

WHITE SUPREMACY: An Overview

For each of the 19 years from 1996 to 2015, the highest number of deaths from crimes by extremists living in the United States occurred at the hands of white supremacists—a tally that includes both non-ideologically as well as ideologically motivated murders.ⁱ 2016 marked the first break from this pattern,ⁱⁱ when the country’s worst mass shooting last June was perpetrated by a self-identified Muslim at a nightclub in Orlando.ⁱⁱⁱ Though we do not know whether there are long-term implications in this shift, what is clear is that, at the start of 2017, white supremacy is still one of the primary causes of domestic terrorism and hate crimes in the U.S. today.

Neither terrorist attacks nor beliefs about white superiority are new in the American story. Concepts of white power date back to the founding of the country. In fact, one of the most studied terror attacks in our history took place more than a century ago, with the assassination of Abraham Lincoln in 1865 by John Wilkes Booth—a passionate supporter of the Confederacy, an opponent of ending slavery, and a vocal white supremacist.^{iv}

The link between such terrorist acts and a belief in white superiority has persisted over ensuing decades, often personified by Ku Klux Klan adherents. Widely evident during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, this link was poignantly exemplified in attacks like the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, where four young black girls attending Sunday school were killed, and in the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.^v

In more recent decades, white supremacist beliefs have persisted, emerging and sometimes merging into what is often called the radical right^{vi}. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many members of the radical right^{vii} were active against abortion and some used violence to stop it. Thus, for example, at least ten murders or bombings of medical professionals who performed abortions or at abortion clinics were attributed to radical right adherents from various constituencies. On occasion, the core identity of the perpetrator was as a white supremacist, like Eric Rudolph (the man responsible for the 1996 Olympic bombing in Atlanta and is a member of the white supremacist Christian Identity movement).^{viii} Significantly, while these anti-abortion white supremacists often acted because of a religious belief that abortion is a sin, a variety of corollary beliefs also served to motivate them. Some believe that abortion of white babies threatens the survival of the white race because it decreases the white population. Others support some abortions as a way to limit the proliferation of non-whites. And some hold both views simultaneously.^{ix}

Other white supremacists have been active on more universal white supremacist ideologies like anti-Semitism, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQ, anti-Muslim and anti-black activities.

- In 1984, members of the now defunct white nationalist Neo-Nazi group The Order assassinated Jewish attorney and talk show host Alan Berg, who had sought to “smoke out” anti-Semitism in the Denver area where he lived.^x The group, which included several Christian Identity adherents, also carried out robberies^{xi} to fund what they called “a race war.”^{xii}
- In 2009, gunman Wade Michael Page attacked a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, killing 6

and injuring 4.

- More recently, in 2014, Frazier Glenn Miller, founder of the White Patriot Party and the Carolina Knights (two KKK groups), murdered three people outside religiously—targeted locations – two Jewish facilities (a community center and an assisted living home) – in Kansas.^{xiii}
- Then in 2015, Dylann Roof attributed his mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina to his white supremacist ideology, when he killed 9 African-American worshipers during bible study and injured one more.^{xiv} Convicted on 33 charges, Roof is the first person in U.S history sentenced to death for hate crimes in a federal case.^{xv}

WHO ARE WHITE SUPREMACISTS?

White supremacists view themselves as fighting for the survival of a white America, and see growing multiculturalism and demographic shifts that increase diversity as an attempt to destroy “the white race.” Most also believe this diversification is evidence of a Jewish conspiracy.^{xvi} These points-of-view are embodied in what white supremacists call the Fourteen Words: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children,” first spoken by the prominent white supremacist David Lane.^{xvii}

As a result, white supremacists are often perceived as a monolithic group. However, there are different sects with varied – although overlapping – motivations, operating styles, beliefs and goals. According to Dr. Pete Simi, a scholar who studies white supremacy movements, “We consider white supremacists as constituting an overlapping web of movements that include various Ku Klux Klans, neo-Nazis, Christian Identity, racist neo-Pagan believers, and white power skinheads...”^{xviii}

The basic tenets tying these movements and groups together are that:

1. White Europeans and descendants of white Europeans around the world are genetically and innately superior to other races and do not include Jews.
2. White Europeans, as they define the term, and their descendants in the U.S. are under immediate threat of extinction from multiculturalism (i.e. genocide).
3. Members of “their race” (i.e. white Europeans and their descendants) are being victimized in a world that they perceive to be in grave danger of collapse.
4. Non-white groups should either be eliminated, subordinated or segregated.
5. Society should be constructed in accordance with a patriarchal, racist, and heterosexual paradigm.^{xix}

White supremacist groups are present throughout the entire United States (and internationally). A study of former U.S. white supremacists^{xx} published in November 2016 found: ^{xxi}

- While only 9.7% of white supremacists in the U.S. sampled say they were raised by parents who were members of extremist groups, 90.3% reported being exposed to racist and/or anti-Semitic beliefs as a child.

- There are non-ideological factors that attract adherents and increase the appeal of white supremacy groups: acceptance from peers, attraction to the group’s outsider status, elevating one’s personal sense of value, and protection from bullying at school and from rival neighborhood gangs.
- Extremist music has been one of the most effective recruiting tools and propaganda; it broadly targets angry youth looking for a sense of identity and/or solutions to their problems.^{xxii}

IDEOLOGIES

White Supremacy: Sometimes used interchangeably with white nationalism—arguably erroneously—white supremacy is the general belief that white people, excluding Jews, are innately superior to people of other races.^{xxiii} While white supremacy has political implications,^{xxiv} not all white supremacists are white nationalists. White supremacists have caused (and continue to cause) a lot of violence, both organized and unorganized.

Traditionally, among white supremacists, followers of the Jewish faith are not considered white for political and cultural reasons, and also because the white supremacists believe that Semites are a different race according to genetics.^{xxv} In fact, credible geneticists dispute this theory, as human subspecies do not exist and race is a social and political – not a biological – construct.^{xxvi}

White Nationalism: The belief that national identity should be built around the white race, and that white people should therefore maintain dominance over the nation’s culture, political, economic and public life. As with white supremacy, white nationalism holds that non-whites are inferior, the interests of white people should be placed above the interests of other racial groups, and that discrimination against minority groups should be incorporated into law, policy and public services. White nationalism is about preserving white economic and political dominance.^{xxvii}

Among white nationalists are those who take the white nationalism ideology to a mono-cultural conclusion. Called both white nationalists and white separatists, these individuals believe that multi-culturalism should be abolished and that their nation or community should be exclusively white.^{xxviii}

Alt-Right (Alternative Right): This right-wing ideology presents itself as a reaction and alternative to mainstream conservatives. Those within this movement are diverse, and adherents oppose some or all of the following: feminism, multiculturalism, much of the mainstream media, immigration, and more. Conversely, members may support one or more of these creeds: white supremacy, isolationism, the “manosphere” (a loose network of online sites focusing on masculinity that often promote misogyny), and other ideas centered on inequality. Some of its followers include white supremacists and anti-Semites. Some groups that fight discrimination and hate speech criticize the title “alt-Right” as simply a new name that re-packages racism. The alt-right is considered ideologically broader than white supremacy, as it includes neo-reactionaries (those opposing democracy) and even internet trolls (online provocateurs).^{xxix}

PROMINENT HATE MOVEMENTS (& EXAMPLE GROUPS)

The FBI defines a hate group as “An organization whose primary purpose is to promote animosity, hostility, and malice against persons of or with a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity which differs from that of the members or the organization, e.g., Ku Klux Klan, American

Nazi Party.”^{xxx}

At the time of this writing in March 2017, by one measure, there are 917 hate groups throughout the United States.^{xxx} Some individuals may identify with more than one,^{xxxi} although some are mutually exclusive from each other.^{xxxii} The following include some of the better-known movements and groups, but it is important to note that many white supremacists do not consider themselves part of any group or movement in particular.^{xxxiii} For additional groups, see the “Hate Map” and “Extremist Files” in the Additional Resources section.

Ku Klux Klan (KKK): Dating back to 1865, the KKK—once a cohesive group but now a splintered movement made up of connected individual groups—is the oldest organized hate and terrorism movement in the U.S. Established as a response to the freeing of the slaves after the Civil War, the group sought to prevent black people and their allies from exercising their new civil rights, through intimidation and physical violence, including murder.^{xxxv} By the 1920s, the KKK had not only targeted black people, but also on the influx of immigrants, mostly Catholics and Jews. Later, in the 1960s, it violently opposed the Civil Rights Movement. The KKK continues to be active in support of white supremacy and against non-whites, non-Christians, LGBTQ and other minority groups. Members self-identify as Christian.^{xxxvi} The independent groups within the KKK vary in their activities and even sometimes fight one another.^{xxxvii} Some members, particularly those who joined groups formed since 2000, also ascribe to other white supremacy doctrines, in particular neo-Nazism^{xxxviii} and Christian Identity.

- **United Klans of America (UKA):** One of the largest Klan groups during the late 1960s and 1970s, UKA, based in Alabama, was tied to the 1963 Birmingham church bombing and the 1965 murder of Unitarian civil rights activists Viola Liuzzo near Selma. It was also responsible for the last recorded lynching in the U.S. of African-American teenager Michael Donald in 1981, who was randomly murdered in retaliation for the murder of a white police officer. After several members were convicted on murder charges and the group lost a civil suit for the Donald murder, the group disintegrated, with members likely joining other groups.^{xxxix}

Christian Identity: An informal but active network of self-identifying Christians who base their anti-Semitic and racist beliefs on their interpretations of Christian theology. The movement has a view that is incompatible with evangelical and fundamentalist beliefs, who generally believe that fulfillment of the end of time prophecy requires Jews to return to Israel.^{xl} Christian Identity, however, believes that Jews are the spawn of Satan and that non-whites are “mud peoples” who predate their idea of the Garden of Eden. Many of the violent acts by right-wing extremists in the U.S. during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s can be attributed in whole or in part to adherents of Christian Identity, including shooting sprees, bombings and bomb plots, and armed robberies.^{xli} Membership in the Christian Identity group has since declined.^{xlii}

- **Aryan Nations (AKA Church of Jesus Christ Christian):** Called a “terrorist threat” by the FBI in 2001,^{xliii} Aryan Nations was originally an arm of Christian Identity, but is now a mostly defunct and splintered neo-Nazi group.^{xliv}

Neo-Nazism: First recognized in the U.S. in the 1950s, members of this movement prioritize their extreme rejection of Jews, whom they believe control government, finance and media and are responsible for society’s ills. The group is split among those who just focus on hate against non-whites and “others” in general, and those who seek actively to create a fascist state. The group is defined by its reverence for Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany.^{xlv} Some neo-Nazi groups, such as the now moribund National Alliance, have called for murder, or even genocide, of Jews and other minorities.^{xlvi} While other neo-Nazi groups or their leaders claim they do not condone violence (and still others neither denounce nor condone it), members

within these groups have been known to partake in violent acts against minorities and even members of other white supremacy groups.^{xlvi}

- **National Socialist Movement (NSM):** Referring to itself as “America’s premier white civil rights movement,” this neo-Nazi group, founded in 1974, claims it is “defending the rights of white people everywhere.” Currently the largest neo-Nazi grassroots membership organization in the U.S.,^{xlvi} its core beliefs are: “preservation of our European culture and heritage, strengthening family values, economic self-sufficiency, reform of illegal immigration policies, immediate withdrawal of our national military from an illegal Middle Eastern occupation, and promotion of white separation.” Membership is only open to non-Semitic heterosexuals of European descent.^{xlix}

Racist Skinhead: Named to distinguish this diffuse subculture from SHARPs, or Skin Heads Against Racial Prejudice, and traditional skinheads,ⁱ racist skinheads first emerged in Britain in the 1970s and spread to the rest of Western Europe and the U.S. in the 1980s. Overall, the movement is loosely organized, but within the movement, there are some highly structured and hierarchical gangs. The ideology is similar to that of neo-Nazism, except that it openly condones violence and is known for its violent activities – thus, for example, one member is responsible for the 2012 shooting at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. Adherents are also distinguishable by their appearance (dark boots, suspenders, tattoos and head shaving). The two most notable gangs are the Hammerskinsⁱ and Blood & Honour.^{lii}

Associated movements include: Neo-Confederates; Radical Catholics; Phineas Priesthood; and some Anti-Muslim, anti-LGBTQ, anti-Semitic, and Anti-immigrant/Nativist.^{liii} Odinists; and Norwegian pagans.^{liv}

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[What’s the alt-right? A primer:](#) The Washington Post

[Extremist Files:](#) A database of prominent extremists and extremist organizations that includes background information on some of the most common ideologies, such as the alt-Right and Christian Identity. Produced by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

[Hate Map:](#) A map of hate groups across the United States produced by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

[Recruitment and Radicalization among US Far-Right Terrorists:](#) A November 2016 report based on 2 years of research by extremism scholar Pete Simi, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Director of Earl Babbie Research Center, Chapman University.

[With Hate in their Hearts: The State of White Supremacy in the United States:](#) A thorough accounting of white supremacist ideology, methods of organizing, groups, and subcultures as of July 2015 by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).

[Hate.com: Extremists on the Internet™:](#) A documentary film produced by HBO and the Southern Poverty Law Center about the rise of the hateful rhetoric on the Internet and that features Stormfront, an online web forum created in 1995 for white nationalists, white supremacists, and neo-Nazis. Founded by former

KKK leader and white nationalist Don Black, Stormfront is the Internet's first major racial hate site that gained public notoriety. The film also discusses hate groups detailed in this fact sheet, such as the National Alliance and Christian Identity. Released in 2000, the film includes an interview with Black and other white supremacists, who speak bluntly about their views on minority groups and white supremacy.

IN THE NEWS:

[Are Jews White?](#) The Atlantic

[Control Alt Elite](#) Vice News

[This is how you become a white supremacist](#) by Arno Michaelis | The Washington Post

[How I Became a White Supremacist](#) by Christian Picciolini | Vice News

[The Long List of Murders Committed by White Extremists Since the Oklahoma City Bombing](#) Slate

[Too Much Stigma, Not Enough Persuasion](#) The Atlantic

[In diverse California, a young white supremacist seeks to convert fellow college students](#) LA Times

[How white supremacist hatred drives acts of violence against powerful women](#) Salon

[The year of 'enormous rage': Number of hate groups rose by 14 percent in 2015](#) The Washington Post

[Same Anger, Different Ideologies: Radical Muslim and Neo-Nazi](#) The New York Times

ⁱ ADL. <http://www.adl.org/combatting-hate/domestic-extremism-terrorism/c/murder-and-extremism-in-2015.html#.WE8HktUrJQL>

ⁱⁱ New America. <https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/terrorism-in-america/what-threat-united-states-today/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Police transcripts recorded the shooter expressing grievances with U.S. foreign policy and pledging allegiance to ISIS, although other news stories suggest his motivations are not entirely clear. For purposes of this document, we are accepting the words of the shooter as documenting his motives, though we are not certain that this is what will ultimately be determined by the authorities.

^{iv} New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/1865/04/21/news/murderer-mr-lincoln-extraordinary-letter-john-wilkes-booth-proof-that-he.html>

^v "Terrorist attacks and related incidents in the United States." Wm. Robert Johnston. <http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/terrorism/wrip255a.html>

^{vi} According to the ADL, while some white supremacists are part of the far right, which includes other constituencies, such as Black Separatists and a variety of anti-government groups and militias, other white supremacists are apolitical.

^{vii} Many of the anti-abortion members of the radical right were associated with the Christian underground network Army of God. National Abortion Federation. <https://prochoice.org/education-and-advocacy/violence/anti-abortion-extremists/>

^{viii} Explained in fact sheet later.

^{ix} Kaplan, Jeffrey (2000). *Encyclopedia of White Power: A Sourcebook on the Radical Racist Right*. AltaMira Press. p. 539. ISBN 9780742503403.

^x The Denver Post. <http://www.denverpost.com/2009/06/17/the-murder-of-alan-berg-in-denver-25-years-later/>

^{xi} ADL. <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/backgrounders/christian-identity>

^{xii} SPLC. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/david-lane>

^{xiii} SPLC. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/frazier-glenn-miller>

^{xiv} "Terrorist attacks and related incidents in the United States." Wm. Robert Johnston.

<http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/terrorism/wrip255a.html>

^{xv} Emily Shapiro, Anne Emerson, and Kristen McFann. <http://abcnews.go.com/US/charleston-church-shooter-dylann-roof-sentenced-death/story?id=44674575>

^{xvi} ADL. <https://www.adl.org/with-hate-in-their-hearts-the-state-of-white-supremacy-in-the-united-states>

^{xvii} SPLC. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/david-lane>

^{xviii} Pete Simi. http://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_RecruitmentRadicalizationAmongUSFarRightTerrorists_Nov2016.pdf

^{xix} Pete Simi. http://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_RecruitmentRadicalizationAmongUSFarRightTerrorists_Nov2016.pdf

^{xx} The sample members were limited to individuals who joined a right-wing extremist group during adolescence (as opposed to preadolescence or adulthood).

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- xxi Pete Simi. http://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_RecruitmentRadicalizationAmongUSFarRightTerrorists_Nov2016.pdf.
- xxii For additional information about push factors (childhood home environments) leading to group entry see Pete Simi. http://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_RecruitmentRadicalizationAmongUSFarRightTerrorists_Nov2016.pdf
- xxiii Eric Kaufmann. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/22/world/americas/white-nationalism-explained.html>
- xxiv Stormfront website.
- xxv Stormfront website.
- xxvi Rev. Dr. William Gardiner http://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/documents/gardinerwilliam/whiteness/white_supremacy_us.pdf
- xxvii Eric Kaufmann. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/22/world/americas/white-nationalism-explained.html>
- xxviii Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/white-nationalist>
- xxix Eric Kaufmann. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/22/world/americas/white-nationalism-explained.html>
- xxx FBI. <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime-data-collection-guidelines-and-training-manual.pdf>
- xxxi SPLC. <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map> While most of these groups are white supremacist groups or share some white supremacy tenets, around 200 groups ((some anti-Muslim; most Black Separatist) do not fall on the white supremacist spectrum.
- xxxii Slate. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2009/05/the_six_flavors_of_white_supremacy.html
- xxxiii ADL. <http://www.adl.org/combating-hate/m/state-of-white-supremacy-in-the-united-states/#.WFLO-VUrJQI>
- xxxiv ADL. <https://www.adl.org/with-hate-in-their-hearts-the-state-of-white-supremacy-in-the-united-states/#.WFLO-VUrJQI>
- xxxv Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/ku-klux-klan>
- xxxvi Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/ku-klux-klan>
- xxxvii Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/ku-klux-klan>
- xxxviii ADL. <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/combating-hate/tattered-ropes-state-of-klk-2016.pdf>
- xxxix https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Klans_of_America
- xl Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/christian-identity>
- xli ADL. <http://www.adl.org/combating-hate/m/state-of-white-supremacy-in-the-united-states/#.WFLO-VUrJQI>
- xlii Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/christian-identity>
- xliiii FBI. <https://web.archive.org/web/20010812035823/http://www.fbi.gov/congress/congress01/freeh051001.htm>
- xliiv SPLC. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/aryan-nations>
- xli v Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/neo-nazi>
- xli vi Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/national-alliance>
- xli vii According to our research.
- xli viii ADL. <http://www.adl.org/combating-hate/m/state-of-white-supremacy-in-the-united-states/#.WFLO-VUrJQI>
- xli x National Socialist Movement website.
- l ADL. <http://www.adl.org/combating-hate/m/state-of-white-supremacy-in-the-united-states/#.WFLO-VUrJQI>
- li ADL. <http://www.adl.org/combating-hate/m/state-of-white-supremacy-in-the-united-states/#.WFLO-VUrJQI>
- lii Pete Simi and Robert Futrell. 2015. *American Swastika: Inside the White Power Movement's Hidden Spaces of Hate*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- liii Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology>