

# Uniting the Right: Anti-Immigration, Organizing, and the Legitimation of Extreme Racist Organizations

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the use of anti-immigration rhetoric and organizing efforts by extreme rightwing racist groups to present themselves as political actors. The authors analyze this process through a case study of the Keystone State Skinheads/Keystone United, a Pennsylvania-based hate group. The authors identify the manner in which this countercultural group uses anti-immigrant rhetoric to frame itself as a political organization. White racist organizations utilize issues such as the opposition to immigration to minimize stigma associated with their beliefs. This strategy has allowed them to participate at the forefront of anti-immigration organizing over the course of the last decade. By engaging in such organizing activity, extreme groups often present themselves to a more mainstream audience as non-violent organizations working merely to uphold immigration law. Additionally, the participation of white supremacists in the immigration debate shifts rhetoric further to the right and legitimizes expressions of racist sentiment by mainstream political actors.

*Keywords:* white supremacist movement, anti-immigration, legitimation, stigma management, neo-Nazi skinhead

## INTRODUCTION

Recent political activity and discourse that opposes immigrant rights and immigration reform in the United States has frequently faced accusations of racism and xenophobia, particularly with regard to discussions around immigration from Mexico. Movement leaders and spokespeople deny such accusations as ad hominem attacks by their opponents. However, activists, politicians, academics, and many others have noted the consistent involvement of white supremacists in the anti-immigration movement. White supremacists not only find common political ground

within this movement, but also use it as a means of trying to legitimize their ideology in a public forum, in part to potentially recruit new members. The opposition to immigration allows white supremacists to mobilize a number of macro- and micro-level stigma management strategies in order to portray themselves as legitimate political actors<sup>1</sup> in the immigration debate.

Even racist skinhead groups, often associated with criminality and violence (Simi & Futrell, 2009; Simi, Smith, & Reeser, 2008), have mobilized in the anti-immigration movement in order to present themselves as a political movement rather than a countercultural gang. Using a case study of a Pennsylvania-based white supremacist organization known as the Keystone State Skinheads (KSS), this article outlines the key strategies and actions employed by white supremacist groups in order to legitimize their ideology in public discourse. In order to build a holistic understanding of the way in which KSS engaged with the issue of immigration, the authors analyzed the organization's (and affiliate organization's) website, materials produced by anti-racist watchdog groups and individual activists, as well as media coverage of the group. The data indicate the manner in which white supremacist group participation in the anti-immigrant movement demonstrates a number of stigma management strategies designed to garner legitimacy in a larger social climate that is hostile toward overt displays of racism.

Section I of this article provides an outline of the key sectors of the white supremacist movement—Political, Religious, and Countercultural—and explains each sector's relationship with mainstream and conventional political actions and actors. Section II discusses the concepts of stigma and legitimation in relation to the white supremacist movement, its members, and its activities. This section highlights the major macro- and micro-level strategies utilized by white supremacists to legitimize their movement and ideology as well as negotiate a stigmatized political identity even when they engage in everyday activities and lawful forms of political participation. Section III presents a case study of the KSS in order to demonstrate the processes of legitimation used by stigmatized Counterculture white supremacists to present themselves as mainstream political actors categorized within the Political sector of the movement. Section IV applies the macro- and micro-level strategies employed by KSS in the process described in Section III. Section V explains how the processes of legitimation described in this article impact mainstream political discourse by allowing political actors affiliated with major parties, political organization, and media to express racist and white supremacist sentiments. Such sentiments are considered normative because it is claimed that they reflect the position of a political base or lack the overtly racist language of stigmatized, hardcore white supremacists. Finally, the authors summarize the impact of the legitimation strategies of the white supremacist movement by

describing the dynamic between such strategies and shifts in political discourse.

### I. SECTORS OF THE WHITE SUPREMACIST MOVEMENT—POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS, AND COUNTERCULTURAL

In order to understand the process of legitimation employed by white supremacist groups, one must first be familiar with the ideological and action positions of the variety of organizations within the movement. The white supremacist movement consists of three distinct sectors—political, religious, and countercultural groups—defined by the basis of each sector's ideology and forms of activism (Berlet & Vysotsky, 2006). White supremacist political organizations address social and political issues from a white supremacist analytic framework. In this way, they often frame the world through a racist view and advocate a neo-Nazi/fascist solution based on racial hierarchy to rid the world of its social problems (Arena & Arrigo, 2000; Berbrier, 1998a; Berbrier, 1998b; Berbrier, 1999; Daniels, 1997; Dobratz, 2000; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000; Ezekiel, 1995; Ferber, 1999; Hamm, 1993; Ridgeway, 1995). In contrast, white supremacist religious organizations often rely on a spiritual foundation for white superiority. Regardless of the specific type of white racist religion, there is a consistent theme that white superiority and social control are the desire of god(s) or creator(s). This spiritual basis distinguishes religious white supremacist organizations from their more secular, political counterparts and has at times been the cause of distinct rifts in the movement (Dobratz, 2000). Countercultural<sup>2</sup> groups, made up of predominantly teenage and young adult members, are less ideologically coherent than political or religious groups. While such non-normative youth-oriented groups share similar musical tastes, aesthetic styles, and argot (Clarke et al., 2006; Roberts, 1978; Smith, 1976), it is not uncommon to find a variety of ideals regarding the nature of white supremacy among members of countercultures. The skinhead scene incorporates members of neo-Nazi organizations, members of the Creativity Movement, Odinists, and Christian Identity followers. In the Black Metal and industrial/Goth scenes, there exists a variety of both secular and religious beliefs. For example, some members of the National Socialist Black Metal scene reject religion entirely, while others embrace Satanism or neo-Pagan Odinism (Burghart, 1999). The prominence of one ideological stance over another among white supremacist countercultures is often the result of targeted recruitment and support on the part of other specifically political or religious supremacist organizations or influences (Berlet & Vysotsky, 2006).

It is in the realm of activities that one truly begins to see the distinc-

tions between the three categories. Groups and organizations in all three sectors share a common white supremacist ideology that is translated into the unique representations described above; however, these distinct interpretations of the ideology result in unique forms of activity for each sector. Even though all white supremacists often engage in forms of political activism, religious and countercultural white supremacists blend ideologically motivated political activity with “sacred” and subcultural activities, respectively. This marks each type of supremacist sector as having a unique “action repertoire” distinct from other segments (Tarrow, 1994; Tilly, 2006).

The most consistent activity across all three categories appears to be a belief in and preparation for a coming race war. This is consistent with the ideology of both political and religious groups as well as the lifestyle of youth countercultures. Political supremacist organizations are motivated by the politics of neo-Nazi or fascist ideology, and fascist movements are essentially revolutionary movements (Berlet, 1992; Lyons, 1995; Passmore, 2002). Participants in these organizations seek to make social change through a radical transformation of the political system. This revolutionary fascist philosophy entails a notion of conflict that is based on a struggle for the supremacy of one nation or race over others. The justification underlying this conflict philosophy within fascism is victory of the powerful over the weak and the understanding of power as the ultimate goal, in and of itself. For the fascist, power can only be achieved through violence, and the ultimate form of power is control of the state. The fascist method of violence as a means of control becomes the justification for war, and likewise, fascists must engage in war for domination to prove their philosophy. In this respect, the fascist vision of the world is one of total war until total control has been achieved (Berlet, 1992; Lyons, 1995; Passmore, 2002). Therefore, the advocacy of a race war as a means of establishing their ideal social system can be directly linked to the fascist ideology of political supremacist organizations.

Religious white supremacists put a theological spin on the fascist/neo-Nazi justification for racial violence. However, the religious orientation of these groups adds an element of zealotry to their call for armed resistance. Whereas political organizations are engaging in a struggle for social control, religious groups are preparing for an inevitable holy war. For the Christian Identity religious belief system, it is the duty of white Christians to engage in conflict against Jews and other non-white “mud people” as part of a struggle to ensure the second coming of Christ and the redemption of all white Christians as the true children of Israel (Aho, [1990] 1995; Bushart, Craig, & Barnes, 2000). Furthermore, according to what many Christian Identity adherents believe, there is a constant battle on Earth

between the children of Satan (Jews) and the children of Adam (white, "Israelite," Christians) (Bushart, Craig, & Barnes, 2000). The Creativity Movement stresses the importance of racial-based conflict in its theology, encompassed by the frequently used term "RaHoWa" (which stands for "Racial Holy War"). According to Creativity's former highest priest, Matthew Hale, "Creativity adamantly proclaims that the White race must survive. It must expand" (Dobratz, 2000, p. 290). Additionally, many religious supremacists interpret Odinism's focus on Nordic myths of war and conflict to encourage engaging in fierce struggle for people of their own race.

The clearest distinction between the three categories comes in the form of activity that goes beyond a commitment to violent racial struggle. Political groups are much more likely to engage in what are generally deemed as traditional political activities such as lobbying or running for political office (Berlet & Vysotsky, 2006). This may reflect a trend within the extreme right of attempting to appeal to the political mainstream. This process has taken the form of running candidates for office, lobbying for legislation, and other participation in mainstream politics (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1995; Ezekiel, 1995). Political groups are also more likely to engage in other forms of political activity such as debates, conferences, political rallies, and prisoner support. These types of activities most appropriately designate such groups as political.

Religious white supremacist groups incorporate religious ritual and hierarchy into their ideological practices. Members of such groups often meet in formal and informal settings to discuss the contents of texts which they consider holy and to derive from them a spiritual significance for their own racist beliefs (Berlet & Vysotsky, 2006; Simi & Futrell, 2004). For example, Christian Identity is organized around concepts of fellowship and members often meet in makeshift churches, religious compounds, or at retreats where Christian theology is actively linked to white supremacy (Aho, [1990] 1995; Bushart, Craig, & Barnes, 2000; Dobratz, 2000). Both Christian Identity and the Creativity Movement are hierarchically structured with reverends in leadership positions. These individuals' status is derived from their advanced knowledge of their organizations' religious texts and principles, and rank-and-file members defer to them in matters of ideological importance and movement action. By engaging in religious practice and maintaining a hierarchy rooted in their own theological understandings of their religious texts, the actions of these supremacist religious organizations are distinct from the other two sectors.

Countercultural groups are unique in terms of activity in that they are often more oriented around maintaining their subculture, while still encouraging the politics of racial superiority. While there are a number of differ-

ent countercultural styles and aesthetics represented in this sector of the white supremacist movement, a key number of activities are shared by all groups in this category. The first and most obvious is the intentional display of neo-Nazi, racist, and white supremacist imagery as part of the distinct countercultural aesthetic (Berlet & Vysotsky, 2006; Futrell & Simi, 2004). This mobilization of aesthetics is designed to distinguish white supremacists from non-racist or actively anti-racist members of various countercultures and to promote racist ideology (Berlet & Vysotsky, 2006; Sarabia & Shriver, 2004; Wood, 1999). Members of white supremacist countercultures have in the past communicated via fanzines that combine “elements of specific youth subcultures and the politics of white supremacy,” which “inextricably links white supremacy to the subculture in a way that forces youth involved to adopt the ideology as a condition of membership” (Berlet & Vysotsky, 2006, p. 31). Contemporary countercultural groups have moved to the blog format to produce similar content. Finally, such groups often gather in social settings such as rock concerts, “crash pad” houses, or hangouts such as record and clothing stores where young “dabblers” can meet older “hatemongers” (Levin, 2002, pp. 30-38) who often have the respect of all members of the counterculture and learn the ideals and norms of the movement. Bonds in the counterculture are often solidified and reinforced through violence, which is used as a boundary maintenance activity within the subculture through attacks on people of color and anti-racist activists (Blazak, 2001; Vysotsky, 2009). This dynamic constructs the counterculture as a “prefigurative space” that gives members a sense of community and belonging (Berlet & Vysotsky, 2006; Blazak, 2001; Ezekiel, 1995; Futrell & Simi, 2004).

While each sector represents a unique type of approach to ideology and action, organizations often represent overlaps in categories. This has been especially true in the case of the countercultural category. The association of white supremacy with skinhead and other countercultures has allowed white supremacist ideology to spread to a much wider and younger audience. Countercultures often represent the largest and fastest growing elements of the movement (Blazak, 2001; Burghart, 1999; Futrell & Simi, 2004). It is for this reason that many of the most successful political and religious organizations have courted countercultures as primary recruiting grounds for their membership (Burghart, 1999; Langer, 2003; Ridgeway, 1995). These alliances and overlaps, coupled with a number of high profile media representations, have led to a public association of white supremacy and the skinhead subculture. Such an association has greatly contributed the growing stigma associated with open expressions of white supremacy.

Racist skinheads are often perceived as the most violent and stigmatized of all white supremacist groups. The subculture’s commitment to

destructive violence coupled with an ideological commitment to white supremacy creates a perception of the skinhead as a violent thug or “storm-trooper” in the race war (Blazak, 2001; Bowen, 2009; Hamm, 1993; Sarabia & Shriver, 2004; Simi & Futrell, 2009; Simi, Smith, & Reeser, 2008; Wood, 1999). This stigmatized identity is further complicated by the skinheads’ countercultural focus – they are largely focused on their status as outsiders from the mainstream and as participants in a subculture instead of being primarily concerned with mainstream acceptance or legitimation. Unlike political or religious groups, which often seek to build a mass movement and gain widespread support through various “legitimation techniques” (Sykes & Matza, 1957) that rationalize violence or other deviant actions as what is best for the nation or as the will of God, racist skinheads seek status within the subculture or local scene. They are, therefore, largely unconcerned with the opinions of the public in general and relish a stigmatized identity (Berlet & Vysotsky, 2006; Blazak, 2001; Hamm, 1993; Simi, Smith, & Reeser, 2008). By constructing a subcultural identity based on being a hooligan, thug, or criminal, racist skinheads are significantly more subject to stigma (Simi & Futrell, 2009; Simi, Smith & Reeser, 2008).

## II. WHITE SUPREMACIST IDENTITY, STIGMA, AND STIGMA MANAGEMENT

In an era when overt racism is largely taboo, active membership in a white supremacist organization is a highly stigmatized social identity. While scholars generally agree that racism persists as a structural and systemic force, public and even private expressions of such sentiments are generally considered unacceptable, and people tend to distance themselves from individuals who express such sentiments (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Simi & Futrell, 2009). Mitch Berbrier summarizes the attitude most people hold toward white supremacists by stating “[the] stigma of white supremacist racism evokes impressions of hatred, boorish irrationality, and violence or violent intent” (1999, p. 411). This stigma is increased for racist skinheads who are often primarily identified with violence and criminality in addition to white supremacist stigma (Simi & Futrell, 2009; Simi, Smith, & Reeser, 2008; Sarabia & Shriver, 2004; Wood, 1999). In order to adapt to these stigmas, white supremacists develop a number of macro- and micro-level strategies to minimize the stigma associated with their ideology and political involvement which serve to legitimize their participation in broader social movements.

The ascription of stigma to an individual or group creates a social distance between them and “normal” society. Stigmatic labeling often serves as a means of delegitimizing unpopular, radical, or marginalized political positions (Berbrier, 1999, 2002; Goffman, 1963). In the case of political

and social movements, stigmatization is a direct strategy employed as a means of delegitimizing movements by denying them access to resources, alliances, and means of cultural framing (Berbrier, 1999, 2002; Boykoff, 2006; Buechler, 2000; Corrigan-Brown & Wilkes, 2011; Jasper, 1997; McAdam, 1992; Rauch, et al., 2007; Simi & Futrell, 2009; Snow & Benford, 1988; Tilly, 1978). Cultural, economic, and political elites engage in deliberate social distancing in order to draw distinct boundaries around what types of actions and ideologies are considered legitimate and acceptable as part of the mainstream political process. This strategy serves to marginalize and exclude political actors on both the left and right. It therefore becomes crucial for social movement members to develop a series of counter-strategies to build effective stigma management in order to achieve movement success through the acceptance of policy goals or incorporation into mainstream, and by extension, legitimate political activity (Gamson, 1990).

Mitch Berbrier (1998a, 1998b, 1999) has identified two key macro-level strategies used by white supremacists to reframe stigmatized identity: ethnic claims-making and intellectualization. The process of ethnic claims-making involves the effort to portray white supremacist ideology as representing that of an ethnic group, arguing, among other things, that the label “racist” is applied to them simply for having a healthy pride in their heritage and culture. Moreover, racists argue that if, “according to the values of *cultural pluralism* and *diversity*, ethnic or racial pride is legitimate for (other) ethnic or racial minority groups. . .then it is also legitimate for whites” (Berbrier, 1998b, p. 499, italics in original). With this logic, the members of a white supremacist group can feel comfortable in their racist ideas because they are no different from other ethnic groups in American society that express pride in their heritage. Conversely, there is a belief that minority groups who exhibit pride in their ethnicity are likely to be as bigoted as members of their own organizations (Berbrier, 1998b).

#### A. *Macro-Level Strategies*

Berbrier’s other macro-level stigma management strategy, intellectualization, involves a process of legitimizing and rationalizing white supremacist ideology through academic and scholarly references. Such intellectual legitimation is achieved through a series of scientific arguments which serve to buttress racist world views. White supremacists point to the work of controversial educational psychologist Arthur Jensen and, more recently, Murray and Herrnstein ([1994] 1996) in discussing the correlations between IQ levels and race, specifically that African Americans score lower on IQ tests than whites (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000). Others point to the

research of somewhat marginal academics. As Dobratz & Shanks-Meile (2000) point out, many white supremacists “discussed a number of scientists who support the ‘new’ scientific racist work, such as J. Philippe Rushton who maintained that whites and Asians were typically more family-oriented and intelligent than blacks and anthropologist Roger Pearson who advanced the idea that the white race is threatened by inferior genetic stock” (p. 95). These strategies of ethnic claims-making and intellectualization allow white supremacists to position themselves as members of just another advocacy group in a pluralist political and social climate.

### B. *Micro-Level Strategies*

The micro-level strategies of stigma management deployed by white supremacists are much more complex and varied than the macro-level strategies. Pete Simi and Robert Futrell (2009) outline a number of these strategies that they believe allow white supremacists to maintain their ideology and movement affiliations in a society that is largely hostile toward them.

The first of these strategies involves an actual physical *distancing* of white supremacist political activity from other life activities. White supremacists create “free spaces” such as music events, parties, camping events, and intentional communities that allow them to openly express their beliefs and build the movement free of resistance (Futrell & Simi, 2004; Simi & Futrell, 2009).

A second strategy involves the strategic *silencing, avoidance, or hiding* of white supremacist political identity from family, friends, and coworkers. This process involves avoiding discussion or debate of issues with others who may disagree, hiding symbols and markers of white supremacy from public display, and wearing clothing that covers racist and inflammatory tattoos.

The processes of silence, avoidance, and hiding often inform the third strategy of *civility/avoiding conflict*. Simi and Futrell (2009) note that white supremacists, in order to avoid conflict, rarely engage in political discussions with people who do not share their beliefs. More surprisingly, they also found that white supremacists often treat people of color with whom they work or interact in daily activities with civility and, at times, even respect. This strategy allows them to maintain employment and generally navigate through an increasingly multiracial and multicultural world.

The fourth strategy involves attempts at *mainstreaming* through the avoidance of the use of racial slurs and the presentation of their ideals in alignment with conservative positions. Mainstreaming often involves the framing processes discussed above wherein white supremacists present their position as a legitimate political position in opposition to liberal values

or attitudes espoused by others. Disagreements or arguments between supremacists and those who do not share their views often end with a statement to “agree to disagree” (Simi & Futrell, 2009).

Finally, white supremacists engage in *passive expression* of their belief through displays of their political position on clothing and other symbolic displays. Simi and Futrell (2009) contend that such displays are a way for movement members to enact their political ideology without being directly confrontational with others. This passive expression approach often works effectively because such displays typically involve symbols that are only recognizable to other racists or individuals well versed in the ideology. Thus, the impetus for action falls upon those individuals able to recognize such symbols, rather than the white supremacist him or herself (Vysotsky, 2009). By utilizing this dynamic of passive expression, white supremacists may conveniently understand potential conflicts to arise via a victimization lens wherein they are merely the victim of a confrontation initiated by others while innocently going about their everyday activities, including legally-protected expressions of speech and dissent. In the case study to follow, we address the manner in which the KSS use many of the aforementioned stigma management strategies in their attempt to gain legitimacy through the strategic adoption of anti-immigration political discourses and activities.

### III. FROM COUNTERCULTURAL TO POLITICAL—THE EVOLUTION OF KEYSTONE UNITED AND THE EUROPEAN AMERICAN ACTION COALITION

The Keystone State Skinheads were reportedly founded in 2001 in response to a violent confrontation between white supremacists, primarily skinheads, and anti-racist, anarchist, and community protesters at a rally organized by the racist religious group, the Creativity Movement, in York, Pennsylvania (Anti-Defamation League [ADL], 2009). The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) (n.d.) identifies the KSS as one of the largest racist skinhead groups in the country with chapters in most major cities across the state of Pennsylvania. Typical of countercultural groups, KSS activity was initially based around subcultural events like music concerts and festivals, such as the annual Hammerfest (2003 with the Hammerskin Nation) and its own annual festival, “Uprise” (ADL, 2009; SPLC, n.d.). Like many other skinhead groups, KSS strikes a precarious balance between operating as a political organization and criminal gang (Simi, Smith, & Reeser, 2008). While the group presents itself as “wish[ing] to break the stereotypes of skinheads being alcoholic thugs and violent drug-addicted criminals. . . [by] offering education and guidance” (KSS website cited in SPLC, n.d.), the

group's members and leadership have consistently been convicted of violent attacks against people of color and anti-racists (see ADL, 2009; SPLC, n.d.). With such an infamous record, KSS, like many of its white supremacist counterparts, struggles to present a more palatable public image by shifting its presentation from that of a countercultural group to political organization by focusing on political and social issues such as immigration.

As KSS attempts to make this transition, it faces the greater challenge of appealing to a broader population. To that end, the group officially promoted a name change to Keystone United and added leafleting, public protests, and media appearances to its action repertoire. A significant portion of this public campaign involved the promotion of the group's opposition to immigration, especially the immigration of those from Latin America. KSS members staged various anti-immigration leafleting campaigns with fliers stating "American Jobs for American Workers" (Byrne & Sinclair, 2007) and others that linked crime to changing racial demographics in Northeast Pennsylvania (Bello, 2008). Such campaigns are designed to not only educate the public on the group's positions, but also to present them as a political interest group, rather than a skinhead gang. KSS members have also participated in rallies opposed to "illegal-immigration" on the state capitol steps in Harrisburg (Isis, 2007), in support of the acquittal of individuals accused of hate crime charges for the murder of a Mexican immigrant in Shenandoah (Bello, 2008; Holthouse, 2009), and in support of the introduction of a bill modeled on Arizona's Senate Bill 1070 in the Pennsylvania legislature (NoPawN, 2010). These rallies put KSS in the same political context as more mainstream political actors, such as Ron Paul supporters and numerous elected officials<sup>3</sup> (Denvir, 2011; Isis, 2007).

In addition, KSS leader and spokesman Steve Smith formed the European American Action Coalition (EAAC) in 2011 as "an organization that advocates on behalf of White Americans" (EAAC, n.d.). The EAAC is designed as a strictly political organization advocating for "white people's rights" (Krawczeniuk, 2012) rather than the countercultural, skinhead organization with which Smith has been previously affiliated. This repositioning allowed Smith to move into mainstream politics by being elected to the Luzerne County Republican Committee with one write in vote, likely his own (Krawczeniuk, 2012). By distancing itself from the name and activities typically associated with skinheads, KSS has increasingly moved toward becoming a political white supremacist group.

The public attention created by such appearances and activities gives KSS leaders and spokesmen (as a patriarchal organization, these are exclusively male) a unique opportunity to appear in media outlets to promote their organization. Longtime members Keith Carney and Steve Smith have become regulars in the Pennsylvania and national press as "Kinder, Gentler

Skinheads” and “white people’s rights activists” (e.g. Harte, 2009; Krawczeniuk, 2012). Such appearances allow interested parties to seek out Keystone United or Smith’s EAAC via their most public forums: their respective blogs and websites. These blogs feature a number of “news” items that attempt to present a more mainstream version of white supremacist ideology. Included in these are references to their position on immigration. The KSS blog features the transcripts of an address by Mark Weber, director of the Institute for Historical Review,<sup>4</sup> which focuses primarily on the effects of immigration from Mexico and Latin America as understood by white supremacists—economic, intellectual, and political decline (keystonestate, 2011a). In a combination of the political and countercultural sectors, an interview with KSS member “Felix” for a Croatian white supremacist website features a question directly addressing the organization’s position on immigration:

The illegal immigration problem is out of control here. Not only do they have the same rights, they have MORE rights. Our people have been cast aside as second-class citizens to make way for this cheap, unchecked-capitalistic dream world, where all the laborers work for next to nothing, they don’t want benefits of any kind, and there’s lots of them! The business owners and farmers and politicians allow these invaders to enter our country and take all the jobs because it allows them to make a greater profit to be able to pay off one another, when you have liberals, and Marxist-leftovers from the 1960’s as your politicians, you get their doctrines and decrees pushing you aside in the name of the “labor struggle”. . . When the politics make laws enabling the migrants to work and stay here, the farmer and businessman are happy – so they say nothing about paying the taxes on profits made, because there’s more where it came from to them (keystonestate, 2011b).

The EAAC’s website presents an overlap between media appearances and blog posts with a collection of its members’ letters to the editor, including a graph of predicted population demographics highlighting the increase in the Hispanic population and decline in the proportion of the population represented by whites. Such representations seek to prey on fears related to immigration and to bring individuals into the organization based on such comparatively mainstream concerns.

#### IV. IMMIGRATION CONCERNS AND LEGITIMATION STRATEGIES

The public debate on immigration provides a unique opportunity for stigmatized and politically marginalized white supremacists to participate in mainstream political discourse. The racialized rhetoric in opposition to immigration gives supremacists an opportunity to marshal stigma transfor-

mation strategies in order for their movement to be an influential political participant on public matters—namely, the immigration debate—and therefore to present their movement as a political actor like any other, which is crucial to their efforts to pursue legitimation of their ideology. The KSS present an ideal case study of the process utilized by a number of white supremacist groups. By engaging the immigration issue, KSS is able to engage in both macro- and micro-level stigma management strategies in order to build relationships with more mainstream actors on the right.

With contemporary anti-immigration rhetoric focused primarily on non-white Hispanic and Latino immigrants, the racialization of the “illegal” immigrant serves to validate the ethnic claims-making strategies of white supremacists (Berbrier, 1998a, 1998b). Groups like the KSS can portray themselves not as racist bigots, but as advocates for a deindustrialized white working class. This was evident in the slogan used by KSS on their leaflet on immigration: “American Jobs for American Workers.” By utilizing such a slogan, KSS points away from its racism and claims to be advocating for “American” workers. Charges of racism can be deflected by noting that KSS supports native-born and naturalized citizen workers, while using a language that fellow racists understand as code for whiteness. Despite this patriotic or nationalist veneer, the racist politics of KSS and other white supremacists only genuinely recognize white Americans as true citizens with full rights. Further, by advocating against immigration, groups like KSS and EAAC construct themselves as ethnic advocacy organizations defending the interests of white American citizens against perceived threats of economic loss and increased criminal activity stereotypically associated with non-white Hispanic and Latino immigration. They are able to claim a position of ethnic advocacy rather than overt white supremacy (e.g. *KeystoneUnitedOfNEPA*, 2010). Such ethnic claims-making activities allow white supremacists to deny allegations of racism as they engage in anti-immigrant activism.

Intellectualization processes further allow white supremacists like KSS to legitimize their opposition to immigration behind the facade of rational reaction to empirical evidence. The use of pseudo-scientific claims, such as the correlation of racial demographic changes with economic decline and increased crime noted above, gives an empirical rationale to the emotional components of white supremacist discourse. The ideological position of racial exclusion in response to immigration taken by KSS and EAAC is portrayed not as the product of an emotional aversion to non-white Hispanics and Latinos, but as a response to “legitimate” economic, social, and political concerns. Citation of statistical data and projections, as made by the U.S. Census Bureau and other official or reputable institutions, regarding predicted demographic shifts in American society is also designed to

substantiate supremacist claims about the loss of power experienced by whites. The predicted growth of the proportion of the U.S. population who identify as non-white Hispanic and Latino, as well as “two or more races,” and the projected decline in proportion of the U.S. population who identify as white, provide what white supremacists believe is clear empirical evidence for their political position. By drawing on empirical support for their claims, KSS and EAAC are able to present their ideological and political positions as the products of intellectual engagement with the world rather than as the result of ignorance or emotion (Berbrier, 1999).

The strategy of distancing is the most evident micro-level product of ethnic claims-making and intellectualization for the KSS. As the group has attempted to move from operating as a countercultural group to a political one, it has faced the obvious stigma associated with the skinhead subculture. This stigma has made it almost impossible for the group to engage in mainstream political discourse, especially on issues such as immigration. Byrne and Sinclair’s (2007) portrayal of KSS’s anti-immigration leafleting campaign indicates that they received little support from the public as many individuals tore apart the literature which the group distributed. In order to present itself for the purposes of political participation as tied to its pursuit of group legitimation, KSS officially changed its name to Keystone United in 2009 (SPLC, n.d.). Additionally, KSS leader and spokesman Steve Smith founded the EAAC in order to further distance him from the skinhead stigma and present himself as just another political participant lawfully exercising his civil liberties within the context of the immigration debate (Denvir, 2011, 2012b). By distancing themselves from the skinhead label and the countercultural stigma of criminality that comes with it, KSS has utilized the mechanisms and forms of legitimate political participation in order to portray itself as just another actor in policy debates, yet doing so precisely to advance the group’s legitimation (Berbrier, 1999; Simi & Futrell, 2009; Simi, Smith, & Reeser, 2008).

In order to properly distance itself from the skinhead stigma, KSS relies heavily on the strategy of avoidance, hiding, and mainstream displays (Simi & Futrell, 2009). This is primarily achieved through their public presentation. When engaging the public or media, KSS members avoid using overt racist and neo-Nazi symbolism or wearing the attire of the traditional skinhead aesthetic. At the leafleting event discussed above, KSS members dressed in jeans and hoodies—some with the KSS logo which itself is only an indirect racist symbol because it does not contain any overt imagery (Byrne & Sinclair, 2007). This type of aesthetic allows them to present themselves as “concerned” members of the working class, rather than as a group of countercultural racists. As referenced above, the KSS members at the anti-immigration rally on the Pennsylvania Capitol steps

were only recognizable by the coded imagery on their clothing, such as the number 88 which stands for “heil Hitler,” or the number 14, a reference to a central ideological slogan for the white supremacist movement,<sup>5</sup> in the url of the website featured on their picket signs (Isis, 2007). This is a conscious choice on the part of the white supremacists at such protests because it allows them to participate as part of the broader anti-immigration movement without the stigma associated with their ideology. Most protesters or citizens would not be able to readily identify these individuals as members of a racist skinhead group, thus allowing the white supremacists to blend in with other anti-immigration protesters and make connections with other activists in the movement.

#### V. STIGMA MANAGEMENT, LEGITIMATION, AND THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE

In the cases of legitimation and stigma management outlined above, KSS have participated in the larger anti-immigration movement with little concern expressed by other participants because they are able to engage in conventional, legal political activity as overt white supremacists. The danger of this lack of vocal opposition to white supremacist participation in the anti-immigration movement is not that such a strategic dynamic will bring white supremacists such as the KSS fully into the mainstream; it is that this type of relationship may pull anti-immigration groups, indeed even more mainstream political participants and platforms, toward more extreme and bigoted stances. Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons (2000) point out that the rightwing populist focus on issues such as immigration creates a link between white supremacist groups and legitimate political actors on the right, such as elected officials. The participation of the KSS members in anti-immigration activism largely served as an embarrassment for other activists in the movement as they tried to distance themselves from accusations of racism (Piggott, 2010). White supremacists like the KSS, however, benefit greatly from the increased media attention that political issues campaigns provide by receiving media exposure, which in turn allows them to present their message to a wider audience and compliments their recruiting campaigns. Such attention serves to reinforce many of their efforts at legitimation and stigma management, and therefore, these strategic tactics warrant serious concern and consideration by political activists as well as social movement scholars. Activists on the left and right of the political spectrum should recognize legitimation strategies of white supremacists as a unique social danger which shifts political discourse in a more racist and authoritarian direction. Scholars may be able to apply the model above to understand the processes used by extremist actors in order to legitimately

participate in wider political processes, and to under the influence such movements have on mainstream discourse and policy.

In addition to legitimating and mainstreaming white supremacist activity, the participation of groups like KSS represents a shift to the right for the anti-immigration movement.<sup>6</sup> Populist and conservative social movements, such as the anti-immigration cause, provide a common ground where a variety of actors across the right of the political spectrum can interact with one another (Berlet & Lyons, 2000). By deploying the legitimation and stigma management strategies discussed above, white supremacists are able to participate politically in such movements and come in contact with other activists and political leaders, especially those on the right. Professional politicians and other political actors who would not typically associate with open white supremacists for fear of a backlash from constituents are able to espouse hard-right, even overtly racist, positions because these become the norms in the movement. Activists and politicians on the right who take more moderate positions on immigration may find themselves losing the support of a base that is increasingly nativist as the anti-immigration movement incorporates individuals and groups with overt white supremacist positions (e.g. Denvir, 2011).

What is more, the rightward shift in the anti-immigration movement ultimately allows mainstream politicians and pundits, especially but not only on the right, to express overtly white supremacist and racist sentiments under the guise of opposition to immigration. As white supremacists engage with and support the anti-immigration movement, nationalist and nativist rhetorical framing has become increasingly infused with explicitly racist sentiment. Mainstream advocates against immigration can then use coded, and occasionally overt, racist statements while still distancing themselves from the more extreme positions taken by white supremacists. For example, prominent television hosts such as Lou Dobbs, Bill O'Reilly, and Glenn Beck have linked Latino immigration to crime, economic recession, loss of sovereignty, and even leprosy (Media Matters for America, 2008). The 2012 Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney's "joking" comments on the campaign trail that "had he [George Romney, Mitt's father] been born of Mexican parents, [Mitt would] have a better shot of winning th[e] [election]" evokes similar white supremacist sentiments of racial resentment, white victimhood, and loss of sovereignty (Fabian, 2012). Such claims mirror white supremacist thinking about widespread anti-white discrimination and the evils of immigration, yet mainstream pundits and politicians can distance themselves from direct associations because supremacists are assumed to be virulent racists whose statements and other presentations of message are unsophisticated and are limited to direct

expressions of hate through the use of racial slurs and incitement to violence.

Likewise, white supremacists also use statements from mainstream actors as part of their strategies of distancing, mainstreaming, and intellectualization. They may more easily claim that their positions on immigration are not racist when they are similar to those of widely known and popular television commentators and politicians. This dynamic creates a feedback loop where the reactionary and bigoted positions of white supremacists allow mainstream politicians to make racialized statements while still presenting themselves as less extreme by comparison, and white supremacists can claim not to be extremist racists because their position on issues such as immigration is similar to mainstream politicians. Through this interplay, the ideology and rhetoric of the right becomes more extreme, overtly racist, and potentially violent.<sup>7</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The processes described above allow white supremacists to present themselves as ordinary political actors in the immigration debate. By engaging in macro-level strategies of ethnic claims-making and intellectualization, groups like KSS present their opposition to immigration as an advocacy position born of empirical data, instead of the product of a racist ideology. Utilizing micro-level strategies of distancing, avoidance, hiding, and mainstream displays, groups like KSS attempt to present themselves as “ordinary” citizens protesting against immigration rather than as extreme racists, violent criminals, or countercultural deviants. Leaders such as Keith Carney and Steve Smith remove many of the subcultural trappings of the skinhead identity when interacting with the public in general. By changing the organization’s name and focusing on issues of public concern such as immigration, these groups are able to present themselves as ordinary political actors on the right, perhaps different from others as to viewpoint but no different from others insofar as they seek to lawfully exercise their participatory civil liberties. These strategies place white supremacists in greater contact with other types of activists in more mainstreamed political movements, some with similar affinities and stances on major political issues (Berlet & Lyons, 2000).

Therefore, white supremacist involvement in anti-immigration political activity has distinct and significant functions for their members. It allows white supremacists to engage in mainstream political conversations where they might otherwise be far too stigmatized to be included, especially were they to present themselves through statements and messages that are more directly expressive or evocative of hate, including racial slurs and incite-

ments to violence. This enables them to create the perception of being ordinary political advocates like others rather than ones who are racial agitators, violent criminals, or domestic terrorists. Their participation in the larger anti-immigration movement pulls the acceptable discourse and goals of that movement toward more extreme and bigoted positions, especially those on the right, and ultimately forces the entire debate to occur within parameters as influenced by actors on the right's most extreme fringe. The adoption of more extremist stances on immigration occasionally serves to highlight the often implicit and covert biases of anti-immigration activists in general, however, such statements are frequently rebranded and reframed as conventional anti-immigration policy concerns when, in fact, the rightward shift reflects a strategic and deliberate advancement of the white supremacist agenda (Berbrier, 1998a, 1999; Berlet & Lyons, 2000). It is for these reasons, as regrettable as they might be, that we must appreciate the significant role of white supremacist activists, and their hateful ideology more generally, if we wish to fully comprehend the state of the American immigration debate in the 21st century.

#### NOTES

1. The concept of legitimation presented in this article derives from political sociology in reference to the distinction made between which political actors and actions are designated as normative. This concept differs from its legal counterpart, which more closely resembles political sociological concepts of conventional and unconventional political action. Using the sociological concept described herein, an individual, group, or action may be considered illegitimate if it is considered outside of the bounds of normative politics as defined by individuals and groups in positions of power or pluralities of actors and organizations operating in the public sphere. Therefore, even legal and socially acceptable forms of protest and political action may be considered illegitimate if they are carried out by individuals or groups who fall outside of the bounds of normative political categories. For a more detailed discussion of this concept, see section II.

2. Scholars have used a number of terms, including subculture and contraculture (Yinger, 1960), counterculture (Roberts, 1978), and youth culture (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, [1975] 2006; Smith, 1976), to refer to non-normative, youth-oriented groupings that share similar musical tastes, aesthetic style, argot, and beliefs. As members of supremacist youth groups and academics alike distinguish these terms inconsistently and such

distinctions go beyond the scope of this article, they will henceforth be used interchangeably.

3. Clear evidence exists that both mainstream and “extremist” actors benefit from mutual associations and shared positions on political issues. Politicians and commentators build a support base, while reactionary organizations gain legitimacy by associating with individuals and organizations that are considered mainstream (Berlet & Lyons, 2000).

4. The Institute for Historical review is a think tank famous for producing “scholarly” evidence in support of the claims made by several white supremacists that the Holocaust was either a fabrication or an exaggeration of a Jewish conspiracy. For a detailed overview of this phenomenon, see Lipstadt (1994).

5. The 14-word slogan, “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children” is credited to the late David Lane, a member of the white supremacist terrorist group The Order (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000, p. 17).

6. Contrary to popular belief, opposition to immigration as a populist issue has historically not been an exclusively right-wing position. Left-wing oriented individuals and organizations in the labor and environmental movements also have long histories of arguing in favor of restricted immigration policies in order to further their own political ends (Beirich, 2010; Briggs, 2001; Foreman, 1987; LeMay, 2006).

7. While there are examples of these dynamics at play in the case study presented above, further empirical research is needed in order to fully develop the interplay described here. Additional research should focus on the rhetorical and framing overlaps between mainstream and “extremist” actors within rightwing movements and/or the development of violence by rank-and-file members in relation to increasingly xenophobic and racist framing by leadership with particular focus on the ideological positions of individuals who are willing to engage in violence and militancy.

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