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Hate in the Heartland: Examining Hate Groups in Nebraska's Past and Present

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Running head: HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

Hate in the Heartland: Examining Hate Groups in Nebraska's Past and Present

University of Nebraska at Omaha Honors Program Thesis

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HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

Abstract

Hate groups that malign entire classes of people based on race, religion, sexuality, gender, or other characteristic appear in every U.S. state. Nebraska is home to nine such groups, one of the highest figures in the country on a per capita basis. While notoriously secretive, previous research and watchdog reporting has pulled back the curtain on hate groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan and various neo-Nazi organizations, positing theories on how and why groups form. Minimal research has described in depth hate groups in a single state, let alone a quaint state like Nebraska. This case study of hate groups in Nebraska fills this gap by examining each of the nine hate groups in Nebraska, as designated by the Southern Poverty Law Center. This paper provides a picture of how hate groups operate, covertly and overtly, within state lines. It finds that Nebraska hate groups run an ideological gamut, reflecting a diversity of beliefs as well as strategies and tactics in public and private. To conclude, this paper explores limitations and resources to combat hate.

Keywords: *hate groups, neo-Nazis, white nationalism, belongingness, identity, far-right ideology, hate in Nebraska*

Table of Contents

Abstract2

Introduction.....4

Methods.....5

Theoretical Background.....7

 Table 115

Historical Context.....16

Case Study19

 Global Faith Institute19

 Mission to Israel.....26

 Great Millstone33

 MSR Productions38

 Figure 143

 Proud Boys.....45

 Figure 251

 Patriot Front51

 National Socialist German Workers Party (Overseas Organization).....57

 Third Reich Books63

 Folkish Resistance Movement/FolksFront64

 Figure 367

Limitations68

Concluding Thoughts.....69

Appendices.....74

 Appendix A.....74

 Appendix B.....75

References.....77

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*

Introduction

On August 11 and 12, 2017, a mass of white supremacists and hate groups held a rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in protest of the removal of Confederate monuments. Members of these hate groups chanted phrases such as “you will not replace us” and “Jews will not replace us,” (Lind 2017). Fast forward to January 6, 2021, when thousands of individuals, many bearing white supremacist symbols and paraphernalia, rallied at the U.S. Capitol, Confederate flags in tow, in violent protest of a free and fair presidential election. A common thread between these events is the presence of hate groups who hold beliefs or hostilities against entire classes of people based on their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or other characteristic. Contemporary hate groups run the gamut of ideologies, from white supremacism to anti-immigrant to anti-LGBTQ. Despite this diversity of hate, organized hate groups often fall under the radar of average citizens, perhaps apart from flashpoint events such as Charlottesville or January 6. Vagaries of what constitutes a hate group, incomplete data on hate groups and/or hate crimes, or sheer avoidance or refusal to address the hateful elephant in the room can each cause the ignorance and dismissal of organized hate in America. Perhaps more sinister is the notion that hate and hate groups have become normalized in society that one fails to differentiate hate from typical public discourse. This notion may be far-fetched today, though it is not out of the realm of possibility if hate groups and hate rhetoric go unidentified and unchallenged. This paper

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

intends to push back against the normalization and ignorance of hate groups by identifying and describing hate groups in one U.S. state, Nebraska.

The primary research questions in this effort are 1) what hate groups have had a significant presence in Nebraska and 2) what hate groups are currently active in Nebraska? Supporting research questions derive from these, such as what ideologies do current hate groups espouse and what are their tactics and strategies? This paper seeks to not only answer these questions, in part, but open a discussion on Nebraska's past and current struggle with hate group activity. This conversation is perhaps more important now relative to years prior, given the increases in hate speech, racism, and conspiracy theories since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (Peters 2020). Social networking and communications innovations aid and abet this proliferation of hate by enabling the spread of hateful propaganda and rhetoric. These technology trends are unlikely to cease in the near or long term, necessitating an informed overview and understanding of hate and hate groups. In the preceding section, I will expound on the methodology and follow with a review of the literature on hate groups. Then, this paper will delve into hate group activity in Nebraska's history to set a foundation for a more in-depth examination of present hate groups. The paper concludes with limitations and resources on how to combat hate at the individual and collective levels.

Methods

This research is qualitative in nature and uses case studies of hate groups in Nebraska. Qualitative case studies allow for more in-depth descriptions of a smaller datasets, making for more detail-rich analyses of contemporary phenomena. Refining the spatial context to Nebraska also allows for a more accurate description of the state of hate in an area where hate groups may be less visible, perhaps due to demographic, political, or historical reasons. As of 2021, Nebraska

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

is home to nine hate groups. While nine may not sound like a large number, it is noteworthy that that figure is one of the highest in the country on a per capita basis (Southern Poverty Law Center 2022). Perhaps more importantly, hate is by-and-large a product of the social environment in which it takes root, festers, and grows (Woolf and Hulsizer 2004; Levin and Rabrenovic 2004). Thus, examining hate groups in a refined geographic area provides a greater understanding of the wider social environment.

This paper utilizes the definition of hate groups provided by the civil rights and watchdog organization, the Southern Poverty Law Center, henceforth abbreviated to the SPLC. Under this definition, a hate group is “an organization or collection of individuals that – based on its official statements or principles, the statements of its leaders, or its activities – has beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics,” (SPLC 2020). Hate groups require some degree of organization and structure to attack, either verbally, psychologically, or, in some cases, violently, their target. Hate motivates group activity and permeates throughout each organizational unit. Hate groups are, of course, made up of individuals, but individuals who hate are not the subject of this paper. The topic of hate crime, which can certainly be related to hate groups and their rhetoric, likewise falls outside the scope of this present study.

The hate groups examined in this paper derive from the SPLC Hate Map, a geographic representation of all hate groups in the country. SPLC hate group data is the gold standard as it is one of the few organizations to systematically maintain listings of hate group activity in every U.S. state, which it has done each year since 1990. The SPLC uses a variety of methodologies to this end, including reviewing hate group publications, field sources, news media, reports by citizens and law enforcement, and SPLC-conducted operations (SPLC 2020). While SPLC

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

methodologies for identifying hate groups and hate incidents have been critiqued by scholars (Freilich and Pridemore 2006) and members of the public (Montgomery 2018), its data is used in this study because they provide a barometer of hate activity, both violent and nonviolent, which is a key differentiator between SPLC data and law enforcement statistics. Finally, this paper focuses on hate groups in Nebraska from 2021, the most recent data available.

This paper also utilizes reporting and research from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which focuses its efforts on combatting antisemitism in specific, but hate and white supremacy more broadly. Newspaper and news media reporting from contemporary Nebraska sources will describe activities and actions of hate groups. To this end, this paper utilizes a variety of search engines (Google, Google Scholar, Google News, Yahoo, Search Encrypt, Yandex), watchdog reporting, the Internet Archive or the Wayback Machine, and academic literature from the fields of criminology, psychology, sociology, and political science. In some cases, this paper will refer to the websites and/or publications of selected hate groups. It is vitally important to note that in doing so, this paper does not intend to spread the hateful rhetoric or brand of these groups. Nor do I intend to glorify these groups in any way or appear as indifferent or callous towards their hate. This paper only intends to critically examine hate groups in Nebraska, painting a picture of the unvarnished reality of hate in an otherwise accommodating community.

Theoretical Background

Conceptualizing hate groups as groups that malign entire classes of people based on characteristics such as race, gender, or ethnicity seems cut and dry. This definition sparks images of the Ku Klux Klan rampaging across the post- Civil War American South. Perhaps one thinks of racists donned in Nazi insignia or apparel. To be sure, the Klan and neo-Nazis are indeed hate groups, but these examples don't tell us much about what hate, and by extension hate groups,

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

really are. One could look at hate group statistics over time, such as those provided by the SPLC, and see that in the year 2021, there was over 733 active hate groups (SPLC 2022). This figure is down from 830 in 2020 and 940 in 2019 but is still considerably higher than hate group totals from the early 2000s, which hovered around 600 (SPLC 2022). These quantifiable data tell us little about the reasons hate groups form and why they hate. What makes someone don a white sheet and terrorize a Black community? What makes racist skinheads want to beat up and kill someone due to their national origin or skin color?¹ These questions have no simple, or singular, answer. A multitude of contextual, social, psychological, cognitive, and political forces are at play in any given hate group, violent or otherwise. Before this paper endeavors to mention some of these key factors, it touches on key definitions and theories that inform our analysis of hate groups. It begins with the foundational concept to all hate groups- collectivized hate.

The object of collectivized hate is entire social identities and groups instead of individuals. This form of hatred may be rooted in the cognitive distortion, that is, an error in thinking, to overgeneralize the “other” or the “them” in relation to the “us,” (Szanto 2020). Another common cognitive distortion is dichotomous thinking, where one views experiences or concepts as mutually exclusive (Beck and Pretzer 2005, 69). In this line of thinking, there is only black or white, good or evil, heaven or hell, no room in between. In the hate and prejudice scene, this can manifest as anti-Muslim bias, to take one example. Perhaps one inclined to dichotomous thinking and overgeneralization of the outgroup, in this case Muslims or Islam, believes that Islam is violent or evil. Pastor Terry Jones of the Dove World Outreach Center certainly believed

¹ This is a reference to the horrific beating and murder of Mulugeta Seraw, an Ethiopian man from Portland, Oregon. Three members of a white power skinhead gang attacked Seraw because of his race, killing him with a baseball bat. After the gang members were convicted, the SPLC sued Tom Metzger, the founder of White Aryan Resistance (WAR) because of his influence on the young gang members. Metzger was in contact with the gang prior to the murder and encouraged them to “bash” people of color. In 1990, the SPLC won the suit and WAR was held liable for \$12.5 million, effectively putting the hate group out of business (Bennet 2020).

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

this to be true and held a Koran burning in 2010 in protest of the “religion of the devil,” (Russel 2010). Unsurprisingly, protests around the world followed suit. In two weeks’ time, a protest in Afghanistan turned deadly with an attack on a United Nations building, killing 12 people (Lister and Rashad 2011). This example shows that the effects of dichotomous thinking and overgeneralizing the other can be severe. This type of framing can inspire people to commit horrendous acts or join groups of likeminded and prejudicial individuals.

Beyond cognitive distortions and sustained emotional attitudes towards a collective other, a variety of historic, geographical, socioeconomic, and social psychological factors contribute to hate group formation and hateful attitudes in general. Jefferson and Pryor find that historical circumstances, such as being a former Confederate state, are more important predictors of hate group formation than socioeconomic factors such as higher income tax rates, unemployment rates, divorce rates, and lower education attainment, though these variables are associated with the presence of hate groups (1999). Durso and Jacobs corroborate these results, finding that hate group presence increases in places with significant historical lynching rates, a growing Black population, and high murder rate (2013). Goetz, Rupasingha, and Loveridge extend Jefferson and Pryor’s results but take more value in the importance of socioeconomic factors in hate group formation. Their results show that decreases in social capital stock, or a lack of social cohesion and trust among the population, is associated with hate group activity (2012). As Americans become less civically, politically, and socially engaged, the propensity of distrust amongst groups increases.

The impulse for people to separate their own group from the outgroup is a product of evolutionary social adaptation. Humans are hard-wired to distinguish between an “us” and “them,” as well as cooperate with their own group for mutual benefit, in the interests of survival.

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

Even people in homogenous groups tend to separate themselves into us-them groups. According to Levin and Rabrenovic, similarity can make people feel that their own attitudes are correct or somehow better than those of the outgroup, thus reinforcing in-group solidarity (2004, 64-65). This notion of social identity and its impact on intergroup dynamics is integral to the evaluation of hate groups and those who malign members of a certain outgroup.

Tajfel and Turner founded social identity theory (SIT) to uncover truths about the salience of identity in social groups. Tajfel et al. found through a series of experiments that when arbitrarily assigning people to groups, ingroup members will act to favor the ingroup at the expense of the outgroup (1971). Tajfel found that ingroup members can deliberately act in opposition to the outgroup to benefit the ingroup, even if a situation of mutual benefit is possible. The reason ingroups do this, according to SIT, is that people value their ingroup identity so much that they actively seek negative aspects in the outgroup to prop themselves up (Tajfel and Turner 1979). This inclination is even more pronounced in groups that hold extremist ideologies, for their ingroup beliefs heighten hostility and anxiety against the outgroup (Berger 2018).

Moving from the social psychological space, psychological theories may also provide insight into the personality types and attitudes that predict prejudice and hate. Most notably among them include right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO). Individuals with an authoritarian personality type exhibit high degrees of deference to authority, aggression toward outgroups when permitted by authorities, and support for traditional values (Adorno et al. 1950). Altemeyer (1983) refined this personality type with the RWA personality, which encapsulates people who tend to be morally self-righteous, show deference to authority, and perceive outgroups to be threatening traditional values. Studies have found that

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

RWA, measured by a 32-item scale, can be a predictor of prejudice and ethnocentrism (Altemeyer 1998). Studies on social dominance orientation come to similar conclusions.

Social dominance orientation (SDO) is a personality trait conceptualized by Sidanius, Pratto, and Mitchell (1994), characterized by one's desire for their group to dominate the outgroup. People high in SDO may stereotype or denigrate the outgroup to justify and sustain the "right" social hierarchy (Levin and Sidanius 1999). Individuals high in the SDO personality trait may feel that immigrants or ethnic minorities should be lower on the social hierarchy than the dominant group. This trait, then, facilitates prejudicial attitudes. Importantly, SDO and RWA do have plenty criticisms. Akrami and Ekehammar, for one, argue that these models are better described as social attitudes rather than personality traits (2006). Regardless of the terminology, these models do little to explain why unprejudiced individuals, including those who may lack an authoritarian bent, join hate groups. This is not a rare phenomenon, as hate is not always a necessary condition for entry into a hate group (Blee 2002, 27-28). As Woolf and Hulsizer (2004) note, hate is more often a means and an end for individuals and leaders of hate groups. Many of those in hate groups join the ranks of a Klan or racist skinhead gang for reasons beyond hate or prejudice, such as a sense of belonging and identity, or to regain a sense of certainty in a world characterized by constant change. Perhaps no better justification of this idea is the testimony of hate group members and former members.

In the documentary film *Hate Groups USA* (1998), a member of the Aryan Brotherhood (AB), a neo-Nazi prison gang, shared with filmmakers how the AB drew him in. AB offered two things the individual lacked while incarcerated- fellowship and family. The neo-Nazi ideology or tenets of white power were not the leading factors in his recruitment. What ultimately drew him in was the fact that the AB got him a birthday card when no one else, including family and

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

friends, did. Christian Picciolini, a former neo-Nazi turned anti-hate activist, echoed the importance of family and belonging in his recruitment. Picciolini's parents were working all the time, leaving little "family time" growing up. A neo-Nazi recruiter confronted Picciolin at age 14, pulled Christian's joint out of his mouth, and said "That's what the Communists and the Jews want you to do to keep you docile," (Ottesen 2020). Picciolini did not hold racist views prior to that moment, yet he felt that the neo-Nazi movement gave him a sense of belonging and family. These examples illustrate the salience of belongingness, especially to impressionable and vulnerable individuals. Without this sense of belonging, individuals may turn to hate groups to fill this void.

The desire for belongingness, connection, love, and identity, especially within one's own group, is a key aspect of self-actualization and fulfillment (Maslow 1943). Individuals derive self-fulfillment and a sense of self-worth from their group-based identity, but also from the group's acceptance of the individual (Ellison 1993). Many factors can upset one's ability to meet their basic needs, such as economic downturn, social change and/or restructuring, and chaos and uncertainty (Staub 1999). Amidst times of uncertainty, fear, and powerlessness, individuals may be more susceptible to joining lives of extremism and organized hate, and potentially more likely to act violently on that hate.

The importance of uncertainty, fear, and the ingroup's perception of a threat from the outgroup cannot be understated. These factors transcend ideological boundaries and have motivated hate group activity, violence, and prejudice since the days of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). The KKK was born in the milieu of Reconstruction, the era following the end of the Civil War. With the South's slave economy in shambles, many a white landowner felt a grave sense of loss and displacement. The Klan, formed originally as a seemingly innocent social club,

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

metastasized into the U.S.' first domestic terrorist organization. The Klan provided a space for displaced and disaffected individuals to regain lost political and social power (Simi and Futrell 2010, 16). Examples of hate and prejudice after major social or political events abound, from the rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes and Islamophobia after 9/11 (Ser 2016) to the increase in hate groups in the U.S. after President Obama's ascension to the presidency. But perhaps the best example of how uncertainty and fear beget hate is straight from the source- the "manifesto" of a white nationalist.

In 2018, the self-avowed white nationalist Greg Johnson published *The White Nationalist Manifesto* to outline the ideological tenets of white nationalism. Even a cursory look through the text can identify the theme of fear and uncertainty amongst the white race. Per the *Manifesto*, "White demographic decline is extremely advanced in the United States," projected to decrease from 90% of the U.S. population in 1965 to below 50% of the population by 2042. This inevitably means "political disempowerment" for the white race. While proponents of multiculturalism laud this demographic change, white nationalists feel left out and threatened. As Johnson argues, "In the present system, we (white people) have no future, and we are acting accordingly." Johnson continues, "Loss of hope for the future is what ties together a whole array of social pathologies afflicting white Americans." To surmise Johnson's argument, white people are becoming more alienated and lonelier in the face of a hedonistic and selfish culture that promotes diversity through multiculturalism, immigration, and race-mixing, effectively replacing whites with non-whites. White people, therefore, need a new political vision and leadership to "give our people a future again." This future goal of white nationalists is to "replace multiracial, multicultural societies with racially and culturally homogenous homelands" known as ethnostates (Johnson 2018).

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

The white nationalist ideology is objectively racist. But it is also based on fear. Fear of demographic change, fear of disempowerment, fear for their future. To be fair, the loss of hope for the future is a legitimate concern that demands attention. However, using this loss of hope to justify hate and discrimination based on race, color, or national origin is not excusable.

Furthermore, hate groups and hate ideologies feed off this fear and uncertainty and use it as a tool of recruitment and mobilization, a way to keep members engaged in the success of the organization.

To round out this section, this paper mentions a model for how hate groups form. With the theoretical background set, we now can better understand the group model developed by FBI Special Agents Shafer and Navarro. While this 7-stage model, captured in Table 1, focuses on racist skinhead hate groups, it is apparent that certain stages have wider applications beyond a racist skinhead group. The first stage, for instance, is the gathering of haters. This stage is integral to any hate group, as haters tend to hate with others, as groups both provide a sense of belonging but also reduce feelings of personal responsibility (Levin and Nolan 2017, 110). The second stage is equally important to any hate group, being the formation of a common group identity with common symbols (Swastika, Confederate flag, etc.) and mythologies that fortify group ties while denigrating the outgroup. (Shafer and Navarro 2003). This stage is common across most hate groups and is thus important to recognize here. However, the full model should not be used to characterize every hate group, as it does account for violent hate groups. Not all hate groups are violent, nor are all violent groups hate groups. This paper merely includes this hate group model to create an understanding of how hate groups may, in their early forms at least, coalesce, given the theoretical background laid forth in this review. Next, we turn to the case study portion of the paper, first describing the first and most infamous hate group in

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

Nebraska- the Klan. The review of the Ku Klux Klan in Nebraska serves two primary purposes. First, it illustrates the idea described in the prior section that hate groups are products and reflections of their social environments. Second, the example of the Klan in Nebraska provides a historical context to hate groups in the state, showing how hate groups in Nebraska are not a recent phenomenon. Rather, hate groups, even the reviled KKK, do have a reasonably strong history in this state.

STAGE	CHARACTERISTICS
The Haters Gather	Validation from peers bolster self-worth and diminishes responsibility for actions of the group, violent or non-violent
The Hate Group Defines Itself	Groups form identities through symbols, rituals, and mythologies that enhance the member's status and degrade the target of their hate
The Hate Group Disparages the Target	Verbally disparage the object of the group's hate to elevate themselves and their group's status
The Hate Group Taunts the Target	Group taunts the object of hate through slurs, hateful rhetoric, or violence to maintain high levels of agitation
The Hate Group Attacks the Target Without Weapons	Differentiates vocally abusive haters from physically abusive ones as groups become more aggressive against targets. Racist skinheads at this stage typically attack individual people instead of engaging with multiple people at the same time; this stage also provides adrenaline rush to violent haters
The Hate Group Attacks the Target with Weapons	Haters use guns, knives, or commonly broken bottles and baseball bats for; these weapons require the hater to maintain close contact with the victim to reflect the intensity of the hate and anger towards the target
The Hate Group Destroys the Target	Haters may psychologically or physically destroy the target/victim, providing intense feelings of power for the hater

Table 1: Adapted from Shafer and Navarro (2003)

Historical Context- The KKK In Nebraska

The Ku Klux Klan is the most infamous hate group in American history, due in large part from their distinguishable white hoods, notorious cross burnings, and vicious record of racial violence. It's perhaps most associated with former slave states in the South, though in its heyday had thousands of members across the nation. This was especially true in the early 1920s, when the Klan was at its strongest. This paper provides brief overview of the KKK in Nebraska, as well as background on the Klan as an organization. This historical background of the Klan in Nebraska will lend to a greater understanding of hate group activity in the state, beyond the current hate landscape addressed later in this paper.

The Ku Klux Klan formed in 1866 in Pulaski, Tennessee as a fraternal order for Confederate veterans. As alluded to, the post-Civil War Reconstruction left the South in shambles. Infrastructure, property, and the economy were destroyed or severely impaired. With the Union victory and emancipation of black slaves, white landowners held two major fears- loss of political and economic power and retribution.

The institutional threat to white supremacy, as McVeigh and Estep describe, instigated racial violence against African Americans even before the Klan fully formed (2019, 19). In the pre-Klan era, many white southerners feared slave rebellion or escape. To combat this threat, some members donned white sheets in the guise of ghosts to scare slaves into submission (Fry 1975 as cited in McVeigh and Estep 2019, 21). As the Klan grew more powerful in the late 1860s, violence followed. Klan members or supporters murdered Black Republican politicians, assaulted and intimidated officials who were amiable towards African Americans, and beat, shot, stabbed, and hanged thousands of innocent people based on racial differences (McVeigh and Estep 2019, 23). The first installation of the KKK was relatively short-lived due to these high-

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

profile crimes. Following the Civil Rights Act of 1871 (also known as the Ku Klux Klan Act), the organization disbanded.

The second iteration of the KKK emerged in 1915 in Stone Mountain, Georgia, under the backdrop of immigration influxes and the soon-to-be enfranchisement of women. This version of the KKK espoused “100% Pure Americanism” and white racial purity, targeting not only African Americans but also immigrants, Jews, and Catholics (Simi 2010, 16). In this era, the Klan spread across the country, reaching membership figures of up to 5 million people by 1925 (Simi 2010, 16). The 1920s Klan was also a political powerhouse, reaching a wider audience and raking in over \$20 million annually (nearly \$400 million today) to prop up political candidates who’d tacitly or overtly support their bigoted policy preferences (McVeigh and Estep 2019, 32). The xenophobia and bigotry espoused by Klan members and supporters in the 1920s was hardly extreme for the time. Rather, the Klan’s message of scapegoating immigrants, Jews, Catholics, and African Americans for economic and social woes and deep-seated anxieties was shockingly palatable to the masses, bordering on the mainstream (Herschthal 2018). Supporters of the Klan were not necessarily viewed as racists, but as patriots fighting for the true American. This is the era and social context in which the Klan flourished in Nebraska.

In 1921, the Klan founded the first local Klan outpost (called a “Klavern”) in Omaha at 41st and Farnam with promises of adhering to law and order while advocating against anything un-American (read: anyone or anything not white, Protestant, or native-born). The once-secret organization was now actively recruiting members and holding public initiation ceremonies and meetings. The Klan’s reach was expansive, dominating not only in population centers Omaha and Lincoln, but also Grand Island, Hastings, and Scottsbluff. By 1924, Klan membership reached 45,000 statewide. Most members were not fringe members of society, rather a mix of

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

rural farmers to middle-class urban dwellers, Christians, mothers, and fathers drawn to either the ideology of “patriotism” or fraternal comradery (Schuyler 1985).

Public ads and displays of Klan activity were commonplace in early 1920s Nebraska, as it was in many states. In July 1924, the Klan used cross burnings to advertise for an upcoming rally in North Platte, a rally in which 2500 men gathered to hear a lecture on patriotism and Americanism (Kinley 2021). A Klan ad from *The Gering Courier* in October 1924 invited men to bring their wives to a Klan lecture, provided that the individual was a native-born citizen and protestant (Kinley 2021). In 1925, thousands of people would attend Klan lectures and appearances from national Klan organizers, including the imperial wizard Hiram Wesley Evans. The common theme at such talks was that Nebraska would be inundated with so-called “foreign elements” (anyone the Klan was against- Catholics, immigrants, immodestly dressed women), and therefore “genuine Americans” should join or support the Klan (Kinley 2021). Some Nebraskans bought what the Klan was selling. Not every Nebraskan, though, was willing to accept its message.

Notable among the many Nebraskans who tried to limit the Klan’s presence in the state are Chancellor Samuel Avery of the University of Nebraska and Reverend Russel Taylor. Chancellor Avery made it clear that Klan membership on campus would lead to suspension because “Learning knows no distinction or race or color,” (Schuyler 1985). Rev. Taylor, an African American minister and civil rights leader in 1920s North Omaha, was one of the most powerful and fearless condemners of the Klan through this ministry and public media (Guenther 2011).

Surely, the Klan’s presence in Nebraska was not universally welcomed and should not be construed as such. This overview of the Klan in Nebraska does, however, provide key insight on

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

hate groups relevant to the present. The Klan's revival in the 1920s was a testament to the larger social environment, both nationally and statewide. The 1920s brought with it social change, economic downturn, and immigration that caused widespread anxiety and fears that allowed the Klan to resurrect itself and capitalize on such fears, as well as the long-held racial biases that remained intact. Like any contemporary hate group, the Klan constructed an us-them dichotomy that justified their bigotry. The following profiles of hate groups in present-day Nebraska show similar tendencies.

Case Study

The following case study portion of this paper profiles each of the nine hate groups in Nebraska, as identified by the SPLC in the years 2021. This paper breaks down each hate group into two subsections. First, this paper provides an overview of group's ideology (Neo-Nazi, white nationalist, anti-Muslim, etc.). Second, it analyzes the group's organizational makeup, goals, and activity and/or presence in Nebraska. Following each of these profiles, this paper concludes with a discussion of the case study and its limitations.

Global Faith Institute

The Global Faith Institute (GFI) is perhaps the most unconventional hate groups in Nebraska. Unconventional in this sense meaning that the GFI is a legitimate 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that champions the U.S. Constitution and preaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ. GFI does not elicit images of hooded Klan members or neo-Nazis with swastika tattoos. Rather, the organization operates as a standard nonprofit organization, albeit one with an ideology marked by anti-Muslim bias.

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

Ideology

The Global Faith Institute is a religious organization based on spreading the Truth on Jesus Christ and the Word of God. While this message is all well and good, the hate group side of the nonprofit is far less innocent. GFI claims, per the “About Us” webpage, to be advocates for the “victims of political Islam” through education, conferences, social media, and seminars available on-demand as recordings on its website. However, a hateful bias against the Muslim community and Islam as a religion in general shines through much of their “advocacy,” warranting their anti-Muslim ideology categorization.

Anti-Muslim hate is a relatively recent phenomenon in the U.S. In fact, this ideology and was quite rare until the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. These attacks, carried out by members of al-Qaeda, a militant Sunni Islamic terrorist group, ignited fears of the Islamic faith and practicing Muslims. This is even though Muslims constituted less than 1% of the U.S. population in the immediate aftermath of the attacks and still only make up 1.1% of the population (Mohamed 2021). Nevertheless, anti-Muslim hate and hate crime skyrocketed following the attacks. Between 2000 and 2001 alone, anti-Muslim hate crimes increased over 1600% (Alfonseca 2021). Hate crimes against Muslims decreased over time, though many Muslims continue to face fear and insecurity about how their public perception in American society.

Survey results from two decades since the 9/11 attacks indicate that as much as 80% of Muslims feel at least somewhat worried about the safety of their family in the U.S. (Alfonseca 2021). Non-Muslims across the country seemingly recognize that anti-Muslim bias and the fear of the threat Islam supposedly poses to the world (also known as Islamophobia) is a reality in modern-day America. According to a Pew survey from 2021, a majority of U.S. adults believe

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

that Muslims face “a lot” of discrimination compared to other religious groups like Jews or evangelicals (Mohamed 2021). Years of Pew surveys confirm that Muslims are consistently ranked amongst the “coldest” in terms of religious groups (Mohamed 2021). Part of the reason why these anti-Muslim and Islamophobic perceptions, especially in relation to Islamic terrorist threats to the U.S., is that media coverage of terrorist plots and attacks, successful or otherwise, is disproportionate to the actual number of such plots. Thus, the public may perceive that Islamist terrorist plots are more common than they really are. Another, and perhaps more sinister, reason why Islamophobia persists is because influential figures spread anti-Muslim messages.

During the presidential campaigns of President Obama, public figures and media outlets spread false rumors about his religion and place of birth. The foremost proponent of these falsehoods was Donald Trump, who stoked these baseless claims and used the very Islamophobic and bigoted fears he spread to secure the presidency himself. Preceding the 2016 election, Trump claimed that “Islam hates us...there’s tremendous hatred there,” (Schleifer 2016). The logic is simple- fear buys votes and influence. By claiming that practitioners of Islam hate America, one cultivates a fear of the other. If people feel threatened by someone, they may place their trust in those who claim to be able to protect them. Separating the world into categories of an us versus them lays the tracks for prejudice and hate, as does claiming the other is evil. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, President George W. Bush importantly said that “The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam...Islam is peace,” (Alfonseca 2021). The Global Faith Institute appears to be unaccepting of such truism, as GFI has gone so far as to say Islam has a goal of global domination.

Organizational Overview and Activity in Nebraska

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

GFI claims to be ambassadors of Jesus Christ who advocate for the victims of political Islam and are champions of the U.S. Constitution. Dr. Mark Christian, the founder of the organization, apparently “understands Islam and its goal of global domination” because he is a former Muslim and imam from Egypt who left the faith after he discovered that his faith was a lie. A decade into his spiritual journey, Dr. Christian found Jesus and Scripture. Dr. Christian also grew up in a family involved in the Sunni Islamist organization the Muslim Brotherhood, which gave him a fuller understanding of their “plans for America through civilization jihad.” Regarding the U.S. Constitution, GFI believes that this country was built on Judeo-Christian values and the freedom of religion, if the doctrine of a certain religion is not opposed to the U.S. Constitution. The inference here is that religions outside the Judeo-Christian tradition may conflict with the U.S. Constitution and American government, which is where GFI’s anti-Muslim prejudice comes to the fore.

GFI claims to advocate for victims of political Islam through education, specifically in the form of social media, seminars, news briefings, and conferences. GFI does not appear to define what political Islam even is, though based on its website it seems like GFI takes political Islam to mean the use of Sharia law and tenets of Islam to govern. GFI feels that adherents to whatever political Islam is are persecuting countless Christians around the world. To this end, GFI takes part in “Save the Persecuted Christian Awareness Movement,” or STPC. To be sure, Christians worldwide have been persecuted and even killed in countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan. GFI tries to spread awareness of this persecution and pressure government to act on it. The STPC coalition, as GFI terms it, includes a who’s who of individuals deemed anti-Muslim misinformation experts by the Center for American Progress, as well as designated extremists by the SPLC. These include Frank Gaffney of the Center for Security Policy and Jerry Boykin of

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

the Family Research Council.² The impact of these experts shines through in GFI's own flawed set of beliefs and misperceptions of Islam (Global Faith Institute n.d.).

GFI espouses a sundry of myths about Sharia law, the moral and ethical principles underpinning the Islamic faith. GFI does note that Muslims are often the first victims of political Islam because they are supposedly not allowed to question or leave the faith and women are treated as property. There is no denying that some Islamic extremists hold these views and aspire to govern as such, but to characterize the entire faith as adherents to this doctrine is hardly accurate. GFI also claims that Sharia law requires honor killings and punishes Muslims for slight infractions with violent beatings and brutal executions. Further, GFI asserts that female genital mutilation is a common Islamic practice, even in the U.S. These assertions regarding Islam's complex moral and ethical code of conduct are overly general, reflecting a misunderstanding or perversion of the Islamic faith.

Sharia law is, first and foremost, a moral and ethical set of principles derived from the Quran and teachings of Muhammad rather than a civil or criminal legal system. Sharia has a diversity of interpretations specific to time, place, custom, or religious school, and is far from a universal body of law that demands violence or exactions for petty crimes (Marglin 2019). Contrary to what GFI believes, Sharia does not mandate honor killings, a concept not even mentioned in the Quran (Muhammad 2013). Granted, some so-called Islamic republics and extremist groups adhere to a rigid interpretation of Sharia precepts that influences legal codes and promotes violent punishments. In Brunei, for instance, the government imposed draconian punishments for those convicted of gay sex, adultery, and rape, including death by stoning, based

²Gaffney and Boykin each spread the idea that essentially all Muslims are radical Muslims who have infiltrated the government under the tacit consent of President Obama. The SPLC designates each as extremists and their organizations (Gaffney's Center for Security Policy and Boykin's Family Research Council) as hate groups that denigrate Muslims and LGBTQ people, respectively (Bump 2016; Gibson 2012).

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

on a strict interpretation of Sharia (Westcott and Wright 2019). After international backlash, Brunei took the death penalty off the table for such being gay, though gay people still face the threat of whippings and jail time (Westcott and Wright 2019). European colonialism heavily influenced many Muslim-majority countries that try to enforce Sharia in the legal system, as it centralized the law within the state (Quraishi-Landes 2016). This type of legal system differs from the precolonial legal system of many Muslim-majority countries in that these countries separated governing authority from what is called “Fiqh,” which is the Islamic rules of action that is guided by religious interpretation (Quraishi-Landes 2016). To sum up, Sharia law is not a monolith, nor does it hamstring all practicing Muslims to stone people. More extreme sects of the Islamic world may want to adapt stricter Sharia interpretations and systems of governance, but these surely do not represent all Muslims. If we are to judge an entire religion or culture based on the extreme actions or views of a minority, then we would have to view all Protestants as Ku Klux Klan members. It would be ludicrous, of course, to cast all Protestants as Klan members, and similarly ludicrous to assess as much for Muslims.

Nevertheless, GFI continues to preach its view of Islam. GFI spreads messages through blogs, video seminars, guest lectures, and printed materials distributed through their website. Dr. Mark Christian also appears for guest speaking events and on radio shows. Dr. Christian periodically uploads news briefings to YouTube but does host these briefings at their physical location. Accessible on GFI’s YouTube page are recordings of speakers from right-wing politicians and activists such as U.S. Representative Louie Gohmert and former Governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee. The topic of these videos center on Muslims the supposed threat they pose to the U.S. In Dr. Christian’s news briefing events, he speaks on a range of topics, from critiquing American politicians to social movements such as Black Lives Matter, which Christian

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

compares to the Muslim Brotherhood (Global Faith 2020). Dr. Christian claims, in many of these videos and elsewhere on the website, that he does not hate Muslims or Islam, even though he has a reason to. Rather, he is “just asking questions” about Islam. These questions certainly stir up discontent in public speaking events, such as one held at Creighton University in 2019 by the conservative organization Turning Point USA. In a panel discussion on immigration, Dr. Christian reiterated GFI’s claims about Islam attempting to establish a kingdom to take over all other nations while adamantly arguing against illegal immigration and open borders (McCormick 2019). The discussion “went south” soon after Dr. Christian remarked that you should love your neighbor as Jesus said, provided that the neighbor is a legal resident and not “somebody who just jumped and moved in next door,” (McCormick 2019). This prompted some students to walk out of the event, after which many complained about the administration’s allowance of such discourse on campus (McCormick 2019).

Dr. Christian and GFI are entitled to their own opinions and are protected by freedom of speech. GFI does have legitimate concerns, too, as the persecution and killing of Christians worldwide is a horrific human rights violation, as is the practice of executing people for being gay. It is imperative, though, for GFI and the public to recognize the dangers of overgeneralizing Muslims based on a subset of violent actors with extreme and selective interpretations of the Islamic faith. Spreading misinformed rhetoric can make Muslims the U.S. in broad and Nebraska in particular feel like outsiders or perhaps the enemy of non-Muslims. In analyses of anti-Muslim hate groups such as GFI, it is important to keep in mind that freedom of religion is freedom of all religions, not freedom of all religions except for Islam. Further, the threat GFI feels is not a threat of Islam, but the threat of those misappropriating Islam for political or personal gain.

Mission to Israel

The SPLC designates Mission to Israel Ministries, based in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, as a Christian Identity hate group. Despite the name, Christian Identity (CI) strays far from the tenets of Christianity, even its most extreme, ultra-conservative sects. Rather, CI is a deeply antisemitic and racist theology based on the notion that white people are God's favored people from the Bible, the Israelites (SPLC n.d.-a). CI groups have decreased in recent years due to lack of relevance within the modern white power movement, though nine groups remain in existence across the U.S. as of 2021, including Mission to Israel.

Ideology

The Christian Identity ideology is as unique as it is diverse, spanning a range of pseudo-religious interpretations that vary in their radicalism. As Davis notes, men like Ted Wieland, who will be discussed in greater detail in the next subsection, are considerably tamer in their beliefs relative to the adherents of a particularly dangerous sect of CI adherents known as the Phineas Priesthood (2010, 9). In the centuries that basic tenets of the CI ideology have festered in the U.S. and abroad, different groups and individuals, such as the infamous white nationalist Louis Beam, have incorporated components of CI into their own hate-filled belief systems. And while people may diverge in how they adopt and conceptualize CI, there is unifying foundational ideology that focuses not on Christianity or good works to thy neighbor, but on discrimination and hate.

The decentralized belief system and movement of Christian Identity is based on British Israelism, the belief that the English descended from the Old Testament's lost tribes of Israel (Michael 2013, 189). This would make the English God's chosen people and blood relatives of Jesus Christ, rather than the Jews. This belief was popular in the mid-1800s, both in Great

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

Britain and the U.S. Scottish minister John Wilson popularized British Israelism in his 1840 book *Our Israelite Origin*, basing his argument that Europeans descended from the lost tribes on his reading of a passage from the Old Testament that spoke of a bow and arrow that belonged to an ancestor of Jesus named Joseph (Michael 2013, 189). Since the English bowmen were renowned for their skill in the Middle Ages, Wilson figured this connected the English to the Israelites (Michael 2013, 189). Wilson noticed commonalities between the social institutions of the modern English and Hebrews, further justifying his claim (Davis 2010, 11). Wilson significantly differentiated between the northern and southern kingdoms of the ancient Israelites, asserting that the northern Israelites were racially pure and would migrate into northern Europe, hence the relation to the English (Davis 2010, 11). The Jews from the southern kingdom supposedly disappear into racial oblivion, with their descendants later allying with Satan (Davis 2010, 11).

While this idea may seem far-fetched, it was “consonant with the zeitgeist of that period,” (Michael 2013, 189). After all, this was the time of European colonialism and British imperialism, where the thought of using religion to justify English dominance over a perceived racially or socially inferior people was more of a norm than it was exceptional. That said, Wilson’s theories were not blatantly antisemitic or prejudicial towards non-British Israelites. Theorists such as Edward Hine would change that by infusing Wilson’s ideas with religious and nationalistic ideology (Bailey 2010). In his scriptural interpretation, the true Hebrews crossed the Caucasus Mountains and founded the new Israel in the British Isles, thus making the British the fulfillment of the Israelite legacy (Michael 2013, 190). This theory departed from Wilson’s musings that other European peoples (i.e., Germans) were also God’s chosen people (Bailey

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

2010; Davis 2010, 14). Hines' ideas caught on with the English middle class and aristocracy, as well as the U.S. following his emigration in the 1880s.

When Hines' followers brought his ideas to the U.S., the ideology of British Israelism took on a more antisemitic and racist turn. In the early 1900s, antisemitism, eugenics, and scientific racism gained more credibility in American society. By the beginning of World War II, British Israelism in the U.S. reimagined itself in increasingly antisemitic way. Pseudoscientific and pseudohistorical research from this era formed the foundational belief system of Christian Identity. Early doctrinal statements describe two types of human beings- Adamites and pre-Adamites. The former descended from Adam and Eve and are white, Anglo-Saxon Aryans, whereas the latter, nonwhite people came before Adam and Eve and were tainted through race-mixing. Pre-Adamites were associated with satanic Jews who descend from Satan and Eve and were intent on overthrowing God's plans. This set of beliefs paints the Jews as the satanic enemy, which would prove to be a cornerstone of the burgeoning CI movement in mid-1900s America (Davis 2010, 14-15).

Wesley Swift, a former Methodist minister and KKK member, founded the Anglo-Saxo Christian Congregation shortly after WWII. Swift renamed the church to a more innocent sounding Church of Jesus Christ Christian. Throughout the 1940s-1960s, Swift networked with so-called theologians of the CI movement, namely Conrad Gaard, William Gale, and Bertrand Comparet and deepened ties to neo-Nazis, skinheads, Klan members, and anti-government extremists such as Posse Comitatus (Michael 2013, 194). By infusing British Israelism with hardcore antisemitism, political activism, white supremacist ideology, and biblical interpretations, Swift effectively crafted an Americanized form of Christian Identity (Bailey 2010). Adherents to this loosely organized movement and ideology vary in their specific

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

interpretations of scripture but generally believe that Jews are the offspring of Satan, as mentioned earlier, and that non-white people are “mud people” who have no souls because they were created before Adam and Eve, and not in the image of God. This separates non-whites and Jews from the God’s real chosen, people of white European descent (Bailey 2010). This belief unifies CI with white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups such as the Aryan Nations and The Order, each of which has ties to Swift and the CI movement.

An important component across CI ideologies is millennialism, or the belief that the end of the world is nigh. CI adherents believe that Jesus Christ will only return to Earth after an apocalyptic racial battle. They believe that government institutions and laws are in imminent collapse or hold no value because they are man’s law, not God’s law. Given these core beliefs, it is perhaps no surprise that CI groups tend to overlap with anti-government groups and ideologies, as well as armed militia groups who believe the true followers of God will have to fight the soulless mud people. CI has also notoriously inspired many violent “lone wolf” attacks due to the inflammatory apocalyptic rhetoric. After all, people may be inclined to do a lot of outrageous or even violent things in the name of religion or a higher power. In 1999, for instance, a pair of brothers who held CI beliefs firebombed three synagogues and murdered a gay couple (Bailey 2010). Thankfully Nebraska’s Mission to Israel is not as extreme nor violent as this example exhibits. That is not to say that the organization is without flaws.

Organizational Overview and Activity in Nebraska

The evangelist and author Ted Weiland leads Mission to Israel Ministries in Scottsbluff and is its spiritual and ideological figurehead. The organization resembles a unique mix of evangelical Christian beliefs with the occasional Hebrew reference and terminology. They believe that the Bible (as found in the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts) is the literal Word of

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

God, that Yeshua (Jesus) is our Lord and Savior, and Yahweh is the one true God (Mission to Israel n.d.). The Mission's Mission Statement, and entire website more broadly, is littered with biblical references, mostly from the Old Testament books that make claims about the perfection of Yahweh's laws such as Deuteronomy 4:5-8, 28:1-14 and Psalms Psalm 19:7-11. One of the main points of emphasis of Weiland and his ministry is that modern Christians don't believe that Yahweh's laws have any practical value today. Any practicing Christian, especially so-called New Covenant Christians, should pursue Yahweh's laws individually and societally (Weiland 2011). This paper doesn't intend to critically analyze these religious interpretations or claim them as valid or incredible, as this would be well outside the scope of this paper and a lengthy process at that. Furthermore, Weiland and his followers are fully entitled to their own biblical interpretations and religious beliefs. It is only a matter of when these beliefs discriminate against someone, or an entire group based on these beliefs that trouble arises.

Mission to Israel Ministries' stated beliefs on Jews and the Hebrews of ancient Israel can be problematic and potentially racist. The post entitled "Could You Be an Israelite and Not Know It?" provides a lengthy essay on how Christians, specifically "Celto-Saxon" people, are the true Israelites, descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jews, apparently, have less in common with the Israelites than Christians, even though it's widely accepted that Hebrews, Jews, and Israelites are one in the same. Nevertheless, it's argued that scriptural, archeological, and anthropological evidence supports the notion that today's Jews are not Yahweh's chosen people, the Israelite. In fact (or supposedly a fact), most Jews are descended from Turkish and Mongolian tribes from the 7th and 9th centuries. Under this line of argument, Jews do not have the right to Israel because they aren't the real Israelites (Weiland n.d.).

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

Like any other post on the Ministries' website, references from the Bible are interspersed to make it look credible. For example, there are numerous references to the books of Genesis, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Jeremiah that describe what Israel truly is. Israel is said to rule over other nations (Deuteronomy 15:6), would be given a new covenant and saved by Yahweh (Jeremiah 31:7), and would be the only nation given Yahweh's Law (Psalm 147:19-20). Who do these signs point to? Not the Jews, apparently, but "the Celtic, Germanic, Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon, and kindred peoples." Put differently, people of European descent are the true Israelites, not the Jews, who are "imposters." This last is significant because, according to Mission to Israel's interpretation of the book of Revelation (chapters 2 and 3, verse 9), false Jews are the "synagogue of Satan." This, of course, connects Mission to Israel with the theories of early British Israelism thinkers, and objectively devalues and dehumanizes Jewish people.

Mission to Israel is not just a ministry that claims white Christians are the true Israelites. Another area of significance for the organization is the U.S. Constitution. Weiland has written extensively on the topic of Bible law versus the laws of the Constitution and has appeared in numerous debates and lectures on the topic, which are available on the group's website as well as the other website Weiland operates called "Constitution MythBusters." The main point of contention is whether the Constitution is compatible with Yahweh's law. As Weiland, and by extension the Ministries, see it, the Constitution is a godless document that is in opposition to God's law and will. It is not a biblical document because it was built on Enlightenment ideas and not the word of God, or so it's claimed. Credit where credit is due, that last claim is true. The Constitution is not a biblical document by design, as freedom of religion is core to the United States' legal, social, and political system. In fact, it is because of this freedom of religion (and

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

that of free speech) that Pastor Weiland and his church are allowed to worship freely despite their borderline antisemitic belief system.

To be clear, Weiland does not appear to advocate for violent overthrow of the U.S. government even though it is based on a godless body of law. As stated previously, not all hate groups or hate-based ideologies are violent. Sure, Weiland's writings on the Ministries' website defend gun ownership because the Bible talks about the right to defend oneself, but that is as close to violent confrontation as the group gets. These writings do, however, echo of the sovereign citizen and anti-government ideology that is present in many Christian Identity groups. According to Weiland, the government is destined to fail because it is based on godless law, not Yahweh's law. Weiland has even written a modified Constitution for the U.S. that better reflects the laws enshrined in the Bible. Writings and lectures of this ilk are less of a concern for the SPLC and this paper because they do not blatantly malign or demean a certain group of people as their scriptural interpretations do, but it is important to at least highlight these other beliefs to better understand the group holistically.

While Mission to Israel's unique biblical interpretations appear harmless, it is important to keep in mind that the organization is profiting off antisemitic beliefs through their dozens of CD lectures and books available for public consumption. And while the group doesn't openly advocate for violence for or against the government, it may not be outside the realm of possibility further down the line, given Christian Identity's ties to so-called "lone-wolf" attacks. To be abundantly clear, this paper does not accuse Mission to Israel of provoking violence. Rather, this paper calls to attention their ideological beliefs, which could and has led to increased risk of violence in the name of their religious identity.

Great Millstone

The SPLC designates Great Millstone as a “general hate” hate group, meaning it has no singular defining ideology. There are approximately two dozen Great Millstone groups spread across the country, including Omaha. In previous hate group reports, the SPLC named Great Millstone as a Black separatist group, specifically a Black Hebrew Israelite group. In 2020, the SPLC removed the Black separatist category while continuing to track such groups, placing them in a different category that better reflects their ideology. Such groups continue to spread antisemitic or anti-LGBTQ views, but their ideology is less centered on opposing the white supremacist power structure (SPLC 2020). These groups are less interested in Black separatism or nationalism, but express hate in other forms. And since Great Millstone was formerly categorized as a sect of the Black Hebrew Israelites (BHI), this subsection proceeds with an overview of BHI groups and their ideology.

Ideology

The BHI faithful share commonalities with Christian Identity adherents, each laying claim to the status of being true Israelites. The story of how this identity formed is markedly different. Unlike British Israelism, the BHI movement has roots in the subjugation and dehumanization of African Americans. Though as a matter of clarification, this paper notes that the term Black Hebrew Israelites does not include the many Jews of color in the U.S. or abroad in Israel or elsewhere. It is also important to bear in mind that not all BHI groups are antisemitic, anti-LGBTQ, or anti-white. In fact, most adherent do not despise the Jews or even advocate violence.

As previously alluded to, BIH adherents believe that they are “the elect” or God’s chosen Israelites. The ancient Israelites of the Old Testament, of which there are 12 tribes, were

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

enslaved and conquered by the likes of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon but held a covenant with God that would bless them and their descendants if they obeyed his commandments (New World Encyclopedia contributors 2018). Enslaved African Americans as early as the late 1700s drew parallels from their own suffering to those of the Israelites and looked to the Hebrew scripture for comfort or answers as to why white people treated them so inhumanely (DeFord 2000). When stripped of one's own humanity, faith can be the sole source of refuge. In the later part of the 1800s, congregations of newly freed slaves began to form based on these spiritual connections to the Israelites. Earliest among these were F.S. Cherry's Church of the Living God, the Pillar Ground of Truth of all Nations and William Saunders Crowdy's Church of God and Saints of Christ (ADL n.d.-b). Cherry was infamous for integrating extreme racism into his biblical interpretations, preaching that God hates white people and all prophets in the Bible were Black (ADL n.d.-b). Crowdy's teachings mixed aspects of Christianity with the Old Testament narrative of the Israelites and were markedly non-racist and not ideologically extreme relative to Cherry's. Crowdy also claimed to have received a vision from God that showed him that the Lost Tribes of Israel were Black, a connection that Ben Ammi Ben-Israel made in the early 1960s (ADL n.d.-b).

Ben Ammi was the spiritual leader of another non-violent yet influential group in the BHI movement known as the African Hebrew Israelite Community (AHIC). Under the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement, Ben Ammi and his followers turned to the scripture for a sense of identity, which had long been stripped away by the injustices of preceding and during the fight for basic civil rights. Ammi reasoned that the biblical Israelites disobeyed God's commandments and were punished when the Romans sacked Jerusalem and scattered the people of Israel southward to Africa to evade the attacks from the north (Markowitz 2020). Here, the Israelites

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

embraced more than one God and false gods, for which they were punished by the Transatlantic slave trade (Markowitz 2020). Ammi connected the biblical Israelites to the plight of African Americans, finding in this connection a sense of shared spiritual identity that he shared with his congregants. In 1966, Ammi claimed to have had a vision that told him it was time for the Children of Israel (or those in America) to return to their land of origin, the Holy Land (AHIC n.d.). To Ammi, America represented the land of his people's captivity, from which they would never be released or redeemed. Shortly after this realization, Ammi and a few hundred of his followers from Chicago migrated to the Holy Land, originally settling in Liberia and then to Dimona, Israel, where almost 3,000 AHIC followers currently live (Kestenbaum 2016). For the last half century, AHIC Hebrew Israelites have peacefully advocated for citizenship rights in Israel based on their claims of soul citizenship and shared identity (Markowitz 2003). While relations between the community and the state of Israel tend to be amicable, the deportation of AHIC members are not uncommon (Surkes 2021).

At the same time Ammi articulated his message of soul citizenship with the Israelite people, a more insidious Hebrew Israelite ideology began to form. In 1960s New York City, Abba Bivens laid the foundation for the One West ideology that encouraged extreme adherence to religious text (SPLC n.d.-b). This ideology is core to groups like Israel United in Christ, the Israelite School of Practical Knowledge (ISUPK), and Great Millstone (SPLC n.d.-b). While not every school or congregation is the same in terms of objectives, tactics, and leadership, most groups of this more extreme ideology share common core beliefs. These groups do not believe Jews are real Jews, instead labeling them as Satanic imposters who secretly run the world. White people are also associated with the devil, with extremist sects advocating that they deserve death or slavery (SPLC 2008). It's believed that Jews have stolen the true identity of the Israelites, who

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

are actually African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans. Radical adherents may preach messages of bloody Armageddon and destruction of America, after which the true Israelites will gain salvation. Members often spread these messages through speeches on street corners, during which they may harass anyone not deemed to be a real Israelite. Targets of their rhetoric and biblical interpretations (also called “evangelical terrorizing”) include white people, non-believing Black people or people of color, women, and members of the gay community (SPLC n.d.-b). Sometimes rhetoric shifts to violence, as individual with links to the BHI movement have been tied to murders in New York and New Jersey as recent as 2019 (Gold and Watkins 2019). With the advent of instant communications technology and social media, some radical Hebrew Israelite groups spread misinformation and sermons to the masses. For example, Great Millstone, the SPLC-designated hate group supposedly located in Nebraska, has a limited online presence, to which this paper now turns.

Organizational Overview and Activity in Nebraska

In July of 2015, three members of Great Millstone uploaded a series of videos to Facebook that consisted of preaching on street corners. The social media profiles provided minimal information on where the group is based, but the content of the video entitled “The Lord’s Revenge” provides clear insight into their beliefs. In this video, the three men preach about who the Lord really is and the plan for salvation of the true Israelites. The adherence to biblical literalism is clear, as each person recites biblical passages in every sentence or statement they make. In John 8:32, for instance, the Bible says the Truth will set you free. The Truth is that Black, Hispanic, and Native American people are God’s chosen. The men claim that the Bible says in Revelation 22 that we are to testify to every “man” but does not say “woman,” therefore

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

women aren't supposed to be taught or have autonomy because they are best fit to serve whatever the man wants, as this was foretold in Genesis.

A reoccurring point made in the video is that the Bible states that the Lord is a Black man and that the white man is the devil. The Lord is supposedly Black because in Revelation it is written that the Lord appears with feet burned and charred. This would mean that the Lord's feet were black, and if the Lord's feet are black then the Lord must be a Black man. And because the Lord is Black, anyone who is not Black, Hispanic, or Native American will not rule with the heavenly father after the world ends. When the world does end, either through a thermonuclear war, race war, or when martial law is installed, only God's chosen will rule. In this Armageddon, white people, or those who have not learned the Truth, will be enslaved. The men in the video don't delve into specifics about how the world will end nor do they advocate for violent action towards that end. An ominous comment on the Facebook video does note, however, that "All their martyrs will not live in the name of Joshua in the name of the Holy Spirit," in apparent reference to those who die in Armageddon (Black Hebrew Israelites -Greatmillstone 2015).

Great Millstone leaders use YouTube to preach directly to the masses. The YouTube channel GMSawakening 144,000 has nearly three thousand followers and dozens of videos uploaded frequently. The number 144,000 is significant, as it is a reference to the book of Revelation. In Revelation, 12,000 Israelites from each of the 12 tribes will be redeemed and preserved by God at the end of days. There are different interpretations of who the 144,000 are, of course, but suffice to say they are the symbolic chosen people of God who must know the Truth, the Truth that can be spread through the video medium. Videos on this page range from street talks across New York to short lectures on topics that range from the benign to conspiratorial to borderline violent. A video from January 2020 entitled "Race Wars!" claims

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

that race wars and the end days are coming soon as prophesized. For context, this video was uploaded in response to the Jersey City murders by a Black Hebrew Israelites in late 2019, after which a New York Post article reported on a of Hasidic Jews taking an axe throwing class to learn self-defense. The Great Millstone teacher connects this story with a coming war between the Jews and the BHI, who are claimed to be painted as terrorists. The reach of these videos is limitless, in theory, but most videos only receive between 60 to a few hundred views (GMSawakening144,000 2020).

The activities of Great Millstone in Omaha appear invisible to the public eye. There is no media reporting on the Great Millstone in Omaha or statewide. Broadening the scope to the national scale yields few mentions of Great Millstone as an organization, aside from SPLC and ADL reporting that mention Great Millstone passingly without details on national group activity. The SPLC does not explain how they concluded that there was a Great Millstone chapter in Omaha, nor does there appear to be any evidence supporting their claim. This is perhaps not too surprising because hate groups usually take measures to avoid public recognition. The radical BHI movement is also quite limited in terms of political power, social capital, and followers. While the Great Millstone's presence in Omaha or Nebraska more broadly appears to be minimal, the reach of the group can still be quite large given their social media presence.

MSR Productions

MSR Productions, headquartered in Gering, Nebraska, is a hate music organization. Hate music is a particularly interesting addition to the hate group landscape with immensely impactful effects on hate group recruitment, radicalization, and resource acquisition. While hate music chapters nationally have decreased from 15 in 2019 to 11 in 2020 and 2021, the reach of racist

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

and hateful music can be span across and between nations. First, this paper examines what hate music is and how it affects the formation of hate ideologies and groups.

Ideology

Hate music groups typically take the form of music labels that record, publish, and distribute racist music (SPLC n.d.-c). While not all hate music is white power or white supremacist music, the hate music spread by MSR Productions, and indeed most hate music in general, focuses heavily on pro-white messages and empowerment. For the sake of this overview of hate music, it should be noted that by the term white power or white power movement (WPM), this paper means the movement based on the belief that white people are genetically and culturally superior to other races and deserve to rule over them (Simi and Futrell 2010, 8). As we shall see, racist music has been integral to the maintenance of the white power and white supremacist movements on a global scale, though predominantly in Western Europe and the U.S. (Dyck 2016).

Music has long held an important role in social movements. Social movements are deeply rooted in a condition of unrest and derive their motive power on the one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a new scheme or system of living,” (Blumer 1995, 60). Lyrical analyses of protest music can provide insight into how music is used in recruiting and mobilizing activists by highlighting rhetorical strategies or specific grievances articulated in certain songs (Simi, Futrell, and Gottschalk 2006). Articulating how members of social movements, such as the WPM, use music to express their beliefs or grievances is only part of the equation, as how members of social movements live and feel the ideas expressed through music (Frith 1996 as cited in Simi, Futrell, and Gottschalk 2006). Music is instrumental in both expressing ideas and living them out,

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

forging not only an ideology but also an identity. In extreme cases, this identity may be one of a white supremacist. In an ethnographic study of women in the white supremacist and white power movement, a racist skinhead recalled to Kathleen Blee,

How I really started believing, thinking, in that white separatist sense and then got all white supremacist, it was really through the music.... It gives you an identity... you're special, you know, because you're white. (Blee 2002, 162)

As this insight from a racist skinhead in the WPM music scene explains, music is vitally important for those in the WPM. Simi and Futrell refer to such people as Aryans, who must find ways to create a collective identity and recruit new members in wider social landscape that dismisses or marginalizes their beliefs (2010, 8). In a world that casts Aryans off as extreme and racist, adherents to white power ideology must find ways to create ingroup solidarity, forge a collective identity around their beliefs, recruit new members through events such as concerts or parties, and acquire monetary resources to sustain the movement. Listening to, producing, and disseminating white power music checks all these boxes.

As Simi and Futrell note, Aryans use white power music to convey their ideas about their righteous struggles and to unite racists in “free spaces” where Aryans can gather and show their true selves (2010, 58). White power music generally paints a picture of white societies being threatened by immigration, liberal elites and liberal ideology, and a Jewish controlled media and/or world order (Grosholz and Pieri 2020). Taking white society back to its rightful place of power may, and likely does, involve violence and vigilantism, according to this general narrative of white power music (Grosholz and Pieri 2020). This message may resonate with people who already hold racist beliefs and attitudes kept to themselves, though hate music and hate music social events (festivals, concerts, etc.) may provide a sense of social solidarity and camaraderie that pushes the person further into the WPM (Dyck 2016, 4). Music can reinforce and cultivate

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

their ideology, articulating a clear narrative of white society being victimized and threatened by various outgroups. Record labels and bands that create and disseminate this music, especially through online sales and merchandising, can pull in valuable revenue streams as well to keep the movement going.

The hate music scene, particularly the white power music scene, is not a recent development, nor is it isolated to the U.S. White power rock music originates from punk and Oi! Styles of music from 1970s England (Simi and Futrell 2010, 60), though pro-white musicians in the U.S. can be traced to the early 1950s “hate country music” and companies like Red Rebel Records and Conservative Records (Dyck 2016, 110). The modern white power rock music scene owes itself, however, to the English band Skrewdriver, who rose to prominence in the late 1970s and 1980s. As noted by Simi and Futrell, Skrewdriver was truly the first premier Aryan rock band who appealed to punk rockers, skinheads and young people who may or may not be “racially aware,” (2010, 61). Skrewdriver’s music hardly does little to hide their pro-white messages. Take, for example, their song “White Power,” which includes the following lyrics:

I stand watch my country, going down the drain
We are all at fault, we are all to blame
We're letting them takeover, we just let 'em come
Once we had an Empire, and now we've got a slum
White Power! Forever
White Power! Today
White Power! Forever
Before it gets too late
Well we've seen a lot of riots, we just sit and scoff
We've seen a lot of muggings, and the judges let 'em off
Well we've gotta do something, to try and stop the rot
And the traitors that have used us, they should all be shot. (All the Lyrics n.d.)

Of course, Skrewdriver was merely exercising their right to speak freely so long as their music doesn't directly incite violence or the commitment of crime. So too does MSR Productions exercise their freedom of speech in the U.S. from their Nebraska headquarters.

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

Organizational Overview and Activity in Nebraska

According to their website, MSR Productions (short for Mountain States Republic Productions, a desired Aryan homeland in the Pacific Northwest) has been in business since 1988, making it “the oldest and most reliable distributor of racist musical products in North America.” MSR’s contact information lists an address in Omaha, which differs from SPLC’s assertion that the hate music label is headquartered in Gering, Nebraska, in the far western area of the state. In fact, MSR has moved locations numerous times in its organizational tenure, according to open-source publications. The website Rate Your Music says that MSR was founded in Salt Lake City, Utah but was located in Wheat Ridge, Colorado. The online antifascist collective Rocky Mountain Antifa reported the same Wheat Ridge address (2016). This reporting was independently verified by journalists at the nonprofit journalism collective Unicorn Riot (Schiano 2016). In 2019, a Colorado-based news outlet reported that MSR’s founder and owner David Daboll had operated the business from his Wheat Ridge home, but had moved to Hershey, Nebraska, a small town near North Platte, Nebraska (Lotus 2019). Interestingly, the 2016 reports from Schiano and Rocky Mountain Antifa note that a man with Nebraska license plates had been frequently seen driving from Daboll’s house with boxes of, presumably, MSR merchandise.

This information, while notably filled with gaps and insufficient details to draw definitive conclusions, does paint a picture of how MSR may operate. Each source confirms that David Daboll is the man behind MSR’s operations. Rocky Mountain Antifa reports that Daboll was a failed white nationalist musician who went by the stage names David Custer and David Hess (2016). In the 1980s, Daboll started MSR Productions as a white nationalist music label, where he created hate music under the name Lightning Rod, though the company now sells flags, shirt,

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

beanies, DVDs, stickers, and even gift certificates. While the company did operate in Wheat Ridge from the early 2000s until at least 2016, it now appears Daboll operates the business from either his home base in Hershey or at MSR headquarters in Omaha or Gering, as suggested by the SPLC. The identity of the Nebraska man who used to drive to Daboll's house in Colorado remains a mystery. Perhaps he was transporting MSR merchandise, such as Confederate flags or Lightning Rod CDs, though nothing can be said definitively.

It should be noted that Rocky Mountain Antifa and Schiano derive their information from a 2016 blog post from a Swedish white supremacist blog which no longer exists, as well as a YouTube video of Lightning Rod which has been removed from the site. However, the blog post from Midgard Magazine can still be viewed through the Wayback Machine, an archive of the Internet. In the article, Daboll discusses his music background as an "artist" producing songs such as "White Liberation" and the 1997 album *More Evil than a Hollywood Jew* with his band Lightning Rod. Daboll doesn't bother hiding his beliefs, asserting that "The Jews have totally taken us over, that's what I have against them," (Midgard Magazine 2016). These beliefs shine through in MSR's array of products for sale on their website.



Figure 1 Skrewdriver demo album, for sale by MSR for \$20

MSR Productions sells hundreds of white nationalist and white power rock music CDs from bands around the world, including Daboll's Lightning Rod, Skrewdriver, and Third Reich.

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

See Figure 1 for an example of a Skrewdriver demo album for an idea of the extent of MSR and Skrewdriver's overt prejudice. MSR also sells country hate music, including a compilation CD of songs from Johnny Rebel and a compilation CD titled "For Segregationists Only." For non-music fans, people can sate their racist appetites with a range of hoodies and t-shirts. Hoodies with Confederate flag designs or Nazi insignia abound, as well as other logos of neo-Nazi groups like Blood and Honor. MSR has dozens of flags with KKK or Nazi insignia, as well. MSR keeps up with contemporary social issues and sells shirts and hats that poke fun at those who wear masks and get vaccinated for COVID-19. MSR does, however, sell face masks, albeit ones with either a Swastika or reference to Hitler and/or white power, or even a mask that says, "Masks Don't Work." Finally, MSR offers a limited selection of supposed hand-crafted jewelry and custom rosaries.

As these products show, hate is core to the MSR Productions' business model. Through listening to the tracks they sell or buying their neo-Nazi or Confederate merchandise, people can express their hate-filled beliefs or attitudes. Perhaps they can listen to MSR's hate music with others at a concert or house party. Or perhaps they can simply follow MSR on Facebook and be greeted with white nationalist or conspiratorial memes that argue that a Jewish and elite cabal are conspiring to replace white people and their role in society. While it is easy to look at MSR's products and cast them off as fringe or horrific, there is clearly still a market for them. After all, MSR has been in business since 1988 across at least three different states. That said, Daboll noted in the Midgard interview he still has to work day jobs because "the business has yet to make a profit," (2016). Selling hate music may not be profitable for MSR Productions in the long run, but the success of hate music and hate ideologies is hardly measured in profits alone. Rather,

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

hate music has the biggest impact in the minds and actions of white power ideologues who rally around it to recruit, indoctrinate, and sustain their hate groups or belief systems.

Proud Boys

The Proud Boys is a far-right extremist organization and hate group whose beliefs are as expansive as their reach, which spans the U.S. and Canada. Shades of anti-Muslim, antisemitism, homophobia, chauvinism, misogyny, and xenophobia proliferate throughout the ranks, which makes the group difficult to sort into a singular ideological framework. For this reason, the SPLC sorts the Proud Boys under the category of “General Hate,” (SPLC n.d.-d). Despite its relatively short organizational tenure (founded only in 2016), members of the Proud Boys have been exceptionally active in violent and nonviolent protests and attacks across the U.S. It is also noteworthy that the number of Proud Boys chapters increased by nearly 70% from 2020 to 2021, with chapters totaling 43 and 72, respectively (Miller and Rivas 2022). The January 6 attack at the Capitol, then, did not appear to negatively impact the Proud Boys, making it all the more imperative to understand exactly who this group is and how they operate at a national and local level.

Ideology

The Proud Boys are “Western chauvinists who refuse to apologize for creating the modern world” in the words of founder Gavin McInnes (2016), longing for the days of the 1950s when girls were girls and men were men. McInnes believes that being proud of western culture in today’s culture is controversial, much like being “a crippled, black, lesbian communist in 1953,” (2016). Members of Proud Boys, which are nearly exclusively male, by little surprise, feel a lost sense of identity and victimization, a common aspect of many white supremacist and white nationalist ideologies (Berbrier 2000). McInnes and the Proud Boys adamantly argue that

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

they are not white supremacists nor nationalists, though they regularly spread racist, pro-white tropes (SPLC n.d.-d). Western culture is perceived to be instable due to multiculturalism, immigration, and demographic and social change (Kutner 2021). Social isolation and disintegration compound this change and perceived instability. By being a member of the Proud Boys, one regains their lost identity, push back against social change and multiculturalism, and be proud of who they are and their culture.

The classical hero of the Proud Boys mythology is former President Trump, though McInnes is analogous to a prophet. President Trump embodied the Proud Boys' chauvinist and nationalist ideologies by posing as a strong leader, utilizing victimization rhetoric, calling on supporters, mainly white, heterosexual men, to "Make America Great Again," (Kenes 2021). Trump commonly used anti-immigrant rhetoric, associated immigration with invasion, and promised to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexican border, appealing to the Proud Boys' goal of having closed borders (McInnes 2016). Trump also gave tacit approval of the Proud Boys in his infamous "Stand back and stand by" request during the 2020 election debates, after which Proud Boys leadership noted that they took the message as a sign to keep doing what they were doing (Kenes 2021). What they were doing, at that point in time, was engaging in violent clashes at protests, especially in the Pacific Northwest. Proud Boys regularly show up at protests to engage in combat, fighting for their Western values. Often, Proud Boys members fight with the antifascist collective known as Antifa or Black Lives Matter protesters (SPLC n.d.-d). This propensity for violence is at the core of the Proud Boys, so much so that it is a component of their initiation process.

Organizational Overview and Activity in Nebraska

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

To become a full-fledged Proud Boy, one must undergo four stages of initiation. First, one must publicly declare themselves a Proud Boy who refuses to apologize for creating the modern world. Second, and this is serious, one must name five breakfast cereals while being beat up by at least five other guys. Once you name five breakfast cereals, the beatdown ends. According to McInnes, the rationale for this is to control your adrenaline and withstand physical fighting and arguments. This stage has a second aspect to it, as well- no masturbating or porn more than once per month. Per McInnes, this encourages men to go out and meet women if they are single and helps married men focus on getting in bed with their significant others instead of with their computer. Third-stage Proud Boys get a Proud Boys tattoo, though branding is also permitted (McInnes 2016).

The fourth stage of becoming a Proud Boy is beating up left-wing activists on behalf of the group. The Proud Boys justify violence by claiming “We don’t start fights, but we finish them,” (Kutner 2021). Rhetoric and actions by Proud Boys members seem to tell a different story, one of violence being at the very core of the group’s ideology and mandate. As McInnes himself has said at a 2017 event, “I cannot recommend violence enough. It’s a really effective way to solve problems,” (Mapping Militant Organizations 2022). In June 2016, McInnes pronounced that, “We will kill you. That’s the Proud Boys in a nutshell. ... We will assassinate you,” (Kenes 2021). The Proud Boys believe that Western society and culture are under attack and must literally fight to save it. The group even has a paramilitary arm called the Fraternal Order of Alt-Knights (FOAK) to “protect right-wing activists at political demonstrations,” presumably from Antifa agitators or left-wing activists (SPLC n.d.-d). The reasons for enduring these initiation procedures and joining the Proud Boys or Girls are many. These include the group’s edginess or counter-cultural appeal, a legitimate perceived threat to the traditional way

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

of life, and perhaps most significant, camaraderie and brotherhood (Kutner 2021). In this respect, the motivation for joining the Proud Boys parallel to anyone looking to join a group where they feel understood, connected, and valued. Of course, these reasons do not justify the Proud Boys' blatant prejudice towards several outgroups.

Articulating each of the Proud Boys' enemies or outgroup targets in full would be a lengthy endeavor but suffice it to say that they oppose anyone or anything that threatens Western culture. Immigrants, Muslims, feminists, liberals, and members of the LGBTQ community draw the ire of the Proud Boys (SPLC n.d.-d). Though the group paints itself as libertarian and opposed to government, they are increasingly cozy with right-wing politicians and figures including Sen. Ted Cruz and Donald Trump, Jr. (Kenes 2021). McInnes openly admits to being xenophobic and Islamophobic and asserts that a disproportionate number of Muslims are "mentally damaged inbreds," (Silva 2018). The Proud Boys don't hate women (aside from feminists), but they think women are less ambitious than men and should stay home and be a housewife (SPLC n.d.-d). Much of these beliefs are spread throughout social media and memes, especially on encrypted platforms like Telegram and Signal, each of which have seen increased membership from Proud Boys (Kenes 2021). Racist or misogynistic memes are increasingly prevalent with the Proud Boys and are popular tools of recruitment and ingroup identity formation for younger men (DeCook 2020). Further, they reinforce outgroup hostility by demonizing and dehumanizing the other.

Proud Boys, in general, are identifiable online by coded racist memes. Overtly, Proud Boys often wear yellow-trimmed, black knockoff Fred Perry polos and show off their Proud Boys tattoo. The Proud Boys' catchphrase is Uhuru, a Swahili word meaning liberation or freedom, which the group appropriated from a YouTube video about reparations (SPLC n.d.-d).

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

The group may also be present at protests, either ones organized by left-wing activists or ones propped up by the Proud Boys to start a brawl. These features are identifiable to the Proud Boys on a national scale. After over a hundred Proud Boys attended the January 6 siege at the Capitol, dozens of which were later apprehended for doing so, the group moved away from national scene and began to focus on local level organizing (Miller and Rivas 2022). The Proud Boys went to at least 114 public events in 2021, including public school board meetings, local level right wing protests or demonstrations (Owen 2022). The group also has its sights set on getting people elected who are sympathetic to their cause (Mak 2021). Making inroads with the mainstream political establishment on the right has already been a strategy of the Proud Boys and has increased focus within the previous year. At public events, the Proud Boys operate with the guise of providing security, though the SPLC notes that their primary goal is intimidation (Miller and Rivas 2022). Reporting on the Proud Boys chapter in Nebraska is relatively sparse, which could indicate that the following in the state is minimal or that members are just good at hiding their presence. This is not to say that the Proud Boys have been invisible in the state.

In July of 2020, five members of the Proud Boys showed up at a pro-police “Back the Blue” rally at Memorial Park in Omaha, decked out in Fred Perry polos with gold trim and a large flag that read “Nebraska Proud Boys,” (Sanderford 2020a). While a majority of the 2000 or so present at the rally were supporting the police, there was a group of about 100 protesters from the political left-wing, including those identifying with Black Lives Matter (Sanderford 2020b). Organizers of the pro-police rally clarified that they did not invite the Proud Boys, and the Proud Boys claimed that they did not attend the rally to stir up protesters (Sanderford 2020a). Dr. Pete Simi, a professor who studies hate groups at Chapman University in California and former UNO professor, said to the Omaha World Herald that the Proud Boys want to look like good patriots

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

and nationalists but are really just far-right extremists who look to make themselves look innocent while attempting to trigger a response from “snowflakes,” (Sanderford 2020a).

The story of the Proud Boys in Nebraska does not end at that Back the Blue rally. At this rally, a spokesperson for the Omaha Police Department claimed to have not heard of the Nebraska chapter of the Proud Boys (Sanderford 2020a). This could mean that the local Proud Boys kept a low profile or were too insignificant to warrant police attention, or perhaps could indicate a police oversight. As Janelle Corr points out in a post from the left-wing Nebraska publication *Seeing Red*, a handful of Proud Boys met at a bar in Omaha on a recruiting stop in 2018, where they were photographed brandishing the “OK” hand sign that can be used to represent white power or just troll liberals (2020). This indicates that the at least some members of the Proud Boys were known of in public. Of course, these individuals have the freedom of speech and assembly, and if they did not commit any crimes then law enforcement would have no reason to know of them. The Proud Boys’ freedoms were on display later in 2020, as members draped a Proud Boys sign on the bridge over Dodge Street, as photographed by an Omaha citizen and posted on *Seeing Red’s* Facebook page and pictured in Figure 2. This took place in October 2020, after Trump’s “Stand back and stand by” message to the Proud Boys. After this, Governor Ricketts made sure to point out that Nebraska doesn’t need “any of these groups getting involved,” in reference to white supremacist militia groups (WOWT 6 News 2020). However, the Governor followed those comments up in saying that President Trump was “really strong” in the debate in which he gave tacit approval to the Proud Boys, which somewhat diminishes the strength of his condemnation of the Proud Boys.

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

Figure 2 Proud Boys banner over Dodge Street in Omaha as shown on Seeing Red's Facebook page from October 2020



To be clear, this is not to pick political battles or call out the Governor or the Omaha police. Rather, this discussion serves to take a critical look at the Proud Boys in Nebraska, particularly in Omaha, as this is where the chapter appears the strongest. While the Proud Boys appear to have had less visibility in Nebraska in 2021, it is imperative to remain vigilant on the extremist hate group that masquerades as patriotic, especially as the group shifts focus to the local political arena.

Patriot Front

This paper turns to a white nationalist group that, like the Proud Boys, doesn't always hide its true colors. Originally a part of the neo-Nazi group Vanguard America, Patriot Front formed in 2017 in the aftermath of the Charlottesville "Unite the Right" rally. The group has used both overt and covert organizing tactics and has a massive propaganda regime that leaves no state untouched.

Ideology

The neo-Nazi organization Vanguard America participated in (and helped organize) the Unite the Right rally in August 2017. Several months after the deadly rally and following internal disputes, member Thomas Rousseau and his loyalists broke off from the group to start

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

their own white nationalist organization, Patriot Front (PF), a nationwide hate group with 42 chapters as of 2021. Rousseau felt that large public demonstrations were less affective because they could get out of control and lose appeal to the masses, or at least those who may be receptive to the ideology of white supremacy and white nationalism (SPLC n.d.-e). The idea behind the rebrand was to disguise white nationalism in Americana and patriotism, replacing swastikas with American flags.

Patriot Front's attempts to disguise their white nationalism is a common strategy of the white nationalist and supremacist movement in the U.S. Overt white nationalism, or the belief that immigration and multiculturalism threaten white identity, is usually cast aside as racist. Several white nationalist groups attempt to reframe their ideology as pride in the white race, not hatred of other races. Certain members of the political establishment have somewhat normalized white nationalism, including former President Trump and Rep. Paul Gosar (Republican from Arizona), the latter of whom spoke at white nationalist Nick Fuentes' America First Political Action Conference in February 2021 (SPLC n.d.-f). Buddying up with the Republican establishment is a strategic move by Fuentes and the wider white nationalist/supremacist movement as they integrate white nationalist ideas into mainstream political discourse. The fact that Rep. Gosar spoke at a white nationalist conference (both in 2021 and 2022) and that Republican Reps. Matt Gaetz and Scott Perry have alluded to the white nationalist "great replacement" theory shows that the white nationalists have had notable successes in this effort (Contreras and Primack 2021).

The Patriot Front Manifesto holds key insights into Patriot Front ideology, as does any white nationalist group or ideologue worth their salt. What follows are select excerpts from the

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

manifesto that illustrate an ideology based on fear for America's (or the white person's America) future.

America stands at the crossroads of an era. An uncertain future lies in the hands of a new generation which has been given a simple choice between sovereignty and subjugation. America suffers under the rule of an occupied government. Tyrants, with delusions of infinite power, have declared the American people too weak to revolt. The damage done to the nation will not be fixed with the approval of the dysfunctional system which remains American in name only. Democracy has failed this once great nation. The resurgence of the American Spirit will bring with it the death of tyranny. The torch of revolution has been lit.

Our mission is a hard reset on the nation we see today— a return to the traditions and virtues of our forefathers. The same spirit that urged our ancestors onward to create this nation will once again be brought to light, and a new America will be built within its current dilapidated, shameful iteration. Generation after generation lived in war and strife so that their descendants may know peace. It was their duty to give their lives in such a way. The torch is now passed to our generation, and it is our duty to make their sacrifices mean something. (Patriot Front n.d.)

This manifesto makes clear what Patriot Front believes. America is no longer the great and moral country its founders created. Of course, they created America on the backs and blood of Native Americans and African slaves, but that is evidently unimportant to Patriot Front. After all, the group denounces indigenous peoples as savage, a common racist trope used to justify colonization and imperialism for centuries. Globalism, multiculturalism, and internationalized migration apparently led the country astray from the common American identity, an identity that must be retaken from the corrupt tyrants of today. Quotations from cherished American idols like George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and General Patton scatter the manifesto to evoke a sense of patriotism, a common Patriot Front tactic.

Organizational Overview and Activity in Nebraska

The group ensures it looks patriot at any public demonstrations, as American flags and flag-adorned apparel abound. The group claims to engage in legal activism in public though data leaks and chat logs reveal that Patriot Front members struggle to refrain from bringing firearms

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

to public demonstrations to brandish or even assault people of color or perceived agitators (Schiano and Feidt 2022). Patriot Front's website dedicates an entire section to recounting the group's public demonstrations and rallies. In June 2021, for example, Patriot Front "activists" held joint marches in San Antonio and Nashville in observance of Memorial Day. Members caravanned through downtown San Antonio and made powerful speeches at the Alamo, harkening back to the spirit of what America once was to inspire "new generations of the nation's faithful," (Patriot Front 2021). While PF ditched its neo-Nazi roots, antisemitism remains core to the business model. As noted by the ADL, the organization often distributes antisemitic flyers on college campuses. Recent leaks uncovered by the journalism collective Unicorn Riot provide evidence to back Patriot Front's antisemitic neo-Nazi roots, as well as give insight into the group's recruitment and membership bases.

In January 2022, Unicorn Riot uncovered over 400 gigabytes of data from Patriot Front chat servers. Over 50,000 records of message from platforms such as Slack, Discord, and RocketChat indicate rife misogyny and racism, where women are called "cooking slaves" and the N-word. Members revel in the days of yore when they could do the Nazi salute in front of a Patriot Front flag while yelling "Sieg fucking heil!" There is open admiration for fascists like Mussolini and neo-Nazi leader George Lincoln Rockwell. Chat logs reveal members blaming Jews for the perceived decline in status for white people. One chatroom post assert that "The biggest threat to America right now is jewry," because they are somehow behind the "race-mixing" and "browning" of the country. Also included in the data leak are membership applications and interview questions where prospective members can document their ideology and aspirations. Patriot Front chats indicate that members must be at least 17 and a half to join but members can be accepted at a younger age. The chats reveal procedures for documenting

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

group activism, such as distributing Patriot Front propaganda to meet a weekly quota. Defacing public murals of BLM or George Floyd are always crowd pleasers for the group. Members were also shown to communicate strategy and tactics, mapping out places to drop banners or graffiti. Patriot Front leadership has taken strides to keep group membership and identifying information secret or undiscoverable to avoid liability in case of a Charlottesville-type lawsuit. That said, Unicorn Riot's data show that 21% of applicants from 2021, from a pool of 87, claimed to be current or former members of the U.S. military. One applicant claimed that he currently works for the Department of Homeland Security. (Schiano and Feidt 2022).

Patriot Front is just as effective in the online space as they are in public. In addition to their own public website, Patriot Front has a YouTube channel, Gab, BitChute, and Telegram for communicating and disseminating racist and antisemitic memes, videos, and pictures of Patriot Front members vandalizing or tagging public edifices (as indicated by the Unicorn Riot data) with their "patriotic" designs and messages (Counter Extremism Project. n.d.). Each of these accounts has a few thousand followers or subscribers. The bottom of Patriot Front's website links to many of these accounts. Following these links, one can easily find accounts and profiles on platforms like Gab that contain conspiratorial and extremely racist views, jokes, and memes. A query in Gab for "Nebraska" finds dozens of profiles of this type, most of which have quotes on censorship and/or patriotism/nationalism. On this note about perceived censorship, Patriot Front did have a handful of Twitter accounts tied to leadership at the national and chapter level suspended. Unfortunately, de-platforming hate groups and their most extreme proponents does not fully curb the problem. There will likely always be another social media, podcasting, or streaming platform that fills in once major platform kicks hate groups out. And to be fair, groups such as Patriot Front are entitled to retain their online presences if they adhere to the platform's

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

terms of service and U.S. law. This protection may explain why Patriot Front has littered propaganda flyers wide across the country, as part of a nationwide surge in white supremacist and nationalist propaganda over the past two years (Boorstein 2022). Nebraska is no exception.

The ADL tracked eight incidents of Patriot Front activity/propaganda in Nebraska in 2021. This is a significant decline in Patriot Front propaganda from 2020, when the ADL tracked 32 instances of white supremacist Patriot Front propaganda across the state. It should also be noted that this paper examines incidents of Patriot Front propaganda, not individual acts of antisemitism or white supremacist or nationalist activity. While these incidents are no less important, hateful, or disturbing than the PF cases, they do fall outside the scope of this paper.

Patriot Front propaganda found in Nebraska from 2020-2021 differ more in quantity than quality. In each year, Patriot Front members distributed flyers with common messages about standing united against the tyranny or other threats to the America (again, the white man's America). In May 2020 in York, the group distributed propaganda that read, "For the nation against the state," "Not stolen conquered," and "To ourselves and our posterity." The group disseminated flyers as well as American flag themed stickers with a QR code for Patriot Front in Grand Island days later. As in 2021, Patriot Front covered every geographic corner of the state in 2020. Since many documented cases of Patriot Front propaganda occur over the span of a few days in a general geographic area, it may be the case that Patriot Front members travel together to distribute their propaganda. In the May 2020 incident referenced above, propaganda appeared in York, Grand Island, Aurora, and Hastings over the span of a couple days. Perhaps, then, members knock out a general area of the state in, say, a week timeframe and then repeat in another part of the state a few months later. This pattern showed up again in 2021.

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

In February 2021, Patriot Front members spray painted their group logo and messages reading “To ourselves and our posterity” and “United we stand.” The ADL notes that this occurring in Omaha, though does not provide specifics as to where in Omaha. In the same month and city, PF members hung a banner that read “America First.” This could be an innocuous political reference, sure, but this slogan has been appropriated by white nationalist extremists like Nick Fuentes.

In March 2021, Patriot Front distributed more propaganda in Omaha with the “United we stand” message. Following this incident, Patriot Front broadened its reach in Nebraska. In August and September 2021, PF distributed propaganda in Kimball, Hastings, North Platte, Scottsbluff, and Chadron. The content of these flyers/posters included the “America First” slogan, as well as new messages such as “One nation against invasion,” “Revolution is tradition,” “For the nation, against the state,” “Reclaim America,” and “Reject poison.” The poison referenced here likely means the COVID vaccine, though could mean anything that the supposed tyrant state pushes upon the masses. The other messages blur the line between being patriotic and advocating for revolution. One could argue that these flyers cross that line. And while incidents include mere words and not violent action, these messages can still cultivate a hateful and malignant ideology that can be used to justify discrimination and militancy against the outgroup or government (ADL 2022).

National Socialist German Workers Party /Overseas Organization, Third Reich Books, Folkish Resistance Movement

The final group of this case study is three groups that share a common ideology in neo-Nazism. While neo-Nazi groups have recently struggled to remain afloat from a financial and influence perspective, the presence of three neo-Nazi groups in Nebraska is one of the higher

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

figures in the country, especially on a per state basis. According to the SPLC Hate Map, Texas has the most neo-Nazi groups with seven; Tennessee and Pennsylvania each have four; and five states have three (Nebraska, Washington, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Michigan). This subsection will describe each of Nebraska's three after a brief background on neo-Nazism in the U.S.

Ideology

In basic terms, neo-Nazi groups share an adoration for Adolf Hitler, Nazi Germany, and the Third Reich, as well as an intense hatred for Jews. Other minority communities, such as LGBTQ, Muslims, immigrants, and communists have also drawn the ire of neo-Nazis. Neo-Nazis (who also call themselves National Socialists) embrace Nazi symbolism³ (swastika, the number 88, the Nazi eagle, etc.) and promote eugenics to defend and support the supposedly pure white race (Simi and Futrell 2010, 19). At its core, neo-Nazism is about promoting a totalitarian, fascist ideology of white supremacy at the expense of anyone who is perceived as a threat to the white, or Aryan, race.

The roots of Neo-Nazi groups in the U.S. trace to George Lincoln Rockwell's American Nazi Party (ANP). Rockwell popularized the phrase "White Power" and Holocaust denial while proudly brandishing Nazi symbols (Simi and Futrell 2010, 19). At a time when the horrors of the Holocaust and WWII were still fresh in the minds of the international community, Rockwell openly advocated for "shipping blacks to Africa and sending millions of 'Communist Jews' to the gas chambers," (Miller 2017). Rockwell's hateful ideology did not die out after his assassination in 1967. Rather, people like William Pierce stepped in to fill Rockwell's Nazi shoes with his organization National Alliance. A few years later, Pierce published the one of the

³ See the ADL Hate Symbols Database (n.d.-a) for more examples of white supremacist and neo-Nazi symbols and slogans. It serves as a valuable resource to recognize and understand hateful imagery or terminology.

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

modern far-right's favorite book, *The Turner Diaries*. In this story, Earl Turner, a member of an underground white supremacist army called the Organization, seeks to overthrow the U.S. government through terroristic, white supremacist, and antisemitic violence. In the book, Turner bombs a federal building. In Oklahoma City in 1995, Timothy McVeigh, bombed a federal building. McVeigh reportedly, and unsurprisingly, used the book as inspiration for the bombing, the deadliest domestic terror attack in U.S. history (Ware 2019).

Aside from being an author of a notorious white supremacist book, Pierce used the Alliance's headquarters in West Virginia as a base for the white power music label Resistance Records. Pierce's organization used the Internet while in its infancy to organize activities and communicate nationwide. By 2001, there was 35 Alliance groups in 30 different states (Simi and Futrell 2010, 19). The violent confrontations between the federal government and the Branch Davidian compound in Waco and Randy Weaver's compound at Ruby Ridge contributed to the spread of anti-government attitudes in the 1990s, which facilitated far-right extremist and militant beliefs (Ware 2019).

Following Pierce's death in 2002, adherents to such extreme beliefs organized into decentralized groups across the country, often facilitated by secure and effective communications technology. While the neo-Nazi movement has struggled to organize in-person events over the last few years, neo-Nazism is far from dead. The 2017 white supremacist and neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, at which right-wing protesters chanted "Jews will not replace us" while brandishing Confederate and Nazi paraphernalia, provides plenty of evidence of that. But the mold of organizing public events is no longer applicable to the extremism landscape. Neo-Nazis groups and individuals increasingly use social media and encrypted messaging platforms like Telegram to organize and spread propaganda that glamorizes terroristic violence (SPLC n.d.-g).

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

The model of leaderless resistance and lone-wolf attacks in the name of white supremacy is becoming ubiquitous across the far-right (Tenold 2019). With the tacit approval of these ideologies by those in political power, acts of violence in the name of hate will become more common. To prevent these tragedies, we must accept that neo-Nazi ideas and groups can and do take root anywhere. The following examples illustrate this very point.

Organizational Overview and Activity in Nebraska

The SPLC cites Lincoln, Nebraska as the base of the hate group the National Socialist German Workers Party /Overseas Organization (NSDAP/AO). This is the same official name as Hitler's Nazi Party, specifically their overseas unit. Gary "Gerhard" Lauck founded NSDAP/AO in 1972 and currently claims to be the largest supplier of National Socialist (Nazi) propaganda material in the world. Lauck, a.k.a. the "Farmbelt Fuhrer," is the man behind NSDAP/AO and the next neo-Nazi group in this paper, Third Reich Books. One can only understand the reach of these hate organizations when accounting for Lauck, the Hitler wannabe from Fairbury, Nebraska.

Lauck claims to have become a Nazi when he was 11 years old (in the early 1960s). As a youth in Lincoln, Lauck read *Mein Kampf* and felt inspired by its musings of a master race (Vaughan 2017). When he was 19, he changed his name to Gerhard to become more Nazified. After a stint with the neo-Nazi organization National Socialist White People's Party, Lauck founded the NSDAP/AO to promote Nazi materials and ideas worldwide, all from his home base in Nebraska (hence the nickname Farmbelt Fuhrer). After the launch of his business, Lauck fully committed to the Nazi persona, donning a Nazi uniform, Hitler mustache, and a German accent (SPLC n.d.-h). Lauck also grew a penchant for making extreme remarks to rile dissent, such as the claim that Hitler was "too humane." He sums up his overall ideology aptly in a 2019

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

interview, saying “We believe in race and nation. We believe in the survival of all white nations and of our race,” (Mauro 2019). This echoes of any neo-Nazi, white supremacist, or white nationalist ideology.

Lauck kept a relatively low profile in public, even as his Nazi propaganda business exported hate material to over 30 countries in the 1980s and 1990s (SPLC n.d.-h). In the late 1990s, Lauck was arrested in Denmark on international warrants for disseminating Nazi propaganda in Germany, which certainly does not have the same regard for free speech as the U.S. does. This is especially true for Nazi materials, which German law strictly cracks down on. In 1996, German authorities charged Lauck with 38 offenses related to antisemitic and Nazi material distribution (*The Irish Times* 1996). After conviction and four years in German prison, Lauck returned to Nebraska and operated his propaganda machine through the Internet and his web-hosting platform called Zensurfrei.com (“censorship free”). Through this platform, which remains in existence, is catered to European hate groups who feel that their hate speech is being censored (Vaughan 2017). In addition to this service, Lauck operates and oversees NSDAP/AO and Third Reich Books.

Lauck’s primary operation, NSDAP/AO, operates out of Lincoln. Its website appears to have been removed or rendered inaccessible, though previous screenshots of the site are available on the Wayback Machine archive. To be precise, the Wayback Machine has 751 screen captures of this website from 2000 to February 2022. The following paragraph examine a select few pages in broad strokes but does not intend to overgeneralize the site or NSDAP/AO’s entire service inventory. To do so would be, regretfully, far too intensive of a project that exceeds the scope of this paper. The following simply intends to provide a general picture of NSDAP/AO.

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

NSDAP/AO webpages appear in English and German, though multiple other languages (Spanish, French, Dutch, Bulgarian) abound. Nazi symbology litters the homepage. Ads for NSDAP/AO propaganda, such as books and racist flyers, fill much of the screen. One example is a downloadable PDF that includes a photo of George Washington next to a racist photoshopped image of President Obama in what appears to be African traditional or ritual garb. The text above the images reads “What’s YOUR Family’s Future? Third World HELLHOLE or the Real America?” The second page of the flyer presents a case for the “Final Solution” to the “Invasion Threat” of immigration. It essentially argues that illegal immigration should be viewed as an invasion and should be prosecuted heavily. The flyer ends with in saying that it is time for the next revolution if no mainstream political candidate endorses their final solution.

Webpages from the early 2000s appear slightly different in that they advertise Nazi newspapers, DVDs, and CDs, each of which has slightly fallen out of style and demand. The presence of Nazi symbols and portraits of infamous Nazi leaders are still ever-present, though. A screen capture from 2005 even includes links to Nazi cartoons and video games. There is one video game called “Ghetto Blaster,” a reference to the segregated areas Nazi confined Jews to in the pre- and intra-war years. Presumably, players of the game get to blow up or “blast” these Jewish communities. Also included in the 2005-era NSDAP/AO webpage are posters saying, “Stop non-white immigration” and “White power!” among other blatantly racist phrases. NSDAP/AO also advertises Nazi military regalia, such as armbands, pins, badges, and even daggers from the SS. Most, if not all, products advertised on NSDAP/AO webpages link to Lauck’s secondary operation, Third Reich Books, the second neo-Nazi group/organization this paper examines (The Wayback Machine n.d.).

Third Reich Books

Third Reich Books (TRB), an online bookstore tied to the publishing activities of NSDAP/AO. TRB is headquartered in Fairbury, Nebraska according to the SPLC, which is about 50 miles southwest of Lincoln. Omaha's WOWT 6 News reports that Lauck lives in Fairbury, though he has taken responsibility for neo-Nazi and pro-white propaganda in Omaha (Mauro 2019). Lauck claims that TRB publishes over 400 titles (mostly translated Nazi works) in 13 languages (Vaughn 2017). TRB has their own binding equipment, which enables them to bind books and Nazi literature in-house (Vaughn 2017). Based on TRB's website, CDs, DVDs, poetry, artwork, and speeches are also products for sale. Nazi books, as well as philosophical and ideological print materials, are easily the most numerous and popular works.

TRB has nearly 285 products for sale in the English language department. While a detailed description of each work would far exceed the scope of the present paper, a mere cursory look at the selections provides enough insight into the beliefs of TRB and its Nazi propagandist leader Lauck. There are picture books about the Nazi SS (Schutzstaffel- the Nazi paramilitary security unit), speeches from Dr. Joseph Goebbels and Rudolf Hess, select quotations from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, countless books about SS culture and ideology, and Hitler's family tree. There are multiple books about Jews in the U.S. as well as U.S. leaders like President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Any book about Jews depicts an antisemitic caricature of Jewish person made out to be a greedy miser. There are anti-communist and anti-Bolshevik books. Texts on Nazi warfare abound, including multiple volumes about how German Panzers overran Poland. There are multiple books about the so-called "Jewish question," or what to do with the perceived Jewish problem. Of course, the Nazi's answer to this question was to exterminate Jews- the "final solution."

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

The selections mentioned only scratch the surface of TRB's merchandise. This summary does make clear a concerning point- that a significant portion of TRB's inventory is directed towards younger people. Picture books and Hitler's teachings for Hitler Youth make this quite obvious. In 2018, parents discovered Nazi children's books in over a dozen of Little Free Libraries in Lincoln and Omaha, the same books TRB sells (1011 Now 2018). These libraries are small, outdoor boxes designed to hold books for people, often children, to share. Lauck took credit for providing the Nazi books found in these libraries (Mauro 2019). To be sure, local citizens rightfully voiced outrage when Nazi propaganda popped up in the book boxes. While there is evidently some market for Nazi books, the local market and opinion is adamantly opposed to Lauck's hate. Furthermore, TRB and NSDAP/AO advertise themselves as distributors of propaganda worldwide. Their clientele appears to consist mostly of foreign customers. The fact that Lauck was imprisoned for doing exactly this does not seem to hold him back much today.

Folkish Resistance Movement/FolksFront

A newcomer to the Nebraska hate group scene is the Folkish Resistance Movement (FRM), also known as FolksFront. The SPLC first tracked FRM in Nebraska in 2021, which is not surprising considering the group only started operations in 2020. Despite the short tenure, FRM has been exceptionally active in disseminating Nazi propaganda across the country. In fact, FRM, Patriot Front, and the white supremacist group New Jersey European Heritage Association were responsible for 91% of white supremacist propaganda incident reports from the year 2021 amid record highs of antisemitic and pro-white messages and flyers (Boorstein 2022). FRM gained notoriety by posting flyers at Arizona State University declaring "Hitler was right" and

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

other Nazi/Hitler imagery and phrases (Johnson 2020). As if this message doesn't tell one enough about FRM, their website makes clear other components of their ideology and objective.

FRM believes that a new resistance is needed to face "increasing new threats," and only through combined effort will "our people" overcome these threats and make North America the bulwark of Western Civilization. Details on this overly general belief can be found in FRM's 14-point statement of beliefs. The number 14 is significant in the white supremacist community because, as noted by the ADL Hate Symbols Database, it references the "14 Words" slogan: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children." FRM's 14 points will be listed in full Appendix B, though a few points bear mentioning at present to better understand who FRM feels threatened by.

Like any neo-Nazi group, FRM despises the Jews and the global Zionist elite who control international finance (Point 1). Point 2 articulates who must unify in the face of Zionist elites who control finance and the media- all Anglo-Saxon people. According to FRM, Anglo-Saxon people of any nation must come together to overcome threatening forces. FRM views the struggle as beyond the U.S. alone. Point 3 argues for an end to foreign immigration and birthright citizenship. Only "white people of good stock may be members of the nation," per Point 4. This supposed nation would prioritize the common interest above self-interest, as the interests of the nation must not conflict with the interests of the individual or corporate power (Point 6). Put simply, FRM's core beliefs are quite similar to those of the National Socialist (Nazi) Party. Of course, this is not surprising considering FRM uses a swastika as its logo (see Figure 3 below).

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND



Figure 3

FRM's website contains three articles entitled "On Freemasonry," "Why the Swastika?" and "A Call To The Folk." In these articles, FRM expands upon its ideology and the aforementioned 14-point statement. Each essentially covers why the "Folk" (Anglo-Saxons) need National Socialism and should accept the sacred symbol that is the swastika. The swastika, apparently, represents the very existence of the white people and the struggle for their existence. The article on the swastika also makes frequent reference to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* to support its claims. If these messages are found to be persuasive, young men can join the FRM through its website.

The requirements to become a member of FRM aren't overly burdensome. One must be at least 18 years old, able-bodied, male, of White European descent, from the U.S. or Canada, willing to perform activism, not have issues with substance abuse, and agree with the 14 points. If one meets these requirements and can maintain good physical condition, he's in. At this point, the FRM member must follow FRM on the encrypted app Telegram. FRM's Telegram account only has about 1.5 thousand followers and almost 1000 photos. Most, if not all, of these photos are of flyers with FRM's logo or common phrases. These include a flyer that says "Break Debt Slavery," "White Lives Matter," "Resist Zionism," and "Blood and Soil," each of which are common in the neo-Nazi and white supremacy scene. Geotags on these posts indicate that FRM has so-called activists in Texas, Colorado, Alberta, Canada, and many more. Just on March 18, a poster sent photos of FRM flyers in Gering, Nebraska (See Figure 3 below).

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

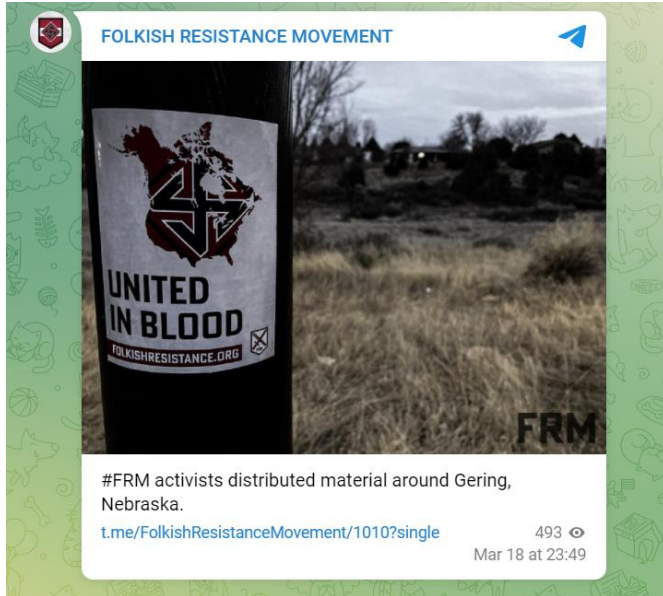


Figure 3

FRM’s presence in Nebraska is not confined to a single town or base of operations. Rather, FRM activity spans from the panhandle to the heart of Omaha, much like Patriot Front. ADL data from Nebraska in the year 2021 highlights seven cases of FRM propaganda dissemination, mostly from April and December. Since the group is still in its early stages, both nationally and at the state level, there is a dearth of reported group activity or propaganda dissemination, which likely explains the relatively small number of documented incidents.

In April 2021, FRM left flyers at two locations in Omaha and one in Papillion with the message “Our blood is our faith. Our race is our nation.” Other flyers at these locations included swastikas and the Star of David. In July 2021, ADL tracked FRM propaganda from Millard with similar phrases and imagery, in addition to posters reading “White lives matter” and “Smash white guilt.” More FRM propaganda of this same ilk appeared in Omaha in November, as well as in Chadron and Scottsbluff in December 2021 (ADL 2022). “Flyering” incidents such as these continue to be tools for recruitment, publicity, and intimidation for white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups in the U.S. (Bates and Gale 2021). So, while the seven Nebraska cases may not

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

seem like a high figure, the fear, intimidation, and sense of unwelcomeness felt by the target audience are far more challenging to quantify and are certainly more valuable in the eyes of FRM leadership.

Limitations

This case study of hate groups in Nebraska is not without limitations. To begin, examining hate group activity in the state does not cover every instance of hate or discrimination. In reviewing databases of hate group activity (flyering, propaganda, etc.), this paper omits individual incidents of antisemitism and what supremacy. Individuals who are unaffiliated with a certain hate group can and have spread conspiracy theories and hurled antisemitic insults at Jewish people. This case study paper does not intend to describe each of these incidents, though they are nonetheless significant measures of hate and prejudice in the state. This case study is also limited in that its scope constrains the amount of detail covered per hate group. Examining nine different hate organizations is task that sacrifices depth for broadness. One could write an entire monograph on any one hate group covered in this paper, including its history, organizational makeup, and activity over time.

This paper is further limited in that an SPLC hate group designation does not provide much insight on how many people are active in each group. There could be two Patriot Front members in Nebraska or there could be 50. The reporting and publications cited in this paper cannot always provide precise figures on membership data such as this, due in large part from the underground, secretive behavior of most hate groups. Encrypted platforms provide much needed privacy and security for members of hate groups, as does the so-called “deep web” and “dark web” (i.e., Tor network) in which online users can engage in illicit activity with anonymity. Hate group activity in public view online is limited to what is available (or what has

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

yet to be removed by the platform) and what the group wants the public to view. The material on Patriot Front's website and social media are what the group wants the public to see, perhaps leaving the most vile and illicit content to more secure and private platforms. Future research could examine how domestic hate groups utilize "dark" networks to communicate or disseminate propaganda. As alluded to above, future research could also refine the scope of study to a singular hate group or ideology. Doing so would enable finer detail and analysis of said group. Despite these limitations, this paper hopes to have painted a broad and accurate picture of hate groups in general and hate group activity in Nebraska in particular, based on a litany of primary and secondary source material. Based on such sources, this paper makes the following observations.

Concluding Thoughts

The nine hate groups active in Nebraska run the ideological gamut from anti-Muslim to white nationalism. Due to this ideological variability, these hate-based organizations may seem entirely dissimilar with each other. A follower of Mission to Israel's belief system may be entirely confounded by the Proud Boys' adulation of Trump and the good old days. The reasons for joining the group or ideology for members of each respective group may, and likely does, look different. Perhaps a neo-Nazi enters the hate movement because of their individual misfortunes (job loss, breakup, etc.), whereas another may enter because they legitimately hold a deep sense of being victimized by a globalist, Zionist government. The academic literature and primary source material from these groups' websites and propaganda confirm there is no singular reason why people join hate groups. While the psychological theories of an authoritarian personality seem like attractive solutions because they chalk hate and hate groups up to in-born personality traits, the reality is that hate groups are much more of a social problem. The cases

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

examined in this paper, and indeed throughout the literature, reveal a common motivating force in hate- the need for identity and belonging.

The need for identity or belonging is common to all people. When this identity is threatened, real or by mere perception, individuals can be susceptible to hate groups. White supremacists and white nationalists feel that immigration, “race-mixing,” or other forms of demographic and social change threaten their identity and social-political standing of power. When individuals feel insecure about their social standing or identity, they can look towards hate groups answers and for an improved sense of self and camaraderie. Human beings are innately social, craving group acceptance and solidarity. One way to heighten group solidarity is to discount, dehumanize, or “otherize” the outgroup. Scapegoating the outgroup gives the hate group simple answers to complex questions. Why did I lose my job? Because an immigrant took it and therefore all immigrants are bad. Why are white people losing their political power? It’s because the Zionist government is conspiring to deprive white people of power. These conclusions are clear overgeneralizations and examples of scapegoating, though the mind of a vulnerable person looking for answers can easily craft these solutions to their unanswerable problems. These answers, no matter how extreme or racist, provide a sense of control when one feels powerless. When that individual is in a group of likeminded individuals or immersed in propaganda that normalizes extreme beliefs, the seeds of hate take root. When fear of the other or fear of change is present, as is evident in much of these cases and belief systems, hate festers. Fear of the other is very much the gasoline poured on the fire of hate and prejudice. Without fear, hate would wither. With fear, hate provides the group a reason to exist, a reason to fight.

Hate and hate groups will not disappear from Nebraska anytime soon. For the last decade, there have been between six and nine active hate groups in the state. Hate groups are often

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

transient, yet Mission to Israel, MSR Productions, and Lauck's two neo-Nazi enterprises have managed to stay afloat for decades. This is not to say that Nebraska is a hateful state, nor is it one that lets hate and discrimination run rampant. Hate groups are active in every single state, a trend unlikely to end in the foreseeable future. The proliferation of social media and encrypted communications platforms will only make the cultivation of hateful ideologies more prevalent. Nebraska citizens, much like a majority of the U.S. populous, abhor hate and antisemitism. Groups like the ADL and SPLC depend on reports from the citizenry to compile their databases. The watchful eye of the people is, and always will be, the most dependable tool in the fight against hate. That said, there are a few notable concerns regarding the apparent normalization of hate, both in Nebraska and nationally.

This paper has stressed the importance of overgeneralization, scapegoating, and dehumanization of the other in hate groups. The current, hyperpolarized political climate, in addition to (and in cooperation with) the boom of social media echo chambers and misinformation has made spreading hateful messages and conspiracies, either for entertainment, profit, or political self-interest, more profligate. Anyone in Nebraska has likely seen gubernatorial advertisements that call illegal immigrants "illegals" or depict migrants running to make immigration appear like an invasion.⁴ This tactic is not unique to Nebraska, which is perhaps more concerning considering such messaging dehumanizes immigrants, paints them as criminals or invaders trying to destroy the state or country. It creates an outgroup that is perceived to be a serious, existential threat to the masses. Again, this tactic is not new nor is it unique to this state. It simply follows a dangerous trend of normalizing and spreading prejudicial rhetoric for political gain. This paper points this out not to make a political point. Rather, it

⁴ See an early campaign ad of Jeff Fortenberry against Mike Flood (KETV 2020) or remarks by Charles Herbster claiming that most people crossing the border want to destroy the country (Sanderford 2021).

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

serves to highlight the instances of dehumanization and overgeneralization that hateful ideologies and hate groups cultivate. Overcoming these ideologies, these deeply held belief systems that malign entire classes of people, is no easy task.

Responding to and overcoming hate has no silver bullet. Hate and hate groups reflect the social environment from whence they came, meaning that deep social and structural changes will serve as the best treatment for the root causes of hate. This means addressing those who feel hopeless, powerless, confused, rebellious, or angry not with name-calling or combativeness, but with empathy and understanding. If a loved one appears to be in a vulnerable position or leaning towards hate or a hate group, we must try to connect with them, listen, and recognize their vulnerability. When confronting hate groups or hateful propaganda, report it/them to watchdogs and local authorities. Calling out hate when we see it is an indispensable tool. But pure naming and shaming and sicking the criminal justice system on hate groups cannot always punish the hate away. Doing this is no substitute for meaningful intergroup dialogue, empathy, and understanding. Legislation or de-platforming hate propaganda or hate speech on social media similarly fails to curtail the spread of hate. Given today's polarized political climate, passing any meaningful legislation on hate groups seems like a fever dream. Even in a non-polarized climate, the U.S. still has broad protections for speech and assembly. The policy community must create the conditions for bipartisanship, democracy, and the rule of the law at every level of government. Though perhaps more importantly, policy must ensure that no one feels left out, disadvantaged by their government or society. Surely, this would not prevent everyone from feeling vulnerable or let down by their leadership or community. More robust civic education and media literacy could play a significant role here, providing the tools needed to steer vulnerable people away from extremism and hate.

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

This is all to say that the fight against hate is not a simple task, nor does it have a one-size-fits all prevention strategy. It is not a job for the policymaking community alone, but for the society, local community, and family that must all work together to stamp out hate. This is important in any state, let alone Nebraska. One may not even think of hate groups when it comes to this state, one that has been advertised as “Nebraska nice.” Thus, education and awareness of such groups is perhaps more important in Nebraska, a place where hate could fly under the radar. Only with this awareness can a community be welcoming to all people, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or country of origin. As Nebraskans work to make these ideals a reality and to stamp out hate, the inscription on the state Capitol provides a fitting guiding light:

“The salvation of the state is the watchfulness of the citizens.”

Appendices

Appendix A

Helpful Resources for Combating Hate

The SPLC and ADL have extensive repositories of toolkits for parents, teachers, and caregivers for use in combating extremism, hate, and radicalization in young people and adults alike. These resources, in addition to their hate group databases and profiles of hate group leaders and organizations, inform policymakers, local communities, and individuals who are often the first line of defense against hateful ideologies and actions. Included below are but a few of such resources dedicated, along with links to other helpful references such as non-profits and research organizations that deal with hate and extremism.

- A toolkit on online radicalization entitled “Building resilience & confronting risk a parents & caregivers guide to online radicalization,” by American University’s Polarization and Extremism Research Innovation Lab (PERIL) and the SPLC includes best practices on identifying extremism through the online space. This toolkit also includes valuable references and resources on how to get help if you or someone you know becomes radicalized:
https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/2022january31_splc_peril_parents_and_care_givers_guide_jan_2022.pdf
- Life After Hate is an anti-hate organization “committed to helping people leave the violent far-right to connect with humanity and lead compassionate lives” through education, interventions, research, and outreach: <https://www.lifeafterhate.org/>
- The toolkit “Extreme Measures: How to Help Young People Counter Extremist Recruitment” by the ADL includes information on white supremacist propaganda and how it can be used to recruit and radicalize young people online:
<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/extreme-measures-how-to-help-young-people-counter>
- We Are Many -United Against Hate is a nonprofit organization that engages in outreach and intervention in communities to promote understanding and healing. The organization’s website includes links to toolkits and helpful guides to combat intolerance:
<https://www.united-against-hate.org/>
- The SPLC wrote “Ten Ways to Fight Hate: A Community Response Guide” days following the deadly Charlottesville rally, a helpful resource with actionable steps on combating hate: <https://www.splcenter.org/20170814/ten-ways-fight-hate-community-response-guide>
- The News Literacy Project is an education nonprofit that provides resources for educators and the public learn and share the skills and abilities needed to responsible consumers of news and information: <https://newslit.org/>
- The SPLC-sponsored program Learning for Justice provides resources and workshops for educating school children on important yet hot-button issues such as race, bias, gender, and religion: <https://www.learningforjustice.org/>
- The SPLC Hate Map documents every hate group tracked in each U.S. state per year:
<https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>

Appendix B

Folkish Resistance Movement 14 Points

1. By all available means, work to combat the global Zionist elite and the forces of international finance which have come to dominate the better part of our world and threatens the existence of our people.
2. The unification of all Anglo-Saxon peoples. Our current situation is not confined strictly to one nation, and therefore cannot be overcome by one nation alone. Only through the combined effort of our people will we overcome the forces which threaten their existence.
3. An immediate end to all foreign immigration and an end to birthright citizenship. All those who are not of the nation will be repatriated.
4. Only White people(s) of good stock may be members of the nation. Only members of the nation may become citizens of the State. Those who are not members of the nation will be subject to laws which pertain to aliens.
5. We demand an end to the corrupt democratic system and its replacement with a true democracy. The right to vote is to be held exclusively by the citizens of the State. The positions of the State are to be held only by citizens and those who are not citizens are barred from all positions of government whether they be national, state, or local levels. All citizens are to be granted equal rights and duties.
6. We recognize the common interest before self-interest, and believe the interests of the individual must not conflict with that of the nation. In accordance with this, corporate interests will be brought into line with the interests of the nation.
7. We demand an end to income unearned by work and the abolition of debt-interest slavery. There must be no place for those who draw their sustenance from society without giving anything in return.
8. Mass media today is a tool which is used as a bludgeon by a handful of financial elites to exercise control over the entire nation. As a consequence of this, media is to be held exclusively by members of the nation. Media which is dominated by foreign interest will be nationalized.
9. A complete and total reformation of the educational system is necessary in order to give future generations the means necessary to secure the best possible conditions for life through self-assertion. The State places upon itself the interest of the youth and as a result guarantees that every child of the nation, regardless of class, be provided the best possible education for which they are suited.
10. The State involves itself directly with the health of the nation and seeks to raise its quality of life. The State will seek to combat illness and disease through new government initiatives which place an emphasis of life over profits. Physical fitness and sports are also to be encouraged by the State and made compulsory for the youth.
11. The State concerns itself with the nation's standard of living and seeks to eliminate poverty. Under no circumstance will our people be allowed to go hungry or cold. The

HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

State must work exclusively for those whom it is created to serve and must ensure that its people are afforded a livelihood.

12. The State takes an active interest in the cultural life of the nation, and as a result seeks to bring about the highest of cultures. Consequently, all forms of art and entertainment which are harmful or seek to degrade the national character are to be eliminated.
13. While the State believes in religious freedom and seeks to safeguard the faith of its people, it does so with the belief that religion must not threaten or undermine the existence of the people. Religion is to be by the blood and for the blood.
14. We demand the formation of a strong central State which will enact these points and secure the existence of all members of the nation. The State is a means to this end and will place above all things the well-being of those whom it is created to serve

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HATE IN THE HEARTLAND

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