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# Fighting for the Right to Be White: A Case Study in White Racial Identity

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## ABSTRACT

Membership in extremist groups, such as White Revolution and the Ku Klux Klan, embody specific behavioral attributes. These attributes include practicing endogamy and exhibiting racial pride. There is general consensus among members as to what it means to be part of a socially constructed extremist group. There are also strong motivational factors that support maintaining in-group solidarity and dominant status. By adhering to the rules dictated by group membership, both the self and the group are uplifted based on white racial identity. The process of self-categorization for white racial activists accentuates their own physical similarities along with perceived negative physical differences among racial and ethnic groups. The result is a reinforcement of norms that favor the in-group over the out-group. Subjective belief structures, such as the superiority of whiteness and heterosexuality, legitimize the existence of a universal higher status in-group (at least in the white supremacist worldview). This project is based on ongoing field research that began in July 2009, survey data collected in May 2010, and discussion topics posted on the hate site, *Stormfront.org* in 2013 and 2014. These findings, among others, contribute to literature about why some people join extremist groups, adhere to racialist ideology, and believe that whites are superior to all other groups.

*Keywords:* white nationalism; white racial identity; white racial activism; white supremacy

## INTRODUCTION

White extremist racial identity ideology is fixated on “whiteness” and its importance as an in-group signifier. A segment of the white population, which is profiled in this study, is overtly racist and has opinions about immigration, black-on-white crime, and white genocide which permeate racialist discourse within organized groups and on the Internet. This article

focuses on the importance of “whiteness,” white culture, and white ethnicity from the perspectives of a sample of people all of whom affiliate with the white supremacist movement. The data used in this article come from three sources: a) a now defunct neo-Nazi group called White Revolution; b) discussants on *Stormfront.org*, a website for white nationalists; and c) interviews with people who are affiliated with the Knights Party Klan group and a Christian Identity ministry in Zinc, Arkansas. This article provides insights into a segment of an openly racist white population and its place in an increasingly diverse American society. Scrutiny of extremist groups continues to be important as our society experiences demographic shifts and as more minority populations demand equal rights and representation.

Most researchers agree that the white nationalist movement is home to a confusing array of ideologies and loosely organized groups (Barkun, 1990; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1997; Ezekiel, 1995; Futrell & Simi, 2004).<sup>1</sup> The persistence of the movement following President Barack Obama’s two terms of election suggests that fragmentation, a lack of centralized core leadership, and unpopular racialist ideology have not resulted in a decline in white racial activism, but rather resurgence among some groups across the country (Terry, 2014). With advancements in technology and social media, white racial activist mobilization continues with rhetoric that is directly connected to “whiteness” and a collective concern about the perceived fragility of white culture.

This study presents information to increase the general understanding of how overtly-racist individuals create social solidarity through white racial identity formation. The study’s sample includes responses to and discussions about the importance of identity and culture that, in turn, provide insight into the mindset of white racial activists who are opposed to ideas of social justice and who position themselves against progressive ideals and politics in favor of extreme social isolationism based solely on race. The article proceeds as follows: Section I offers a brief review of literature surrounding identity construction and race; Section II presents a discussion about whiteness theories; Section III describes the data and methods utilized in this study; Section IV provides information from the findings; Section V analyzes those findings. In closing, the article offers conclusions and recommendations for further research.

## I. WHITE RACIAL IDENTITY: “A WHITER SHADE OF PALE”

Prior to the Civil War, “whites” were defined as individuals from Northern Europe primarily of British, Scottish, and German descent (Warren & Twine, 1997). The boundaries of whiteness eventually expanded to include the Irish and Italians, both groups who were once labeled as their

own distinct races (Feagin & Feagin, 2012, pp. 87, 99). Often segregated from other Northern Europeans and living in black neighborhoods, Irish immigrants were referred to as “niggers turned inside out” (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 41) and the “missing link” between apes and humans (Feagin et al., 2012, p. 87). The “white” category continued to expand following World War II, when Jewish people were included after having been labeled a distinct race similar to Irish and Italian immigrants (Brodkin, 1999). Historically, segregation and miscegenation laws, discriminatory immigration and naturalization policies, and other tools of exclusion and subordination provided a framework for determining who characteristically was “white” (Haney López, 1996).

Individuals whom immigration officials determined were “white” became citizens despite hostile reception by White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (“WASPs”). They eventually had the opportunity to acculturate, assimilate, and achieve “whiteness” especially through intermarriage. Other immigrants applying for citizenship under the white category, but who were classified as non-white, lost the right to become naturalized citizens and were denied equal chances to assimilate. The label non-white carried with it implications of degeneracy, bad morals, lack of self-restraint, and political immaturity (Haney López, 1996). Notably, many of the White Revolution survey respondents and Arkansas interview subjects under the study that is the focus of the present article assert pride in their Irish and Italian ancestries, despite the fact that in the past these group affiliations carried negative “non-white” connotations.

Critical studies of “whiteness” have drawn on the literature and scholarship from areas like Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Legal Studies (or LatCrit) to elucidate why some people think it is important to be white. Roediger (2002) argues that even though race is a social construction, studies focusing on white identity minimize accompanying elements of power and privilege. Martinez (2000) cites several influential case decisions that resulted in the legal construction of Mexican Americans as “white,” yet he also notes that Mexican citizens remained unable to escape the racialized “other” stigma as established through discourses and violent encounters during colonization processes in the 19th century. Neil Foley (as cited in Blanton, 2006, p. 574) takes a different approach by investigating the internalization of “whiteness” by Mexican Americans in the Southwest during the 1940s and 1950s. Mexican citizens signed a deal with the devil, Foley claims, by combining their own Latin American racialism with Anglo racism in an attempt to avoid discriminatory practices and hasten the assimilation process. In the end, they lost an opportunity to partner with African American civil rights activists in the early days of the Civil Rights

Movement, which, according to Foley, would have been in their long-term best interests.

Authors including W. E. B. Du Bois (1920, 1935, 1940/1968), Frantz Fanon (1952/1986, 1963), bell hooks (1992), and more recently Paul Gilroy (2004) insist that white identity is ideological and derived from and maintained by domination, which is itself legitimized by such diverse sources as law, politics, economics, aesthetics, and ways of knowing. Critical legal studies (“CLS”), which emerged during the 1970s, attempted to challenge and overturn accepted norms and standards in legal theory and practice that benefit wealthy and powerful members of societies such as the United States. However, CLS did not yet have an analytic framework specifically attuned to the conditions of racial domination. Beginning around the same time as CLS and influenced by it, Critical Race Theory (“CRT”) developed in response to perception that the powerful civil rights coalition of the 1960s and reform measures like affirmative action in 1970s had stalled. CRT developed into an interdisciplinary scholarship movement that transformed understandings of the relationship between race, racism, and official power. CRT has remained influential on its own, provided inspiration, and served as a conversation partner in other critical interdisciplinary movements such as the work on “whiteness” within other areas of scholarship. A large volume of interdisciplinary work on “whiteness” has developed over the years, including Critical White Studies (“CWS”), with important contributions by Delgado and Stefancic (2012, 2013), Frankenburg (1993, 1997, 2001), Gallagher (2000), Harris (1993), Matsuda (1987/1995), Shuford (2001, 2012), and countless others.<sup>2</sup>

In colonial and even post-colonial contexts, “whiteness” has been represented as orderliness, rationality, and self-control (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). For white racial activists, these connections with “whiteness” persist along with perceptions of goodness, morality, and overall superiority. Today, some of the core tenets of critical “whiteness” studies include the following: white culture and identity is taken-for-granted; white privilege is ignored; and most Americans’ adherence to colorblind, individualist ideas obscures white identity and privilege. However, it should be noted that people who identify as white nationalist never take their race for granted, they claim to have no privilege based on their race, and assert that white identity has nothing to do with privilege because of what they perceive as a concentrated effort to destroy white culture and ultimately the white race. In other words, white nationalists do not recognize themselves in the mirror which critical theories of race and whiteness attempt to hold up, and in fact see themselves and their situation as just the opposite. A detailed discussion of racialist framing of “whiteness” follows.

The key distinguishing factor between whites who belong to racist

groups, such as White Revolution, the Knights Party, and *Stormfront.org*, from whites who do not is the development of racial pride. Blazak (2001), Blee (2002), Dobratz et al. (1997), Ferber (1999, 2004), and Simi and Futrell (2010) focus on collective action and identity formation within white supremacist movements that include various ideologies such as neo-Nazi, Ku Klux Klan (“KKK”), and Christian Identity. Their findings have shed light on some of the structural issues that precipitate white racial activism in contemporary American society and reveal individual attitudes about race, white identity, and white superiority specifically.

For white racial activists, the “white” experience is paramount to their existence and group solidarity of these likeminded individuals is reinforced by opportunities to socialize both online and through group activities (Brown, 2009; Daniels, 2009; De Koster & Houtman, 2008; Simi et al., 2006, 2010). Racially tolerant whites are not part of the inner circle (in-group of whites) and are considered to be part of the problem (Dobratz et al., 1997). White racial activists create their identities based on a perception that they occupy a lower status ranking in the existing social hierarchy because of their race (Dentice, 2008, p. 45; Dobratz et al., 2006, 1997). According to Dobratz (2001), Dobratz et al. (1997), White (1989) and Zeskind (2009), racial consciousness, buttressed by racially oriented religious perspectives such as Christian Identity, is important as a means to unify the movement and solidify their collective identity. The concept of racial superiority is embedded in a collective nationalist psyche that strives to strengthen white identity, fix the problem of a rapidly diversifying society, and empower disenfranchised whites to stand up for their rights before it is too late.

## II. THEORETICAL DISCUSSION: SOCIAL STRAIN, SOCIAL IDENTITY, AND WHITE NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY

Scholarly inquiry into “whiteness” does not represent a single methodology or theoretical claim but has instead established transdisciplinary approaches across the academic milieu. The Critical Whiteness Studies Bibliography (2006), for example, offers a broadly based taxonomy that includes philosophy, history, literature, psychology, education, oral histories, international/comparative perspectives, media studies, and qualitative inquiries, and engages with ideologies of white supremacy, if not necessarily all the research conducted about white supremacists. For our investigation into identity formation among white racial activists, we focused specifically on sources of strain, inflation of self-worth based on exaggerated racial pride, and the creation of privileged in-group status. Strain theory was initially developed by Durkheim (1897/1951) with his theory of

anomie. The microside of anomie or strain theory represents the sense of despair or aggravation that some individuals experience when they feel their needs are not being met. We also turned to a psychological perspective to address the ways in which white privileging mechanisms find a home in relationships, awareness of self, and generally agreed upon assumptions about morality and decency. The authors employed Robert Agnew's strain theory (1994, 2001) and Henri Tajfel's identity theory (1974) in order to examine white nationalist ideology. Both will be discussed below.

Agnew (2001) suggests that anomie and strain result when identities significant to an individual become threatened. He explores social strain from a perspective that accounts for personal goals beyond the acquisition of money and other material resources. Although his research focuses on individual dispensation toward delinquency and crime, Agnew's theory can help explain negative attitudes about and responses to diversity among white racial activists who join stigmatized groups such as White Revolution and the KKK, and those who post messages on websites such as *Stormfront.org*. Specifically, because white nationalists believe that their collective identity is threatened by unfair social relationships that block them from achieving desirable societal goals (Blazak, 2001; Dobratz et al., 1997; Ezekiel, 1995), white nationalists in our study identified several strains, including: immigration processes that result in undesirable demographic changes; forced integration and social interaction with undesirable groups that is reinforced by government policy; perceived infringement on free speech and gun rights; and both the media's and government's assault on white culture (Dobratz et al., 1997; Simi et al., 2010; Swain, 2002). Likewise, affirmative action, deindustrialization, and the increase in multiculturalism are seen as attacks against white identity and white culture. As a result, white nationalists feel that whites themselves are the victims, and not the perpetrators, of racial prejudice (Ferber, 1999).

Additionally, white nationalist movement activists feel threatened by the perceived loss of personal autonomy and their implicitly deserved superior status (Blazak, 2001; Dobratz et al., 1997). Collectively, these individuals believe that social policy now primarily benefits minorities and that the American Dream is no longer attainable by native-born whites. There is also a generalized belief among people in the movement that African Americans are contributing to a moral degeneration in the United States that is exemplified by hip hop culture, language variations (e.g., Ebonics), and distinct styles of dress (Potok, 2010). As a reaction to these types of social and cultural changes, individuals may opt to engage in behaviors which they believe may lead to the re-establishment of more equitable conditions for whites. For example, some of the people in this study joined white nation-

alist groups and became active in the broader white supremacist movement. Others, such as discussants on *Stormfront.org*, engaged in rhetoric that inflates the value of “whiteness” and white cultural contributions throughout history. They may also be affiliated with groups such as the KKK, Blood & Honour, and the Council of Conservative Citizens, among others.<sup>3</sup>

Berlet and Vysotsky (2006), Dobratz et al. (1997), Swain (2002), and Swain and Niele (2003) have enumerated three social categories of utmost importance to white racial activists: race, ethnicity, and nationality. These categories define who the individual is within the context of self, group, and society. For that reason, the authors of the present study believe that social identity theory also helps explain how white nationalists inflate their self-worth based on the concept of “whiteness.” Social identity refers to an individual’s knowledge of belonging to certain desired social groups. In the case of white racial activists, they believe that whites are superior to other groups, so race trumps all social categories. Specific behavioral attributes such as practicing endogamy, exhibiting racial pride, and maintenance of in-group solidarity are requirements for white racial activists. By adhering to the rules dictated by group membership, the self is uplifted along with the group based on white racial identity.

A white nationalists’ understanding of the world rests on racial classification. They also denigrate “other” behaviors based on distinct racial identities and culture. Their own self-aggrandizement reinforces in-group norms and creates stereotypes that favor the in-group (whites) over the out-group (other races/ethnicities). Some of these stereotypes include the notions that whites are the creators of advanced civilizations, have higher moral values than other groups, and are more intelligent than other groups (Dobratz et al., 1997; Simi et al., 2010). Important to note is that the authors and scholarly movements on race and “whiteness” outlined in Section I have previously exposed all of these stereotypes as false ideologies; yet white nationalists continue to adhere to, and identify with them as true. Indeed, each of these stereotypes was articulated in some manner by the participants in our survey, the discussants in the *Stormfront.org* forums, and during interview sessions in Arkansas. Subjective belief structures, such as the superiority of whites over all others and heterosexual behavior as “normal,” legitimize (for white racial activists) the existence of a universal higher status in-group. Group membership is conceived of collectively as “we” and “us” versus “them.” Interestingly, the “them” may also be applied to whites who are antiracists or other unenlightened whites who support policies that benefit non-white, non-European groups or may have voted for Barack Obama for President.



### III. DATA AND METHODS

The data for this study come from three sources: A) a survey of White Revolution, a defunct neo-Nazi group; B) five recent discussion forums posted on *Stormfront.org*, an Internet site for white nationalists; C) and ongoing field research in Zinc, Arkansas with a KKK group and Christian Identity sect headed by Pastor Thom Robb. Each source will be discussed below and well as the recognized limitations of the study.

#### A. *White Revolution*

Billy Roper, former leader of White Revolution, has a long association with white supremacy. Both his father and paternal and maternal grandfathers were Klansmen. Upon graduating from college in Arkansas, Roper was recruited by the late William Pierce to be the youth recruiter for his neo-Nazi group, National Alliance, which was active during the 1980s and 1990s. Following Pierce's death, Roper left the National Alliance compound in West Virginia and moved back to Arkansas. In 2002, he formed White Revolution, a group that was anchored by an Internet website of the same name. Roper used his group to launch a fledgling political campaign and mobilize a political party called the Nationalist Party of America. He ran as a write-in candidate for governor of Arkansas in November 2010 and had plans to run for President on the Nationalist ticket in 2012; however, in August 2011, Roper disbanded White Revolution and shut down the Internet site. Our survey was conducted in May 2010, prior to the site being shut down.

According to Roper, approximately 1,100 individuals were affiliated with White Revolution during the time of the survey. A total of 148 responses (13 percent) were received. The survey was developed, in part, to gather information from White Revolution members as to their collective social identity. Questions for the bulk of the survey were adapted from the General Social Survey ("GSS").<sup>4</sup> The questionnaire consisted of three sections: 1) Race and social policy; 2) White identity and religious perspectives; and 3) Demographic questions relating to region of residence, age, and education.

This article utilizes the following open-ended questions about white identity that appeared in Section 2 of the survey:

- a) What does it mean to be "white"?
- b) How do you define "white culture"? Do you think most whites feel that they have a distinct culture? Why or why not?

c) What is your ethnic heritage?

Additionally, we include demographic information from Section 3 of the survey. We recoded the education variable into a three category ordinal variable: 1) high school diploma or lower; 2) bachelor’s degree or some college; and 3) some graduate school or higher. Thirty of the 148 respondents did not answer all of the demographic questions. This low response rate may be due in part to the members’ general distrust and dislike of academic researchers. There were missing responses to some of the other questions as well. Refer to Table 1.

TABLE 1: WHITE REVOLUTION DEMOGRAPHICS

	Female	Male	Missing			
Sex	19 (12.8)	97 (65.5)	32 (21.6)*			
	18-30	31-45	45-60	61+	Missing	
Age	30 (20.2)	43 (29)	28 (18.9)	6 (4.1)	41 (27.7)*	
	HS or less	BA or some college	Grad school or higher	Missing		
Education	32 (21.6)	61 (41.2)	23 (15.5)	32 (21.6)*		
	South	West	Midwest	Northeast	International	Missing
Region at time of Survey**	39 (26.4)	25 (16.9)	8 (5.4)	18 (12.2)	8 (5.4)	50 (33.8)*
Region at age 16	35 (23.6)	23 (15.5)	12 (8.1)	23 (15.5)	6 (4.1)	49 (33.1)*

N = 148; Data is written as Raw Number (Percentage), e.g., 19 (12.8)

\*Rounding error

\*\*Regions defined according to U. S. Census categories

### B. *Stormfront.org*

Stormfront, an online community for white racial activists, was initially a private dial-in bulletin board developed by former Klansman Don Black to accommodate supporters and staff of the David Duke for Louisiana Senate Campaign in the early 1990s. In March 1995, *Stormfront.org* became the first fully online white nationalist Internet website. According to site statistics, an average of 40,000 people visit the site in a 24-hour period. Users can become members at different levels and those who want to gain access to private polls and discussions are encouraged to pay a small

fee. According to archived profiles, some users have been members since 1995, the year *Stormfront.org* officially started online.

The second source of data for this article is contained in five blogs posted on *Stormfront.org*. These blogs were selected based on content that mirrored questions posed in *White Revolution* about white culture and white identity including the following:

- a) Southern White Identity (<http://www.stormfront.org/forum/t962164/>);
- b) What happened to WASP America? (<http://www.stormfront.org/forum/t971419/>);
- c) Debunking the “White is Not an Identity” Myth (<http://www.stormfront.org/forum/51004587/>);
- d) What the heck does “white culture” mean? (<http://www.stormfront.org/forum/t1015643/>);
- e) Can we really deny that whites are superior? (<http://www.stormfront.org/forum/t1019411/>).

A total of 147 posts by 97 discussants contained in the five blogs began on April 22, 2013 and ended on January 29, 2014. On the day of access, January 31, 2014, the site documented 804,965 threads, 10,367,065 posts, and 281,157 members (<http://www.stormfront.org>). Demographic data used in this article comes from a list posted under “Community” where information such as age, gender, and state or nation of residence is archived. Due to the racist nature of this website, many users only share minimal data and it is difficult to get a sense of where they live; however, some users give adequate demographic information to create a profile of typical discussants/bloggers. Refer to Table 2.

TABLE 2: *STORMFRONT.ORG* DEMOGRAPHICS

	Female	Male	Unknown			
Sex	8 (8.2)	75 (77)	14 (14.4)*			
	South	West	Midwest	Northeast	International	Unknown
Region At time of Discussion	16 (16.4)	3 (3)	1 (1)	5 (5)	20 (20.6)	52(53.6)*

N = 97; 5 discussions; 147 posts; Data is written as Raw Number (Percentage), e.g., 19 (12.8)

\*Rounding error

\*\*Regions defined according to U. S. Census categories

### C. *The Knights Party*

Located in the remote Ozark region of Arkansas, the Knights Party is a Klan group headed by Christian Identity minister, Pastor Thom Robb. The socially isolated enclave community sits on 300 acres and houses a racist church called the Christian Revival Center and a training institute for white racial activists led by Pastor Robb, some of his family members, and Billy Roper. Pastor Robb has lived in Arkansas since 1980 when he moved with his family from Detroit, where he ran a printing company. When asked what prompted his move to Zinc, he had this to say:

I left Michigan to escape the “moral depravity and social decline” caused by Blacks and other non-white groups who were taking over the city. My goal was to raise my family in a crime free white community (personal communication, December 11, 2011).

The third source of data comes from ongoing field research in Arkansas that began in July 2009. Interview data comes from individuals who live and work in Arkansas and have ties to both Roper and Pastor Robb.<sup>5</sup> Even though interviews encompassed more than individual attitudes about white identity issues, individuals who participated in the study were unified in opinions about race, culture, and the intrinsic superiority of whites. Some of those opinions are included in our findings. Refer to Table 3.

TABLE 3: FIELD RESEARCH DEMOGRAPHICS

Name	Age	Education
Carla	27	High School Diploma
Anna	30	Associate's Degree
Melissa	45	High School/some college
Elsie	67	High School Diploma
Gary	45	College Degree (BA)
Billy*	42	College Degree (Master's)
Adam	38	College Degree (BS)
Darrell	40	College Degree (BA)
Kyle	42	High School Diploma
Khalil	45	College Degree (BS)
Ryan	46	Trade School
Glenn	68	High School Diploma

N = 12

\*Billy Roper is well known in the movement and has signed a release form allowing his name to be used in publications associated with this study. All of the other names are pseudonyms.

#### D. *Limitations*

It should be noted that the data from White Revolution, *Stormfront.org*, and field research in Arkansas is limited in its focus due to the nature of convenience sampling. Additionally, because of the small sample size and the inability to verify the identity of some of those who responded to the survey and *Stormfront.org* blogs, these findings cannot necessarily be generalized or considered directly representative of the broader population of people who identify in some way with the American white nationalist movement. However, as the findings demonstrate there are consistent overlaps in racial attitudes and beliefs in the superiority of whites throughout all three data sets.

### IV. FINDINGS<sup>6</sup>

#### A. *White Revolution Survey Responses*

*“Being White – A Thankless Job”—Response to Question #1: What does it mean to be white?*

Whiteness is not a fluid, socially constructed category for white nationalists; rather, it is a static, naturally occurring physical characteristic associated with purity (Ferber, 1999). The boundary of whiteness is established in order to preserve white identity because should the boundary collapse, the identity it protects falls along with it. Out of 104 total responses to this question, 56 respondents (54 percent) specifically referenced European ancestry. Samples of responses include the following:

Highly identifiable DNA of the people of Europe/Eurasia (considered by some anthropologists to have evolved from both Cro-Magnon and Neanderthal)

To be of European or Caucasian ancestry

To be white means to come from a European background and to be a part of the culture that has founded civilizations

Other respondents stressed racial superiority. For example:

To be white is to be part of a small group possessing talents, conscience and beauty that cannot be found in any other creatures on the planet.

We are civilization builders.

SMART MANNERED CULTURED

*“NO PIMPS NO HOE’S NO RAP!!!”—Response to Question #2: How do you define ‘white culture’? Do you think most whites feel that they have a distinct culture? Why or why not?*

There were 97 responses to the two-part question about white culture. The first question asked respondents to define “white culture.” The second part of the question asked if respondents think most whites feel they have a distinct culture. Most respondents only offered their own personal definition without addressing the second part of the question. A total of 24 respondents (25 percent) made some reference to European heritage forming the basis of white culture. For example, some specific comments include:

Culture created by people of European ancestry

I define White culture as all of the things that have been typical of European Whites, including lifestyle, mores, art, architecture, fashion, music, literature, inventions, achievements in science, etc. that have made White civilization as great as it has been. Besides all of those things that comprise and represent White culture, White culture is also the requisite environment for Whites to thrive.

White culture is European culture. Most whites are ignorant and have forgotten their ancestors.

Twenty-one respondents (22 percent) referred to cultural and/or religious values that they feel sets white culture apart from other cultures:

White culture is best defined by shows like Leave it to Beaver, or the Andy Griffith Show. It is wholesome working class culture.

. . . whites brought civilization and education here to the US of A.

Whites do have a distinct culture, just like any other racial group. They have created nearly every major technological, social, and scientific breakthrough in the modern world. I do not believe that most whites truly appreciate their ancestors and what they meant for this country.

Twenty-two respondents (23 percent) believe that white culture is slowly being destroyed so they lamented the fact that some whites feel persecuted for having pride in their race:

I can’t explain what “white culture” is because white people are not allowed to have their own culture without being considered racist.

Most American whites today are ignorant of their culture and are being actively taught to be ashamed of its history and accomplishments.

The remaining 30 respondents (30 percent) in this section of the survey submitted random answers regarding white culture and are illustrated by the following:

#### DIP BEER MASHED POTATOES AND STEAK

White culture is the same as Western Civilization.

Most American whites still think of themselves as Americans first, whites second. Therefore, in America, most white folks do not yet consider themselves a distinct culture. Although, if one were to point out the various Mexican and militant Black groups active today (see La Raza, MS-13, and the “New Black Panther Party”) most whites, when pressed, would recall their European heritage. This is more of a defense mechanism, vs. any sort of active racial identification or conscious desire to segregate themselves from others.

White people have suppressed who they are as a race because of shame and fear, to the point where many Whites today don’t even know their ancestral history, roots, where they came from, or how they even got to America.

*“Mostly English and a little Irish”— Response to Question #3: What is your ethnic heritage?*

Ethnic pride is paramount for the white nationalist community. “Whiteness” carries with it impressions of superiority among white racial activists who align with groups such as White Revolution and the KKK. We received 134 responses to our question about ancestry/heritage. A total of 41 respondents (31 percent) referenced German ancestry followed by 24 respondents (18 percent) who mentioned English ancestry. Most of the posts, 68 respondents (51 percent) mentioned combinations of various ethnic identities such as Italian, Irish, Swedish, Scottish, and French. Others contained references to skin color (white) and region (Northern European). Samples of responses to the question about ethnicity follow:

Anglo- Norse

English, Norwegian, and French

Caucasian-N. European type

WHITE CONFEDERATE AMERICAN

TEXAN (100%)

My ancestors came to America from Prussia (What is now called Ger-

many) in 1849. I suspect they had to flee because of the failed liberal revolution of 1848.

### B. *Stormfront.org Discussion Forums/Blogs*

The Internet is a rich source of data for social research, and *Stormfront.org* is one the most highly developed and stable sites for discussions and blogs among people who are affiliated with the white nationalist movement. All of the selected blogs dealt with some aspect of white racial identity. The statements and questions that started each blog were followed by a sample of responses. The *Southern White Identity* forum, initiated by a discussant named Fortress Europe, opened on April 22, 2013 at 10:52 AM. Fortress Europe asked the following question:

I would like to know which are the main characteristics of the American White South and how it differs from the North culturally, religiously and racially. Where it's geographical boundaries are drawn [sic]? Is there a Southern White nationalism?

I would like also the White Southerners here to explain me, a European, what is the composition of the ethnic makeup of the Southern White population? Mainly WASP, maybe? What makes a Southerner? Can I become one, if I choose to?

Responses to the question include:

Generally, much of the South still remains pro-Confederate (pro-white), or at least many are proud of coming from the rebel side of history, even if they aren't racist, and will still fly the rebel flag. Of course, Southern cities are some of the most negro infested (gang infested) streets in all of America. The city where I live is in the west, but flew under the Confederate flag for about five days (Nationalsozialismus 04-22-2013 01:55 PM).

Northerners, it seems to me, have a predominantly modern/post-modern ethic while the Southerners have a mixture of all three. In the "new" South, which is more urban and suburban, the modern/post-modern ethic is more pronounced. The "old" South, which is more town and country, is more traditional. The continued presence of the honor/shame system in the South, both old and new, is pretty distinctive. Also, there is a strong historical awareness among Southerners of the antebellum era, the civil war, and reconstruction. Northerners don't have this, and for the most part don't understand the obsession Southerners continue to have with it (knight404 04-22-2013 02:13 PM).



The second forum titled *What Happened to WASP America?* began with a question posted by Revilo on June 3, 2013 at 10:41 PM:

Thus, last summer, the Christian Science Monitor carried a portentous article on America's founding stock (of which Christian Scientists are of course an offshoot): US Government and Politics No Longer Run by WASPs, Do It Matter? By Brad Knickerbocker, August 19, 2012. It declared White Anglo-Saxon Protestantism moribund and bereft of social and political weight.

If true, this constitutes a sociological seismic shift—and it bodes ill for America's future. Will WASP a.k.a. American values continue without WASPs?

Samples of responses to this question include:

Well, being a WAS myself (dropped the P a long time ago). I would say they gave up their identity. I personally have never heard a single person talk about themselves in public as a WASP in my entire life in the U.S. even though the media constantly keeps talking about these WASPs. Who and where are these people? How can you even exist as a group if you have no identity? (bioprof 06-04-2013 12:02 AM).

They used to be a very prideful group with a strong focus on their English roots. So prideful, that they even looked down on most other Whites as sub-human. My Catholic German ancestors were certainly not well received when they came here. Now people of English descent in this country just consider themselves generic Americans on the whole (Lucillus 06-04-2013 12:06 AM).

A *Stormfront.org* member, flugelrod, began a forum titled *Debunking The "White is Not an Identity" Myth* with the following statement:

White is an ethnic identity. The idea white is not an ethnic identity comes from two perspectives. One perspective states that white is not an identity but rather people of euro heritage should identify with national identities like english, irish, german, etc. Sometimes people of this perspective imply that the white identity is an inferior form of identification by cultureless colonials. The other perspective states that white is not an identity because race itself is a social construct. What does everyone think?

Responses from discussants include:

Guilt which then transforms into negation of own identity, which is what is required to erase someone. People with no identity sooner or later cease to exist. Proper answer to them is to hit them back as hard as

possible. Stop arguing with them, debating with them. Anything passive won't work, only action works (Alpha Tauri 11-10-2013 04:18 PM).

We are facing something we've never faced before, under circumstances the world has never seen. We are living in a world in which there is a concerted and conscious attempt to destroy the White race. Not the Jews, not the Armenians, not the Ukrainians, not the Boers, not the Hutu or the Tutsi, not the. . . you get the picture. These are all tribes. When we drop the phrase "White Genocide," we are talking about the obliteration of a whole family of tribes. I'm not a historian but I do not believe there has ever been a project for organized destruction of a segment of the human population on this scale before (Tin Omen 11-10-2013 07:09 PM).

On January 4, 2014 at 9:27 PM, Joe Rogers, a guest on the *Stormfront.org* site, posed the question *What the heck does "white culture" mean?* Among the responses to this question:

White culture is that derived from white born civilizations. A common culture where thievery and rape is not tolerated. A culture that encourages personal growth, independence, and liberty. A culture where excellence is celebrated and sloth is not. A culture that values personal property and where family values takes precedent over personal indulgences. Until recently, one where personal honor did not require the strong arm of the law to enforce, but was something each white person strove to project willingly (Lord Jim 01-04-2014 10:14 PM).

White culture means "state of the art '1st world civilised cultures'." All created by white man (aly fox 01-04-2014 10:59 PM).

It means I don't have to deal with dirty foreigners messing with my German heritage. All I see is brown and black corruption in my community. . . makes me sick (ryanjoe1008 01-04-2014 11:07 PM).

On January 24, 2014, a *Stormfront.org* member called European Crusader posed the question *Can we really deny that whites are superior?* The following responses appeared in the ensuing discussion:

We may know Whites are superior, but we shouldn't fall into the trap of claiming this and then being forced to defend what is ultimately an untenable position. "Superiority" is such a broad claim that it is impossible to conclusively prove to an adversary in a typical debate setting. They will run you in circles for hours and then claim victory when you finally realize they will never listen to logic and give up. Have some class. Talking about "White superiority" or "supremacy" or whatever makes us look like those brain-dead Hollywood "Neo-Nazis" that our enemies keep trying to paint us as. Lets not give them any more ammunition (UnmarkedGrave 01-24-2014 05:26 AM).

One thing I would like to add is that if we are going to focus on the idea of “superiority,” we should focus on the superiority of racially homogeneous societies, rather than the superiority of our particular race. We’re never going to win if we’re pitting ourselves against other races. We need to make the argument that white nationalism is the part of a larger strategy which benefits humankind as a whole (StopZionism 01-24-2014 06:50 AM).

The White Race truly is THE Master Race. That’s what Adolf Hitler preached, and I most sincerely believe it. We ARE at the top of the food chain, and when the day comes that we ALL start thinking that way again, this time the world will truly be OURS (Hoffmann1987 01-28-2014 09:28 PM).

### C. *Field Data from Arkansas*

Interviews and observations of rallies, church services, and other events were conducted by the lead investigator over a three year period beginning in July 2009 and ending in May 2012. People who participated in this portion of the research were affiliated with groups led by Roper and Pastor Robb. Interview subjects were asked a variety of questions about ideology and generalized belief systems—including the importance of white racial identity. Many of their responses to interview questions support the essentialist beliefs thesis regarding group membership (Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernest 2002). In some cases, as with the individuals in this study, perceptions support the idea that a racial category is fixed and specific surface characteristics such as skin color have special meaning. Among the people whom the lead investigator interviewed there is distaste for diversity and a clear preference for racial homogeneity in their social interactions, living spaces, and work environments.

*Question #1: Why do you think whites are at risk in contemporary American society?*

Baby boomers have focused on basic civil rights for everyone and that is a real problem. When they all finally die off civil rights won’t really matter all that much anymore. Once demographics finally gets out of control, Black and Mexican overlords are not going to give a damn about whites and their rights and unenlightened whites just don’t want to recognize this inconvenient fact (Adam).

You know that the majority of whites are in this baby boomer population bubble and when that happens whites will become a super minority. What white people need to realize is that it doesn’t matter if they are racist or not but the majority of blacks and Hispanics are racist against

whites and they don't care what your political beliefs are or whether you voted for Obama or not (Ryan).

*Question #2: Why do you believe that whites are superior to other races?*

First of all, let me say that sometimes it is hard to hold these white power groups together especially if there are internal and external conflicts. When I was growing up in the skinhead culture, I knew about fights and violence. That was the way it was. Some people who come into the movement don't know anything because they have never experienced the culture firsthand. So there is this idea about white unity and it is not always that easy. There are different factions and sometimes we don't all get along. We might all be racialsists but we don't all get along. So basically to answer the question I would say that generally speaking whites are the people with strong morals and good values. In Pastor Robb's group there is a strong family orientation and I like that. Now that I'm reading more about founders of our movement I'm realizing that it has been an uphill struggle but white people will ultimately prevail because we are the best of all the races and the most suited to be leaders (Anna).

I think when whites find themselves surrounded by blacks they suddenly understand they are really superior to them. That is one of the reasons we have so many guys join up with groups like Blood and Honour when they get out of prison. But those guys are really not what we need in this movement to help the white race. We need the average hard working white guy. But that doesn't happen because they are all brainwashed by the liberal media into staying away from groups like ours (Kyle).

*Question #3: What are your thoughts about the value and importance of white culture?*

. . . . Sometimes an unforeseen future is more important than what you can predict. I think that America is in for a bunch of unforeseen realities. You know, I voted for Reagan and I remember when he was elected everyone thought he was going to cut out welfare and food stamps and stop immigration and everything was going to be perfect. Well, he didn't do any of that. He just sort of held down the fort. That's all he could do. I place a high value on civilization that was created by white people. . . . unfortunately a great president like Reagan couldn't really do anything to protect our people and our culture. We are still in a state of flux and I don't know where we are actually going but if we can re-establish some of the moral imperatives that made this country great, I think activists in this movement will have done their job. Instilling white culture in our children is also really important work for the ladies (Gary).

When you take a small white community and everybody pulls together when times are tough, then that is a superior culture. Let me give you an example - a few years ago when some tornadoes came through this part

of Arkansas there was a lot of damage. The day after the storms struck, white folks were out there with their tractors and other equipment cleaning up property and helping everybody out. Not a single Mexican came out to help. They all left and went to stay with relatives somewhere else until the cleanup was done. Their idea of culture is Cinco de Mayo and tacos. African Americans are going to tell you that their idea of culture is government housing, subsidies, and rap music. White culture is totally different and without a doubt, superior (Darrell).

Demographic analysis indicates that White Revolution was male dominated. It also appears that *Stormfront.org* has a similar gender balance among respondents who participated in the sample discussion posts with eight females (8.2 percent) and 75 males (77 percent) with 14 unknown (14.4 percent). The lead investigator has documented similar findings regarding gender during fieldwork in Arkansas. Consequently, the interview sample from Arkansas selected for this study included four women (33.3 percent) and eight men (66.6 percent). The median age of White Revolution survey respondents was 36 years old and 39 respondents (26.5 percent) live in the southern region of the country. The average age for the Arkansas interview subjects was 44 years of age, slightly older than the White Revolution sample. If the White Revolution survey responses are true regarding education, 84 respondents (56.8 percent) have completed some college or hold a BA or higher. The sample of interview participants in the Arkansas field study was also educated, with five individuals holding college degrees, one holding an associate degree, and six others with high school equivalencies. Ten of the 12 interview subjects from the Arkansas field sample were born in the South. Even though the demographic information regarding region of residence for *Stormfront.org* discussants was difficult to determine for 52 bloggers (53 percent), it appears that 16 bloggers (16.4 percent) live in the South and 20 bloggers (20.6 percent) live outside of the United States.

## V. DISCUSSION

The social construction of white racial identity among the individuals cited in these samples is a result of unquestioned beliefs about white identity and culture, as well as and perceived threats to that identity and culture, specifically by forces exterior to the movement. Various responses to the White Revolution survey, posts on *Stormfront.org* discussion blogs, and recorded interviews with 12 white racial activists in Arkansas illustrate many of the concerns that activists in the white supremacist movement have about the future of the white race, preservation of their European-derived ethnic heritage, and reinforcement of traditional gender roles. Whether it is

due to the increase of multiculturalism in American society, sluggish national and regional economies, or fierce competition for scarce jobs, the segment of the white population represented in this study interprets sources of social conflict as an assault on white culture and their way of life.

Believed to be under attack from unenlightened whites, antiracist activists, and non-white out-groups, respondents in these studies have crafted a definition of “whiteness” that protects their identity from more mainstream whites who support diversity and display tolerant attitudes toward social issues such as gay rights. According to the white racist worldview expressed in the survey, *Stormfront.org* blog posts, and interviews, liberalism and racial tolerance makes a mockery of pure white culture. The following response posted in the White Revolution survey reveals the opinion that mainstream whites have no cultural pride:

. . . most whites today identify w/alien cultures (african, american-indian) instead of their own. It is not acceptable to be proud of your European heritage, so a lot of people have let cultural pride fall by the way side.

Roper, now a member of Pastor Robb’s Knights Party Klan group, also articulated some of his views with the following comment in an interview with the lead investigator on May 5, 2010:

Those of us who are part of the movement are hyper-aware that our race and culture is on the verge of genocide. We also know that some of our enemies are feminism and unenlightened whites – both men and women. White nationalist women want their men to be real men. They are biologically wired to be attracted to men who can take care of them and their offspring. Most American white men have abdicated their responsibility as leaders of race and nation and as protectors of their families. They are so brainwashed about being racist or homophobic that they will physically step off the sidewalk just to avoid offending all the minority groups out there demanding their rights. To be blunt about it, white men have been emasculated. White nationalist men are the last of the alpha males because we are not afraid to stand up for our race and our women and our rights even it offends people.

Many of the responses from all three data sources echo Agnew’s (2001) discussion about how individuals cope with perceived strain in the broader society. Face-to-face associations within groups such as White Revolution and in online communities such as *Stormfront.org* enable socially-marginalized racist individuals to establish networks with other likeminded individuals who, in turn, reinforce their attitudes about race and diversity. When asked about the importance of white culture, respondents indicate a general feeling of loss and fear of the future, especially for their

children and grandchildren. This perception of cultural loss results in anger toward social institutions that have failed to maintain dominant, Anglo-Saxon core values. Agnew and Broidy (1997) differentiate between how males and females react emotionally to strain. They found that males are more likely to respond to strain with anger followed by moral outrage. Males are also quicker to blame others for their troubles than are females. The demographic profile represented in this research study indicates that males outnumber females in all three samples, which may help explain some of the rancor exhibited in many responses and posts.

Survey responses, discussion forum posts, and face-to-face interview data reinforce Tajfel's (1974) assumptions outlined in his social identity theory. A sense of group position based on race and cultural relativism gives this sample of white racial activists a collective sense of pride and self-esteem. Survey responses, *Stormfront.org* posts, and interview data reveal a tendency for people who self-identify as white nationalist to inflate their self-worth (great civilization builders; wholesome working class culture) by pointing out the ascribed shortcomings of other groups (less talented; more troublesome) thus creating true in-group versus out-group status through social categorization. Social identity theory states that the in-group will likely discriminate against the designated out-group(s) in response to perceived cultural/racial differences. Group membership is not something that is external but rather a real and vital part of the individual persona that is bound by race and sealed by perceptions of cultural superiority.

#### CONCLUSION

Organized American racial extremism began in 1866 in Pulaski, Tennessee with formation of the first KKK group. Eventually the emergence of anti-immigrant and anti-Jewish sentiments during the 1930s and 1940s resulted in the formation of other extremist groups such as the Silver Shirts, a pro-Hitler group originating in California<sup>7</sup> and the Church of Jesus Christ Christian, a racist church founded by Klansman Wesley Swift (Milwicki, 2015). With advancements in technology such as the Internet, broader social networks have evolved making it easier for racist ideologies to spread and white racial activists to connect and form new groups. People who participate in and support extremist causes consciously assess their own in-group status based on physical and cultural characteristics, which indicates that the focus on "whiteness" and white culture persists. White racial activist mobilization continues with the proliferation of rhetoric that is directly connected to the importance of "whiteness." One of the ways that overtly racist individuals create social solidarity is through white racial

identity formation, which results in individual affiliation with White Revolution, the KKK, and other groups that are part of the white supremacist movement in the United States. Entrenched racial attitudes exhibited by the people represented in our study are echoed in the words of George Lincoln Rockwell, founder of the American Nazi Party:

White man, let us stand together to secure the survival of your people and my people, for they are one and the same – they are our beloved, miraculous, wonderful, blessed and masterful white race!

Future research should include more investigation of emergent technologies and mobilization efforts for extremist groups in the United States. Researchers should also try to examine demographic characteristics of activists in the movement in order to get a sense about who activists are, where they live, and what they do for a living. Work in the field is difficult; however, in our opinion one of the best ways to learn what drives individuals to join extremist groups, such as the KKK, is to question activists about their beliefs and lives, observe events, and document findings. While hate may never be eradicated from American society, sources of conflict should continue to be explored in an effort to identify why some people become disenchanted enough to join groups ideologically opposed to social justice and equal opportunity for all persons.

#### NOTES

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1. Even though we use the terms white supremacy/white nationalist and white supremacist movement/white nationalist movement interchangeably, we use the label “white nationalist” as a universal descriptor of the movement (Swain, 2002; Swain & Niele, 2003; Zeskind, 2009).

2. See Critical Whiteness Studies Group, *Towards a Bibliography of Critical Whiteness Studies*, available at <http://facweb.northseattle.edu/jreis/White%20Privilege/WhitenessBibliography%5b1%5d.pdf>.

3. Blood & Honour is a neo-Nazi skinhead group that is composed of young white power activists and other white nationalists. The Council of Conservative Citizens is an American political organization that supports a



large variety of right wing causes that include white nationalism and white separatism.

4. The General Social Survey is an annual survey of a representative sample of American adults conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (“NORC”).

5. The twelve individuals profiled in this study were taken from a larger interview sample collected beginning in July 2009 and ending in December 2012. The interviews selected include specific discussions about the importance of “whiteness” as well as fears the respondents have about the sustainability of white culture in a multicultural society.

6. All survey responses, *Stormfront.org* posts, and interview quotes from fieldwork in Arkansas are direct quotations that include misspellings and other grammatical errors.

7. For a chart documenting connections between racist groups from 1930 to 1990 see *Blood in the Face* by James Ridgeway.

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