

# What spurs the terrorism of the racist ultra-right?

By Andrew Hazlett

The eight white supremacists arrested recently in Los Angeles are representatives of a new era for the racist ultra-right. In recent years, the

■ Andrew Hazlett is a research assistant at the Manhattan Institute's Center for the New American Community.

movement has exchanged its hoods and nooses for ski masks and Uzis. The arrested leaders of the Fourth Reich Skinheads, for example, plotted to blow up a popular black

church, spray its congregants with machine gun fire and assassinate prominent black citizens, including Rodney King.

The history of white racist violence in America is long and sordid, but recently white supremacy has associated itself with outright terrorism. What is the source of their new militancy? Is there something more than simple brute hatred at work in these cases?

The new events appear to be an outgrowth of an increasingly influential religious belief system — the doctrine of "Christian Identity" theology. It is a unique melange of ideas as disparate as a belief in an impending apocalypse, occult mysticism, admiration for Nazism and conspiracy theory. Serving as a force to unite a multitude of far right splinter groups, Identity has saturated various Skinhead groups, the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi organizations. Identity provides them with a moral and religious sanction for violent racism.

Identity removes moral barriers to violent behavior by dehumanizing its victims, drowning individual responsibility in a "holy" mission and romanticizing the cause of armed racist revolution. If followed to its logical conclusion, the premise of Identity Christianity can lead to murderous action on a grand scale. Although few believers seem willing to act on their beliefs, adherents provide moral and logistical support for comrades willing to "start the race war."

"Christian Identity is a theological undergirding for racist violence," says Leonard Zeskind of the Center

for Democratic Renewal, an Atlanta-based organization that keeps tabs on white supremacists. Identity beliefs teach that only whites can be true Christians and that Jews are literally the devil's children — the product of an unholy union between Eve and the Serpent, often glibly referred to as "Satan's kids." Non-whites are "mud people" and the subhuman agents of evil, according to their literature. Identity believers argue that "white Aryans" are the only true "Chosen People," the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. Adolf Hitler is treated as a saint in most Identity congregations.

To these self-described "white Christian patriots," the United States struggles under the yoke of the "Zionist Occupation Government," a conspiratorial cabal of Jewish bankers and politicians whose first loyalty is to Israel. They see America as the battleground for imminent apocalypse. The battle that signals Christ's second coming is a race war in which white patriots overthrow and annihilate the "anti-Christ Jews" and their "mud people lackeys."

The Los Angeles group is associated with White Aryan Resistance, a group headed by Tom Metzger, who is perhaps best known for being involved in the televised battle that broke Geraldo Rivera's nose. According to the Anti-Defamation League, Metzger was ordained a Christian Identity minister in a Louisiana congregation in 1975. Although he keeps his distance from the violence, his rhetoric and beliefs continue to reflect the influence of Identity Christianity.

There are rough estimates that there are nearly 16,000 adherents to Christian Identity nationwide, and there is always the potential for growth. Until now, many grandiose programs for terror have failed due to incompetence. Yet as the movement becomes more sophisticated, attracts new members and perhaps finds a charismatic leader among its ranks, its potential to succeed grows exponentially.

To combat this form of violence, we must first take the motives of white supremacists seriously and try to understand them in their own terms.