

Baptizing Nazism: An Analysis of the Religious Roots of American Neo-Nazism

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ABSTRACT

The years following the Second World War saw American religious leaders making fervent attempts to bridge the denominational gap and encourage peaceful cooperation among America's three leading faiths: Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. While the religious revival movement was largely successful, it was not as complete as historians have previously suggested. Scholars of the postwar religious awakening have neglected the darker, conflictual, and even violent strains of religious revival which developed alongside the optimistic, cooperative, and harmonious efforts that have taken center stage. Simply put, the development and propagation of Christian Identity, as propelled by Dr. Wesley Albert Swift, provided a ready-made system of values and organizational tenets to the various white power and neo-Nazi organizations that emerged across America after World War II ended. This article seeks to bring scholarly attention to this national movement that emerged in direct opposition to the Judeo-Christian tradition, and in so doing, highlight the evolution of the American Neo-Nazi movement as a theologically-based movement that is starkly different from and considerably more malleable than modern American Nazism (which is often referred to as neo-Nazism, albeit, incorrectly).

INTRODUCTION

Reverend David Ostendorf of the United Church of Christ wrote "Christian Identity is a belief system so strange, indeed bizarre, that most Americans who know anything about it dismiss it outright and relegate those who believe it to the quaint and quirky fringes of the nation's subcultures" (Ostendorf, 2002, p. 24). Ostendorf's claim notwithstanding, Christian Identity has been widely influential in specific American subcultures and social movements, thus it is important from a scholarly perspective—for those who are concerned to understand these subcultures and movements—to examine the role of the Reverend Dr. Wesley Albert Swift, who was the chief ideologue of this vehemently racist sect of Christianity. While historians of the radical racist Right acknowledge Swift's significance as the man behind Christian Identity, for the most part they either

ignore or fail to engage Swift beyond this role. There are several potential explanations for the lack of attention. It may be due to a lack of interest and/or scholarly materials, or perhaps a reluctance to attribute greater import to Swift. After all, analysis of both Swift and his followers reveals them to have been self-interested, self-aggrandizing people who had no qualms with falsifying or misappropriating information to improve their respective circumstances. Likewise, historians may have overlooked Swift's wider significance because ascertaining the "truth" about his actions, claims, plans, and programs would also prove to be exceedingly difficult.

Yet in order to better understand how the radical racist Right continues to exist today, it is necessary to understand how it evolved, whom its chief architects were, how it spread, and why it has been so adaptable. The research and analysis presented in this article—of U.S. government intelligence documents, Swift's own writings and sermons, the writings and sermons of Swift's predecessors and followers, and various secondary sources on the evolution of the radical racist Right—suggests that Swift was central to the coalition of religious and militant white nationalist organizations that spread nationwide in the post-World War II period. Indeed, an examination of Swift's role outside the ministry reveals his centrality to the proliferation of an American white power network. From the myriad of organizations that Swift created, figured in prominently as a member, or with which he developed affiliations, it is evident that his rhetoric and teachings helped to develop a network of social action that remains a powerful force on the racist fringe of American society to this day. From his time as a Ku Klux Klan recruiter, Swift was described as a "prolific organizer" with "bombastic oratorical style." It is arguable that Swift utilized these skills to create, lead, and support a number of informal groups, socio-political organizations, and religious institutions that reached across the United States after the Second World War (Levitas, 2002, p. 25).

I. EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP

Historians of the religious racist Right have recognized that Wesley Swift played a vital role in the proliferation of this white racist Christian theology. In *Religion and the Racist Right*, political scientist Michael Barkun states that "more than anyone else Wesley Swift was responsible for popularizing Christian Identity in right wing circles by combining British Israelism, a demonic anti-Semitism and political extremism" (Barkun, 1997, p. 60). Historian Charles H. Roberts agrees that the Christian Identity movement and its theology are "inconceivable without Wesley Swift" (Roberts, 2003, p. 12). Jeffrey Kaplan, head of the Institute of Religion,

Violence, and Memory, notes that anti-racist non-governmental organizations like the Anti-Defamation League also treat Swift “as the personification of Christian Identity” (Kaplan, 1997, p. 147). In this regard, the historiography about Swift is consistent: he molded Christian Identity into the rabidly anti-Semitic, racist, and nativist dogma that remains a core doctrine among the religious racist Right, and he was the man most directly responsible for crafting its major theological tenets.

However, historians have failed to engage how Swift figured in the creation of a variety of different organizations, and how the dissemination of his theology connected these organizations and their members not only to him, but to each other and to other like-minded organizations as well. This oversight may be entirely due to the fact that crucial FBI documents remained classified until recently. Whatever the reason for this oversight may be, it is important to recognize that Christian Identity—as led by Swift—emerged as a darker, more conflictual movement in opposition to the Judeo-Christian and religious revivalism that was burgeoning in mid-century America (Marty, 1996, p. 4).

The years following the Second World War are often seen as an age of remarkable religious enthusiasm. One of the distinguishing characteristics of this particular “Great Awakening” in the United States was the cooperative spirit that it evinced, a spirit that diminished long-standing theological and racial divides and helped to secure an era of social harmony (Silk, 1989, p. 38). This cooperative spirit further heightened the appeal of religion for many Americans, who by midcentury sought relief from the seemingly endless rounds of social turbulence and wartime violence (Wuthnow, 1988, p. 11). The revelation of Nazi death camps in 1945 broke down religious antagonisms and prejudices, thereby undergirding the growth of popular belief in a common Judeo-Christian heritage shared by all Americans; the use of a phrase like “our Christian civilization” as synonymous with the United States began to seem ominously exclusionary (Silk, 1989, p. 44).

Evidence of the revival’s success is clear in Gallup polls taken shortly after the War’s end. Because a reported 94 percent of Americans “believed in God,” citizens overall were becoming more animated about their faith, particularly with the fear of spreading secularization and anti-religious Communism inspired by the Cold War (Wuthnow, 1988, p. 19). As Silk notes, “having proved itself against the Nazis, the Judeo-Christian tradition now did duty among the watch fires of the Cold War” (1989, p. 44). In the face of what was perceived as the rising Communist threat, American religious leaders urged their congregations to see religion as the foremost means of defending against godless Communist infringement upon American freedoms and, indeed, upon civilization itself. Thus, according to historians of

the postwar religious revival, the emergent American Judeo-Christian tradition became the front line of defense against Communism.

Anti-Communism would also become a central tenet and attractive facet of Swift's unique theology. However, unlike the wider, more conciliatory aspects of the era's religious revivalism, Swift claimed that Judaism and Communism were not only linked, but indeed synonymous. Swift's claims found some receptive ears because, despite the objective horrors of the Holocaust, many Americans in the immediate postwar period "found it hard to believe that the reports from the Nazi concentration camps could be true," perhaps in part because reports on the number of Holocaust victims varied widely (Marty, 1996, p. 63). During the rise of the radical Christian Right, the idea of a "Holo-Hoax"—a belief that the Holocaust had been manufactured by Zionist leaders and Communists—would become a prominent and lasting tenet among Identists (Swift, 1962).

Furthermore, although the strides toward religious toleration and interfaith unity may have been strong among religious leaders, opinion polls indicate popular sentiment may not have been quite as harmonious. For example, Wuthnow notes that anti-Semitism was still strong among Americans (1988, p. 78).² Persistent anti-Semitic attitudes, American racism and nativism, growing anti-Communist fervor, the conflation of Judaism and Communism information about the fact pattern of the Holocaust, and (mis)information about the fact pattern of the Holocaust combined for an ideal atmosphere for Christian Identity to emerge and also provided Swift with an atmosphere appropriate to crafting an ideology that connected, influenced, and guided the emergence of a white power network which crisscrossed the nation.

The Christian Identity theology popularized by Swift emerged as a counter to the harmonious postwar religious revival. This new strain of religious racism did not form in a void; its origins are traceable to the explosion of religious faith that began in roughly 1940 and continued through the 1950s. Yet Swift's own brand of religious racism was distinctive in that purported to provide theological "proof" that Nazi anti-Semitism, racism, and American nativism were biblically justified. Within a climate in which the peaceful goals of religious revival and the success of the Judeo-Christian tradition were not as comprehensive as many historians have suggested, Christian Identity presented itself as a spiritually-inspired endeavor to which an individual could dedicate his life.

II. PREDECESSORS—FROM FORD TO SMITH TO SWIFT

The fact that American religious leaders had already been on an anti-Communist crusade for years by the time the Second World War ended

provided a mainstream point of reference from which Swift could broker a radical turn. However, unlike his right wing predecessors—Henry Ford, Howard Rand, William Dudley Pelley, and most notably, Gerald L.K. Smith—Swift remained firmly a religious figure as a preacher and minister. True, his organizations and affiliations were politically oriented, and he himself wanted to affect political change, but Swift always did so from the pulpit. Furthermore, there is no record that he aspired to attain political office.

The author's research indicates that Swift was likely involved in existing White Power circles by the early 1930s. Yet Swift's name was not well known as it would be in later years. Before Swift became a "household name" among postwar American Neo-Nazis, Gerald L.K. Smith was the face of white nationalism—as a political ideology—and the "true America." Smith would later become Swift's mentor and benefactor in the late 1940s. Like Swift, Smith was a preacher. He began his career as an ordained Disciples of Christ minister in Shreveport, Louisiana. Smith continually used Christianity as a tool and constantly referred to the importance of creating a "Christian America" in both his speeches and writings, but his contribution to the racist Right was not primarily religious. When Philip Lieber, a banker with Jewish roots, foreclosed upon Smith's church in 1933, it confirmed for Smith that the Jews were in control of international finance and were attempting to collectivize the global economy. Thus, Smith became a rabid anti-Semite promoting the conflation of Communism with Judaism, and he became obsessed with the notions that Jews manipulated or initiated wars, were determined to Communize and destroy the United States, and were in fact the source of all the world's ills. In order to ensure this did not happen, Smith "left the ministry permanently for politics" (Jeansonne, 1997, p. 31). According to his biographer, Smith remained more of a political entity rather than a religious figure because "the taste of political power," for Smith, "was irresistible" (Jeansonne, 1997, p. 30). Smith was driven, above all, by his hatred of Jews; a hatred that would become more emphatic as the 1930s and 1940s progressed. His political ambitions and the political orientation of his movements, organizations, and rhetoric truly differentiated Smith from his protégé Swift.

The man who taught Smith that Judaism and Communism were intrinsically linked was one of the men he considered a "superman": the industrial tycoon, Henry Ford. After what Smith described as a "long conversation" with Ford in 1937, Smith came to understand and recognize the connection Ford had forged between Communism and Judaism, and he integrated Ford's analysis of this link into his own ideology (Jeansonne, 1997, p. 75). Ford's four-part "study," entitled *The International Jew* (1922), became a powerful source not only for Smith's views but also for

American anti-Semitism more generally (Kaplan, 1997, p. 290). Army intelligence documents reveal that Ford was even suspected of having left money to Swift in his will (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2012). As a protégé of Smith, it is possible (though unconfirmed) that Swift was introduced to Ford, as the American industrialist died a year after Smith and Swift had met. Regardless, the influence of Ford's work on Swift's notions of Jewish conspiracy and sedition is evident, and the *International Jew* served as a primary reference point for both Christian Identity rhetoric and the white nationalist anti-Semitic organizations that it spawned nationwide.

For his own part, Smith believed Ford's work to be "thoroughly objective," claiming that "the book does not contain one sentence of hate." Smith concluded that he would "defy any honest well-meaning citizen, courageous enough to believe the truth when they see it to read this report and not be concerned with the plans, purposes and programs of the international Jew" (Smith, 2008, pp. 111-19). He also praised the founder of Ford Motor Company as the genius who "discovered what the Jew was up to," and, raising the specter of Jewish conspiracy, Smith claimed that "the organized Jew" sought to suppress publication of Ford's work. That Ford was able to publish and circulate his book in spite of "the arm twisting persecuting pressures of the organized Jew" would be a primary reason why Smith considered him a "superman" and a patriot loyal to the "true" America (Smith, 1978).

To Smith, the most profound element of Ford's work was the supposedly definitive identification of Jews and Communism, effectively collapsing any distinction between Jews and America's greatest ideological enemy. In a chapter from *The International Jew* entitled "Bolshevism and Zionism," Ford asserted that "Communism works in the United States through precisely the same channels as it used in Russia and through the same agents" particularly, "Jewish agitators" (Ford, [ca. 1955]). Ford claimed "there are more Communists in the United States than there are in Soviet Russia," and that "Russian Bolshevism came out of the East Side of New York where it was fostered by the encouragement—the religious, moral and financial encouragement—of Jewish leaders." The alleged centrality of New York to Judeo-Communism was something that Smith would latch onto, as he would not only echo Ford's statements throughout his career, but also take it a step further. "New York City was also the center of world communism," Smith claimed, and "the Soviet government was really established by Jews from the lower east side of New York City" (Smith, 1978). Smith proclaimed that, when he embraced Ford's research, he "became courageous enough and honest enough and informed enough to use the words, Communism is Jewish" (Jeansonne, 1997, p. 76).

As already discussed, Smith was deeply anti-Semitic even before he

accepted Ford's contention about an intrinsic connection between Jews and Communism. In the same year that his church was foreclosed, he became involved in the proto-fascist Silver Legion, or Silver Shirts, led by American Nazi and Hitler supporter William Dudley Pelley (Jeansonne, 1997, p. 27). On January 30, 1933, the day that Hitler rose to power, Pelley founded his political group and mirrored it after National Socialism. His followers wore Nazi-esque uniforms in silver, and the Legion's emblem was a scarlet letter 'L' that stood for "loyalty to the American republic, liberation from materialists, and, of course, the Silver Legion itself" (Jeansonne, 1997, p. 31).

From the 1930s onward, Smith's own rhetoric encompassed Pelley's ideas and statements, indicating that his association with the Silver Shirts would exercise an enduring influence. Throughout his organization's brief prominence in 1933 and 1934, Pelley boasted that his group had about 15,000 members and that chapters existed in multiple states. Additionally, he published and sponsored several periodicals, including *The Liberation*, *The Galilean*, *The New Liberator*, and *Silver Shirts Weekly*. Like Pelley, Smith would go on to found a variety of publications, although the latter's would be more successful than the former's (Werly, 1972).

Pelley's political ideology essentially consisted of extreme forms of anti-Communism, anti-Semitism, racism, nationalism, and isolationism—all of which would be influential to Smith.³ After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, Pelley officially disbanded the Silver Shirts—though they were essentially nonexistent after 1934—but continued to publicly denounce Roosevelt. In 1942, the President authorized the Silver Shirt leader's arrest under the Sedition Law, and Pelley was sentenced to fifteen years in federal prison. Although Pelley was paroled in February 1950, he did not pursue the same goals as before his arrest, and he died in relative obscurity in 1965 (Beekman, 2005, p. 143). However, his veneration of the Third Reich would survive as a common theme among future American National Socialist groups, as well as within the religious racist Right, including Swift's own Christian Identity Movement.

Meanwhile, at the close of the Second World War, Smith reorganized his first political party, The America First Party, into the more religious themed and named Christian Nationalist Crusade. Through this organization, Smith "sought out young fundamentalist Christians who were militant about their cause," and that "he was less concerned with what they believed in than with their commitment to following orders" (Jeansonne, 1997, p. 97). As head of the Christian Nationalists, Smith espoused the same notions about the Judeo-Communist threat to America that he had previously asserted, but calculated that restructuring the organization to include the word "Christian" would attract more people who were committed to

opposing the godless Soviet regime. Smith provided his apprentice Swift with the opportunity to deploy his organizational skills and made him his West Coast Representative of the Christian Nationalist Crusade. This position allotted Swift a modicum of power and influence, but it mainly served as a vehicle and opportunity for Swift to begin spreading to the public the vitriol of Christian Identity. Due to Smith's genuine affection for the younger preacher, and Swift's obvious oratorical skill of the younger preacher, Smith would often allow Swift to precede him to the podium (Boylan, 1997).

In the postwar world, the lines of division were clear for the ideologues of Christian Identity: Communists and Zionists on one side; "true Americans," like Smith and Swift, on the other (Jeansonne, 1997, pp. 98-100). In time, the persistently adaptive term "true Americans" would become central to the self-conception of Christian Identists. To them, the only "true American" was a white Protestant with ancestry in Western Europe, preferably the British Isles. These were the men and women whom Smith, and later Swift, believed would be victorious over their Jewish adversaries in both the Cold War and the larger threat of the Zionist Occupation Government, thus enabling them to claim the United States as their own (Jeansonne, 1997, p. 64).

Smith's political agenda lacked the cohesion and consistency to affect political change after the Second World War. His inability to marshal evidence for wild assertions and wanton accusations clashed with postwar America's newfound sense of Judeo-Christian harmony. Despite the significant reach he gained utilizing mass media—including newspaper, radio, and public speaking—it was clear that he would not be able to successfully mount a political campaign driven so blatantly by anti-Semitism.

Yet white nationalism grew almost immediately in stature when Smith took on a new lieutenant in Swift, who firmly grounded his mentor's anti-Semitism and racialized vision of American Identity within the fruitful soil of Christian theology (Quarles, 2004, p. 137). Most self-professed crusaders against supposed Jewish power had failed to find footing within the American political arena after World War II. However, the conflation of Jews and Communism, Smith's diatribes about Jews as the source of the world's problems, his notions of Jewish plans for world domination, and his innumerable conspiracy theories would find fertile ground in the theology of Swift, who would pull away from Fundamentalism into a more particular strain of racist Christianity.

Despite his abandonment of the ministry, Smith professed to dedicate himself to the precepts of "British Israelism" or ("Anglo-Israelism"), an obscure biblically-inspired ideology developed in 19th-century England. As the precursor to the Christian Identity theology, the primary doctrines of

British Israelism are worth noting. Moreover, along with Smith, both Henry Ford and his editor, William James Cameron, followed this doctrine.

British Israelism began conceptually in the late 17th century in the work of John Sadler, who professed the Israelite origin of the British people in *The Rights of the Kingdom*, published in 1649. However, it was not until the 19th century when that idea would gain a modicum of popularity and truly become a doctrine of faith (Parfitt, 2003, p. 42). In 1840, Scottish Reverend John Wilson gave a lecture, which was later published, entitled “Our Israelitish Origins.” Wilson’s lecture has been credited as a key moment in the growth of British Israelism into a religious social movement. For in this document, Wilson asserted that the “ten lost tribes of Israel migrated over time onto the European continent and eventually to Great Britain“ (Ostendorf, 2002, p. 27).

It is due in no small part to Wilson’s influence that British Israelites came to teach the belief that the peoples of Western Europe, especially those in the British Isles, were the direct descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, and also to embraced the notion that the British Royal family was the direct descendants of King David (Ostendorf, p. 37). “Through an analysis of English and Hebrew language similarities, and the proximity of social institutions like the monarchy to the British form of government,” Ostendorf notes, “Wilson concluded that Anglo-Saxon peoples were indeed the lost tribes, and thereby inherited the promise given by God to the northern kingdom of Israel.” Through Wilson’s work and that of his follower, Edward Hine, British Israelism became “foundational to an explicitly racial understanding of the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon peoples,” an “understanding firmly grounding the mainstream of racist notions of white supremacy” (Ostendorf, p. 37)

Although British Israelism was not particularly anti-Semitic when in the context of Europe during the 19th century, British Israelites were chiefly responsible for fervently supporting and publicizing—in certain circles—the Khazar theory of explanation on the origins of the Jewish people, a belief that would have profoundly anti-Semitic consequences in later years. Ironically, this theory of Jewish ancestry was first proposed by Russian Jewish anthropologist named Samuel Weissenberg in the 1920s. It was later appropriated and twisted by Swift and his predecessors as further proof of the conflation of Communism and Judaism (Smith, 2002). Indeed, Swift treated the fact that this theory was proposed by a Jew as tantamount to an admission that Judaism and Communism were indistinguishable (Barkun, 1997, p. 5).

In the 1930s, as the Khazar theory became popular in religious right wing circles, Christian Identity founder Howard Rand crafted his new theology, primarily by copying British Israelite beliefs on the divine heritage of

white Anglo-Saxons while ramping up anti-Semitism and Jewish wickedness. In *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement*, Barkun contends “the suggestion that the Jews were Asiatic rather than Europeans made it possible to include them within an existing category of inadmissible foreigners” (1997, p. 137). Rand utilized the Khazar theory to ensure the damning of the Jewish people as foreigners and invaders, but he did not as successfully equate them with the quintessence of evil as Swift, his devotee and follower, would later accomplish (Quarles, 2004, p. 54).

III. SWIFT’S WHITE RACIST THEOLOGY

Not much is known about Wesley Swift’s early life other than this: He was born in New Jersey in 1913, was ordained as a minister in 1930, and was involved with the Anglo-Saxon Federation in 1931 (Dobratz, 1997, p. 75). The Federation was an American continuation of British Israelite principles, with the exception that America, not Great Britain, represented “true Israel,” and its main organizers were Cameron, Rand, and the young Swift (Barkun, 1997). The significance of this Federation is that it represents the context in which Swift started to make a name for himself, likely due to his probable early involvement with the Ku Klux Klan (“KKK” or “Klan”), with whom he had a continued affiliation throughout his life. Swift’s association with the Federation also brought him into the orbit of Ford, one of his future mentor’s “supermen” and the author of one of the most influential documents to white nationalists (Jeansonne, 1997, pp. 39, 76). Cameron, who was Ford’s second-in-command and editor of the *International Jew*, was a British Israelite and one of the organizers of the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America in 1931. Cameron and Swift had likely interacted through the Federation, and although it is unknown whether Swift and Ford had any direct contact, it is more plausible to suggest that, rather than Swift introducing his protégé to the ailing industrial tycoon, it was the connection to Cameron which brought Swift onto Ford’s radar.

There is as yet no information available on Swift’s activities between the founding of the Anglo-Saxon Federation and 1939. However, according to FBI declassified dossiers, by 1939 Swift was living in Lancaster, California (FBI, 2012). Lacking a congregation of his own, he worked odd jobs, including as an auto supply salesman (Levitas, 2002, p. 24). Despite the banality of his occupation, it is highly likely that Swift was an active, key member of the KKK; the FBI was tracking him as early as 1942, and the Bureau noted that he left Lancaster for several months. Indeed, FBI sources refer to rumors that he may have gone north to Oregon or Washington (FBI, 2012). The documents then note that Swift returned to Southern

California in 1944; within a year, Swift was able to establish his first church, the Anglo-Saxon Christian Congregation (Levitas, 2002, p. 25).

Moreover, FBI intelligence suggests that by this time, Swift had attained the Klan rank of Kleagle, or recruiter (FBI, 2012), yet it is arguable that Swift was already among the rank of Kleagles before his sojourn north. From what experts know about the inner workings of the Klan, Kleagles were sent out to recruit people who would be interested in joining the Klan. Kleagles would move to whatever region they were investigating, for long periods of time, in order to get to know the area and profile likely individuals. Thus, the fact that when Swift returned to Southern California he had enough cash and status to create his first church dedicated to the principles of Christian Identity—the Anglo-Saxon Christian Congregation—suggests that he had some earning potential through the Klan, and likely made a decent amount of money Kluxing (the Klan term for recruiting). This scenario seems far more likely than Ford leaving Swift a bequest; the Klan position of Kleagle was fairly lucrative (Shotwell, 1974, p. 20).

Within a year of opening his church, however, Swift would meet his mentor and benefactor Smith, and his rise to the prominence within the religious racist Right would begin in earnest. According to Smith, his first meeting with Swift solidified the younger Reverend's place in both Smith's organizations and Smith's own personal life. A hostile crowd picketed one of Smith's speaking engagements at the Fort Worth, Texas Polytechnic High School auditorium. Police were unable to gain control of the situation and get Smith and his wife to safety. Smith claimed to have been terrified of being attacked by the picketers until he "turned to the right and there sat a young man about 30 years old," who turned to Swift, and said "'Don't be afraid Mr. Smith. Anyone who comes toward you will be sorry.' He then lifted his coat and held a black automatic pistol" (Smith, 1978, p. 238). Thereafter, Swift would be employed as Smith's lieutenant and bodyguard, and he became involved in many of Smith's anti-Communist crusades. Smith stated that this "young preacher and great student of the Bible" would influence his life in a "very unique way," and his presence at every one of his speaking engagements in Los Angeles, gave Smith "a sense of security." Indeed, Smith allowed Swift to promote Christian Identity in his publication, *The Cross and the Flag*, "gave Swift thousands of dollars" and told the younger preacher, "that he thought of him as a son" (Smith, 1978, p. 238). Swift's involvement with Smith in the Christian Nationalist Crusade and California anti-Communist League (which Swift created) would follow a similar pattern of anti-Communist rhetoric as the primary focus until the 1950s. FBI intelligence on Swift in the late 1940s and early 1950s emphasizes his rabid anti-Communist views more than anything else (FBI, 2012).

Yet while Communism would remain a focus for Swift throughout his life, promoting his gospel of Christian Identity took priority, and it would be Smith who provided him with ample opportunity to do so. In his autobiography, *Besieged Patriot*, Smith described a conversation between Swift and himself in which Swift explained Identity theology to him. In the essay entitled “Courageous Protector and Helper,” which is specifically about his protégé, Smith states that “one day [Swift] said to me: ‘Mr. Smith, I would like to bring my Bible up to your hotel room and talk to you.’ He did, and he made one of the greatest contributions to my life that any man ever made. He opened the Bible and demonstrated with proper texts that Christ’s worst enemies were not God’s chosen people. He identified the “true Israel” which gave us the Messiah, and demonstrated to me that we were the heirs to the covenant that God made with Abraham, and we were indeed Israelites.” Smith continues, stating that Swift showed him that “the Crucifiers of Christ were the apostates of Satan, and the seed of Cain. He proved by scriptures that Jesus Christ was not a Jew as we now know Jews, and that God is going to give His Kingdom to those who have accepted Jesus Christ, and not to those who caused His crucifixion and still justify it.” This, Smith would claim, was Swift’s “greatest contribution” to his life (Smith, 1978, p. 239). After this discussion, Smith was seemingly converted to Christian Identity (at least nominally).

Moreover, with Smith’s endorsement, Swift’s brand of Christianity began to draw more attention in right wing circles. Swift’s Identity theology differed from British Israelism and even Rand’s version by going further than both had and by conclusively “proving”—theologically—that the Jewish people were the embodiment of evil. Swift took issue with the Khazar theory because it stopped at proving that Jews were foreigners and non-white, but went no further toward a theologically based condemnation of Jewish Origin. Initially, Swift embraced a notably more anti-Semitic biblical revision of Jewish origins: Jews were descended from Jacob’s brother Esau, “whose descendants had rejected traditional Judaism in favor of atheism, embraced violence and revolution, and favored Zionism” (Barkun, 1997, p. 129). Esau’s progeny were interchangeably referred to as Amelek, Canaanite, or Edomite, the last of which had significant implications that would explain the contemporary conflation of Judaism and Communism. “We are all aware that [the Communists’ favored color of] red and Edom are interrelated,” Swift would argue, “and that the Amelek Seed line, the Canaanite Seed line, merging with the Edomite Seed line is the house of Red Jewry Communism today” (Barkun, 1997, pp. 127-130). The distinguishing of Esau’s descendants as “Edomites” suggests that notions of Jewish Communistic tendencies even predated the seventh-century beginnings of Khazar domination in the Caucasus region. According to Identity and

British Israelist scholars alike, “edom” in Hebrew means “red.” Therefore, in the very name of Esau’s ancestors, there is an apparent allusion to Communism.

A fundamental flaw of this position is that the literal translation of the word “red” in Hebrew is “*adom*” not “*edom*,” a fact that members of the Christian Identity Church glossed over. Notwithstanding this basic error, this version of Jewish origin also failed in Swift’s mind because of one vital and unacceptable aspect: whether they were the ancestors of Khazars or Edomites, such theories still enabled Jews to remain classified as human. Swift would revise this theory accordingly by creating a theological justification that not only declassified Jews as members of the human race, but also explained why they had become the cause of such suffering and hardship for white Christian America—the “true Israel” (Swift, ca. 1955-1965).

With Swift applying this new set of biblical proof to the cause, many of his predecessor’s inconsistent accusations against Jews could now seemingly be substantiated. To support his predecessor’s contentions that Jews had tricked the United States into joining the Second World War, as well as his position regarding the “Holo-Hoax,” for example, Swift readily explained that this was all possible and true for one simple reason: the Jewish people were the descendants of Satan (Barkun, 1997, p. 49).

The theological evidence that Swift provided for this claim rested on his interpretation of Jewish origins through the “Dual Seedline Theory,” a theory by which he both revised biblical history and furnished a new perspective on the Jews’ place in contemporary America. According to this miscegenation-based theory, the serpent in the Garden of Eden seduced and mated with Eve, thereby producing a hybrid creature, Cain, who is known in biblical history as the world’s first murderer. Whereas the descendants of Adam and Eve would be the true “chosen people,” the Jews were the descendants of Eve and the serpent; consequently, Swift’s view was that Jews were not simply an “unassimilable or evil force, but rather the quintessence of evil, the literal offspring of Satan” (Barkun, 1997, p. 63).

By locating the origin of modern Judaism in the Garden of Eden, all of Smith’s disparate beliefs about Jewish wickedness and deceptiveness—beliefs that Swift himself would also adopt—acquired a new biblical foundation. At the same time, Swift furnished a “believable” rationale for how the Jews could accomplish such fantastic feats, including manipulating the United States into allying with the Soviets during World War II to, fight against Germany, who he regarded as a fellow white Christian nation, and all the while strengthening the power of “Organized Jewry” (Swift, [ca.1955-1965]).

According to Swift, the man created on the sixth day within the Genesis narrative was not, in fact, the white man made in God’s image. Instead,

he was the seed from which came the inferior races of “yellow” and “black” people (Swift, ca.1955-1965). Only on the eighth day did God create Adam, whom Swift asserted was the culmination of all creation: a white man and the original Christian. At the same time, Swift warned, due to their common parentage in Eve, Jews retained the outward appearance of full humanity and whiteness, despite their hybrid serpent-human nature. The persistent place of Jews as “outsiders” in Western society, Swift contended, stemmed from these origins. As offspring of Eve, the Jews could pass as humans; as children of Satan, they would always find themselves as the cast-offs of human civilization (Barkun, 1997, p. 171).

In Swift’s account, Cain’s legacy in contemporary history was the “ongoing plot against God” evident within the battle between good and evil in the Cold War. “Cain had institutionalized his plot against God and the [white] Adamic race,” Swift declared, “in a secret organization to which his descendants belonged and gave loyalty.” That organization which Cain founded, Swift said, was “Organized Jewry.” Consequently, because the descendants of Eve and Satan “were superficially indistinguishable from those whose father was Adam,” it was necessary for “informed” men like Swift to reveal the history, the plans, and the characteristics of “God’s adversaries on earth.” Commenting on Swift’s appointment of himself as a crucial agent working on God’s behalf, Barkun argues that the “incorporation of satanic paternity into already existing theories of a world Jewish conspiracy gave [Christian Identity] ultimate parsimony,” substantiating the claim that “everything that was or is undesirable in the world has come from a single source. If that source is destroyed, the world will be perfected and the millennium will begin” (1997, p. 181). Swift’s affirmation of satanic origin explained why previous right wing anti-Semites, including Smith, were continually accused of being contradictory and lacking proof. Simply put, these allegations of incongruity were “fabricated by the conspirators themselves” in order to dissuade investigations into true Jewish origins and intentions (Barkun, 1997, p. 186).

As Swift’s ideas gained a hearing in southern California’s right wing fundamentalist enclaves during the 1950s, the emerging Christian Identity church promoted the notion that Jews, as with Communists, were naturally predisposed to evil, conspiracy, and world domination. The Jesus Christ Christian Church was the most important and influential organization for which Swift was directly responsible. In 1957, Swift reorganized the Anglo-Saxon church more openly toward the anti-Semitic principles of Christian Identity; this is arguably the pivotal moment in the establishment of the fringe Christian Identity movement (Quarles, 2004, p. 88). From his pulpit, Swift would recruit and screen others for membership in more militant organizations, spread the gospel of racism, and attract a number of

despicable characters. In turn, Swift's devotees would create their own churches and start their own organizations, thus reinforcing the Swift's gospel as a staple theological creed and providing a means to connect the members and groups of this growing network on the religious racist Right.

While the name of this church, Jesus Christ Christian, might seem innocuous, its true meanings have decidedly sinister implication, for the name bluntly asserts that Jesus Christ was a *Christian*. The name was chosen to reinforce Swift's interpretation of Scripture revealed, which meant the removal of all Jewish influence upon Christianity and scriptural interpretation, and the recasting of theological and literal history as a Christian history all the way back to Adam, with Jews now located as the center of all things evil. Furthermore, Swift proclaimed that Identists represent "true Americans" as well as "God's chosen few" who are destined to stand against International Jewry (Swift, ca.1955-1965).

This conflation of Nazi anti-Semitism, American racism, and Christian Identity's fundamentalist-style principles ultimately proved fluid enough to be able to remain attractive and plausible to multiple generations of white supremacists. Swift was able to locate a "definitive" theological explanation that made not only traditional American prejudices but also Hitler's Nazism justifiable and, more significantly, ordained by God. The significance of Swift's theological turn is profound, as Swift's church was arguably the initial organization that sparked the creation of a nationwide network of white power and neo-Nazi organizations. Moreover, FBI intelligence agents note that Swift used his church not simply to recruit parishioners, but also to screen and assess potential members for the more militant organizations in which he was involved (FBI, 2012). From his pulpit, Swift "inspired" followers to accept Christian Identity and enlisted potential soldiers in the coming conflict he believed that Americans would soon be facing, a battle that would be fought over the "soul of America" (Swift, ca.1955-1965).⁴

IV. SWIFT'S NETWORK

Analysis of FBI intelligence documents reveals how entrenched Swift's theology and teachings were among the various white power groups that materialized in the late 1950s. Such an analysis also indicates the intricacy of Swift's personal involvement therein. Not only was Swift the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ Christian, but he was also the silent leader of the Christian Defense League, the Christians Knights of the Invisible Empire—Swift's own reinvention of the KKK—and the California Rangers. In addition, Swift served as the West Coast Representative of the National States Rights Party, a position that offered a great deal of influence

over operations both in California and nationwide. He was intricately associated with Robert DePugh's Minutemen, as well; Identity bled into the ranks of this militant organization, because many of Swift's most devout followers were also members of this group. Additionally, almost all of Swift's trained and trusted Rangers were swallowed up in DePugh's group and were arguably instrumental in ensuring that the Gospel of Swift spread across America. Furthermore, FBI intelligence reveals that Swift was suspected of involvement, in some capacity, with nearly every white power, nativist, and segregationist organization that existed in this period, including the American Nazi Party, the White Citizens Council, and the John Birch Society (FBI, 2012).

Swift's white power résumé notwithstanding, his involvement with the myriad of organizations further illustrates why Swift's role and influence in establishing Christian Identity as a staple religious option is necessary to study. Despite the future of fragmentation both within and between Identity and larger white power movements, Swift's ideology remains influential and his legacy provides a anchoring resource from which current adherents still draw, whether they know it or not. Perhaps just as misunderstood, if recognized at all, is how close these movements came to potentially altering the course of American history. To see this, it is necessary to examine the background and influence of Swift's most devoted followers.

Charles Conley "Connie" Lynch was "simultaneously a minister of the Jesus Christ Christian Church, a state organizer for the National States' Rights Party, a member of the Minutemen, and a member of the Christian Defense League" (Boylan, 1997). During the Civil Rights Era, Lynch expanded the maliciousness of Christian Identity and never lost an opportunity to incite a riot (FBI, 2012). Indeed, as the "official policy speaker" for the National States' Rights Party, Lynch's career, as well as his abhorrence, arguably reached its peak at the St. Augustine white nationalist response to the Civil Rights protests that had succeeded in integrating area schools in 1963. Within a year, Lynch had arrived on the scene and was recorded to have proclaimed loudly to a crowd of 800 young white men present—including a mixture of Klansmen, Minutemen, and National States' Rights Party member—that "I represent God, the white race, and the constitutional government, and everyone who doesn't like it can go straight to hell. I'm not inciting you to riot—I'm inciting you to victory!" Almost immediately after this pronouncement, the racist demonstrators attacked the Civil Rights advocates, injuring forty of whom and causing the Governor to call in the National Guard to quell the riot. State investigations show that Lynch, a disciple of Swift, was instrumental in causing the St. Augustine riot—one of the bloodiest and most violent riots during the Civil Rights period (Armbrister, 1964, p. 80).

Lynch was a particularly violent and repugnant man. Perhaps the most descriptive piece of evidence about how vicious and vile a person Lynch was, however, came from the Founder of the National States' Rights Party himself, Dr. Edward Fields. In an article published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in August of 1964, Fields stated that he had kicked Lynch out of the party because he was too extreme; he "scared away the more substantial elements of the community" (Boylan, 1997).

FBI intelligence documents detail that the Reverend Oren Fenton Potito—another Swift zealot—was reported to be the southeastern director of the Church of Jesus Christ Christian, which was comprised of fourteen states (FBI, 2012). In addition to being Swift's Southern minister, the documents reveal that Potito, unsurprisingly, also became involved with the National States' Rights Party. Potito's position grew and he became the National Organizer of the States' Rights Party. He would also frequently invite and host Swift at events at his own Identity Church in St. Petersburg, Florida. Potito was detained and arrested at the riot against the integration of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi in 1962. Potito was found to have a "trunk full of firearms," and upon his arrest Potito admitted that he was a participant in Identity Church led "guerilla warfare units." It is plausible to assume that Potito had every intention of using or distributing them in the effort to stop the integration of the University. It should also be noted that over 200 Minutemen, of whom Lynch was a member, were reportedly present and active at this integration riot (Turner, 1967, p. 72).

William Potter Gale was perhaps the most well-known or public of Swift's devotees. Gale was the nominal leader of several of the organizations but which Swift truly controlled, as FBI documents reveal, including the Christian Knights of the Invisible Empire, Christian Defense League, and the California Rangers (FBI, 2012). Gale proved to be an asset to Swift in several different capacities. Through his military service, as a Colonel under General Douglas MacArthur, Gale seems to have spread Swift's teaching into the United States Military, at least in one reported case thus far: Admiral John G. Crommelin, who had fought in the Second World War and had achieved the rank of Rear Admiral in the United States Navy. When he returned from the conflict, at some point Crommelin was in contact with Gale, who in turn brought him to Swift. After hearing the Swift speak, and being personally introduced to him, Crommelin discovered the "truths" of postwar America. Crommelin went on to represent the National States' Rights Party in their bid for the presidency in 1968, as the vice presidential candidate for governor Orval Faubas. Through it all, Crommelin made his ideological alignment with Swift clear; in a speech where

Swift preceded him to the podium, Crommelin stated he “subscribe(s) 100% basically to exactly what Dr. Swift” preaches.

The intelligence reports reveal that Gale acted, in numerous capacities, as Swift’s proxy. As good as Swift was at organizing, Gale seems to have been just as good at recruiting. Several members who were brought into Swift’s fold—including the future Aryan Nations founder, Richard Girnt Butler—were done so through Gale. Several of these same men would later be under suspicion, or even indicted, for assassination attempts, acts of terrorism, and criminal activity. However, Gale’s influence goes beyond recruiting and connections to important public figures; there are also rumors within the intelligence documents of a close personal friendship with Alabama Governor George Wallace. At the time, Gale was under suspicion for, and openly involved in, several violent acts, particularly against the Civil Rights Movement. In particular, Gale was allegedly responsible for the bombings of several churches and was reportedly active in both Mobile and Birmingham throughout 1963, two cities that were hotspots for the Freedom Struggle. Historians and intelligence documents alike reveal Gale to have been a violent, militant man, devoted to one of Swift’s arguably-favorite ideas: that the American government, people, and dream had been corrupted by the influence of “undesirables,” and that it was essential to do what was “necessary” to ensure the future of the United States (Boylan, 1997).

FBI intelligence also suggests that Swift had a significant role in providing financial assistance to George Lincoln Rockwell’s American Nazi party, despite the fact that Rockwell did not share Swift’s religious ideology. The report from an agent who interviewed Swift also notes that Swift claimed to have differed from Rockwell on the topic of violence; the former claiming himself to be nonviolent. Yet one year after Rockwell organized the American Nazi Party, FBI agents observed a meeting between the two in which Swift was seen handing Rockwell large amounts of money. The two men also united in trying to influence Southern senators to their racist, anti-Semitic, white supremacy agenda. Intelligence agents report a meeting of Swift and Rockwell attempting to gain an audience with Southern senators, particularly Senator James Eastland whom, because of his opposition to civil rights and support of state rights, they believed would be an asset to their cause. Furthermore, despite their supposed differences, Rockwell and Swift convened again in 1964 to discuss a potential merger of the American Nazi party with the Christian Defense League (FBI, 2012). The documents do not reveal a further coalition beyond this supposed merger, but this cooperative spirit suggests that the American Nazi Party and Swift’s various organizations at least enjoyed a professional or cordial relationship.

Adding to the mystical appeal of Swift’s religiously-based organiza-

tion was his propensity to make prophecies and his claim to have predicted major events in America (albeit after they had already happened). Swift dedicated a large amount of time in his sermons to relate to his parishioners that President John F. Kennedy was unworthy of governing the United States. One year prior to JFK's assassination, Swift claimed to have predicted the President's death, and that it had been ordained by God. Swift stated that President Kennedy, through his "fraternizing" with Communists (and, by extension, Jews), had let down the Cubans, Hungarians, and all (Christian) people behind the Iron Curtain. This, as far as Swift was concerned, was unforgivable, and would have serious repercussions. During a church service attended by FBI intelligence, Swift alleged that, one year prior, he had asserted that the assassination of Kennedy was part of a prophecy having to do with Uranus, and that those were the same conditions as a century ago when Lincoln was assassinated. He further claimed that Jews had either installed Kennedy, placed him under hypnosis, or had lobotomized him (FBI, 2012).

Swift's rhetoric and sermons about President Kennedy—both his attacks on the President prior to his assassination and his proclaimed prophecy afterwards—brought Identity adherents, and most particularly Swift, under deeper observation of the FBI and J. Edgar Hoover himself. Hoover sent several inquiries to field officers about Swift, Identity followers, and their activities (FBI, 2012). However, Swift's anti-Kennedy rhetoric was not the only reason Identists were being watched. George King, Jr., a man who was recruited by Gale was under observation from both the FBI and the Secret Service, was arrested for being overheard planning the assassination of Kennedy and being in possession of illegal firearms capable of carrying out the deed. After King's arrest, it was confirmed that not only was King a member of the National States' Rights Party, but also of the American Nazi party, the John Birch Society, and Swift's own Christian Defense League (Boylan, 1997).

Swift himself was no stranger to conspiracy theories, and at some point in his career he seems to have subscribed to the notion that the United States government was being controlled three hundred public officials—or the Committee of Three Hundred.⁵ A statement from a redacted informant on November 26, 1963 reveals that Swift was the suspected mastermind behind a plot to assassinate these officials, who held high positions in both government and industry (FBI, 2012). In 1963, George Harding, Jr., an associate and follower of Swift, was arrested and brought in for questioning by the FBI, where it was revealed that Harding had been recruited by Swift to "become part of an eight man team" whose goal was to "assassinate three hundred public officials." Harding further reported that Swift was the leader of this coalition of assassins. Although it is unclear why

Harding was arrested, his admission reveals that despite Swift's claims of being nonviolent, he was not opposed to committing murder in defense of "true America" (FBI, 2012).

When Martin Luther King, Jr. began to organize nonviolent protests and campaign for civil and equal rights for black Americans, Swift took to the pulpit to immediately vilify and dehumanize his fellow preacher. He referred to Dr. King as "a fat headed Demagogue of the Negroes who likes attention." In a sermon entitled *Why You Cannot Turn Your Back*, Swift also referred to Dr. King as a "Negro educated in Communist schools" who "was chosen as the Negro leader for the Communist Party uprising in America" (Swift, 1965). Swift believed that the African American community wanted to overthrow white Christian civilization in the name of Communism and the Soviet Union. Intelligence reveals that during the Civil Rights era, Swift made periodic appearances and gave speeches at events hosted by the White Citizens Council, whose primary concern was halting integration and emphasizing Black inferiority (Citizens' Council, 1965). Swift's sermons would also emphasize the inferiority of African-Americans, specifically their savagery and depravity; he consistently linked them to animals. Swift claimed the "beasts of the field," that were created on the sixth day of the Genesis narrative included the "black and yellow" races, and otherwise echoed the sentiments of his white supremacists and segregationist predecessors (Swift, ca.1955-1965).

Swift himself never took any immediate and personal action against Dr. King beyond word issues from his own pulpit, but his disciples and followers certainly tried. Keith Gilbert, a member of the Minutemen, a confirmed Identist known to have attended Swift's Sermons, was arrested for stealing 1,400 pounds of Trinitrotoluene (TNT), with the admitted intent of blowing up Dr. King. Upon questioning, Gilbert admitted to being a follower of Swift's church (Aho, 1990, p. 57). Gilbert was sent to San Quentin Prison in California in 1964, the very same prison from which the Aryan Brotherhood would emerge within a year (Aho, 1990, p. 60).⁶

CONCLUSION

During periods of confusion, upheaval, and crisis, many Americans have been drawn to, or at least become more tolerant of, the rhetoric of white nationalism and its demagogues like Swift. After the First World War, America began a new era of fearfulness and mistrust toward immigrants and the outside world. The violently anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, anti-Black, anti-foreigner, and anti-immigration rhetoric that entranced the nation in the first five years of the 1920s came from William Joseph Simmons, the Imperial Wizard of the Second Incarnation of the KKK

(MacLean, 1994, p. 6). So appealing were Simmons's words in this time of social disarray that by 1924 not only had Klan membership reached well into the millions and leadership developed strongholds in state and local governments nationwide, but also the Johnson-Reed Anti-Immigration Act had effectively stemmed the flow of immigrants to American shores (Steffoff, 2007, p. 10).

During the Great Depression, many Americans were drawn to the populist diatribes of Huey Long and his "Share the Wealth" program. Because of the economic crisis, people were willing to overlook the Kingfish's criminal activities and general thuggery. Indeed, the support for this onetime Louisiana Governor and U.S. Senator was so great that, had he not been killed, it is possible that he may have been able to seriously challenge President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1936 election (Hair, 1991, p. 307). Likewise, after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decisions in 1954 and 1955 to desegregate public schools, many white Americans, particularly in the South, were drawn to Governor George Wallace, whose hardlined segregationist and anti-anarchist positions hit close to home for many whites nationwide. Wallace garnered support for his bid to the presidency in 1968 on a third-party ticket.

Now in the second decade of the 21st century, similar dynamics are once again on display. The Southern Poverty Law Center estimates a 700-plus percent national increase in hate group membership. In the summer of 2012, the Aryan Nations marched in Washington, DC; this was the first Aryan Nations gathering to have gained national attention outside of those held in the Inland Northwest (Potok, 2012).⁷ As the Aryan Nations was the vehicle of Richard Girnt Butler, Swift's self-appointed "spiritual heir," this and other recent activity demonstrates that Swift's influence has arguably endured.

Perhaps the reason why historians tend to downplay Swift's influence is that the modern movement pays greater homage to Butler as the Aryan Nations founder rather than to the Swift as his teacher. Furthermore, Butler's organization served as a base for the Order and many other splinter groups that emerged in the late 1970s and into the 1980s, which were responsible for numerous racist hate crimes and arguably placed the focus squarely on this white power conglomerate. Potentially, this means that many white nationalists and Neo-Nazis who either follow the modern incarnation of Christian Identity, known as Kingdom Identity, or support some of the tenets of Swift's creed, do so unaware of Swift's influence, thus also causing Swift's organizational and theological impact to be overlooked, ignored, or diminished by historians. For the most part, however, more publicly-visible organizations like Butler's Aryan Nations, the National States' Rights Party, the Minutemen, the Order, Rockwell's American Nazi

Party, or even prison gangs like the Aryan Brotherhood, the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas, and the Aryan Circle, all bear some of Swift's influence—organizationally, ideologically, or even financially.

Upon examining the intelligence documents that focus on Swift, and investigating the groups, followers, disciples, and others with whom he was associated in some capacity, it becomes clear that Swift and his theology served as both a connecting bridge and a central influence in white supremacist and religious right wing circles. Furthermore, it is nearly impossible to find an organization that existed during Swift's heyday that did not reflect his involvement in at least some capacity. Each one of these groups, organizations, or individuals would help to create the network of white power and neo-Nazi organizations that would spread across the nation; a network that had Christian Identity as a core principle.

Moreover, Swift's home and ranch served as a meeting place and training ground for these people. For example, the FBI suspected that Swift's ranch served as the training ground for the white power militias like the Rangers and the Minutemen. Five years after Swift's death, this suspicion was confirmed, and it was also discovered that Swift had housed a small arsenal in an underground bunker holding tons of munitions and weapons (Kendall, 1976).

Many might still argue that Swift was merely circumstantial to these events because a large amount of the criminal activity potentially happened without Swift's direct knowledge or say-so. Others might continue to believe that Swift was not as influential politically as his predecessor Smith or his successor Butler, especially because each of Swift's own groups were failures. However, it is undeniable that Swift played an influential role in the proliferation of white power organizations—whether ideologically, financially, organizationally, militarily, or theologically—and that, through them, his Christian Identity became established as indispensable to these organizations and future white racist movements. The fact that each of these organizations and individuals—and several more who were not listed in this article—are linked to other likeminded people through Swift's network, and through the theology Swift developed (which they have utilized as justification for their violent and militant racism,) it is arguable that Swift was influential in these cases, if indirectly. Likewise, criticizing Swift for a lack of political impact is moot, for he sought to be influential as a religious figure, and arguably never showed any direct political aspirations. So, whether or not his organizations endured is not entirely the point. These organizations and the network he created were the vehicle for him to spread his theology nationwide. By so doing, he positioned Christian Identity as a strong influence on the religious racist Right fringe of American society.

NOTES

1. Recipient, Gonzaga Institute for Hate Studies Graduate Student Research Award, 2012-13.

2. Polls taken between 1938-1946 indicate that when asked if they thought that “Jews had too much power in the US,” 47 percent of Americans said yes, 20 percent felt Jews were a menace to the United States, 30 percent would not support a Jewish candidate, 43 percent said they would not hire Jewish employees, and 57 percent related that they would not marry a Jew.

3. Pelley’s organization also appears as a precursor to George Lincoln Rockwell’s 1959 American Nazi Party. While neither Pelley nor Rockwell were self-avowedly Christian or religiously inspired, they did share several tenets with Swift’s Identity theology; indeed, there were documented occasions on which Rockwell and Swift would put aside their ideological differences and work together for the greater good of American “safety” and white racial purity (FBI, 2012).

4. Swift states that the “soul of America must rise” and that although “both political parties” and “the armed forces” were being controlled by organized Jewry, the West (America) “has a higher resolve to win.” He claimed that it was the American “destiny” that could never be broken, and that “those in its service,” namely Christian Identists, would be the ones who would be on the frontlines of the coming battle and free the American people from their Jewish oppressors. Essentially, this can be viewed as a call to arms against the Jewish “infected” United States government. Such a call would undoubtedly attract individuals to his faith, but also enlist and inspire a militant response in defense of America’s Soul.

5. Details as to who the members of the Committee were are not revealed in the intelligence documents, and my own research was equally inconclusive. The information available reveals that the committee could have been comprised of politicians, public officials, businessmen, bankers, insurance salesman, or real estate brokers.

6. My own research has revealed that in the 21st century one of the primary religious choices for modern members of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas is Christian Identity. As the Texas branch is an extension of the California branch, it becomes a question of how the theology of Swift got into the prison system. With the arrest and sentencing of Gilbert, an admitted Identist, the first tangible link between the Christian Identity theology and the Aryan Brotherhood prison gang is evident and indeed, will be a focus of my future studies.

7. From my experience attending this rally, it was clear that the marchers – who professed to be there campaigning for white South African

rights – were citing Christian Identity tenets, or at least a modern version of it, in their chants, slogans, and signs.

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