Israelism, which claimed the Biblical lost tribes of Israel were the ancestors of people who settled in the British Isles. Christian Identity believes that White Aryan Christians living in the United States are therefore God’s chosen people, and that

America is the “Biblical Promised Land.” Christian Identity sees “all of history as a Manichaean struggle between white, divine, Anglo-Saxon Christians, and Satanic Jews,” (Levitas 2002, 81). Jews are viewed as evil, according to the main view within Identity, because they are literally the descendants of a race conceived by Satan and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It is crafty and clever Jews who install racially inferior subhuman Black people and other non-Aryan people of color in positions of power. Identity explains that White people show they are true descendants of Adam and Eve by the ability to blush when they sin, and “show blood in the face,” which they argue is what “Adam” means in Hebrew (Dobratz, 2000; Ridgeway, 1995).

The Creativity religion was invented in 1973 under the name World Church of the Creator, but a New Age group with a similar name forced the group to change its name in 2003 in civil court case. Creativity believes that people of color and Jews are “mud races” that are inferior to the “Aryan race.” When Creativity takes power, the “mud races” and White “race traitors” will be expelled from the United States or eliminated in RAHOWA, a Racial Holy War (CNC 2003; Beirich & Potok 2003). Creativity considers Christianity to be polluted by Judaism, and teaches the importance of maintaining racial purity to keep the White race superior (Dobratz, 2000). The religion believes that spirituality is expressed through nature as the collective will of the White race (Klassen 1973).

Odinism is a form of paganism based on the spiritual themes of Norse mythology. Many Odinists are not racists, but there is a branch of White supremacy built around Odinism. Racist Odinism claims it is the true religion of the White people from northern Europe and especially Scandinavians. Thus the Norse gods are the true gods of the Aryan race. Because it is based on paganism, Odinism has appealed to young people looking for an alternative to Christianity or atheism (Gardell 2003; Goodrick-Clarke 2002; Dobratz, 2000). Through the careful

construction of religious identity, white supremacists are able to intrinsically link race and spirituality.

The white supremacist movement has had a series of renewals since the late 1970s due in part to its ability to align itself with certain youth cultures. This process has been so successful that in popular rhetoric, certain subcultures (ex. skinheads) have become virtually synonymous with neo-Nazism. Neo-Nazis have specifically targeted youth cultures where members are isolated and alienated from mainstream society (Blazak 2001; CNC 2001; Hamm 1994).

Through association of respected members of youth subcultures with neo-Nazi ideologies, major organizations in the movement have developed a recruitment base. Certain youth subcultures have been relatively hospitable to neo-Nazi recruitment for a variety of reasons including aesthetic playing with Nazi imagery, ideological openness to taboo philosophies, and a lack of critique of white supremacist politics. The first attempts at recruitment within youth subculture were within the skinhead culture of the U.K. Despite skinheads' anti-racist origins among Jamaican immigrants to the U.K., by the 1970s the subculture had become a mostly white phenomenon. The subculture's obsession with violence was combined with punk rock's rejection of mainstream social values to produce a subculture that would be a fertile recruiting ground for neo-Nazis (CNC 2001; Hamm 1994). Despite a very strong effort on the part of many organized white supremacist organizations and their neo-Nazi skinhead supporters, anti-racists within the punk and skinhead scene challenged these advances into the subculture which resulted in a culture war that continues to this day (Berlet & Vysotsky forthcoming; CNC 2001). White supremacists have also worked to merge other youth cultural identities to their movement and ideology. With its rejection of Judeo-Christian society and values and connections to Odinism, the underground black metal scene has been a fruitful recruiting ground for white supremacist groups. Some of the subcultures founding members have expressed white

supremacist beliefs and declared their allegiance to neo-Nazism which has led to the virtual association of the entire genre of music with white supremacy. Similar inroads have been made into the industrial, noise, apocalyptic folk, and gothic subcultures because of prominent artists' associations with white supremacist and neo-Nazi organizations (Berlet & Vysotsky forthcoming; CNC 2001). By linking certain youth cultural identities with white supremacist ideology, the movement has been able to find new recruits and demonstrate a steady increase over the course of the previous decade.

Using a social constructionist analysis, one can develop a more complete understanding of the white supremacists movement that was unavailable from a countermovement or strain perspective. Social constructionism enlightens researchers to the processes which construct white supremacist discourse and influence recruitment. In addition, it allows the researcher to develop a clear understanding of the roles that individuals play within the movement and the identities that they develop through membership. And yet the picture is not complete. By comparing the white supremacist movement to the theoretical principles of new social movements analysis, one can develop a truly clear understanding of this movement.

### **A New Social Movement?**

The white supremacist movement cannot by any means be referred to as a new social movement. Its ideological bases potentially stretch back hundreds of years and its organized component in the United States is almost 150 years old. However, the movement as it exists today bears very little resemblance to its historical predecessors and may, in fact, lend itself to analysis via the new social movements perspective. The modern white supremacist movement may adhere to reactionary ideologies, wear the symbols and uniforms of its historical antecedents, and engage in the rituals of its namesakes, but it has also developed a style and analysis that is unique to contemporary social conditions. Today's white supremacist movement

share a number of characteristics that fall under the new social movements category: (a) a focus on collective and personal identity, (b) a cross-class social base defined by post-materialist demands and “global” issues, (c) a rejection of the left-right political dichotomy, (d) decentralized, diffuse forms of organization, (e) political activity through cultural construction, and (f) the construction of a future society within movement activity. These characteristics may all be found in the contemporary white supremacist movement, yet with the exception of Johnston’s (1994) study of European nationalist movements, there have been few studies that have tackled the right from this perspective<sup>2</sup>.

White supremacist movements are singularly focused on identity. By racializing every social interaction and structure, they construct a world where collective racial identity becomes the ultimate marker of individual identity. Using the “dualism” frame discussed earlier, white supremacists construct collective identities both for themselves and for groups that they view as “the other.” This dualism results in equally stringent constructions of gender and sexual identity that enforce patriarchal standards of behavior for both men and women (Blee 2004; Ferber 2004; Ferber & Kimmel 2004; Blee 2002; Ferber 1998; Daniels 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile 1997). Discussions of collective identity dominate white supremacist discourse in order to maintain members’ acceptance of a dualistic master frame.

Because race is the primary issue around which white supremacists organize, materialist concerns such as class are viewed as secondary to the organization of the social movement. Although most leaders and many recruits are in fact from the working and lower classes (Blazak 2001; Daniels 1997; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 1997; Ezekiel 1995), the movements members would be better characterized as being members of “decommodified or peripheral” economic groups or members of the “old middle class” (Johnston, Laraña & Gusfield 1994) who feel

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It may be argued that even some of the nationalist movements studied by Johnston do not qualify as right-wing because of their focus on liberation from Soviet Communist domination.

threatened by advances made by minority groups and women. Individuals who are recruited into the movement tend to view themselves as having few options for social mobility and turn to the movement as a means to achieve self-empowerment (Blee 2002; Blazak 2001; Ezekiel 1995). Recruits to the white supremacist movement come from the same social structural locations as many recruits to new social movements (Ezekiel 1995). Finally, many of the issues of primary concern to white supremacists are post-materialist in nature – environmental protection, economic and political globalization, government surveillance and repression, etc. (Berlet & Vysotsky forthcoming) – and reflect the conspiracist and populist frames discussed earlier.

Despite their positioning on the right of the classical political spectrum, the political positions of many contemporary white supremacist organizations reflect their opposition to post-industrial social and economic relations. Modern white supremacist groups often reject democratic states as intrinsically liberal and interventionist in individual's lives and often make very libertarian arguments for their reactionary positions on race, gender, religion, etc. Many white supremacists reject capitalist economic structures, yet they do not support socialist and communist alternatives. Instead, they argue for a "third position" which "rejects both capitalism and communism" as part of a conspiracy created by Jewish bankers and academics respectively and calls for organic, localized, cooperative economic systems based on what they believe to be traditional Aryan lifestyles (Gardell 2003; Berlet and Lyons 2000). While the white supremacist movement still holds characteristics of reactionary movements due to its views on the social status of minority group members and idealization of "old" social hierarchies, in recent years its ideologues have argued for a rejection of the left-right dichotomy in favor of a "third position." The popularity of this philosophy has led to acceptance of this ideology, in part or in whole, by many white supremacist groups.

White supremacist movements have generally been hierarchical movements. The authoritarian ideologies and patriarchal structures of these movements have often placed great importance on leaders creating both strong organizations; and conversely, a great deal of factionalism and internal conflict. In recent years, many in the movement have championed a new organizational strategy commonly referred to as “leaderless resistance” which urges a series of individual acts of violence against the state and racially, religiously, ethnically, and sexually subordinate groups that will trigger a larger race war and place these organizations in power (Shanks-Meile 2001; Ezekiel 1995). This strategy has been greatly facilitated by the presence of white supremacists on the internet. Individuals are no longer forced to join a formal organization in order to be part of the white supremacist movement. They can simply sign on to their favorite website and engage in discussions with other member, obtain music, clothing, and other cultural markers of membership, listen to speeches by leaders, or read propaganda materials (Futrell & Simi 2004). Youth subcultures have also helped to facilitate the diffuse structure of contemporary white supremacist movements. The basis of most youth subcultural groups are small groupings of friends who share similar tastes in music, aesthetics, and socio-political ideology – in this case, white supremacy. These groups generally do not belong to a formal organization and may have no formal membership besides that which is decided by group members’ preferences. Yet their commitment to white supremacist ideology often goes beyond merely toying with symbols in order to offend authority figures or peers. Many of the youth subcultures affiliated with white supremacy carry with them a virtual requirement of violent action as a sign of membership and subcultural commitment (CNC 2001; Hamm 1994). The modern white supremacist movement can best be understood as a network of organizations, members of youth subcultures, and individual sympathizers.

White supremacists have developed a complex language of symbols, codes, and signs to discern sympathizers and organization members from non-members. A partial result of the “dualism” frame that requires the movement to make clear distinctions between good and evil, ally and enemy, this system of symbols, etc. is also an adaptation to social standards that may make overt expressions of white supremacy unacceptable. There is a series of numeric codes used specifically by movement members to demonstrate sympathy with white supremacist ideology and organizational membership. In addition, neo-Nazi skinhead groups often identify themselves as racists through the use of symbols worn on clothing such as the crossed hammers of the Hammerskin nation or the logos of white supremacist bands. These allow members to identify “fellow travelers” from potential enemies in the person of anti-racist skinheads. Futrell & Simi (2004) identify the importance of tattooing white supremacist imagery on members as not only a permanent symbolic commitment to the movement, but also a sign to others that the individual is in fact a member of the movement. Finally, the literature and websites that the movement produces contain cartoons and other images that reinforce white supremacist ideology. Through the construction of cultural symbols, the white supremacist movement reinforces collective identity and also projects a carefully framed image of itself to the general public.

Like many of its progressive counterparts in new social movements, the white supremacist movement has turned to the construction of “prefigurative spaces” as a means for social change. Futrell & Simi (2004) point out a number of these spaces including: family and intergenerational movement socialization, informal gatherings, intentional communities, music events, and the internet. As noted in the discussion of gender identity, white supremacists place a great deal of emphasis on the importance of the family. It not only provides the future of the movement, but also a space within which white supremacist ideology may be freely expressed

without the fear of social condemnation. White supremacists often make concerted efforts to socialize children into the movement from a very young age. Socialization practices vary from dressing children in clothing that has white supremacist or neo-Nazi imagery to home schooling of children in order to control the information they learn and their social interactions. The end result is the creation within the home of a model of future white supremacist communities.

Informal gatherings may take many forms: Christian Identity (or other white supremacist literature) study groups, parties at the homes of white supremacists, and gatherings in spaces that have symbolic meaning such as parks or German restaurants. These gatherings serve as a “safe” space where members can feel free to express their ideas and movement membership. They provide a place where collective identity is reinforced through association and ritual displays of group membership such as collective “siege heils” or celebrations of Hitler’s birthday. They also involve a certain amount of intergenerational contact where new recruits can interact with older members. Older members are seen as high status and often use informal gatherings as a means to reinforce ideology and groom new recruits through selective praise. The homes of white supremacists may themselves be prefigurative spaces as they provide a place where such gatherings can take place and often facilitate interaction between movement members. A number of intentional communities have been created by organized white supremacists that serve as larger scale “safe” spaces where movement members can live free of the social conditions that lead to the strain they may have felt as a result of social, political, or economic changes. These intentional communities are created as a place where the race war has already been won and demonstrate to movement members not residing within them that (to borrow from an anti-globalization slogan) “a white world is possible.” In addition to serving as permanent prefigurative spaces, intentional communities often host meetings of the larger movement as a means to facilitate the growth of the movement and what they believe to be its eventual victory

and ascendancy to power. Music concerts provide a similar space on a smaller scale. Concerts are a highly controlled event where groups of unaffiliated members of youth subculture can come together to experience the movement as more than just an isolated circle of friends. The concerts facilitate interaction between comrades and often the exchange of the cultural symbols of the movement. Finally, the internet serves as a virtual prefigurative space. Websites often provide the means for members to communicate with one other. They serve as spaces where physically distant movement members can organize events through the cooperation of others who may be sympathetic to their cause. Members who “meet” on websites can communicate privately via email and instant messaging programs that allow them to discuss topics without the fear of public scrutiny. The internet also provides a vital link to the cultural expression of the movement through the distribution of streaming radio stations and songs in mp3 format. Images and texts on websites provide a virtual manual for how to be an effective white supremacist. Through the construction of prefigurative spaces, white supremacists are able to develop a movement that is already living out many of its ideals. This allows members to feel secure in their belief systems and facilitates further activity outside of the confines of movement constructed spaces.

## **Conclusion**

The white supremacist movement is a social movement that has not received attention to the extent that many progressive movements have in social movements literature. Initial conceptions of the movement labeled it as a countermovement to the gains made by civil rights movements of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. This analysis saw the movement as a rational response by individuals who were threatened by the civil rights gains of these decades. However, the countermovement approach is limited by its view of the right as being a purely reactive movement. In response, social scientists began to develop an understanding of the unique

position of the white supremacist movement in American society by studying its membership. Studies focused on the social psychological causes of movement membership such as strain and the need to fulfill personal shortcomings. These studies would be supplemented by social constructionist studies of framing processes and identity and cultural development within the movement. While these studies have given scholars a clearer picture of the movement's day-to-day operations on the micro-level, I have argued that a complete picture of the movement can best be attained using a new social movements approach that synthesizes many of the analyses that have preceded it to present a micro- and macro- analysis of the movement. In addition, this approach characterizes the white supremacist movement as a social movement that is responding to the conditions of contemporary society rather than simply reacting to the advances of progressive social movements.

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