

## AMERICAN SKINHEADS: FIGHTING MINORITIES AND EACH OTHER - NON-RACIST FACTIONS TRY TO COUNTER SUPREMACISTS

Washington Post - January 16, 1996

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A leader of a neo-Nazi skinhead group that painted swastikas and antisemitic slogans on synagogues in two Boston suburbs and chased young black girls with baseball bats was sentenced last year to 46 months in prison.

About 700 skinheads attended "white power" concerts New Year's Eve in Cleveland and Portland, Ore., featuring such bands as Aggravated Assault and Intimidation One.

And later this month in Huntington Beach, Calif., two racists will go on trial for the shooting death of a black man who was walking to a carry-out restaurant.

Since emerging in this country in the mid-1980s, racist skinheads have become a pervasive and troubling social phenomenon. Over the past eight years, at least 40 murders have been attributed to them, 34 of them since 1990, according to the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. Racist skinheads also have been held responsible for thousands of assaults, firebombings and desecrations.

They are teenage and twenty-something toughs. Their outward trademarks are cropped hair, flight jackets, swastikas and other supremacist insignia, and steel-toed Doc Martens boots. Their subculture of bigotry, aimed at racial and religious minorities and homosexuals, is loosely derived from Third Reich philosophy, fueled by heavy beer-drinking and throbbing music on themes of racial separatism.

At the same time that violent attacks by race-based skinheads have increased, there have been mounting confrontations between racist and non-racist skinheads as the latter try to quash the white supremacist element while preserving their own iconoclastic look and alternative music.

Hate watchdog groups say that the availability of firearms in the United States has made racist skinheads in this country among the most dangerous segment, along with those in Germany, of the widespread movement that began in Europe. American racist skinheads, who increasingly are also targeting immigrants, are considered the most violent segment of the American extreme right.

"In general, skinheads have replaced the Ku Klux Klan as the most violent edge of the organized racist movement and the far right as a whole," said Floyd R. Cochran, a former national spokesman for Aryan Nations in Hayden Lake, Idaho, who turned against the white supremacist movement three years ago and now monitors racism.

"The violence, however, does not tend to be organized," Cochran said. "It tends to be sporadic and committed by skinheads who become intoxicated on alcohol and hate music and act upon those feelings."

These skinheads have come under increased scrutiny following the racially motivated murders last month of a black couple in Fayetteville, N.C., near Fort Bragg. The victims were shot in the head at close range while strolling down a dirt road just after midnight.

Three white soldiers, who told police they were neo-Nazi skinheads and had set out that night to harass blacks after drinking at a local strip bar, have been charged in the case. One of the suspects, Pfc. James Burmeister, 20, kept a large Nazi flag draped over his bed and white supremacist literature in his room off-post.

The slayings prompted the Army to probe extremism in its ranks worldwide. A report is due March 1. Fort Bragg launched its own inquiry into the 82nd Airborne Division, where the three suspects were assigned, and found seven more soldiers it determined were racist skinheads.

Although skinheads have grabbed headlines for their hate acts and Nazi leanings, the subculture as a whole is splintered and constantly at odds with itself.

Skinheads are in many ways tribal, divided into factions that are identified by the colors, patches and tattoos worn by their members. Racist skinheads, for instance, often thread their boots with white or red laces to signify white supremacy. Some members also bear "88" insignia denoting Heil Hitler (H is the eighth letter of the alphabet).

The deepest rift within the skinhead subculture has occurred between the racist skinheads and the non-racist, or "traditional," skinheads, who include a wide range of minorities and are generally less chauvinistic toward women. Neither side, however, considers the other to be true skinheads. The non-racists disparagingly refer to the racists as "boneheads," who in turn consider their foes "race traitors."

For the non-racists, the appeal of the skinhead lifestyle lies in its hard-edged regalia, camaraderie and brand of music: mainly "ska," which is similar to reggae, and "oi," which sounds somewhat like punk. Their music is devoid of racist lyrics and mostly apolitical.

Still other skinheads describe themselves as independents. They do not belong to any camp and wear no identifying colors or insignia.

"Calling all skinheads Nazis is like a Klansman calling all black people muggers," said Wingnut, 25, a non-racist skinhead from the District who is half black and was adopted as a child by black parents. "It's a bogus stereotype."

Some skinheads pointed out that although Burmeister and another suspect in the Fayetteville slaying had hung out at Purgatory, a local bar popular among skinheads, the vast majority of skinheads frequenting the club are opposed to racism.

"This is far from a monolithic movement," said Brian Levin, associate director of Klanwatch at the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Ala., which tracks hate groups. "Skinheads are made up of a spectrum of individuals ranging from non-racists to diehard bigots to those who see the movement less in terms of ideology than in terms of fashion, music and peer validation."

Many non-racist skinheads are fiercely patriotic and sport American flags on their jackets.

"The American flag to a skinhead is the most important thing you can have. It is worn on your arm with the star side forward; you never wear anything above it," said Robyn Kendall, 24, a non-racist skinhead in Chapel Hill, N.C., who publishes a booklet about her skinhead peers and their activities entitled "These Boots."

She adds, "It's just ridiculous that there are skinheads who are neo-Nazis. Didn't we beat that, didn't we kill that one in World War II?"

Some non-racist skinheads, however, are not comfortable with homosexuals within their ranks because they consider it to be a clash of lifestyles. "It groups two different worlds together and makes the skinhead movement more political and sexual than it should be," said non-racist skinhead Harold Babb Jr., 24, of Springfield.

Non-racist skinheads have earned reputations for violence when dealing with their racist counterparts, who they say are too incorrigible to understand the evils of bigotry. "I hate Nazis. If I see one of them I try kicking him, giving him the boot," said Bobby Mahoney, 18, a non-racist skinhead from Alexandria.

Other non-racists have turned to the Internet. "You say you're proud of being white? Why? You had no control over what race you are. Be proud of achievements, not race," read one recent posting on the news group alt.skinheads.

But the enmity between the two camps, often ignited by drinking, has sometimes turned deadly. In August 1992, for instance, a pair of neo-Nazi skinheads in Olympia, Wash., stabbed and beat to death a 17-year-old, non-racist skinhead who was part Asian and part white.

Many non-racists, the largest group of whom are Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice, or SHARP, say they want to retake a subculture stolen from them by racist interlopers.

Skinheads trace their origins to England's working-class neighborhoods in the mid-1960s. Tough youths began closely cropping their hair mostly so they would be less vulnerable in street fights. They also adopted a dress style from the factories that included military-style, steel-toed boots called Doc Martens, narrow suspenders and knit shirts under the brand name of British tennis player Fred Perry.

British skinheads were introduced to ska music by Jamaican immigrants. But as unemployment worsened in England, their strong sense of nationalism grew into xenophobia and bigotry. Skinheads often blamed immigrants, particularly the large numbers of Indians and Pakistanis in Britain, for their economic plight and assaulted them in what became known as "Paki-bashing." The National Front, England's ultra-right-wing political group, tapped into this anger and recruited large numbers of skinheads. Soon, their racially mixed music was replaced by the hard-driving rock of Skrewdriver, considered the first well-known white supremacist band.

Eventually, this extremism developed a neo-Nazi bent, particularly when the skinhead movement arrived in the United States. Today, the number of racist skinheads here has grown to about 3,500 in 40 states, according to the ADL's rough estimates. The United States has the fourth-highest skinhead concentration, behind Germany, with about 5,000, and Hungary and the Czech Republic, each with more than 4,000.

These American skinheads, some of whom also wear the Confederate flag on their jackets, often move into the Klan, militias and other far-right groups as they grow older.

But their ferocity has made them a feared group. In July 1994, a 36-year-old man in Reno, Nev., was fatally stabbed more than 20 times in what one informant told authorities was a "fag-bashing." A skinhead who pleaded guilty said he had wanted to carve a swastika on the victim's body but ran out of time.

In 1993, the federal government infiltrated a racist skinhead cell in Huntington Beach, Calif., called the Fourth Reich, and eventually arrested five youths who were planning to attack a prominent black church in Los Angeles with machine guns and pipe bombs during a Sunday service. The youths, who had carried out several prior bombings, originally had planned to kill Rodney King, but were unable to get his address.

"One day . . . one of the youths was jumping up and down with a gleeful look and motioning his hands like a gun, saying he was going to kill nigglets as they ran from

the church,' " recalled Mark R. Greenberg, an assistant U.S. attorney in Los Angeles who prosecuted the case.

Last month, skinheads Bryan and David Freeman were sentenced to life in prison for slaying their parents -- Jehovah's Witnesses who disapproved of their teenage sons' neo-Nazi allegiances -- last February near Allentown, Pa.

Because of the negative publicity surrounding racist skinheads, some are growing their hair and shedding much of their unofficial uniform to be less conspicuous.

Some racist skinheads base their world view on Odinism, the pagan, war-based religious doctrine of ancient Scandinavians. Others adhere to Christian Identity, a blend of religion and neo-Nazism that teaches whites are God's chosen race. Each year, Aryan Nations holds an "Aryan Youth Action Conference" at its Church of Jesus Christ Christian compound in Idaho on the weekend closest to Adolf Hitler's April 20 birthday.

"Skinheads are the new breed of white people who are coming up. They are . . . {angry}, disenchanted and ready to fight," said Tom Metzger, founder of White Aryan Resistance (WAR) in Fallbrook, Calif., and one of the first white supremacists to recruit skinheads in the United States.

"They are young and have a lot of years to contribute to the overall racial struggle. And if you are going to be involved in racial political activity that is unpopular, you need the muscle to protect your meetings and gatherings," said Metzger, 57, a former Klan grand dragon who urges skinheads to train in boxing, karate and jujitsu. He also encourages them to obtain an education and find jobs.

Metzger and his son, John, have had property seized to cover part of a \$12.5 million court judgment awarded in 1990 to the family of a 27-year-old Ethiopian immigrant who was beaten to death in Portland, Ore., by three skinheads. The panel determined that the Metzgers ultimately incited the skinheads to commit the murder. Nonetheless, Metzger is still reaching out to racist skinheads through his publication and a hot line.

Experts who monitor hate groups contend that racist skinheads have been lured by a false sense of superiority intended to heighten their self-esteem. Many of these youths are disenfranchised young men from broken families who are unhappy with the opportunities available to them, the experts said.

"Hatred is our only hope of beating back the Jews, blacks and the whole range of muds from inheriting this world at the expense of our great race," said an unemployed neo-Nazi skinhead from Portland, who would only identify himself as Peter, 22.

Racist skinheads, who also have targeted American Indians, generally exist in loosely knit cells. But watchdog groups said that Detroit-based Resistance Records is trying to provide these skinheads with a singular voice for the first time through its music, World Wide Web page and Resistance magazine, a slick quarterly publication that some liken to a Rolling Stone magazine for skinheads.

Resistance was founded two years ago by George Burdi, 25, of Toronto, and several other white separatists. Burdi, a skinhead who uses the stage name George Eric Hawthorne, performs with the band RaHoWa -- short for "racial holy war."

Resistance is now the largest U.S. distributor of white hate music, promoting more than a dozen such bands. Thomas Halpern, acting director of ADL's fact-finding department, said music is crucial to the racist skinhead movement because it is the

main recruitment and propaganda vehicle. "It is more appealing to these young people than bombastic speeches and lengthy tracts," he said.

Burdi said he does not advocate random violence and that Resistance's goal is to provide a clear purpose for the skinhead movement, which he described as a "spontaneous phenomenon" that has had little direction. He promotes the creation of a separate homeland somewhere in the United States to serve as a sanctuary for white culture.

"The emotional connection that white people once had to their collective destiny has been missing," Burdi said in an interview. "With the explosive birthrate of non-whites around the world, whites have become the true new minority."

Burdi was recently convicted of assaulting a SHARP in Ottawa. He served several weeks of a one-year sentence before being released on appeal bail. Asked about the Fayetteville slayings last month, Burdi responded, "It is obviously not a productive route to take. However, my heart bleeds for none but my own."

Staff researcher Alice Crites contributed to this report.

Caption: PHOTO michael williamson PHOTO nancee lewis/san diego union- tribune PHOTO

"Traditional" skinheads, who say they oppose racism, cast a shadow on the wall of a Northwest D.C. nightclub. "Patriotic group": Wingnut, 25, a non-racist skinhead from D.C., wears a flag among other items on his sleeve because "skinheads are very patriotic." Non-racist skinheads: Skinheads Maureen Malone, Harold Babb Jr., Bobby Mahoney and Aaron Crucet gather at a D.C. club. Crucet, who is part Hispanic, says his group tries to combat racial bias. Skinhead recruiter: Tom Metzger, founder of the White Aryan Resistance, was one of the first white supremacists to recruit skinheads. PUBLISHING HATE A collection of items from Resistance Records, a music label that also publishes a magazine. Lyrics from Berserkr's "The Iceman Has Risen," which is distributed by Resistance: In the depths of the Aryan soul Lies an unequaled hatred where icy blood flows The Vikings, the Saxons, the Lombards, the Vandals The Teutons, the Normans, the Franks and the Angels

Edition: FINAL

Section: A SECTION

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Company Name: ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE OF B'NAI B'RITH NAZIS KU KLUX KLAN

Index Terms: STATISTIC; FEATURES; Violence ; Whites ; Racial discrimination ; Hate crimes ; Murder ; Gangs ; Germany ; Homosexuals ; Blacks ; Jews

Record Number: 698538

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