Revisiting Scriptures for America:

Myth and Media in a 20th Century Theology of White Nationalism

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List of Abbreviation

ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AN	Aryan Nations
CI	Christian Identity
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
NWO	New World Order
SFA	Scriptures for America
SPLC	Southern Poverty Law Center
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
Y2K	Year 2000
ZOG	Zionist Occupation Government

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Abstract

Religion is a phenomenon increasingly understood as an information network system that evolves alongside and through technological media. Through this lens, the present study analyzes the evolution of a religious ideology known as Christian Identity across the twentieth century, focusing on the interaction between its core myth and new communications media by the turn of the millennium. The emergence and transformation of an antisemitic and racist reading of the Genesis creation myth, known as Devil's seed theory, is understood to be a central theology not only to the Identity movement, but also to American White nationalism. This thesis focuses on the ministry of influential Identity pastor Peter J. Peters due to the strategies used by Peters to evangelize this myth, especially regarding his pioneering use of computer-mediated communication. This thesis argues that Christian Identity flourished in the 1990s information technology milieu due to the efforts of Peters, but quickly declined as accelerating technological and cultural change exploded by 2001. The dynamic role of myth and media in the twenty-first century rise of global White nationalism is considered as a rich and pressing subject for future studies in the field of religion.

dedicated to those working to understand and eradicate fascism everywhere

Introduction

Insofar as social phenomena can be understood by scholars, the study of religion is reducible to a well-integrated use of the theories and methods developed by other disciplines; this is because a religion itself is a sociohistorically-situated network system that brings together many aspects of human life.[1] Religious people do and say religious things for a variety of reasons, including their relative positions within structural power systems, the ongoing evolution of information technologies, and the differential success of meme-systems (i.e., ideologies that can be broken down into base units of cultural transmission). In addition to the fields of history, anthropology, philosophy, political science, psychology, and comparative literature, this particular thesis draws from the relatively new fields of media studies and memetics in order to analyze the peak and decline of an American myth rooted in Genesis.

The myth itself is a construction of Whiteness as a sacred space that needs defending against perceived enemies.[2] First, against Jews, who are understood to be evil incarnate: the bloodline descendants of a (literal) sexual union between Eve and Satan (in the form of a humanoid creature referred to as the serpent of Eden). The progeny of this union, Cain, is understood to be the first Jew—half White, and half Satanic. In this way, those who perpetuate this myth see modern Jews as the most powerful threat to White hegemony. The other enemies to Whiteness, people of color, are viewed in a non-agential light. This also has an etiology in Genesis. Sometimes referred to as "pre-Adamites" or "mud people," Black people and other people of color are taken to be uncreated beings. Unlike descendants of Adam and Eve (White people) or descendants of Satan and Eve (Jews), they are soulless, subhuman products of evolution. In this construction, people of color are stripped of both agency and humanity; the threat they pose to Whiteness, often

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[1] As Max Horkheimer has observed, phenomenological objectivity is mythic due to its dependency upon technological conditions, which are sensitive to the material conditions of production.

[2] Throughout this thesis, I use the capitalized form of the word "White" to refer to the construct of Whiteness as a distinct racial category. For the subjects of my thesis, Whiteness specifically excludes Jews in addition to all people of color.

expressed in terms of anxiety about multiculturalism or interracial marriage, is of an earthly (often sexual) nature. The threat posed by Jews, in contrast, concerns an epic dualistic clash between Dark and Light, which is played out in the modern political arena.

The social movement created around this myth is a twentieth century American religion called Christian Identity. This thesis examines Christian Identity in the time leading up to and within the technohistorical milieu of the 1990s. I argue that the trajectory of a particularly evangelistic Identity minister, Peter J. Peters of Scriptures for America Worldwide, was responsible for the apparent peak and subsequent decline of Identity around the year 2000. Building upon the foundation laid by Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, I approach the study of modern religion with the public sphere in mind: "Since the 1990s the increasingly public character of religion, the proliferation of the electronic media, and the crisis of the nation-state have shaped people's life worlds throughout the globe in ever more visible ways."[3] In addition to myth and media, the relationship between national identity and religious identity is a theme woven throughout this thesis, which moves chronologically from the days of Henry Ford to the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1, "American Mythmaking: The Christian Identity Movement," is a historical overview tracing the evolution of the central myth associated with Identity, which is the idea that Jews are the bloodline descendants of Satan. Inseparable from this antisemitic core is the belief that White people (White Americans in particular, but usually extended to "Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, Scandinavian, and kindred people" or those who claim northern European ancestry) are the true lost tribes of Israel identified in the Hebrew Bible. Before this myth was concretized in its present form—what Michael Barkun calls "full-blown Devil's seed theory"—it existed in five elements that can be understood as memes. Several key players contributed to this concretization, which occurred in the post-WWII era. Identity theology began to circulate widely in the 1970s

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[3] Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, "Introduction," *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 2.

and 1980s, as White nationalism entered the American mainstream, with antisemitism activating its political thrust.

In Chapter 2, "Prophet of an Imagined Community: The Case of Pete Peters," I examine the impact of the self-styled "circuit-riding preacher" of the LaPorte Church of Christ in northern Colorado. As the founder and head of Scriptures for America Worldwide ministries from the early 1980s until his death in 2011, Peters obsessively evangelized the Identity message via pamphlets and books, audio cassettes, shortwave and satellite radio, television, CDs and DVDs, and Internet webpages. Gaining considerable national media attention as a bigot and anti-government extremist in the early 1990s, Peters claimed to be targeted by the Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG) for preaching the Identity "truth." Through the lens of affect and a theoretical discussion of nationalism, I explore the ways in which Whiteness is constructed.

Chapter 3, "The Year 2000: The Millennial Moment," explores 1999-2001 as a technological and cultural milieu. I argue that public interest in both Scriptures for America and the form of Identity promulgated by Peters began to rapidly decline at this time because exponential technological progress created a cultural paradigm shift. An archival exploration into the Scriptures for America website reveals Peters to be an Internet pioneer, working on the cutting edge of this new information media until the accelerating rate of technological change exploded at the end of the twentieth century, leaving Peters and SFA in the digital dust as everything moved online. I ask what the emergence of the Internet does for the ongoing evolution of White nationalist ideologies.

Finally, in my conclusion, I consider future studies on the interaction between myth, media, and the public sphere in an era of rising global White nationalism. What defines fascism? What defines religion? What is the Internet doing to us?

American Mythmaking:
The Christian Identity Movement

In this chapter, I will examine a twentieth-century American religious movement known as Christian Identity (CI). I will trace its origins from a European fringe idea into what became, arguably, the most unifying theology of American White nationalism by the turn of the century, utilizing Eric Ward's definition of American White nationalism as a revolutionary social movement descending from White supremacism, and emerging in response to the social ruptures of the 1960s civil rights struggle, with antisemitism forming its mythic core.[4] Richard Dawkins' memetic theory, which draws an analogy between the evolution of biological life and the evolution of ideas, provides a theoretical basis for understanding this core. I will show how antisemitism became increasingly central to the Identity movement, straddling the line between myth and conspiracy in the modern context, and operating successfully within the larger White supremacist and Christian structures of American life.

Devil's seed theory

The mythic core of Christian Identity is an etiological construction of Whiteness against non-Whiteness. The most distinctive aspect of this myth is the idea that Jews are the literal bloodline descendants of Eve and Satan:

> In [Genesis 3], Eve is tempted to eat of the tree of knowledge of Good
> and Evil, and she does eat the fruit. But for Seedline Identity, the story
> is not about eating fruit nor about knowledge as self-awareness, but
> about sex and the Family Tree … Satan defiled Eve by teaching her

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[4] Eric Ward, "Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism," Political Research Associates, June 29, 2017.

about sex, impregnated Eve with Satan's child, then left Eve and the garden.[5]

In this racialized and sexualized recasting of the Edenic myth, Eve is the first White woman. The bloodline descending from her union with the serpent, the children of Cain, are Satanically defiled. Jews are thus constructed to be both impure and, due to their divine blood, hyperagential physical manifestations of Satan's power at work in the world. White people, in contrast, are descended from the line of Adam. White Americans in particular, but usually extended to "Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, Scandinavian, and kindred people," are considered to be the true Israelites prophesied in the Hebrew Bible.

Michael Barkun summarizes five elements of this myth, called Devil's seed theory, which appeared one or two at a time in various British-Israelite and emerging Identity doctrines until they came together to form a complete Identity theology:

1. God made a primal distinction between two types of human beings according to their paternity. Some, called Adamites, were descended from Adam. Others, called Pre-Adamites, were created separately, long before Adam.

2. The serpent in Genesis's story of the Fall was not a reptile. He was an intelligent "humanoid" creature associated with the Devil, if not the Devil himself.

3. Original sin consisted of Eve's sexual relationship with this quasi-human "serpent."

4. Because of this liaison, the world contains two "seedlines." One (Adam's seedline) consists of the descendants of Adam and Eve. The other (the serpent's seedline) consists of the descendants of Eve and the "serpent."

5. Cain was a historical figure associated with evil in general and with the Devil in particular, and passed his propensity for evil to a line of descendants.[6]

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[5] Glenn Gottfried and Michael McFarland, "The Chosen Ones: A Mythic Analysis of the Theological and Political Self-Justification of Christian Identity," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 15, no. 1 (2002), 135.

[6] Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement,* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 150.

None of these elements refer specifically to Jews. Barkun argues that it is the synthesis of these elements into a single theory that became associated with antisemitism. The points of Barkun's five elements can be understood in terms of *memes* coming together to form a larger idea, providing a theoretical framework to understand ideological evolution.

What is a meme? In 1976, Richard Dawkins created the word to mean "a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation."[7] Based on the Greek word *mimeme*, meaning "imitated thing," he abbreviated the term in order to sound "a bit like 'gene,'" drawing an etymological and analogical line to his own field of genetics. The evolution of genes and the evolution of ideas, two aspects of human life, both function within the bounds of Dawkins' rule that "all life evolves by the differential survival of replicating entities."[8] Genes are transmitted from organism to organism via the process of natural selection, competing for limited resources to survive; memes, in contrast, are transmitted from mind to mind and compete for attention. The "fittest" memes are thus those ideas, catchphrases, images, etc, that are most memorable. A meme must be simple enough that it cannot be divided into smaller parts; an idea (or "idea-meme," as Dawkins proposes) is a network of memes that work together in order to be replicated and transmitted from brain to brain:

> An 'idea-meme' might be defined as an entity that is capable of being transmitted from one brain to another. The meme of Darwin's theory is therefore the essential basis of the idea which is held in common by all brains that understand the theory. The *differences* in the ways that people represent the theory are then, by definition, not part of the meme. If Darwin's theory can be subdivided into components, such that some people believes component *A* but not component *B*, while others believe *B* but not *A*, then *A* and *B* should be regarded as separate memes. If almost everybody who believes in *A* also believes in *B*—if the memes are closely 'linked' to use the genetic term—then it is convenient to lump them together as one meme.[9]

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[7] Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (2nd ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 192.

[8] James Gleick, *The Information: A History, A Theory, A Flood*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011), 311.

[9] Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (2nd ed.), 196.

In this way, we can understand the elements of Devil's seed theory as memes that, over time, were linked to comprise the core doctrine of Identity. The addition of conspiratorial antisemitism, I will explain later on, was both a consequence of the WWII era and a deeply American tradition.

First, it is useful to consider what makes a religious meme fit, ensuring its ongoing transmission. To approach this question, we must excavate its underlying implication, that religion is continuously made and unmade through processes of signification, transmission, and resignification that reflect the current "reality" and "rationality" of its actors and sociohistorical context. There is no bounded, stable, or essential form of a religion; there are only dynamic systems composed of ideas and practices that are passed from mind to mind. Aaron Lynch attributes the success of religious memes to the multimodal form of meme-exchange known as proselytism.[10] Religious ideas are highly successful when passed down from parents to children, for instance, in combination with adversarial and incentivizing features such as the Christian conceptions of heaven and hell. In this way, proselytism can be understood as the medium by which evangelical Christianity (as a highly successful system of idea-memes) is able to replicate, mutate, and survive. In turn, Christianity becomes a medium through which other memes are able to propagate into society.

Whether bug or feature, antisemitism travels comfortably upon the back of Christianity. Theodor Adorno made a convincing argument for why this is so, describing antisemitism as "much more deeply rooted in Christianity than it would appear":

> It is true that the typical anti-Semite of our day, the highly rational, merciless, cynical, planning fascist, has as little belief in Christ as in anything else, except power. But it is no less true that the anti-Semitic ideas which form the spearhead of fascism everywhere could not possibly exercise such a strong appeal unless they had their strong sources, not only apart from, but also actually within Christian civilization. It would be difficult to exaggerate the role played by imagery of the Christ-killers, of the Pharisee, of the moneychangers

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[10] Aaron Lynch, *Thought Contagion: How Belief Spreads Through Society*, (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 208.

> in the temple, of the Jew who forfeited his salvation by denying the
> Lord and not accepting baptism.[11]

Indeed, history has proven antisemitism to be a central idea-meme of fascism, exercising its appeal by utilizing Christian civilization as an ideological medium. This point by Adorno gets at a central, underlying problem for my project. The subject of the second two chapters of this thesis, Pastor Pete Peters, differs from the typical antisemite of Adorno's day in that I understand Peters to be a "true believer." The differentiation between the planning fascist with "as little belief in Christ as in anything else, except power" and the "true believer" is useful to a student of religion. Its importance beyond that scope is highly debatable.

Finally, it is critical to note here that only when the Jewish response to antisemitism is considered can the phenomenon of antisemitism be viewed analytically. The decline of antisemitism from virulence in the 1930s to less threatening manifestations in the late 1940s can be attributed largely to the effectiveness of the Jewish community in combating antisemitism. Of great significance is the public and covert effort of Jewish organizations, especially the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith to blunt the impact of notorious antisemite and Identity believer Gerald L.K. Smith.[12] Smith, who was a virulent leader of American Christofascism during the Depression, espoused a form of fascism that was "explicitly 'Christian' in nature."[13] His impact on the development of Christian Identity is discussed in the following section. The tactic of "radical silence" developed by the AJC and ADL to reduce media attention on Smith was a stunning success; however, Glen Jeansonne argues that "radical silence" was only effective in the 1930s technological moment. Due to the omnipresence of communications media in today's world, different tactics must be developed to combat twenty-first century Nazism and fascism.

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[11] Theodor Adorno, "The Religious Medium" in *Religion and Media* (ed. Hent de Vries and Samuel M. Weber), (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 533.

[12] Glen Jeansonne, "Combating Anti-Semitism: The Case of Gerald L.K. Smith" in *Anti-Semitism in American History* (ed. David A. Gerber), (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 152.

[13] David Neiwert, *The Eliminationists: How Hate Talk Radicalized the American Right,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 88-90.

Origins

The origins of Christian Identity are found in a little-known nineteenth century European theological movement called Anglo-Israelism or British Israelism. In this belief system, White northern Europeans "saw themselves as the literal descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel."[14] British Israelites engaged in extensive genealogical and pseudoarchaeological arguments tying modern northern-Europeans to the line of King David, Seth, and Adam. Though this ideology is inherently problematic for its White exceptionalism and falsification of history, explicit antisemitism or racism was not a component of Anglo-Israelism. There are four key figures in the initial transformation from British-Israelism into the American movement, which I will briefly treat here. The first pair consists of Howard B. Rand, the energetic organizer of the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America, and his famously antisemitic colleague William J. Cameron. These men were operating primarily in the northeastern US in the 1920s-30s. The second pair is comprised of Wesley A. Swift, the 1940s preacher from southern California who "was responsible for promulgating Identity in the form we know it today," and Gerald L.K. Smith, the Midwestern right-wing political extremist and "most prominent anti-Semite in America" who moved to Los Angeles in the 1940s and linked up with Swift and other West Coast Identity preachers, adding a political thrust to their developing racist theology.[15]

Howard B. Rand is considered to be the critical bridging figure between British-Israelism and its newer American variant, Christian Identity. A highly capable organizer from Massachusetts, Rand started out in the 1920s as the American representative of the London-based British-Israel World Federation. By 1930, he had established the first branch of his own British-Israel organization, the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America, in Detroit. After the first convention in May, Rand set off on a massive organizing campaign across the US South, Midwest, and West. Within a year, a second Federation convention was held in Chicago, and new branches were established in California,

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[14] Gottfried and McFarland, "The Chosen Ones: A Mythic Analysis of the Theological and Political Self-Justification of Christian Identity," 125.
[15] Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right,* 4.

Oregon, Illinois, and Florida. It is estimated that 57,000 pieces of Federation literature were distributed nationwide by the summer of 1931.[16]

At the early Federation meetings in Detroit, Rand met a fellow British-Israelite whose ties to the political right would become a major factor in the Federation's growth. In addition to being an "accomplished lay preacher" around the Midwest, William J. Cameron was a powerful public figure who served as Henry Ford's personal journalist and press assistant. Beginning as a writer and editor of the notoriously antisemitic *Dearborn Independent*—Ford's weekly paper published from 1919-1927—Cameron continued to work in an intimate capacity with Henry Ford until his employer's death in 1947. As a committed British-Israelite with public-relations savvy and access to deep pockets, Cameron became an invaluable asset to Rand's cause, and was made president of the Federation in the mid-1930s. For 91 weeks between 1920-1922, the *Dearborn Independent* published a series of articles later compiled into a book called *The International Jew*. Drawing directly from the infamous antisemitic forgery, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, every issue exposed a new conspiracy or addressed the "Jewish question." The impact of this publication, composed by Cameron and Ford, cannot be overstated; as early as 1922, the book was translated into German and passed around Nazi circles.[17]

Howard B. Rand and William J. Cameron built an American brand of British-Israelism that depended on antisemitism to escape the fringe and establish itself as a viable mainstream option. Riding on the back of this new form of British-Israelism, the next generation of "American Israelites" accepted antisemitism as inherent to the religion while discarding all ties to its European roots. On the West Coast, extraordinary antisemitism was becoming increasingly central to the movement. We begin to see "for the first time, the suggestion that the Jews might be more than simply an unassimilable or

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[16] Ibid., 30.

[17] During the Nuremberg Trials, prominent Nazi leader Baldur von Schiarch is quoted to have said, "The decisive anti-Semitic book which I read at that time and the book which influenced my comrades, was Henry Ford's book, *The International Jew*; I read it and became anti-Semitic." Additionally, in the first edition of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler wrote (concerning Jews in America and referencing the conspiracies laid out in *The International Jew*) that "only a single great man, Ford, to their fury, still maintains full independence."

evil force, but rather the very quintessence of evil, the literal offspring of Satan."[18] Simultaneously, we see an increasing number of links to right-wing political causes connected by Identity believer Gerald L.K. Smith.

Smith grew up in rural Wisconsin, the son of a devout Disciples of Christ minister. As a young man, he read the *Dearborn Independent* and was introduced to *The Protocols*. A gifted orator, Smith worked as a clergyman before his career as a Christian nationalist politician took off in the 1930s, earning him a considerable amount of fame. In one example, a televised 1936 speech, he captivated a crowd of thousands with his characteristic style, "These great phenomenal assemblies … represent the unmistakable edict that is being issued to the corrupt, thieving politicians of America, that the baby-havin', stump-grubbin', sod-bustin', go-to-meetin', god-fearin' American people are about to take over the United States government of America."[19] By 1940 Smith's energy had shifted "from anti-communism and labor-baiting to obsessive anti-Semitism," a transition sparked by "two 'visions' which revealed to him the 'iniquity' of the organized Jew."[20] In the early 1950s, as some of his colleagues did not want to associate with him anymore due to his blatant bigotry, he moved his headquarters to Los Angeles and joined a network of Christian Identity preachers.

One such preacher, Wesley A. Swift, has been called the "single most significant figure in the early history of Identity."[21] After moving to Los Angeles to attend the Kingdom Bible College in the 1930s (a school established in 1930 by an associate of Howard Rand), Swift incorporated the hatred of the KKK with antisemitism and the local British-Israelite theology to create his own Christian Identity church called "Church of Jesus Christ, Christian," (as opposed to Jesus Christ, Jew). It is fitting that his prodigy should continue in this legacy, founding the White nationalist organization Aryan Nations in the 1970s. The impact of Swift's doctrine, especially when viewed as a network system, has not been fully studied. Though a rich subject, the present study only treats him in passing as a link to his prodigy, Aryan Nations founder Richard G. Butler.

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[18] Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right,* 49.
[19] Gerald L.K. Smith, Speech, August 17, 1936, transcribed from video.
[20] Glen Jeansonne, "Combating Anti-Semitism: The Case of Gerald L.K. Smith" in *Anti-Semitism in American History,* 155.
[21] Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right,* 60.

Smith and Swift—operating on the West Coast as the US began to experience post-WWII economic and social changes—built upon the antisemitic, American British-Israelism that Rand and Cameron had constructed in the Northeastern US during the Depression. "In a movement that had always had difficulty in defining orthodoxy and suppressing deviation," Barkun writes, "those on the West Coast felt themselves at liberty to borrow, modify, and discard doctrines as their own idiosyncrasies dictated."[22]

Anxiety

"In a religious connotation, Identity is akin to fundamentalism, in that the proponents of each study the Bible extensively and use it as a literal and infallible document for their beliefs."[23] This is the perspective of the FBI, writing about Identity in 1989. It would be more accurate to say that Identity is impacted by the same anxieties to which fundamentalism responds. Throughout the twentieth century, the world was changing very quickly. Anxiety about urbanization and the loss of the family farm troubled many Americans. In the 1940s and 1950s, anti-communist propaganda sponsored by the US "intimated the menace of atheistic secularism promoted by big government at home."[24] The 1960s and 1970s brought a cultural revolution that threatened conventional family structures with feminism and gay activism. White hegemony was flailing under the Black power movement. By 1980, as American White nationalism was emerging under the larger umbrella of White supremacy, those inclined to racism and conspiratorial thinking had determined that only one group could be responsible for all of this, the Jews.[25]

The parallel and intertwining evolution of the most infamous White terrorist organization in American history, the Ku Klux Klan, is a critical piece of the story. The

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[22] Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right,* 55.
[23] "Christian Identity Movement," The Vault, US Federal Bureau of Investigation (April 28, 1999), 2.
[24] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.
[25] Eric Ward, "Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism."

original KKK was created in the US South after the end of chattel slavery with the purpose of restoring White supremacy by means of violence against African-Americans and public demonstrations meant to arouse terror in those who opposed them. This was a powerful, yet short-lived regional movement "interested exclusively in Southern post-Civil War concerns."[26] Linda Gordon writes that the original Klan "never entirely disappeared, but faded somewhat after achieving its goal: electoral disenfranchisement and economic subjugation of black people."[27] The next Klan, refounded in 1915, gained traction nationwide by moving into northern and western cities and responding to a wider range of perceived threats to white Protestant hegemony. "[The Second KKK] chose its objects of derision based primarily on proximity," demonstrating considerable adaptability in its selection of enemies; in addition to attacking African-Americans in the South, the Klan harassed Jews on the East Coast, Catholics in the Midwest, Japanese-Americans far out in California, as well as immigrants in urban centers. The second wave Klan was also virulently prohibitionist, and responded to a feeling of declining national morality as typified by rising rates of divorce, adultery, and crime. Efforts by the Klan to protect "the interests of white womanhood" have also been examined in recent years.[28]

Gordon points out that the Klan's anticatholicism was "uniquely American" in its reasoning. Klan members were suspicious of international, papal influence seizing control of the American government, law enforcement, and press. They were also hostile to science and intellectualism; in this respect, the Klan "differed from European fascisms, which, partly because they were less religiously narrow, did not typically display hostility to science."[29] In the 1980s, Ku Klux Klan thinking "opened itself up for merger with national socialism, holocaust denial, and the racist recasting of Christianity known as

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[26] Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition,* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 2.
[27] Ibid., 2.
[28] Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 47.
[29] Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK.*

Christian Identity," allowing those "flickering undercurrents" of Klandom to become integral, driving forces behind Klan thinking."[30]

Monstermaking

In his 1986 essay "Anti-Semitism and Jewish-Gentile Relations in American Historiography and the American Past," David Gerber offers a framework for the study of American antisemitism. Critical to his theory is "the differentiation between what we may call *ordinary* anti-Semitism, a common phenomenon of daily life, and the *extra-ordinary* anti-Semitism which has existed in periods of intense social crisis, strain, or change."[31] While ordinary antisemitism consists of daily abuses (the portrayal of negative Jewish stereotypes in art and media, all forms of social and economic discrimination, verbal and physical harassment), *extraordinary antisemitism* is ideologically rooted and serves a political purpose. In America, this ideology often comes as a distortion of 1890s Populist agrarianism, which "sought to understand the transformation of rural America and the decline of the family farm through analysis of modern capitalist market conditions."[32] The twentieth century form of this movement, which John Higham has called "pseudo-agrarianism," understands the American city as Babylon, the locus of liberalism and economic corruption, secretly controlled by "small cliques of rootless, or international, Jews" who ultimately want to destroy White, Christian America.[33]

Conspiratorial thinking responds to a sense of loss or to a perceived threat to a group's way of life. In this way, Christian Identity blames Jews for changes in American and global social and economic structures. For an enemy to exist, the perception of an enemy must exist. "Even though whites have the lowest sense of racial alienation (Bobo and Hutchings 1996), white supremacist organizations continue to frame grievances in

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[30] Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 53.
[31] David A. Gerber, "Introduction," Anti-Semitism in American History, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 20.
[32] Ibid., 30.
[33] Ibid.

terms of white oppression."[34] The ahistorical and sociologically disproven notion of White oppression is central to Christian Identity doctrine. The Southern Poverty Law Center describes the motivation of CI in the following way:

> During the 1980s and 1990s, right-wing extremists were galvanized by several national issues such as the perceived erosion of parental rights and authority through court rulings, expanding multiculturalism, abortion rights and the decline of the American family farm – all perceived as an attack on their Judeo-Christian beliefs which right-wing extremists view as a key component to America's founding. These issues were magnified because of the far-right's perception of a changing political climate which favored expanding benefits and equal opportunities to ethnic minorities, immigrants and other diversity groups.[35]

Indeed, the construction of Whiteness against changing social tides has proven to be a rallying point for the American right-wing. A unique feature of extraordinary antisemitism, however, is the way in which conspiratorial thinking constructs agental monsters to scapegoat problems that are, in reality, caused by complex structural power systems.

Religionist David White advises on the nature of monsters in the social imaginary:

> Monsters are ideologically (in both senses) construed as marginal groups that haunt the boundaries of human, civilized space. Their peripheral location does not imply, however, that they have been of marginal concern to humans living within such bounded spaces. The important, even central role played by these borderline creatures arises from the fact that their existence, real or imagined, has done nothing less than place in question the self-identity of humans. Where does the human begin and the monster leave off? Where does inside meet outside? Where do we become them?[36]

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[34] Josh Adams and Vincent J. Roscigno, "White Supremacists, Oppositional Culture and the World Wide Web," *Social Forces* 84, no. 2 (2005), 762.
[35] "Hate in God's Name," SPLC, September 15, 2017.
https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/09/12/hate-god's-name-part-i
[36] David Gordon White, *Myths of the Dog-Man,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1.

Regarding the construction of Whiteness against its enemies, the mythic White bloodline represents a space that needs protection. "Eden was, according to Identity, an actual space, but it was also a mythic construction of safety. Without Eden, that protective and sacred place is gone. Thus the race must construct a portable sacred space which depends upon remaining pure and Edenic, true to their generations or race."[37] In this sense, people of color are turned into individual monsters that haunt the periphery of the White bloodline, always threatening to break in and impurify through racial mixing.

Jews, in sharp contrast, represent a larger, looming evil, the collective monster created through extraordinary antisemitism. This is a public, inherently political threat. For Identity Christians and other participants in the 1980s-1990s White nationalist milieu, this type of monster was often named ZOG. The Zionist Occupation Government conspiracy theory, related to ideas about a New World Order, claims that "the Jews" secretly control the government of the United States and beyond. Alisha Graefe indicates the root of the ZOG conspiracy to be "inspired by Nazi propaganda heard through World War II," but it is likely that Henry Ford's brand of antisemitism (which influenced the Nazis) had a more direct impact.[38] Rooted in the *Protocols* forgery and the larger network of antisemitic conspiracy, ZOG ideologues are often also virulent Holocaust deniers.

ZOG straddles the line between myth and conspiracy, revealing something interesting about the nature of both. Concerning the role of myth in modernity, White writes:

> Myth, demoted by the Presocratics in favor of testable, provable *logos* to the rank of rustic "bibble-babble," continues to suffer such a low estimation, in Western thought at least, down to the present day. Not only is the place of myth a marginal one in our own modern, scientific quest for truth, but the places that myth takes us, as its readers or hearers, are also located on the fringes of everyday experience.[39]

Building further off of this idea of marginality, it is no coincidence that conspiracy theory is located on the fringes of the political arena. Myth can be defined as an ahistorical

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[37] Gottfried and McFarland, "The Chosen Ones", 137.
[38] Alisha Graefe, "American Hatred: Wild West Myths, Color-Coded Rhetoric, and the Shaping of the Aryan Nations," Boise State University Theses and Dissertations (2018), 71.
[39] David Gordon White, *Myths of the Dog-Man,* 1.

narrative which is typically confined to the murky realm of the past. It is typically held in a neutral, or curious light. Conspiracy is also an ahistorical narrative, but is seen as modern and, thus, dangerous. Writing on new religious movements, Dyrendal argues that "conspiracy theory has been one possible response in struggles over meaning, legitimacy, purity, and power. Conspiracy theories thrive on the dialectics of distrust, stigmatization and conflict."[40] It is possible to read this as a description of myth as well, begging the question of what truly separates myth from conspiracy except connotation.

White separatism

To escape the enemies to Whiteness (both people of color and Jews), one solution was found in carving an all-White space out of the physical territory of the United States. Richard G. Butler was a Christian Identity theologian trained under Wesley Swift at the Church of Jesus Christ, Christian in Los Angeles. When Swift died in 1971, Butler took over. Soon after, however, he decided it was time to "fulfill his dream of creating an all-white 'Aryan Homeland'" in the American Northwest, and so the church moved with him.[41] Butler and his wife, Betty, moved to northern Idaho in 1973 to establish the Aryan Nations headquarters, the political arm of their Identity ministry. This site enabled "the creation of a common language across several organizational lines" including "Klan factions, small Hitlerite sects, and so-called Christian patriot groups."[42] Hundreds of affiliated racists would pour in every summer for the Aryan World Congress. The headquarters also housed church services and Bible studies on a regular basis.

By 1989, the Aryan Nations (AN) was a relatively powerful network of White supremacists based out of Hayden Lake. Pastor Robert E. Miles delivered an infamous speech at AN headquarters in 1986 that espoused the idea of territorial separation. William Pierce, founder of the National Alliance and author of the *Turner Diaries,* called it the Aryan Resistance Movement. Others have called it the Northwest Territorial

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[40] Asbjørn Dyrendal, "Introduction: Religion, Conspiracy, and Conspiracy Theory" in *Conspiracy Theories and New Religious Movements*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[41] David Neiwert, *The Eliminationists,* 54.

[42] Leonard Zeskind, *Blood and Politics: The History of the White Nationalist Movement from the Margins to the Mainstream*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009), 70.

Imperative. The land itself has been called the "Mountain Free State," the "white American bastion," or the "Aryan homeland." The Pacific Northwest was chosen as the location for this separatist movement due to its Edenic beauty, relative seclusion from government interference, and—most importantly—high density of White people. For many besides Butler, the idea of "carving a white nation-state out of the multiracial North American landmass" was a captivating and unifying prospect.[43]

For others, like Randy and Vicki Weaver, hiding away on an armed compound and waiting for Armageddon was enough. Near AN headquarters in the Ruby Ridge mountains of northern Idaho, the Weavers raised their children on Identity doctrine and anti-ZOG conspiracy. In 1992, growing fear and hatred of the federal government caused Randy Weaver to evade a court appearance for a minor firearms charge. Soon after, following a bench warrant, six US Marshals entered their property. Weaver resisted arrest, resulting in a shootout and the death of one Marshal. A highly-publicized eleven-day siege ensued, resulting in the death of Vicki Weaver and the Weavers' 14 year old son.

A day's drive across Wyoming from the AN headquarters in Idaho, Pastor Peter "Pete" J. Peters had established an Identity congregation and radio ministry in northern Colorado. Peters gained significant media attention for his connection to the Ruby Ridge siege in 1992 and subsequent "Rocky Mountain Rendezvous" at Estes Park, CO. The latter event, organized by Peters in October 1992 and attended notably by Richard Butler, is known as the birthplace of the modern American militia movement. Part memorial, part rallying cry, Peters and Butler used the Ruby Ridge incident to gain traction with other Americans who were disturbed by the violence perpetrated by the federal government at Ruby Ridge. Peters published a "Special Report" detailing the Estes Park meeting, which imagined a "far-right organization split into smaller groups that acted on their own, creating chaos for the federal government."[44] In an unforeseen turn of events, the Weavers became martyrs for the growing struggle against ZOG.

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[43] Leonard Zeskind, *Blood and Politics,* 102.
[44] Alisha Graefe, "American Hatred," 71.

Fig. 1 Vicki Weaver at Ruby Ridge, 1992

The last surveillance photograph taken of Vicki Weaver in the Ruby Ridge standoff before she was killed by an FBI sniper. August 22, 1992. Court Files, U.S. v Weaver in Walter "Ruby Ridge" Regan (2002). As a work of the U.S. federal government, this image is in the public domain.

Prophet of an Imagined Community:
The Case of Pete Peters

For over 30 years until his death in 2011, Pete Peters styled himself as a modern circuit riding preacher and prophet of the American frontier, "dedicated to preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to revealing to the Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, and kindred peoples of the world their true Biblical identity."[45] The sermons and literature distributed by Peters' outreach ministry, Scriptures for America (SFA), draw upon the network of idiosyncratic biblical hermeneutics that comprise Identity theology, with Peters occupying a special status as prophet-evangelist. At the core of his doctrine is a twofold palingenetic myth that invites the creation of a racialized theocracy in the United States: (1) White people are the biblically prescribed chosen people, and (2) America is the biblically prescribed promised land. The primary source materials analyzed in this chapter include the web pages, video sermons, newsletters, and pamphlets published and archived by SFA. Due to the decentralized nature of the Christian Identity movement, Peters may not be taken as a "typical" Identity leader; in studying Peters and Scriptures for America Worldwide, I do not aim to summarize the core beliefs or practices of Christian Identity. Rather, I am interested in the strategies used by Peters to evangelize the core myth of his White nationalist theology, especially regarding the impact of emerging information technology on the formation of community identity.

Evangelism from the radio ranch

On digital copies of his sermons, a two-minute introductory video shows Peters, in full cowboy getup, riding atop a black horse through an idyllic Rocky Mountain cattle ranch and crossing a snowy river to a white country church. Up-close footage shows him dismounting the horse and removing a Bible from the saddlebag before taking off his hat and entering the building. There is a flash of fire in a dark room, and a red-hot brand

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[45] "About," Scriptures for America Website, 2019.

shaped like a cross illuminates the screen.[46] A deep, smooth voice narrates the sequence with a country drawl:

> In the West, there are still a few good men left. Men of god, like the circuit-riding preachers of old. Proclaiming truth like the holy prophets of old. Strong and bold. You're about to hear politically incorrect but biblically correct truth from circuit riding preacher Peter Peters, whose home base is a radio ranch nestled in the Laramie River Valley near Laramie, Wyoming. The radio ranch is a working cattle and horse ranch where circuit riding preacher Peter Peters broadcasts nightly worldwide on the Scriptures for America Worldwide broadcasting network, reaching the world through satellite radio, television, shortwave, and the world wide web. Riding for the brand, he preaches for the Man: Jesus Christ, the Son of God. His circuit not only includes a radio ranch outreach in Wyoming, but also the LaPorte Church of Christ located at the base of the colorful Colorado Rocky Mountains in LaPorte, Colorado, where he has preached for over 30 years. The messages preached there by Dr. Peters on Sunday morning are streamed live on the Internet and are archived at the ministry website, scripturesforamerica.org. Doctor Peters' politically incorrect but biblically correct sermons are available on CD and DVD. Many in America, Canada, and all over the world are on the free CD and DVD ministry. Our address will be given at the end of this broadcast. And now, here is doctor and pastor Peter John Peters with the word of God.[47]

Contrary to what one might expect from the outreach ministry of a rural Colorado church with fewer than 100 local parishioners, the video is well-produced and stylish for its time. The purpose is to establish Pete Peters as the modern circuit riding preacher-prophet who, by utilizing a range of technological media, is able to travel from the Wild West straight to your home.

Several core values are established here as well, including the existence of a mythic form of masculinity that is fading, an identification of the American West as the final frontier, as well as the awareness of a fundamental disagreement between the truth narrative presented by SFA and that of the state. More implicit than these is the claim to credibility Peters makes by situating SFA within the longstanding tradition of high-tech

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[46] Possibly an intentional reference to the symbolic practice of cross burning associated with the KKK.

[47] Transcribed from multiple videos on "Scriptures for America" YouTube Channel.

Protestant evangelism. Lastly, it is useful to consider what does *not* appear in this video, i.e., any explicit mention of the virulent antisemitism and racism that characterize Peters' message.

The video sermons which follow, filmed Sunday mornings at the pulpit of the LaPorte Church of Christ, in addition to his radio sermons, are relatively long (often an hour or so), dense with Bible citations and peppered with rhetorical questions and exhortations that Peters deploys "as dividing lines: one either recognizes the code or one does not."[48] This is not esotericism in a mystic or encrypted sense; Peters is explicit and evangelistic regarding the more contentious aspects of his ministry. Rather, the code is more closely related to affect. Delivered with a knowing smile, wordplay often functions as a type of proof for the code, confirming what one suspected or knew all along. Something like "JerUSAlem" (one of Peters' favorites) thus constitutes evidence for SFA's central claim that America is the biblically prophesied promised land. Common invocations by Peters such as "Be honest," and "Think about it," appeal to the audience's base desire of moral and intellectual superiority. If one goes along with Peters' message, there is a sense of collective insider knowledge gained.

Scripturesforamerica.org

In a newspaper interview dated January 23, 1996, Rabbi Abraham Cooper of the Simon Wiesenthal Center identifies Scriptures for America as one of the two "most vehemently racist and anti-Semitic hate groups" on the Internet.[49] Reporting on the contents of the 1996 website, the article specifies the following:

> The group presents as 'facts' on the Internet that the IQ of American 'Negroes' is from 15 to 20 points below those of American whites and that the Black race is 200,000 years behind whites in skull and brain development. Incredibly, it also claims that apartheid in South Africa benefited Blacks.

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[48] Ann Burlein, *Lift High the Cross: Where White Supremacy and the Christian Right Converge,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 68.

[49] The other website identified by Cooper was the National Alliance, a White supremacist organization founded and run by William Luther Pierce from the 1970s until his death in 2004.

> SFA also republishes, via Internet, Willie Carto's anti-Semitic newspaper *Spotlight.* The paper claims the Holocaust never happened and that millions of Jews did not die in Nazi concentration camps. It also promotes Carto's Liberty Lobby's attacks on the Jewish Anti-Defamation-League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith.[50]

An earlier article (May 1995) reporting on Peters' outreach does not mention the website, stating, "'Pastor' Pete Peters of the LaPorte Church of Christ in Colorado has preached [the Christian Identity] message for nearly 20 years, popularizing it through an audiotape ministry called 'Scriptures for America,' a cable television program and shortwave radio."[51] In lieu of more definitive evidence, this leads me to estimate that Scriptures for America went online in the second half of 1995. This is precisely the media moment when access to the Internet accelerated exponentially, meaning that Peters was among the first to take advantage of this new technology that, by the early 2000s, came to dominate society.[52]

Internet Archive's WayBack Machine hosts captures from SFA web pages each year since 1997.[53] Using this tool in conference with SFA newsletter archives (which provided URLs to now-defunct SFA sites), I was able to trace the early trajectory of SFA online:

> www.logoplex.com/resources/sfa (1997)
>
> www.identity.org (1998)
>
> www.christianidentity.org (1999),
>
> www.scripturesforamerica.org (2000-present)

It is significant that Peters would change the URL from christianidentity.org to scripturesforamerica.org in 2000, as this is the time when the popularity of Identity began to decline. In an attempt to stay relevant, harnessing the power of whatever media attention Peters had gained for SFA, Peters tried to dissociate himself from the Identity label. This was unsuccessful, however, which will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

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[50] Greg Williams, "Hate Groups using the Internet to Spread their Racist Message," *Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001),* Jan 23, 1996.

[51] Laurie Goodstein, "'Agents of God' Practice a Christianity Few Would Recognize," *The Washington Post (1974-Current File),* May 20, 1995.

[52] See Ray Kurzweil's graphs in Chapter 3.

[53] WayBack Machine from Internet Archive, www.archive.org.

An example from a 1999 newsletter advertising the website demonstrates the excitement surrounding the novelty of early Internet use:

Internet Web Site: www.christianidentity.org

The best place to find the latest, most-accurate information concerning the *Scriptures for America* ministry is our Internet web site at **www.christianidentity.org** . Posted on the site are the latest schedule of upcoming conferences, the shortwave broadcast schedule, the ministry mailing address, telephone, and fax numbers, and even a complete tape and literature catalogue! Can't pick up the daily shortwave broadcasts in the morning or the evening because of your schedule or poor shortwave reception? You can find the broadcasts as audio files on our web site, and they're available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week!

If you don't have a computer or an Internet account, you probably have a friend, neighbour, or associate who does. Also, most public libraries have computers connected to the Internet which patrons may use free of charge.

Fig. 2 www.christianidentity.org

"If you don't have a computer or an Internet account, you probably have a friend, neighbor, or associate who does." This image was taken from an archived 1999 SFA newsletter.

Peters was sure to evangelize the maximum accessibility of his doctrine at every opportunity while, at the same time, advertising his own technological ability:

> While it is rumored that Pastor Peters is just a hick cowboy and wannabe preacher who knows nothing about computers, the truth is, that I've been in the computer programming and reprogramming business for over twenty-five years, and I know as much about the business as I do about driving cattle.[54]

Indeed, Peters' ability to keep up with the times while retaining the spirit of the "prophets of old" was a major draw for his audience.

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[54] Peter J. Peters, "The Computer Reprogramming Race & Bible Prophecy," Newsletter Volume 1999, No. 2.

Using the WayBack Machine, I traced the development of the SFA logo over time as one accessible indicator of change:

Fig. 3 SFA logo 1997-2000

Earliest available banner image used at logoplex.com/resources/sfa (1997-1998), identity.org (1998-1999), christianidentity.org (1999-2000), scripturesforamerica.org (2000)

Fig. 4 SFA logo 2000-2003

SFA banner graphic (the flag inside of America waves) from October 2000 until September 2003

Fig. 5 SFA logo 2003-2008

SFA banner image from September 2003 to 2008

Fig. 6 SFA logo 2008-present

In 2008, the 2003 image was turned into a smaller graphic (the earth spins in the background) and the text distortion/shading was cleaned up

The above image appears to be the final logo for SFA. One capture from 2010 reveals a bare page with a message explaining that "constant cyberattacks" had caused the site to be taken down for major changes. When the site reappeared in 2011, a few months before Peters died, the design was significantly updated for the final time. Although new material is still added to the newsletter, audio, and video archives semi-regularly in 2019, the site now looks and feels antique. On the "About" page, the Pete Peters biography section remains untouched except for a change to the past tense and a note at the bottom that reads: "Know that Scriptures for America Ministry, and all of its outreaches, continue on in the spirit that Pastor Peters intended for them to. The Staff at SFA is still

guided by our Pastor's teachings, vision, direction and passion for Jesus Christ, His Gospel, and His Way." One cannot find the name of the new pastor nor any other church leadership anywhere on the website.

Other archival explorations reveal more about the nature of Peters' message. Using archived webpages and text analysis software, I created and visualized a corpus of text from Peters' tape catalog:

Fig. 7 SFA tape catalog word cloud

255 most frequently used words in the SFA tape catalog represented as a word cloud, with most frequently used words appearing larger. Corpus only includes titles and descriptions of nearly 1000 taped sermons by Peters, listed in the last available catalog (2007) and located using the WayBack Machine. Created using the Cirrus tool on the Voyant digital humanities text analysis software: https://voyant-tools.org.

The body of text includes the titles and descriptions for every taped sermon delivered by Peters.[55] The most frequently used words in the corpus, appearing as the largest in the word cloud, include many one might expect from a more mainstream Christian group: bible (280), message (177), god (177), america (129), kingdom (129), and love (115). A closer look might raise a few eyebrows—enemies (78), war (43), jew(ish) (25), snake (22), battle (18), warfare (17), white (14), homosexuality (12). None of these are particularly unusual words to find in an American Protestant sermon, but gain meaning when viewed in the context of the Christian Identity mythos.

One problem with the tape catalog corpus is that the descriptions for each tape vary in length and complexity. Some only include a subject line, while others are an entire paragraph. Still, this is the best data available without transcribing the audio sermons themselves. Another issue is that cryptic language is occasionally used by Peters in written form despite the flippant approach that typically characterizes his verbal style, meaning that it is difficult to analyze the actual content of the text without first coding all of the language. One example of this problem is the cryptic "they" Peters uses to refer to Jews. In the screenshot below, I have highlighted every use of "they" in a multi-part series:

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[55] The catalog included guest appearances and interviews. These were not included in the corpus.

Fig. 8 Use of cryptic "they" in SFA tape catalog

An example of cryptic language used by Peters to refer to Jews found in a screen capture
from the first available tape catalog on www.scripturesforamerica.org (2000), located
using the WayBack Machine.

"They" is a word that the software recognizes as a pronoun, and thus non-word, though
an informed reader or listener will understand it to be highly meaningful. The benefit of
using a text analysis tool is that one is able to rapidly visualize results from a high
number of words. The drawback is found in nuances and complexities of language like
this. The tools available for digital humanities studies are increasingly accessible, but my
own practical knowledge of these tools is still intermediate. Further, a greater base of
linguistic expertise is required for text analysis on this level.

Sincerely stompin' snakes

He doesn't look a thing like Jesus
But he talks like a gentleman
Like you imagined when you were young

— "When You Were Young" by The Killers

The nation is born as a collective subject, Etienne Balibar argues, "through integrating the inculcation of political values into affects of love, hate, and representations of the self."[56] Focusing on these affects allow us to understand the strategies used by Peters to construct a collective identity for his audience. Balibar's third point, the representations of the self, is particularly useful here. For Peters, the representative self is an idealized image of a White, Christian, American man. This ideal self, called the Christian Soldier, has "eyes full of Christian compassion" and a "Christian heart made soft and kind by Jesus."[57] He wears cowboy boots, bears arms, reads the Bible, and knows his rights. He is clean-cut and masculine. He looks a lot like Peters himself, in fact, down to the mustache. The Christian Soldier, represented in cartoon form and published by SFA, is a Western gentleman who is also "patriotic and believes that the Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, Scandinavian, and kindred people are the Israel People of Scriptures and not the Jews of today." There is another cartoon that serves as an inverse to the Soldier. Curiously, the inverse image provided by SFA is not the Soldier's enemy. Instead, the inverse is a cartoon showing how the enemy is expected to view the Soldier.

The Christian Villain is the Christian Soldier "as described and depicted by Jewish organizations in their hate group reports, and in the Jewish-controlled media. This representation [sic] frequently dispersed to various law enforcement agencies and major TV networks."[58] The Villain is, in essence, a Nazi. There are a few deviations particular

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[56] Etienne Balibar, *Race, Nation, and Class: Ambiguous Identities*, (New York: Verso Books, 1991), 94.
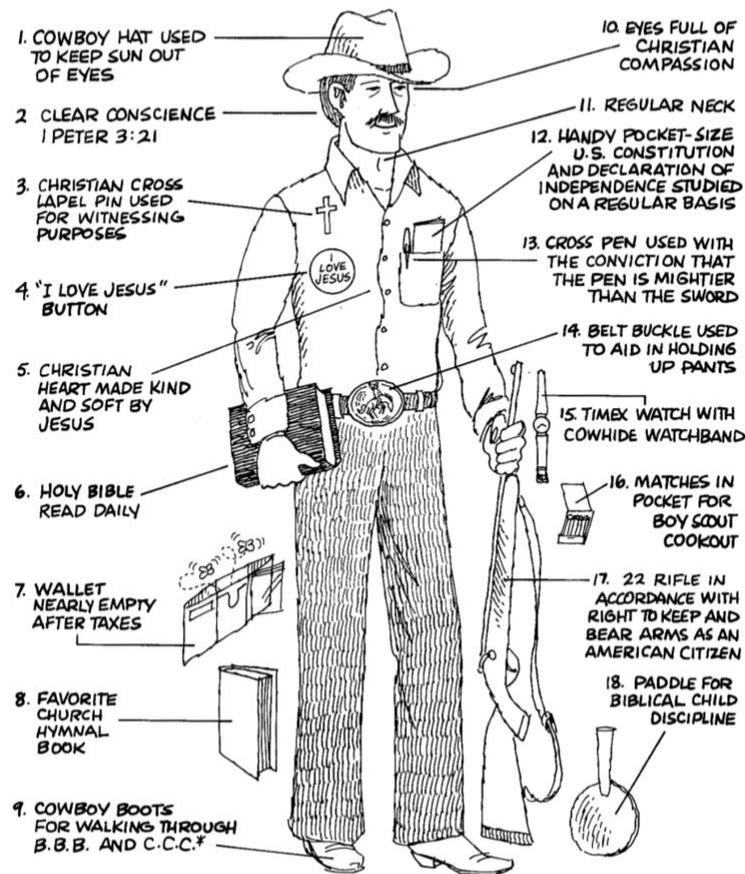[57] See Christian Soldier image.
[58] See Christian Villain image.

to America (e.g., the Villain carries matches "for Klu Klux Klan crossburning" and engages in "red-neckin' and beer-drinkin'" activities). See below and the following page:

CHRISTIAN SOLDIER

ACCURATE REPRESENTATION OF CHRISTIAN WHO IS PATRIOTIC AND BELIEVES THAT THE ANGLO-SAXON, GERMAN-IC, SCANDANAVIAN & KINDRED PEOPLE ARE THE ISRAEL PEOPLE OF SCRIPTURE AND NOT THE JEWS OF TODAY.

1. COWBOY HAT USED TO KEEP SUN OUT OF EYES

2. CLEAR CONSCIENCE I PETER 3:21

3. CHRISTIAN CROSS LAPEL PIN USED FOR WITNESSING PURPOSES

4. "I LOVE JESUS" BUTTON

5. CHRISTIAN HEART MADE KIND AND SOFT BY JESUS

6. HOLY BIBLE READ DAILY

7. WALLET NEARLY EMPTY AFTER TAXES

8. FAVORITE CHURCH HYMNAL BOOK

9. COWBOY BOOTS FOR WALKING THROUGH B.B.B. AND C.C.C.*

10. EYES FULL OF CHRISTIAN COMPASSION

11. REGULAR NECK

12. HANDY POCKET-SIZE U.S. CONSTITUTION AND DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE STUDIED ON A REGULAR BASIS

13. CROSS PEN USED WITH THE CONVICTION THAT THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

14. BELT BUCKLE USED TO AID IN HOLDING UP PANTS

15. TIMEX WATCH WITH COWHIDE WATCHBAND

16. MATCHES IN POCKET FOR BOY SCOUT COOKOUT

17. 22 RIFLE IN ACCORDANCE WITH RIGHT TO KEEP AND BEAR ARMS AS AN AMERICAN CITIZEN

18. PADDLE FOR BIBLICAL CHILD DISCIPLINE

I LOVE JESUS

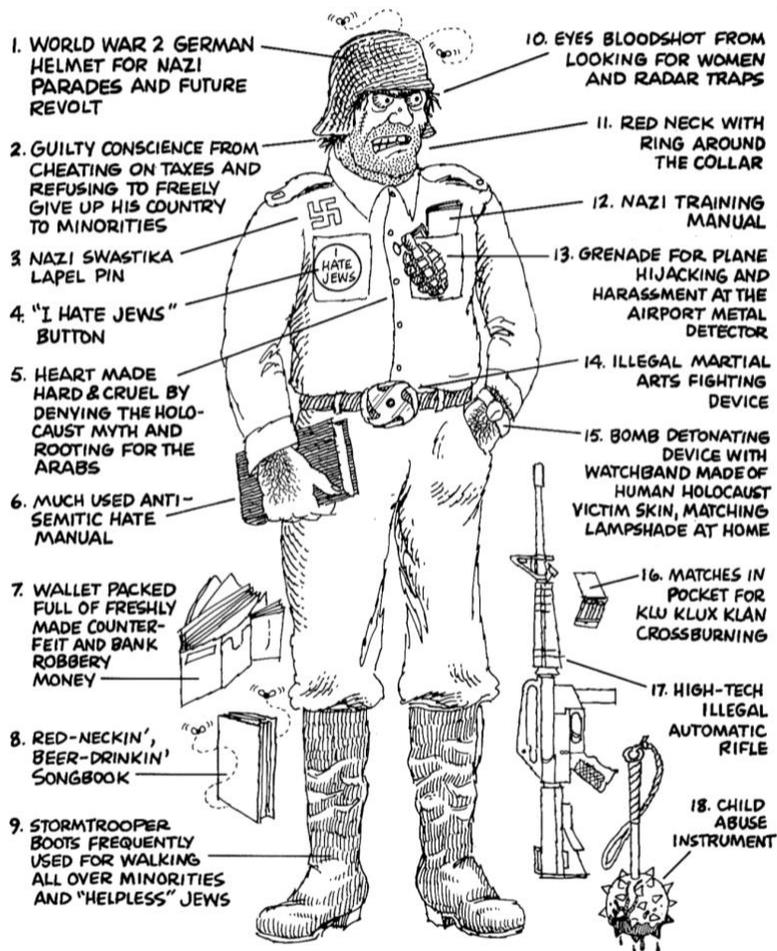*(BIBLE BAPTIST BU-- AND CHURCH OF CHRIST CRA-)

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Fig. 9 Christian Soldier

From "A Christian guide to mass-media mythology" (1988), illustrated by Paul Bunch, featuring the cartoon ideas of Sheldon Emry, Pete Peters, and Ben Williams. Distributed by Scriptures for America Worldwide.

Fig. 10 Christian Villain

From "A Christian guide to mass-media mythology" (1988)

Of course, both the Soldier and the Villain are inventions of Peters that reflect his own self-perception. In the process of being drawn, published, and distributed, however, these images become something beyond the individual. Labelling the image "Christian Soldier" universalizes the self within Christianity, allowing for the construction of a

collective identity built around this self. He (the Soldier and Peters) becomes someone for Christians to emulate—a cowboy Jesus with computer skills to boot.

Fig. 11 Sincerely Stompin' Snakes,
Pastor Peter J. Peters

The editorial section of SFA newsletters ("From the Editor's Pen"), written by Peters, is typically closed with this image and signature.

Interestingly, non-Identity adherents who interacted with Peters and his congregation agreed with his self-image on occasion. In a 1999 article from the *Charleston Gazette*, a camp administrator recalled the group as "delightful" and "cordial" to camp staff. When presented with the disturbing doctrine SFA evangelized, the administrator said, "I had no reason to even think that. I was present on the grounds when they were here last year and had no reason to think that."[59] The author of the article specified that "Peters, who espouses death for homosexuals and separatism for all races, is not considered one of the more radical of Christian Identity leaders. [Joe Roy, the head of the Intelligence Report at SPLC] said his reputation is 'milquetoasty' when compared to others."[60] Notwithstanding, Peters' version of Identity was relatively successful. It would appear that the 'milquetoasty' Christian Soldier as an idea-meme was better suited for its audience than the alternatives. The Christian Villain, neo-Nazi, Klansman, or suicide bomber appeal to their own audiences. Other representations of the White self, mutating with greater speed in the Internet Age, appeal to White nationalists today.

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[59] Tom Searls, "White Supremacists Coming to Kanawha," *The Charleston Gazette,* April 22, 1999.
[60] Ibid.

Concerning his homophobic tract, "Death Penalty for Homosexuals is Prescribed in the Bible," Peters writes:

> That booklet has been shown on the serpent's national TV and it's [sic] author has been cussed and discussed as a radical, the world's most dangerous cult leader, an extremist, a terrorist, etc., on everything from Nightline, CNN Live, Inside Edition, A & E Channel, etc... Newsweek Magazine portrayed him as the worlds [sic] most dangerous cult leader. The A & E Channel had commentator, Bill Moyer, do a program called, "The New Faces of Terrorism", and a major portion was devoted to portraying Pastor Peters as a terrorist. Why? They are terrorized that people might dare think outside the box. Now, mind you, this preacher did not instruct anyone or even intimidate [sic] that anyone should execute a homosexual. He only introduced them to a truth – i.e., that the death penalty for homosexuals is prescribed in the Bible. And isn't it? *"If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them."* Leviticus 20:13.[61][62]

Reminiscent of the culture of "edginess" associated with boys and young men on the Internet in the twenty-first century, Peters appears incapable of admitting to the ideological violence of his actions. In the space of a single paragraph he advocates for the execution of an entire minority group while poising himself as the victim. Ann Burlein, author of *Lift High the Cross: Where White Supremacy and the Christian Right Converge,* argues that the affect of love used by Peters is characterized by heteropatriarchal relations between men and women. Though it seems counterintuitive, Peters' homophobia can also be understood as a function of this affective love.

For Burlein, this is the underlying discourse upon which the claim to Christian White nationalism is established. This strategy, she argues, is rooted in the Victorian era myth that holds that gender is a binary opposition inherently tied to anatomical sex. Biological essentialism, which has historically been used to force women into subservient

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[61] Peter J. Peters, "Thinking Outside the Box," Scriptures for America Newsletter, Volume 2003, No. 6.

[62] Interestingly, the Scriptures for America newsletter this article appeared in is the first to bear the name "The Dragon Slayer Newsletter," complete with a large image of a Christian knight stabbing a dragon and a river of blood flowing from its body on the front. It is not difficult to guess who the dragon represents.

positions to men and to erase queer identities, has been criticized by feminists, scholars of women's studies, queer theorists, and activists involved with the intersexual movement. Tying gender to sex allows Peters

> …to slide invisibly, and hence with the illusion of inevitability and necessity, from (1) heterosexuality as the only natural sexual order to (2) patriarchal gender relations as the only possible social order (heterosexual marriage clarifies paternity and thus secures male inheritance rights) to (3) white theocracy as the only possible governmental order of the nation.[63]

Indeed, Whiteness is maintained covertly through patriarchal gender relations.[64] In the ongoing construction of Whiteness, anyone who is unable (or unwilling) to participate in the heteronormative, nuclear family structure is excluded from the community and the protection it offers.

At other times, Peters stretches his concept of Whiteness to include those with whom he does not typically associate. In a two-part video sermon from 1987, Peters deals explicitly with the question of identity and how it relates to Identity. Detailing his personal testimony, he describes attending college in Colorado and interacting with hippies for the first time. Expressing initial disgust with what he saw, the point he arrives at is that hippies were asking critical questions about identity, and thus were responsible for opening his eyes to the "Identity truth":

> Who are we? What are we doing here? Both questions I realize now were not coming from some dirty long-haired people, but they were coming from my countrymen who was [sic] suffering, hurting inside, lacking the knowledge; they were suffering from what I am entitling in this message Our Identity Crisis. And until we solve that identity crisis, we'll never have an answer to anything else. Those hippies asked a question that I wasn't asking, but by God's grace, and through his providence, and don't ask me why, he allowed this cowboy to find

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[63] Ann Burlein, *Lift High the Cross,* 65.

[64] Burlein also observe this technique in organizations which do not claim explicit White supremacy, namely, Focus on the Family. In *Lift High The Cross*, she shows how this well-known conservative parachurch organization upholds White supremacy through its protection of "the God-ordained institution of the family" (from FOTF's mission statement).

> the answer: we, the Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, Scandinavian, and kindred people are the Israel people of Scripture, that's who we are![65]

Though insistent on reasserting himself as a cowboy in relation to the hippies, he softens toward them as he understands them to be (presumably) White. Etzioni observes that "communities cannot exist without a web of affect-laden relations among a group of individuals."[66] Sympathy for the shared "identity crisis" of White modern people is part of the Identity web that stretches, in Peters' mind, from the cowboy to the hippie.

Messianic nationalism

Benedict Anderson writes that even the "most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet."[67] Even a nation so large as America, which encompasses nearly four million square miles and well over 300 million human beings, is imagined as limited. There are existing, internationally recognized, national boundaries that define physical and social space. Anderson points out that every successful revolution since World War II has defined itself in nationalist terms, which has allowed these movements to ground themselves "firmly in a territorial and social space inherited from the pre-revolutionary past."[68] It is effective, he claims, for revolutionary nationalist movements to operate within a bounded and familiar physical and emotional space. What can be said, then, of a community imagined to be "wholly Christian" by which its adherents mean "wholly White"?

Before we can address that question, we must problematize Anderson's theory. He describes one paradox of nationalism as the formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept (one 'has' a nationality as one 'has' a gender) versus the undeniable particularity of nationalisms; in other words, how can it be that the universal

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[65] Peter J. Peters, transcribed from "My Experience With Jewish Power: Part 1," 1988.

[66] Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule*, (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 127.

[67] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* (New York: Verso Books, 1983).

[68] Ibid.

category of nationalism exists, yet each nationalism is *sui generis*? This framework fails to understand the historical and structural differences among communities imagined by those in power versus those imagined by the oppressed, colonized, or subaltern. Indian political scientist Partha Chatterjee reminds us that the two greatest wars of the twentieth century were brought about by "Europe's failure to manage its own ethnic nationalisms," criticizing Anderson's universalizing theory of nationalism that begins in Europe and ends with Asia and Africa constructing their imagined communities based on the modular forms of nationalisms available in Europe.[69] A related feature of the "paradox" Anderson describes is its potential to engender our understanding of nationalisms as *sui generis*, affording them certain protection from scholarly inquiry.

Within the academic study of religion, this type of thinking invokes a troubling memory. In the 1960s, Mircea Eliade made a case for religion as a discipline being unique and irreducible to other disciplines (e.g., history and sociology) because it had methods by which it explained itself; this development, which is "credited with having made the study of religion possible in North America in the first place," is rooted in Eliade's discourse of religion itself as *sui generis*.[70] Russell McCutcheon addresses how religion has been understood and represented as sociopolitically autonomous since Eliade in his 1997 book, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*:

> …not only do these assorted claims arise from within, and assist in maintaining, this specific discourse on religion but the smooth functioning of the discourse has material and sociopolitical—even geopolitical—implications concerning such issues as individual expertise, social power, and politico-economic privilege. Simply put, the discourse on *sui generis* religion deemphasizes difference, history, and sociopolitical context in favor of abstract essences and homogeneity.[71]

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[69] Partha Chatterjee, "Whose Imagined Community?" in *Mapping the Nation,* ed. Gopal Balakrishnan, (New York: Verso Books, 2012), 216.

[70] Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*, (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1997), 77.

[71] Ibid.

The relationship of this discourse to myth is particularly troublesome, as it provides an opportunity for those who would use mythic accounts of origins or end-times to justify real and present-day distribution of power and privilege. Bruce Lincoln observes that "myth has been used more often and more effectively by those who seek to mystify and preserve exploitative patterns of social relations than it has by those who would reform or radically restructure such relations."[72] Lincoln, who took his PhD in History of Religions from the University of Chicago in 1976 with Eliade as his doctoral advisor, diverges significantly from his mentor by forefronting in his work religion as a discourse "upon which groups — whether dominant or marginal — routinely draw to normalize their various claims to authority."[73] This approach enables Lincoln to move past the old claim of *sui generis* religion and understand religious phenomena as human phenomena that can be analyzed utilizing the same rigorous critical practice used by historians.[74]

Returning to the nation, Anderson offers that it would "make things easier if one treated [nationalism] as if it belonged with 'kinship' and 'religion', rather than with 'liberalism' or 'fascism'."[75] Grouping nationalism and religion into an anthropological category that excludes political movements is contentious, but compelling in the context of Scriptures for America and Christian Identity. The community Peters imagines is a sacred nation imprisoned within the nation-state, i.e., "true" Christians living under the oppression of the United States government, which is controlled by the ZOG. Although "Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, and kindred peoples of the world" are invited to realize their "true Biblical identity" as the chosen race of God, Peters insists (at times) that biblical eschatology refers specifically to the people and geography of the United States. This insistence on forefronting America and Americans is in apparent conflict with the larger project of constructing Whiteness.

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[72] Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 49.

[73] Russell T. McCutcheon, *Studying Religion: An Introduction,* (Oakville, US: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2007), 153.

[74] Randall Studstill, "Eliade, Phenomenology, and the Sacred," *Religious Studies* 36, no. 2 (2000), 180.

[75] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 49.

This is not, however, a problem for nationalism. What Burlein calls "the emptiness of the Nation Thing" (borrowing from Slavoj Žižek's discussion of community formation as "a shared relationship toward a Thing, toward Enjoyment incarnated") refers to the existence of contradictions within the religious right's narrative.[76][77] Rather than discredit and deteriorate the nation-concept, the "emptiness" is crucial to its formation. The desire to "return" to some protective time and space for White people is constituted through the absence of meaning, legitimacy, and even coherence in the present. Contradictions constitute, through displacement, desire.

In the words of Pete Peters, "When someone asks if you take the Bible literally or figuratively, you have been asked either a trick question or a stupid question, and most likely the person on the other end of the question is either stupid or a snake. So don't answer it."[78]

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[76] Ann Burlein, *Lift High the Cross,* 86.
[77] Slavoj Žižek, "Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead," in *Dimensions of Radical Democracy,* ed. Chantal Mouffe, (New York: Verso Books, 1992), 200.
[78] Peter J. Peters, "Snakes," Scriptures for America Newsletter, Volume 2003, No. 4.

The Year 2000: The Millennial Moment

The archaeological and anthropological record is clear that we were technologists all the way back to the beginning. So the idea that science and technology is something new, something unusual, something—we could even find books that say—not really very human, is completely backwards. Technology is, if anything, the most characteristically human activity.

— Carl Sagan (transcribed from lecture, 1994)

At the end of the twentieth century, as the perceived Y2K "crisis" was causing concern around the world, Pete Peters was again ahead of the curve. In a newsletter article titled "Y2K Millennium Bug: The Latest Fear Fad," published on identity.org in early 1998, Peters took a stance against Y2K. As an introduction to the topic, he wrote:

> *"I sought the Lord and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears,"* Psalm 34:4. David knew there were times as a warrior he needed delivered [sic] not only from battle, enemies, plagues, etc., but from FEARS. The Christian soldier today, likewise, needs delivered [sic] from fears. Fears created and sent by his enemy and promoted by the Judeo-Christian doom and gloom theologians and marketed by the Kosher-Conservative gurus and fear marketers. The latest is **Y2K**, a.k.a. **The Millennium Bug**.
>
> What is Y2K? They tell us it is the world wide computer problem that allegedly looms on the horizon and when the clock strikes midnight January 1, 2000, the world will be struck with chaos, paralysis, destruction, and catastrophes. Why? Because of computer programs that have two digits instead of four digits will read the year 2000 as 1900. However, few are telling you what it really is! The latest fear fad.[79]

Peters specifies at the end of this article that he does not oppose preparation and survival, pointing to a 1986 survival tract published by SFA titled *You Have Been Warned.* The

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[79] Peter J. Peters, "Y2K Millennium Bug: The Latest Fear Fad," Scriptures for America Newsletter, Volume 1998, No. 3.

issue he finds with Y2K—in addition to what he claims to be comparably false threats of nuclear holocaust, global warming, economic collapse, and AIDS—is in giving into fearmongering:

> Here is a point to Judeo-Christian fear fad promoters are not telling you [sic]. We have been called to be more than survivors. We have been called to be overcomers and to wage spiritual battle against our enemies (Ephesians 6:10-19). The weapons of our warfare are powerful for the destruction of fortresses (II Corinthians 10:4), but we seem to behave as defeated, frightened, fearful people who can only wait for the return of Christ. The truth is we could all pray against our enemies. After all, Jesus came to save us from our enemies (Luke 1:71).[80]

Interestingly, and diverging from other Identity adherents, Peters does not support the growing 1990s trend of survival expos. According to Peters, this is because "survival expos are, in reality, patriot flea markets where Kosher Conservative speakers (who never point out the real enemies of Christianity and our country) scare the heaven's counterpart out of the audience."[81]

By 1999, Peters had refined his online diatribe against "Judeo-Christian fear fad promoters" into a teaching moment in a print sermon called "The Computer Reprogramming Race & Bible Prophecy." The alarmist subline ("WARNING! Y2K CURSE! MILLENNIUM MELTDOWN! THE EVE OF DESTRUCTION! THE YEAR-2000 BOMB!") is characteristic of Peters' tongue-in-cheek style, but the actual content of the sermon is a remarkably sober analogy drawn between the computer and the human mind. Fear is a "virus" perpetrated by the wicked who, despite knowing "their ultimate destiny," also know "that they can retain possession of the modern-day promised land for a little while longer, if only they can make us believe it is we who are on the eve of destruction, rather than they."[82] In this way, Peters reconfigures the conspiratorial nature of his doctrine into a message of hope—for "us," not "them."

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[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Peter J. Peters, "The Computer Reprogramming Race & Bible Prophecy," Scriptures for America Newsletter, Volume 1999, No. 2.

"NOT 'Identity'"

In 1999, the FBI compiled a strategic assessment of the potential for domestic terrorism undertaken in anticipation of the new millennium. Project Megiddo analyzed "those who believe the year 2000 will usher in the end of the world and who are willing to perpetrate acts of violence to bring that end about."[83][84] The document described a variety of right-wing groups as potential threats, including "survivalists, militias, the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, Christian Identity churches, the AN and skinheads," identifying Christian Identity as "*the most unifying theology* [emphasis added] for a number of these diverse groups and one widely adhered by white supremacists."[85] Ten years earlier, on April 28, 1989, a previous FBI document labeled "Christian Identity Movement" was first distributed and filed under "Right-Wing Terrorism Matters." This document introduced Christian Identity as "a religious doctrine that is a major factor within the ultra right movement in the United States today," and "an ideology that combines religious concepts with elements of racism."[86]

The decade of American history bracketed by these two documents, 1989-1999, is taken in the present study to be the peak of the Identity movement. By 2000, public interest in CI was in sharp decline. Corroborating this claim, Peters' shift from using the domain christianidentity.org in 1999 to scripturesforamerica.org in 2000 is one of the most crucial findings from my Internet archival investigation into SFA. As the mouthpiece of the movement, it is highly significant that Peters would shy away from claiming the Identity title at this time. The URL change was not incidental; a lengthy article called "NOT 'Identity'" accompanied the change (appearing on the SFA homepage from 2000 to 2007), which dissociated SFA from Identity. "Just as the meaning of the words *imp* and *gay* have changed from something innocuous to something

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[83] "Project Megiddo," Federal Bureau of Investigation, CESNUR, 1999.
[84] Project Megiddo was named for "the hill of Megiddo", a location in northern Israel known to be the site of many ancient battles. As cities were built and destroyed in the wake of ongoing war, a hill was formed on the refuse; this site, also known as Armageddon, is designated as the apocalyptic setting of God's final battle against evil in the Book of Revelation.
[85] "Project Megiddo," FBI.
[86] "Christian Identity Movement," FBI.

evil," Peters writes, "so also the meaning of the word Identity has changed from benign to evil."[87] [88] While dissociating from the label was a strategic political move, Peters did not dissociate himself or his church from the actual beliefs of Identity in any way. In another section, he goes on to say:

> Whether the doctrine or belief labeled ***Identity*** [emphasis in original] is true or false, there is one thing which it definitely is not: the ***Identity*** belief is not a crime. It is not a crime for either the Jew or the Christian to believe in ***Identity***, any more than it is a crime for the Jew or the Christian to believe in creationism or evolution. The ***Identity*** belief does not infringe upon anyone's life, liberty, or property. No man who chooses to believe the doctrine labeled ***Identity*** is a criminal for doing so. In like manner, believing that Jesus is the Christ does not make one a criminal, either. However, history records that, through the propaganda efforts of the early Jews,

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[87] Peter J. Peters, "Words Change in Meaning" from "NOT 'Identity,'" Online article, 2000.

[88] Here is the context for Peters' statement that "imp" and "gay" are words that have changed in meaning from "benign from evil":

> Etymology is the study of the history and development of words; it is concerned with origins of words and the way the meanings of words have changed through the years. The fact is that words *do* change in meaning, and sometimes radically so. It is interesting to see how the meaning of a word can change from something good to something bad.
>
> For example, the English word "imp" once meant "a young shoot of a plant." Later, the word came to mean "child." Prayers made years ago for the Prince of Wales referred to him as "that most angelic imp." However, today, the word *imp* means "an evil creature."
>
> Another example of an English word which has changed in meaning from good to evil is the word "gay." Not many years ago, the English word *gay* was an adjective which meant *happily excited, merry, lively.* Today, the predominant use of the word is as a noun, meaning *homosexual.* A few years ago, it would have been a compliment to say that Pastor Peters is a gay man and that the church he pastors is a "gay" church. Today, to say such would be libelous and slanderous--a complete lie. Today, it would be defamation of a Christian's character for the media to accuse him of being "gay," or to portray him as such.

those who believed that Jesus is the Christ became criminals in the eyes of many of their countrymen.[89]

This statement is, from one angle, the defensive rambling of a man who had been shaken by a decade of FBI observance, overexposure on national media, and over 30 years of conspiratorial thinking. From another, it is a propagandist technique that seeks to accomplish multiple ideological goals. One of these goals is to dissociate the Identity *belief* from its violent, material consequences; Peters attempts to do this while, at the same time, pulling away from associating with the term Identity, demonstrating a lack of faith in the possibility that Identity can be revived. Another propagandist goal of the "NOT 'Identity'" article is to equate the near-universal Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ with the extreme minority belief in the racialized Identity perspective, thereby gaining traction with the larger Christian community.

Mutual decline

Though not conclusive on its own, another compelling indicator of SFA's decline is the number of times "Scriptures for America" was mentioned in books over the course of time, beginning at the time of SFA's formation in the early 1980s:
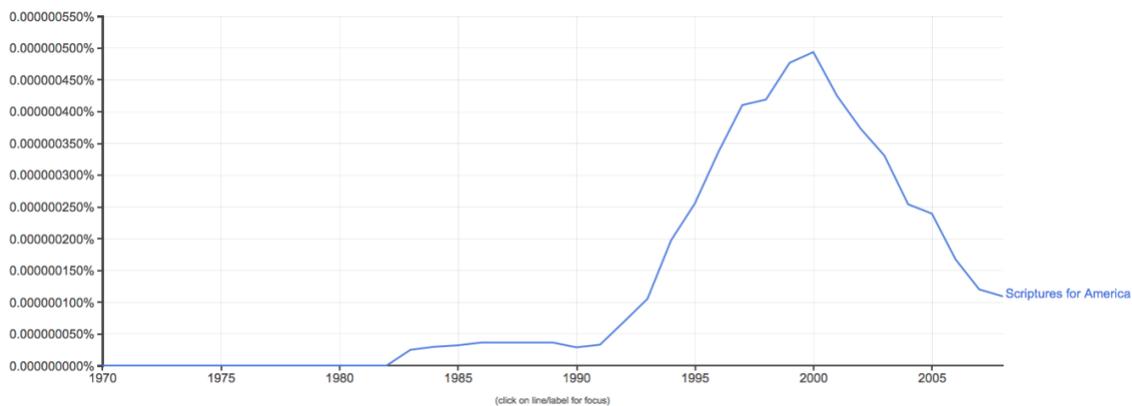

Fig. 12 Google Ngrams results 1

Mentions of Scriptures for America (1970-2008)

https://books.google.com/ngrams/

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[89] Peter J. Peters, "The Label 'Identity'" from "NOT 'Identity,'" Online article, 2000.

As we see in the above graph, interest in SFA rose steadily across the 1990s, peaking in 2000 and sharply declining over the next several years. The tool used to locate this information, Google Ngrams, is only able to show results until 2008 at this time. It is unlikely that significant interest in SFA has risen since 2008, but unfortunately the data is not available.

When compared to the number of times "Christian Identity" was mentioned in books across the twentieth century, we observe a very similar pattern:
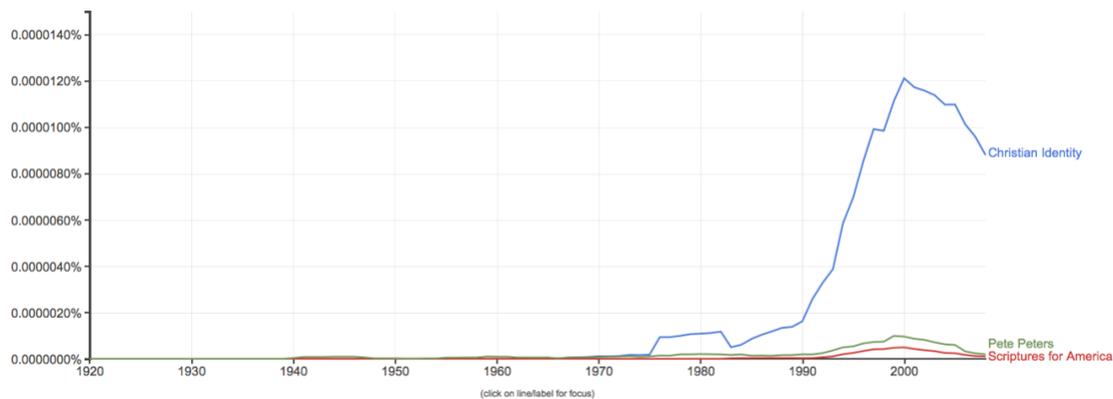
Fig. 13 Google Ngrams results 2

Mentions of Christian Identity, Pete Peters, and Scriptures for America (1920-2008)

https://books.google.com/ngrams/

The number of mentions of Christian Identity began to steadily climb in the early 1980s, just as SFA was getting off the ground, peaking in 2000 and then rapidly declining. Again, the data is not yet available to show if the number of "Christian Identity" mentions continued to decline until the present. In my own search for information on Christian Identity, I have found that most books and articles mentioning Identity were published in the mid-1990s, with one notable exception of Leonard Zeskind's *Blood and Politics: The History of the White Nationalist Movement from the Margins to the Mainstream*, which came out in 2009. It is possible that more work will be written on CI and SFA in the coming years as the twenty-first century rise of American White nationalism becomes an increasingly central public discussion.

The currently available Ngrams data, while not comprehensive or conclusive, indicates that public interest in both Christian Identity and Scriptures for America peaked

in 2000, then rapidly declined. Pete Peters created a boom of attention for both SFA and the larger Identity cause due to his ability to ride the new wave of information media (as well as the new wave of White supremacy) across the 1990s. By 2000, however, the Internet was saturated with information, creating new avenues of simultaneity for all kinds of interest groups (including non-Identity brands of White supremacy). Interest in Peters as a subject declined at the same rate as SFA and CI, indicating that, in a way, he had become a victim of his own success.

January 1, 2000

There is one additional piece to the story of Pete Peters' decline that has not appeared in any other writing on SFA, but should not go unmentioned here. Though the Millennium Bug apocalypse did not occur on January 1, 2000, a personal tragedy occurred in Peters' life on that same day; his only son, Monty, died in a car accident. An audio recording of the funeral service, performed by Peters, reveals a highly tender side of the typically inflammatory preacher. Over the course of an hour and a half, Peters recounts a tearful and heartfelt testimony of his son's life. Peters invites those gathered to pray for his son's three young children "for the rest of their lives," pays special attention to Monty's wife, sister, and grandmother left behind, addresses his son's friends who built the casket "out in the barn, amongst the sawdust and tears, laboring together," constantly returns to the themes of love and fatherhood, and plays several songs on the guitar. If a listener were ignorant to the typical content of Peters' ministry, there would be no indication that he was anything but a loving man.[90]

I bring this up for two reasons. First, in the spirit of intellectual honesty, to suggest that this personal grief may have had a significant impact on the ultimate fate of SFA. Only two issues of Scriptures for America Newsletter were published in 2000—the fewest number of issues published in a year in the history of SFA—a fact for which Peters apologizes in a 2001 newsletter article detailing his struggle with loss. And secondly, to humanize Peters. Not for the purpose of sympathizing with him, for the

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[90] Peter J. Peters, "Funeral Service for Monty W. Peters (Pastor Peter J. Peters)," Scriptures for America YouTube Channel, 2000.

consequences of his actions deserve no sympathy whatsoever, but in order to problematize the notion that hate is ever the product of a singular, evil individual. People who believe, espouse, and act upon detestable ideas are without exception the products of larger systems at play; to villainize an individual is to remain ignorant of structural power, allowing inequity to continue. To villainize is, furthermore, to participate in the same sort of conspiratorial thinking that ultimately manufactures monsters and martyrs.

Paradigm shift

In 2001, inventor and futurist Ray Kurzweil argued that technology can be understood as an evolutionary process. "The emergence of the first technology creating species resulted in the new evolutionary process of technology. Therefore, technological evolution is an outgrowth of—and a continuation of—biological evolution."[91] Like biological evolution, the rate of progress of technological evolution—that is, "the 'order' of the information embedded in the evolutionary process (i.e., the measure of how well the information fits a purpose, which in evolution is survival)"—increases exponentially over time. At certain moments in time, for both biological and technological evolution, paradigm shift occurs:

> A specific paradigm (a method or approach to solving a problem, e.g., shrinking transistors on an integrated circuit as an approach to making more powerful computers) provides exponential growth until the method exhausts its potential. When this happens, a paradigm shift (i.e., a fundamental change in the approach) occurs, which enables exponential growth to continue.[92] [93]

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[91] Ray Kurzweil, "The Law of Accelerating Returns", March 11, 2001.
[92] Ibid.
[93] The term "paradigm shift" was introduced by Thomas Kuhn in his 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. For Kuhn, "paradigm shift" described his observation that scientific fields do not progress in a linear fashion. Instead, periodic paradigm shifts in scientific knowledge open up new approaches to understanding. Since then, the term has become a common idiom. Ray Kurzweil is appropriating this term in the context of exponential technological change, which is related to but nuanced from Kuhn's idea. I use it in line with Kurzweil's definition, only pointing hypothetically to the study of ideological paradigm shift.

The first technological paradigm shifts for humans (e.g., sharp tools, fire, the wheel), Kurzweil explains, took tens of thousands of years to occur. The exponential nature of technological evolution is such that in the nineteenth century, however, "we saw more technological change than in the nine centuries preceding it," while "in the first twenty years of the twentieth century, we saw more advancement than in all of the nineteenth century."[94]

In comparison, the development and mass adoption of the Internet, a major paradigm shift, occurred within the span of a decade. The following two graphs, taken from Kurzweil's essay, allow us to visualize the exponential technological process leading up to this shift:
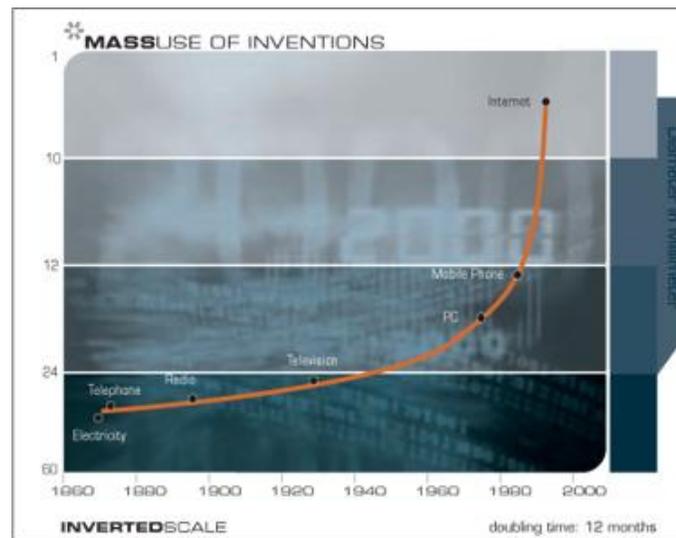

Fig. 14 Mass use of inventions across 20th Century

Exponential adoption of new technology leading up to the Internet visualized as a graph (Kurzweil 2001)
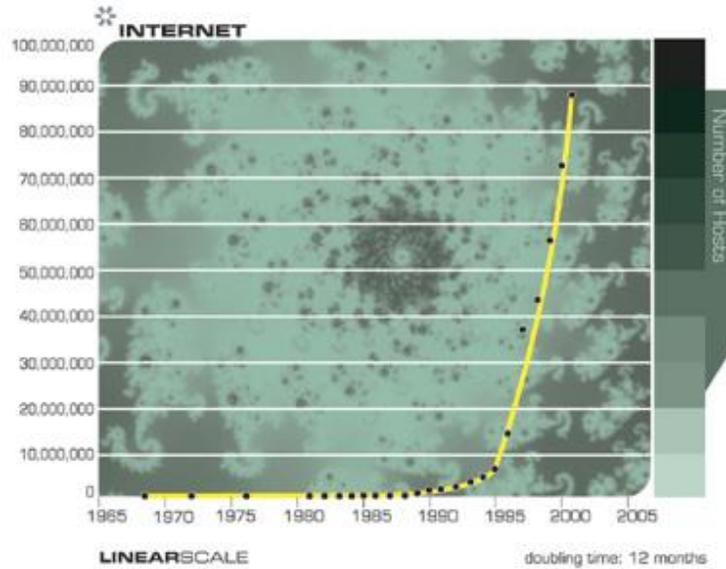
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[94] Ibid.

Fig. 15 Exponential Internet host growth by 2001
Linear scale graph showing the accelerating rate of Internet hosts which exploded after
1995 (Kurzweil 2001)

Although Kurzweil's argument ultimately deals with the impending technological
singularity, well outside the scope of this thesis, his ideas are useful as a scientific and
philosophical backdrop to the technological and cultural milieu at the end of the twentieth
century. Additionally, as Dawkins has shown in his work on memetics, it is possible to
discuss ideas as functions of an evolutionary process. It is interesting to consider the
possibility of a quantitative paradigm shift rate for the adoption of new ideologies.
Evolutionarily speaking, one could hypothesize that the year 2000 was the moment when
the mythic core of Christian Identity was no longer fit to survive its environment, making
room for a new way of thinking, enabling exponential growth to continue. This, of
course, poses an infinite number of unanswerable questions regarding the interactions
among biological, technological, and ideological evolutionary processes.

Why *not* Identity?

The latter part of the twentieth century saw a global explosion of new
technological media that changed the nature of human communication forever, but it was
not until the turn of the millennium that we began to understand the profound and

complex effects of computer-mediated communication. Within the space of the home, the previous arrival of the television screen allowed families to bring the public sphere into the confines of their private sphere, which was still structured by familial and cultural custom. A personal computer screen, however, offered the user an opportunity to bypass many of the demarcations of social space that otherwise structure social interaction and the formation of ideology. In the same way that Benedict Anderson identified print-capitalism as the communications technology necessary for a national discourse to emerge, as well as the proliferation of Protestantism, the availability of CMC is rapidly changing how discourse and ideology function in modern life.

The Internet is interactive and omnipresent, continuously creating new avenues of simultaneity among previously unconnected groups. In his 2001 article "WATCHING THE STORMFRONT: White Nationalists and the Building of Community in Cyberspace," Kevin Thompson discusses this in the context of the Christian Identity movement (here referred to as CIM):

> While conventional Christianity can almost invariably find enough numbers to form real-world congregations in small, localised settings, the CIM needs to cast its net wider to construct a viable quorum. CMC technology is therefore ideal as a means for such groups to facilitate the creation of vibrant and highly valued (by participating individuals) ideological communities.[95]

If CMC is the ideal medium for a group like Christian Identity, why did Identity decline in popularity while other strains of White nationalism continue to grow online? One way to approach this question is to ask what it is that bonds ideological communities. Thompson offers a tripartite framework of community as "a form of association," "an expression of ideology," and "a set of unifying symbols."[96] Taking "association" to be emotionally constructed (rather than existing in physically inhabitable space), it is particularly relevant to consider how association functions in the construction of Whiteness. Whiteness exists in opposition to constructed non-Whiteness, regardless of

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[95] Kevin C. Thompson, "WATCHING THE STORMFRONT: White Nationalists and the Building of Community in Cyberspace." *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 45, no. 1 (2001), 42.
[96] Ibid., 35.

who falls into the latter category. The same tactics used by antisemites like Peters are used by Islamophobes, racists, and anti-immigration lobbyists because "their" identity matters less than "our" identity.

One factor to consider in the decline of Identity, especially present in the form evangelized by Peters and SFA but dating back to the invention of Ford's brand of American antisemitism, is that it is too American for the demands of an increasingly globalized, computer-mediated society. As White supremacy went online, national borders (and local cultures) lost some of their former pull. "In the era of the network society," Meyer and Moors write, "imagined communities are no longer confined to the territorial and conceptual space of the nation but are also formed in arenas both wider and narrower than the nation-state."[97] The construct of race, which transcends the construct of the nation, is "both wider and narrower" than America, and thus more salient than the nation.

Another possibility, which is not at all unrelated to my first point, concerns the impact of the events of 9/11. After witnessing the single deadliest terrorist attack in U.S. history on September 11, 2001 perpetrated by religious extremists, global discourse surrounding the role of religion in the public sphere rapidly shifted. Meyer and Moors write, "If religion assumes a marked public role, this is taken to be a sign of the society's backwardness or at least the backward orientation of the religious movement in question."[98] Additionally, as the George W. Bush administration launched the War on Terror, and Islamophobia became increasingly mainstream to American society, antisemitic ideas were pushed to the fringe. The obsessive antisemitism of Peters and other Identity ministers was seen as backwards when compared to the enemy sponsored by the nation-state. Unsurprisingly, in the first SFA newsletter published after the attacks, Peters claims that 9/11 was prophesied in the Bible.[99] In the same print sermon, he claimed that Christians should reject the draft, writing, "True Christians, i.e., those believers who have repented of their sins and have been baptized for the remission of sins

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[97] Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, "Introduction", *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere,* 3.
[98] Ibid., 5.
[99] Peter J. Peters, "Oil of Understanding for the Remnant," Scriptures for America Newsletter, Volume 2001, No. 5.

(Acts 2:38) have been redeemed, and are not in the jurisdiction of any false god … As a result, they are not required to offer their sons (or daughters) on the altar of war."[100]

At times, Peters' perspective is surprisingly insightful. "When it comes to the subject of conspiracy," he writes in a 2004 newsletter discussing Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, "the system trains the people what is acceptable and unacceptable conspiracy. For example, it is acceptable to think a Hussein or Bin Laden would conspire to kill and destroy, but not a Clinton or a Bush."[101] Just as soon, he slips back into antisemitic rambling, but these moments of clearheadedness reveal another possibility as to why Identity did not survive; Peters' deepest loyalty does not lie with Whiteness as an ideology (for who is Whiter than a Clinton or a Bush?), but with biblically prescribed anti-government ideology. In one sermon on the question of Christian resistance from the state, Peters identifies two extant authorities that exist both "in the Bible and in the world":

> The reason the confusion exists is because we fail to understand that there exists in the Bible and in the world two authorities. Two distinct authorities with two distinct purposes, which require two distinct responses on the part of Christians. One authority is desired by the humanist: they say obey. The other authority is desired by the Christian who understands the kingdom concept, and they say no, don't obey. And of course, we'll show how the enemy had to change, it was imperative, they had to change America from a Christian nation to a pluralistic nation which they call Judeo-Christianity. That had to be done in order to enslave us; there was no other way they could do it. And in order to do that, they had to change the mission of the ministers, which they talk about in the *Protocols*.[102]

Though Whiteness characterizes the Identity message, Peters' loyalty lies with Christian resistance from the state. And yet, this attitude is clearly rooted in antsemitism. Gottfried and McFarland describe the situation clearly: "The government will not side with the Identity conception, they believe, because it is subject to control by Jews."[103]

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Peter J. Peters, "Turning Up the Heat on Fahrenheit 911," Scriptures for America Newsletter, Volume 2004, No. 5.

[102] Peter J. Peters, "Romans 13: Enslavement or Christian Resistance," Scriptures for America YouTube Channel.

[103] Gottfried and McFarland, "The Chosen Ones," 128.

It is difficult to determine which factors were most salient to the decline of Identity and the rise of other forms of White nationalism in the year 2000. Accompanying the technological paradigm shift of widespread Internet access came the possibility of community identity formation that expanded beyond the physical limitations of time and space, beyond the imaginary borders of the nation, beyond religion, and beyond race. Notwithstanding, Whiteness has persisted. If ideology truly is a third evolutionary process in the macro network that includes biology and technology, it is unclear whether it follows the exponential trajectory of the other evolutionary processes. This is because the differential success of ideologies is entirely dependent upon both biology and technology, considering that ideas are transferred from mind to mind and increasingly mediated by information technology. There is not, under this paradigm, a systematic way to measure the definitive success of an ideology like Christian Identity or White nationalism. The best system at present is a well-integrated use of the theories and methods developed by the humanities and the sciences.

Conclusion

In his classic text *The Nature of Fascism,* Roger Griffin argues that generic fascism can be defined by its core myth of the rebirth of a nation. This theory, called *palingenetic ultranationalism*, distinguishes between fascism and all other movements that seek to fulfill goals which are insufficiently palingenetic or ultranationalist.[104] Fascism, under this definition, must not only be anti-democratic and anti-communist, but also anti-conservative: "It does not focus on a single issue, such as the need to take action against the threat allegedly posed by Jews or communists, or to create a separate homeland, but looks towards a total transformation of the status quo."[105] The palingenetic myth at the core of a fascist ideology may well come from a religious source, such as the Identity myth rooted in Genesis, but it must also seek to construct an authoritarian political reality.

In the past, "fascism" was treated as an alien and extreme word that most Americans only applied to movements that happened in other places. As mainstream White nationalism becomes an increasing reality today, however, we are hearing about the possibility of American fascism consistently for the first time. Jason Stanley, author of *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them*, is one scholar who has encouraged its application to the contemporary American situation. He observes that "judgments of normality are affected both by what people think is statistically normal and what they think is ideally normal," arguing that fascist success thrives on the normalization of fascist ideas which go unnoticed and unidentified.[106] In other words, the danger some

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[104] Donald Trump's winning 2016 presidential campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again," fits this description of a mythic rebirth of the nation. Though variations of this phrase were used less vigorously in the past by Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, this meme was absolutely essential to Trump's success and formed the theoretical core for his platform.

[105] Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism,* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 117.

[106] Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them,* (New York: Random House, 2018).

claim in the "hyperbole" of calling Donald Trump a fascist ideologue is lesser than the danger of allowing fascism to become normalized.

In 2019, hyperbole is the least of our concerns. "Surging numbers of hate groups. Rising right-wing populism and antisemitism. Mounting acts of deadly domestic terrorism. Increasing hate crimes. Exploding street violence. That was the landscape of the radical right in 2018."[107] According to the SPLC, American White nationalist groups alone surged 50% from 2017 to 2018. Emboldened by the campaign and 2016 election of Donald Trump and responding to a world that is culturally accelerating at an ever-quicker rate, hate is on the rise in a measurable way:
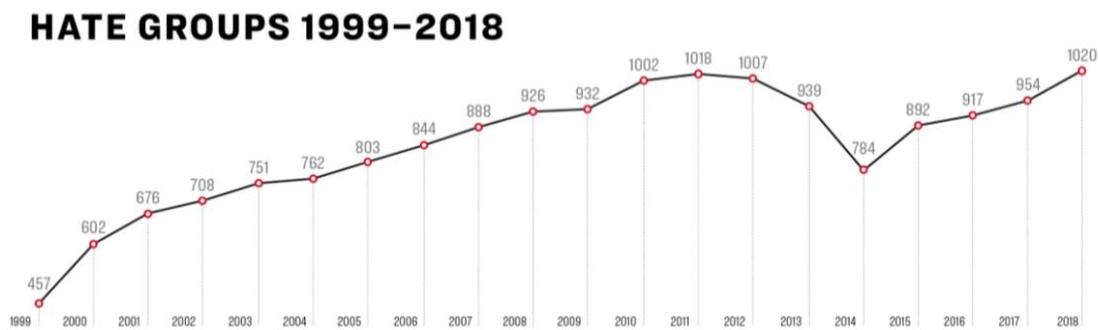

Fig. 16 SPLC hate groups infographic
"The Year in Hate: Rage Against Change," SPLC, February 2019.
https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2019/year-hate-rage-against-change

The SPLC hate group infographic, when viewed in its technohistorical context, also reveals that the emergence and adoption of the Internet is correlated to this change. What we will do with that information is one of the most pressing questions of our era: "Social media and the web continue to be a powerful tool to accelerate the spread of hate to the mainstream, but confusion still reigns across tech companies over how to police hateful content — and Silicon Valley, though it now realizes it must tackle the problem, is still failing to invest enough in removing hate from their platforms."[108] Tackling hate by

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[107] "The Year in Hate: Rage Against Change," *The Intelligence Report*, SPLC, February 2019.
[108] Ibid.

policing the Internet is one possible solution, but I fear that it will be both ineffective and potentially more harmful. The carceral mindset is and should be increasingly challenged.

Instead, or in addition to finding ways to reduce platforms for hate, further work needs to be done to understand the interaction between technology and ideology in the modern context. In this way, the study of religion in the public sphere is more vital than ever. Strikingly, the Public Religion Research Institute recently found that White evangelical Protestants were the only religious demographic to have a majority favorable opinion of Trump in 2018:

> With the unique exception of white evangelical Protestants, majorities of all other major religious groups have an unfavorable opinion of Trump. Majorities of black Protestants (80%), religiously unaffiliated Americans (75%), Hispanic Catholics (74%), non-Christian religious Americans (73%), white mainline Protestants (52%), and white Catholics (52%) have a negative opinion of Trump. By contrast, almost seven in ten (68%) white evangelical Protestants have a favorable view of Trump, including 28% who have a *very* favorable view.[109]

This suggests that evangelical Christianity, when coupled with Whiteness and in the American context, is a religious medium that is more receptive to fascism than others.

Religion, perhaps more than other social phenomena, exists as an information network system that powerfully and effectively connects ideas, people, and places together. In the context of fascism, which is rooted in mythic rebirth, the historical association of myth to religion creates a particularly compelling web. And all of this—the ongoing construction of ideologies and communities, religions and nationalisms— depends upon the available technology at the time.

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[109] Ale Vandermaas-Peeler et al., "Partisan Polarization Dominates Trump Era: Findings from the 2018 American Values Survey," *Public Religion Research Institute*, October 28, 2018.

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