

**RESEARCH**

# Domestic Terrorist Acts as Cultural Texts: A Pentadic Analysis

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Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once said that publicity is the oxygen of terrorism. It is our position that mass-mediated terrorism, white supremacy, and doctrines of racial superiority that justify discrimination, segregation, domination, and even extermination of persons of color should be deprived of the oxygen of publicity. At the same time, we believe that analysis, discussion, confrontation, and condemnation of terrorism and hateful ideologies is painful but necessary. The hate speech and radical ideologies of today's web-based terrorists reach far beyond traditional means of communication. The purpose of this paper is to use Kenneth Burke's pentad to analyze acts of domestic terrorism while removing the names of the perpetrators — the oxygen of terrorism in the Internet Age. We begin our analysis of three recent acts of domestic terrorism with a short analysis of *The Turner Diaries*, written by William Pierce under the pseudonym Andrew Macdonald, as a critical exemplary narrative that continues to drive hate speech, radicalization, and physical violence.

## Introduction

Although many argue that discussions of recent acts of domestic terrorism should be censored or silenced, we wish to argue the opposite: that we must analyze, discuss, confront and condemn these hateful ideologies in papers, journals and books. That is the purpose of this paper. We will use Kenneth Burke's pentad to analyze these acts of domestic terrorism in the following manner. In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke wrote, "In a well-rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the *act* (names what took place, in thought or deed, and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*" (1945, p. xv).

The *scenes* for the shootings analyzed in this paper were carefully selected by the domestic terrorists — soft targets where large numbers of "invaders" would be gathered. The *agents* are the shooters in their own stories, called upon to slow or discourage the "invasion," which would result in the replacement of the White population. The *agency* involved careful planning, often including visits to the scene and careful acquisition of weapons, which will be used at the chosen scenes to commit mass murder. The *purposes* are often stated clearly in the manifestos provided by domestic terrorists, which describe in some detail the reasons for the slaughter of the "invaders." This paper will include an analysis of the topics in the manifestos, which invariably include a statement of a White Supremacist ideology, political and social reasons for the attack, connections to previous terrorists, preparation for the attacks, and encouragement for others who might do similar attacks.

## The Influence of *The Turner Diaries* on Domestic Terrorism and other Extremist Works of Fiction

*The Turner Diaries* (1978) provided the backdrop for the bombing of the Oklahoma City government building in 1995. In a 2017 reprint of the *Diaries*, published by The National Alliance, a White Supremacist political organization based in Hillsboro, West Virginia, the Oklahoma City Bomber himself is quoted on the back cover: "I bought the book out of a publication that advertised the book as a gun-rights book." According to Sarah Pruitt, an historian, "He [the bomber] drew inspiration from the 1978 novel *The Turner Diaries*, written by the white nationalist William Luther Pierce, which depicts a right-wing insurrection against a tyrannical federal government seeking to deprive citizens of their right to bear arms" (2020, para. 1). Written by Andrew McDonald (*nom de plume* for William L. Pierce), *The Turner Diaries* has been linked to scores of domestic terrorist acts. The *Counter Extremism Project's* 2019 report, "The Turner Diaries' Ties to Extremists," connects the diaries to "44 extremist entities — 40 individuals and four organizations — who have been directly or indirectly influenced by *The Turner Diaries*" (p. 3).

In addition, two of the anonymized domestic terrorists (DT's) analyzed in this paper were deeply influenced by the *Diaries*. DT2's "The Great Replacement" manifesto echoes the themes and language of the diaries, as does DT3's "Inconvenient Truth," which also acknowledges a debt to DT2's manifesto and rampage. Both terrorists describe the replacement of and genocide of "Whites" by Muslims or Hispanics as the reason for their terrorist murders, which is also the rationale for the race war in the *Diaries*. DT1 also described "White Genocide" as the motivation for his attack on the synagogue in Pittsburgh, but he was influenced more by Neo-Nazi ideology, which he wrote about frequently in his online Gab account:

He posted on Gab that Jews were "bringing in invaders that kill our people." On the morning of the attack, [DT1] wrote, "I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in" — he then proceeded to murder Jews in a synagogue. (Nathan, 2018, para. 6)

James Berger, in "The Turner Legacy: The Storied Origins and Enduring Impact of White Nationalism's Deadly Bible," argues that over 200 murders have been linked to the *Diaries* since 1978. His 2016 ICCT (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague) research paper analyzes documentary precursors to the book, dating from the Civil War, then moves forward to the immense influence this novel has had on the Alt Right, and the reasons it has become the "Bible" of White Supremacy and domestic terrorism, which reasons include "its focus on rational choices over identity choices, its simplification of White nationalist ideology, its repeated calls to action, and the powerfully persuasive nature of dystopian narratives, which can be understood as a secular analogue for religious apocalyptic texts" (2016, p. 1).

In addition to the *Diaries*, extremist works of fiction continue to inspire and radicalize people to commit acts of violence against people and property. Camille Jackson argues that while "[f]ew works of fiction have moved readers to action quite like *The Turner Diaries*" (2004, para. 2); nevertheless, many have tried:

In the past 15 years [prior to 2004], dozens of racist and extremist novels have been published by writers hoping to use the tool of fiction as persuasively – if, perhaps, to a less explicitly violent end – as Pierce. The novels span every category of extremism – neo-Nazi, neo-Confederate, radical environmentalist, anti-immigration, antigovernment – but most stick to Pierce's formula: a white male hero, learning of a massive conspiracy against law-abiding whites, undertakes violent revenge. (2004, para. 15)

Jackson opens her analysis with a discussion of Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905), which was adapted by W.D. Griffith for "The Birth of a Nation" ten years later, a movie which "revived the flailing KKK" (para. 19). In the 1970's, Jean Raspail's *The Camp of the Saints*, written to counter Algerian immigration into France, became popular in the U.S. as an anti-immigration text. The Social Contract Press reprinted Raspail's novel in 1995, hailing it as "... the first significant racialist novel since the days of Thomas Dixon" (Jackson, 2004, para. 26). The list continues with Ellen Williams' *Bedford, a World Vision*, Lloyd Lenard's *The Last Confederate Flag*, John Ross' *Unintended Consequences*, all of which picture a strong Southern White man taking a stand for whiteness against a Black tide.

### **Pentadic Analysis of *The Turner Diaries***

We open this paper with a discussion of the *Turner Diaries*, because it appears to be the archetype for all these other Pierce copy cats. By 1995 approximately 200,000 copies of the *Diaries* had been sold by Pierce, but then in 1996, Lyle Stuart and the American Booksellers Association (ABA) republished the book, selling 500,000 copies by the year 2000, over the protests of the *Southern Law Poverty Center* and other anti-hate speech groups. Stuart and the ABA argued that the book's contents were protected by the First Amendment. The book now circulates largely in an online format, but was removed from Amazon after the 6 January 2021 attack on the Capitol. "More than a dozen years after Pierce's death, his book still sold well enough that in January 2015, the second edition of *The Turner Diaries* was according to Amazon 'temporarily out of print'" (Nacos, 2016, p. 179).

The *Diaries* is a fictional, White Supremacist account of the "Organization," which takes on the Jewish and Black Controlled Democrat "System," which has sunk the U.S. into moral malaise and economic disaster. The root of the problem is Blacks, Jews, Latinos and Asians replacing the superior White race, because of the White population's indolence brought on by a pursuit of pleasure and creature comforts.

Earl Turner, the "author" of the journals and the protagonist of the novel, begins the journal in [the fictional future of] September 1991. The novel starts small, with the bombing of the FBI building in October of 1991 and Turner's entry into the Organization and eventually the secret inner circle called the Order, into which he is initiated early in the narrative, in a ceremony reminiscent of the KKK. It closes on 9 November 1993 as he prepares for a suicide bombing mission of the Pentagon, flying a crop duster containing a small atomic bomb, which he plans to detonate 150 feet above the building. He is successful. This final bombing destroys the "System's" ability to nuke the Organization's largest "liberated" territory

in Southern California and opens the door for the final push for the “revolutionaries” to take back the U.S. and establish its core principles of racial separation and White Supremacy.

A pentadic analysis of the *Diaries* provides a useful template for the acts of domestic terrorism which have been perpetrated in the U.S. (and elsewhere) over the last 40 years. The organization chooses its targets carefully (*scenes*), soft targets at first, but eventually hard, military targets and then whole cities, which contain large populations of non-Whites, are nuked (Miami, Detroit, Baltimore, etc.). The brutal acts of terror (*acts*) are carefully described, from the slaughter of non-Whites with conventional weapons (knives, pistols, machine guns) to the mopping up activities following nuclear detonations. The guns and homemade bombs (*agencies*), as well as stolen military weapons, are described in some detail by Turner, who builds many of the IED's (improvised explosive devices) himself, and later is sent all over the country to Organization enclaves, to teach others how to build these weapons. And the heroes of the story (*agents*), Turner and his lover, Katherine, are depicted as loyal, patriotic Americans who have just found love, but know that they are called to sacrifice their lives and this new found love, for this higher cause. And the cause (*purpose*) – Domestic Terrorism – will eventuate in the rebirth of the somnambulant White population, annihilate all non-Whites, and finally bring the U.S. back to “God's Great Experiment,” which is to have Whites rule the U.S. and, eventually, the planet. Much is at stake for Turner and the Organization:

If the Organization fails in its task now, *everything* will be lost—our history, our heritage, all the blood and sacrifices and upward striving of countless thousands of years. The enemy we are fighting fully intends to destroy the *racial basis of our existence*.

No excuse for our failure will have any meaning, for there will be only swarms of indifferent, mulatto zombies to hear it. There will be no White men to remember us—either to blame us for our weakness or forgive us for our folly. (p. 34, our italics)

By the end of the narrative the Organization nukes more U.S. cities and fires one ICBM into Russia and hits a number of cities in Israel, which causes Russia to retaliate and wipe out more U.S. cities, which then forces the System to unload all of its ICBMs onto Russian targets, annihilating Russia, which now eliminates the threat of an invasion of the U.S. by Russia. The Organization then moves into the destroyed U.S. cities and murders all Jews, Muslims, Blacks and Latinos, which pattern is then followed by all “White” European nations, which, in turn, murder all non-White citizens, including the Jewish populations. The Final Solution is finally realized, and though neither Hitler nor Fascism are ever mentioned in the *Diaries*, the Epilog [sic] closes as follows:

But it was the year 1999, according to the chronology of the Old Era—just 110 years after the birth of the Great One—that the dream of a White world finally became a certainty. And it was the sacrifice of uncounted thousands of brave men and women of the Organization during the preceding years which has kept that dream alive until its realization could no longer be denied. (p. 210)

Adolph Hitler, of course, was born 20 April 1899, and though he never realized the millennial dream of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich, the Organization does, ushering in the 4<sup>th</sup> Reich, a 1,000-year-rule of the new White Fascist Lords of planet Earth.

### **Don't Name Them, Don't Show Them, But Report Everything Else**

Adam Lankford and Eric Madfis open their December 2018 essay with the following statement: “While mass shootings remain extremely rare events, these incidents warrant serious attention because when they do occur ... they cause multiple casualties and devastate communities ... and create extensive fear among the larger public” (p. 1). While the latter statement about fear is most certainly true, the former statement about the rarity of mass shootings is not true. In December 2019, when we started writing this paper, there were two mass shootings at Naval bases in the U.S., and the number of mass shootings in 2019, when defined as four or more people killed or injured by a lone shooter, was 416, while there were 600 in 2020. As of 26 May 2021 there have been 332 (Berkowitz, B., Alcantra, C., and Lu, D. 2019, Dec. 18; Victor, D. & Taylor, D., 2021, May 26. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/mass-shootings-2021.html>).

We have borrowed the title of Lankford's and Madfis' article for this section of the paper, but we need to also share their subtitle: **A pragmatic proposal for denying mass killers the attention they seek and deterring future offenders**. We will follow their wise advice for this paper and not name or show the domestic terrorists, whose acts of terror we will, nevertheless analyze in some detail. We will discuss three recent acts of domestic terrorism in the paper, all of which occurred in the years previous to researching this paper: the Tree of Life synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh (27 October 2018), which happened two miles from one of the author's home; the massacre of Muslims at two different mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand (15 March 2019); and the El Paso mass shooting, which targeted Black and Brown people in a shopping mall (3 August 2019).

All three domestic terrorists were White Supremacists, all three wrote and posted manifestos before going on their rampages, and all three targeted separate groups of “non-White” people destined for annihilation by the *Diaries*: Jews, Muslims and Latinos. We will simply refer to each of these domestic terrorists as DT1, DT2 and DT3, but leave them unnamed for the reasons provided by Lankford and Madfis.

Michael Davis (6 August 2019) shows that all three of these acts of domestic terrorism are clearly linked and often explicitly. DT3 explicitly names DT2’s manifesto as an inspiration for his attack, while DT2 references five previous domestic terrorists in his manifesto. All three of them reference “White genocide” and “the great replacement” and they all claim to be acting out of “a sense of urgency and in self-defense” (2019, para. 2). Davis observes, “The many links between these attackers suggest that while they may initially seem like ‘lone wolf’ extremists, they are in fact part of an active community, which views itself as the vanguard in a critical struggle seeking to spread its ideas and encourage further attacks” (2019, para. 4).

## Pentadic Analysis of Three Acts of Domestic Terrorism

### *Pittsburgh*

On 28 October 2018, DT1 entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Squirrel Hill, PA and opened fire, killing eleven and wounding six, including a number of police officers (*scene/act*). When confronted by police, DT1 claimed, “that he wanted all Jews to die” and that “[Jews] were committing genocide to his people” (Amend, 2018, para. 2). During the rampage he was shouting, “All Jews must die!” DT1 was armed with four guns, including a semiautomatic rifle (*agency*). For nineteen days prior to the mass shooting, DT1 posted and re-posted 68 anti-Semitic rants and memes on Gab, a social media site known for tolerating hate speech. On the morning of the attack, DT1 posted the following: “HIAS [the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I’m going in” (Amend, 2018, para. 9). Amend notes that these three sentences tell us a lot about DT1’s worldview (*agent*).

First, DT1 believes in the debunked White genocide conspiracy theory which pictures Jews, through HIAS, a nonprofit Jewish American organization that provides aid for refugees and immigrants world-wide, bringing caravans of non-Whites into the country. These people are supposedly “invaders” who are murdering Whites at an alarming rate. Second, the White genocide theory also code-names these Jews “Globalists,” who are involved in a world-wide conspiracy to supplant and wipe out the White race – present echoes of several past worldwide Jewish conspiracies. Third, DT1 is a “Nativist” who believes that this is a real invasion and that the true natives (read White people, not Native Americans) of the U.S. are being systematically murdered, displaced and replaced by illegal immigrants.

The second sentence of DT1 – about not being able to sit by and watch his people get slaughtered – points to an online debate among White Supremacist groups concerning what to do about the invasion of non-Whites and echoes a number of previous domestic terrorists’ concern that most White Supremacists online are all talk and no action. His people, of course, are Whites, but how can one possibly make the case for a wholesale slaughter of non-White people in the U.S.? Amend points out that this is “accusation in a mirror” rhetoric, or classic gas-lighting:

As summarized by the *Dangerous Speech Project*, accusation in a mirror asserts “that the audience [or in-group, e.g. White nationalists] faces serious and often mortal threats from the target group [or out-group e.g. Jews] – in other words, reversing reality by suggesting that the victims of a genocide will instead commit it.” (Amend, 2018, para. 17)

The third sentence about screwing “your” optics is clearly addressed to DT1’s online community of White Supremacists. Amend speculates that DT1 was probably radicalized completely online, and though it appears that he acted as a “lone wolf,” it is also clear that he has drawn inspiration from other domestic terrorists and wishes to be remembered as one who has not just talked, but taken action. In fact, in a February 2018 article on the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) website, Hanks and Amend trace the interconnections of White Supremacist mass killings, beginning in 2014 with the mass murders committed by Anonymous Terrorist #1, which resulted in seven deaths and fourteen injuries through shootings that occurred in January 2018.

During this time period forty-seven non-Whites were killed by domestic terrorists and sixty-seven were injured. All of these domestic terrorists espoused a White Supremacist ideology. Their average age was twenty-six. Perhaps the most chilling finding of this study is the dramatic up tic of these crimes in 2017, a trend which has clearly continued through 2021, with 73 “far right incidents” reported in 2020, the highest number reported since the inception of the database in 1994 (Harrow, Tran & Hawkins, 2021, “The Rise of Domestic Extremism,” para. 10).

According to federal authorities, the synagogue shooter legally purchased four guns (*agency*): three Glock .357 sig semi-automatic pistols and an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle. The Philadelphia Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives also said DT1 did not fall under any current firearms purchase restrictions and had obtained a handgun license. (Oppel 2018).

DT1 acted alone, but he certainly was not alone in his White Supremacist views, which views all non-Whites, including Jews, as invaders who are seeking to murder, displace, and replace “native” Whites. Amend notes, “Given the reckless rhetoric coming from the president on down, rhetoric enabled by digital echo chambers and unchecked social media

platforms, nourishment for killers like... [DT1] is all too easy to find" (October 2018, para. 55). So, we have identified the *scene*, *act*, *agent* and *agency*, but what of the *purpose* for this act of domestic terrorism? The *purpose* dovetails perfectly with the end of the *Turner Diaries*: the creation of a brave, new, all-White world through the annihilation of non-Whites.

### **Christchurch, New Zealand**

A pentadic analysis of the Manifesto released by DT2 yields the following, now familiar pattern. The *scenes* for DT2's mass murder (*acts*) of Muslims (51 killed) were two different mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, and the date is 15 March 2019 (*scene/act*). DT2 allegedly wrote a seventy page manifesto entitled "The Great Replacement: Towards a New Society," which he posted online just prior to the massacres. The manifesto opens with Dylan Thomas' poem, "Do Not Go Gentle Into The Good Night," and notes immediately that it's "the birthrates and immigration" of non-Whites that comprise the exigence for the shootings, because these twin evils "will ultimately result in the complete racial and cultural replacement of the European people" (p. 1). This "invasion" has created the condition DT2 calls "White genocide" (p. 2). DT2 then describes himself (*agent*) as a 28-year-old White man born into a "working class, low income family" of "Scottish, Irish and English Stock" (p. 3).

DT2 moves immediately to the rationale for the attacks (*purposes*), which include taking "revenge" for "hundreds of thousands of deaths" supposedly caused by the invaders, revenge for the murder of Ebba Akerlund (a young girl killed in the 2017 Stockholm truck attack), and to "directly reduce immigration rates ... by intimidating and physically removing the invaders themselves." This action he expects will "create conflict between the two ideologies within the United States ... [which] will ultimately result in a civil war that will eventually balkanize the US along political, cultural and, most importantly, racial issues" (pp. 3–4). This is a direct reference to the *Turner Diaries*.

DT2 then describes why he chose firearms (*agency*), because of "the affect [sic] it would have on social discourse, the extra media coverage they would provide and the affect [sic] it would have on the politics of the United States," which would force liberals to abolish the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment, creating a "dramatic polarization" with a concomitant "fracturing of the US along cultural and racial lines" (p. 9). Again, this is the strategy of The Order in the *Turner Diaries*.

According to New Zealand officials, the mosque gunman in Christchurch was said to have five firearms (*agency*): Two semiautomatic rifles, two shotguns and a lever-action firearm. He purchased the firearms legally using a gun license, issued in November of 2017. He apparently replaced the rifles' small legal magazines with 30-round magazines purchased online. He also had two improvised explosive devices attached to a car.

Images of the weapons used in the mosque attacks posted by the gunman show at least one of them to be a semiautomatic rifle similar to an AR-15. Many of the weapons were emblazoned with White graffiti related to historic conflicts between Muslims and Christians in a variety of languages including Armenian, Cyrillic, Georgian, and Latin. White Supremacist slogans such as "Remove Kebab," a reference to an anti-Muslim propaganda music video that emerged during the Yugoslav Wars, and a Slavic swastika were among the markings on the recovered weapons.

### **El Paso**

DT3 posted his manifesto on 8Chan, an anonymous fringe online messaging board, minutes before his attack on 3 August 2019. 8Chan, which went down for three months, is back as 8kun. These are his opening words:

In general, I support the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto. This attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas. They are the instigators, not me. I am simply defending my country from cultural and ethnic replacement brought on by an invasion. (para. 1)

Once again, we see the connection to DT2 as well as to the local "invaders" who are not Jews or Muslims, but Hispanic. And, again, DT3 is not the aggressor; rather, he and his White country are under attack, threatened by ethnic replacement, and he is simply defending his country. The *scene* is a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, a soft target for a domestic terrorist. The *act* is a shooting spree, leaving 22 dead and 24 wounded. The *agency* is a single semiautomatic weapon. The *agent* is a twenty-one-year-old White Supremacist who posted his manifesto, which contains the *purpose* of his mass murder.

The manifesto, entitled "The Inconvenient Truth," is a four-page scree divided into the following topics: About Me, Political Reasons, Economic Reasons, Gear, Reaction, and Personal Thoughts and Reasons. In the first section, DT3 connects his massacre directly to DT2, The Christchurch terrorist, as noted above, but significantly he finally decided to act after he read DT2's "The Great Replacement." The political reasons are straight out of *The Turner Diaries*: Democrats will soon be the only political party in Texas, because of the mass immigration of Hispanics, and because Republicans are only interested in supporting corporate greed, which in turn, needs the immigrants for labor.

The economic reasons are tied to the political — the Hispanics are taking jobs, which should go to Whites, and corporations are producing more goods to feed this burgeoning invasion, so "the next logical step is to decrease the number of people in America using resources" (para. 5). As for gear, DT3 will be using an AK-47, but since it heats up too quickly, after

100 rounds, he will have to wear protective gloves and is hoping he can get his hands on an AR-15. He also talks about the kinds of bullets he has been considering. He is hoping that the “reaction” will be to continue the “encouraging” trend of many Hispanics returning to their homelands. DT3 apparently ordered his AK-47 (*agency*) from Romania and his ammunition from Russia. According to his manifesto, the rifle was a WASR-10, a semiautomatic civilian version of a Romanian military AK-47. (McCollough 2019).

DT3 closes his manifesto with personal reasons for the slaughter, which include taking action as critical: “INACTION IS A CHOICE” – a choice he refuses. And his action is not an act of “imperialism but an act of preservation” (para. 12). Further, both Republicans and Democrats have failed to deport members of the invasion, whose children will receive educational benefits and take jobs from future generations of Whites (para. 13). DT3 is also against “race mixing” and would hate to have to kill all Black and Brown people, so, as in the *Turner Diaries*, he suggests that we “divide America into a confederacy of territories with at least 1 territory for each race” (par. 14). Finally, he muses that his death is likely, that it is not cowardly to hit soft targets, which he calls “low hanging fruit,” that President Trump’s rhetoric is not to blame, and that he will be branded as a White Supremacist by the media. (para. 15–17). He closes with a statement that the fight to save White America is not lost, it is “just the beginning of the fight for America and Europe” and that he is “honored to head the fight to reclaim” his country from “destruction” (para. 17).

### **Stopping the Violence: Contemplating Future Scenes, Agents, Agency and Actions**

In what follows we discuss issues related to the scenes, agents, agency and purposes of domestic terrorism in the hopes of beginning to identify, slow or even stop the mass shootings. As of 26 May 2021 there have been at least 232 mass shootings this year, compared to 600 this time last year, which makes one despair of an end to the madness (Daniel Victor & Derrick Bryson, Taylor <https://www.nytimes.com/article/mass-shootings-2021.html>.) Still, in hopes of curbing the violence, we discuss the radicalization of these terrorists through social media, governmental attempts at identifying potential domestic terrorists and stopping them, attempts to protect potential scenes from terrorist attacks, the current state of gun laws and gun ownership in the U.S., and the continued problem of the perennial purpose for these acts—the (re)creation of a White supremacist state in the U.S.

### **The Initial Scenes: The Dark Side of Social Media**

DT1, DT2, and DT3 were all radicalized online, influenced by other domestic terrorists and works of fiction like *The Turner Diaries*. Technology and social media platforms are not without blame. Today it is possible to map a web visitor’s demographic and psychographic characteristics and adjust content in real time to promote sales or encourage voting. Machine algorithms focus and filter our digital interactions and internet searches, making it possible for those with extreme views to find and interact with others who share their views. So, these social media platforms are the initial scenes for the radicalization of these domestic terrorists, supporting mutually reinforced anger, rhetoric that justifies violence, and offering encouragement for others to take violent action.

Thanks primarily to the internet, these domestic terrorists are not troubled loners operating in a vacuum. In psychological terms, these three domestic terrorists and their predecessors functioned as a support group for one another. And while technology plays a part, so do human cognitive biases. “Purely from a psychological point of view, subtle individual biases are at least as important as rankings and choice when it comes to spreading bogus news or Russian hoaxes – like a false report of Muslim men in Michigan collecting welfare for multiple wives” (Carey, 2017, p. D1). And, social media provide platforms for rapid dissemination of misinformation of all kinds. A recent study by MIT, for example, found that fake news spreads about six times faster than real news on Twitter. On average, the researchers found fake news was reaching more than 10,000 people, while real news rarely reached more than 1,000 users. (Darcy, O. 2018, March 8).

### **Stopping Agents: Internet, Video Games, Background Checks, Red Flags**

So what drives these young boys and men to commit mass shootings and what steps can be taken to prevent them from acting out their online fantasies? All the research shows that domestic terrorists are inspired by other domestic terrorists and find each other in a variety of online social media spaces. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, the Big Three social media platforms, all monitor hate speech and sometimes remove particularly vile posts, but little else is done and dark web sites like 8chan, 4chan and Gab appear, disappear and reappear with little monitoring. DT1 discussed his anti-Semitic narrative on Gab with other extremists while DT2 and DT3 were influenced by the *Diaries* and other online extremists, eventually posting their own manifestoes online and on 8Chan respectively.

Violent video games are often thought to inspire these acts of domestic terrorism, but recent research suggests that while video games do “increase aggressive behavior,” nevertheless, “[t]he aggression in question falls well short of assault with a weapon, never mind mass murder. So the weight of scientific opinion is that video games are not a decisive factor when a spree killer decides to act” (Carey, 2019, para. 8). Nevertheless, a first person-shooter game series named *Call of Duty*, for example, has sold more than 200 million copies. And there is no question sophisticated video simulations are employed to

train our military in the use of weapons systems, including drones, automatic cannons, smart bombs, missiles, small arms, as well as rescue missions and a host of other real-world scenarios.

The state of firearms background checks is fairly robust. Since 1998, people who wish to buy a gun from a federally licensed dealer have to undergo a criminal background check performed by the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System, or NICS for short (Lindquist 2017). The NICS is a computerized system designed to search several databases to determine if a person is qualified to possess a gun. As of 2017, the latest figures available, NICS had performed some 25.2 million background checks (FBI 2017). Still, the existence of "ghost guns" remains a serious problem, because one is still able to purchase the parts to build one's own gun. On 11 March 2021 the U.S. House of Representatives passed HR 8, the "Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2021," which would expand background checks for all sales of firearms, including personal sales (Diaz & Dean, 2021, para. 3).

We do not know if red-flagging would-be shooters actually works. Los Angeles County has intervened in over 200 cases since 2007, and there has not been a major school shooting in this time, but what about those who have graduated from high school? On 16 April 2021, for example, eight people were killed in a mass shooting at the FedEx facility in Indianapolis, IN. The alleged perpetrator had been red-flagged by a family member. The FBI launched an investigation, then dropped it for lack of a specific threat. Also, there seems to be at most a "tenuous" link between mental illness and mass shootings of the kind described in this paper. In fact, only one out of five mass murderers shows signs of psychosis (Carey, 2019, para. 13) and, according to Carey, "People living in this kind of misery are far more likely to be the victims of violence than perpetrators; but they can act violently themselves, especially when using drugs or alcohol" (Carey, 2019, para. 12).

### **Protecting Real World Scenes: Fusion Centers and Soft Targets**

After 9/11 the government established what it called an Information Sharing Environment. One of several consequences of this policy was the creation of fusion centers, which are owned and operated by state, local, and territorial law enforcement entities in cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and private sector partners including Wall Street firms such as Goldman Sachs and Citigroup. According to the Department of Justice (DOJ), "A fusion center is an effective and efficient mechanism to exchange information and intelligence, maximize resources, streamline operations, and improve the ability to fight crime and terrorism by merging data from a variety of sources" (US DOJ Fusion Centers and Intelligence Sharing, para. 4).

The attacks in El Paso and Pittsburgh have demonstrated that governmental efforts to share data and information in the fight against domestic terrorism have not been effective or efficient. As of 2020, there were 79 centers with this mission, including the El Paso Fusion Center Multi-Agency Tactical Response Information Exchange and the Western Pennsylvania All Hazards Fusion Center in Pittsburgh (US DHS). A December 17, 2019, Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC) report intended to protect synagogues, churches, temples, and mosques found that "Fusion Centers are not well known or understood and are not organized in the same manner across the country." The report, which described Fusion Center messages as "disparate and simply incoherent," contained a series of recommendations to improve outreach, standardize training, and coordinate law enforcement (US DHS faith based, p. 35).

None of this indicates that the fight against domestic terrorism is going well from the standpoint of the government or the public. Little has changed since 2003 when Dory pointed out, "Efforts to educate the public about the range of terrorist threats, our vulnerabilities to terrorism, and ways to respond during attacks have been limited, confusing, and at times even contradictory" (p. 37). In addition to communication and information shortfalls, the absence of a federal domestic terrorism statute hampers law enforcement efforts. Extremists and supremacists who attack faith-based houses of worship are currently indicted on hate crimes or weapons possession charges. The 6 January 2021 attack on the Capitol was a clear act of domestic terrorism, but no federal laws were actually violated by the perpetrators. In practical terms, this means federal and state law enforcement agencies have been unable to obtain dedicated counterterrorism resources, including personnel, training, and technologies.

### **Addressing the Agency: Current Gun Laws**

Currently there are several major federal laws dealing with firearms, including the National Firearms Act of 1934, the Gun Control Act and Firearm Owners Protection Act, both of 1968, the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1993, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, and the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act of 2005. As noted above, on 11 March 2021 the U.S. House of Representatives passed HR 8, the "Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2021," which would expand background checks for all sales of firearms, including personal sales (Diaz & Dean, 2021, para. 3), but it will have a more difficult time passing in the Senate.

All fifty states, the District of Columbia, Mexico and Canada have a patchwork quilt of firearms laws which change every year (Kappas, 2020). In 2020, for example, Texas removed houses of worship and schools from its list of prohibited places for concealed firearms carry for permit holders (Bote, 2019) and the Pennsylvania Supreme Court recently overturned a Pittsburgh ban on high-capacity magazines following the Tree of Life massacre (Svitek and Rubinkam, 2019).

Assault-style semiautomatic weapons have been available on a large scale in the United States since 1907 – more than a century – when the Winchester Model 1907 was introduced. About 400,000 of these high-powered centerfire rifles were produced before World War II. This semiautomatic rifle could be ordered from a Sears and Roebuck catalog and delivered to your home by the U.S. Postal Service. The Model 1907 chambered a .351 Winchester cartridge, fed by a detachable, high-capacity magazine. The only difference between the Model 1907 and what are erroneously called “assault rifles” today is that this rifle came with a wooden stock. In fact, the Winchester .351 bullet is actually larger than those used in more modern-looking semiautomatic rifles with plastic stocks (Sharpe, 1950). As first manufactured, the Model 1907 and other semiautomatic weapons were intended for target and sport use. The U.S. government made semi and fully automatic rifles weapons of war after they had been in use by the civilian population for four decades. Three generations of Americans owned them without one mass shooting. What has changed?

The sheer number of guns in the U.S. is a fundamental logistical problem for control or regulation of firearms. A recent study shows that there are 1.2 guns for everyone in the U.S. Conducted in 2018, the “Small Arms Survey,” found that there were “393 million civilian-owned firearms in the United States, or enough for every man, woman and child to own one and still have 67 million guns left over” (Ingraham, 2018, para. 1).

Should states or the federal government consider firearms buy-backs and bans on assault-style rifles as New Zealand did after DT1’s massacres? By December 2019 56,000 guns were bought back, no questions asked, but estimates are that about two-thirds of the banned guns were not turned in. “In advance of the amnesty period, the consulting firm KPMG estimated in a government-commissioned report that there were somewhere between 50,000 and 170,000 banned guns owned by the public. If the truth is somewhere around the median figure, then New Zealand was able to recover just about half of the outlawed firearms” (Mancin, 2019, para. 8).

### **Confronting the Purposes for Mass Murder**

As we noted at the beginning of this paper, many argue that discussions of recent acts of domestic terrorism should be censored or silenced, but we argue the opposite: that we must analyze, discuss, confront and condemn these hateful ideologies in papers, journals and books. The deepest threat, we believe is ideological: the old problem of White Supremacy, which, as noted above is succinctly defined as “...a doctrine of racial superiority that justifies discrimination, segregation, and domination of persons of color based on an ideology and belief system that considers all other non-White groups inferior” (Sue, 2015, p. 155). This ideology is patently false, but provides the fundamental rationale, the *purpose* for most of these mass murders.

And though the ideology *is* patently false, it has also become dangerously conflated with Second Amendment rights as witnessed in the 20 January 2020 Legislative Day in Richmond, Virginia. Although held for many years by the Virginia Citizens Defense League on the Martin Luther King, Jr. federal holiday as a day to discuss gun legislation with elected officials, it was described by much of the national media as a “gun rally.” In fear of a repeat of the White Supremacist and neo-Nazi Unite the Right Charlottesville rally which killed one and injured nineteen, Virginia Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam declared a state of emergency and banned firearms from the legislative buildings of the Capitol proper.

Still, an estimated 22,000 Second Amendment advocates showed up with pistols, shot guns and semiautomatic rifles (Both concealed handgun carry with a permit and open carry without a permit are legal in Virginia). Unlike the violent Charlottesville rally, which was ultimately declared an unlawful assembly, the Richmond Legislative Day was quite peaceful. As the organizers put it, “Monday, January 20, is VCDL’s Lobby Day. It is not VCDL’s Protest Day. There is a distinct difference between the two” (VCDL, p. 1).

Columnist and commentator Janelle Bouie argued that this “peaceful” gun rally was actually intimidating and threatening to anti-gun activists, who were warned to stay away for fear of another Charlottesville. Bouie noted that gun ownership has a long history of being tied to race as many American colonies in the 17<sup>th</sup> century enforced prohibitions against slaves and Native Americans owning or possessing firearms, while alternately arming the White populations. Is the rally around the Second Amendment by these groups endangering the First Amendment right to free speech? The title of Bouie’s article is telling: “The Iconic Man with a Gun is a White Man.”

Yet all three of the White Supremacist terrorists discussed in this paper viewed themselves as victims of “White genocide” caused by intentional racial replacement. In their warped worldview, Jews and non-Whites are scapegoats and enemies to be slaughtered in order to halt this invasion and replacement. According to Burke, “The Hitlerite Anti-Semitism as scapegoat principle clearly reveals a related process of dialectic: unification by a foe shared in common” (1945/1969, p. 408).

That common foe – all other non-White groups – is a major factor that unifies DT1, DT2, and DT3. These domestic terrorists apparently believed that the violent acts they committed in reality would fulfill the fantasies put forward in their manifestos. When scapegoating is frustrated, as when their terrorist actions do not result in the fantastic ramblings of their apocalyptic manifestos, according to Burke, motives of self-destruction come to the fore. There is more than a little self-destructive behavior evident in the rants of DT1, DT2, and DT3.

### Conclusion: Pentadic Assessment of the Current Threat

In this pentadic analysis we have suggested that the manifestos, narratives, and hate language of domestic terrorists contain themes and words that are important rhetorical sources of information. The clear recurring linguistic themes in the language used by DT1, DT2, DT3 and other terrorists inspired by the *Turner Diaries* – much like the recurring language and other semiotic means (images) of online sexual predators – offer a weakness that can be put to good use (Lorenzo-Dus, p. 26). “Words provide a window into the minds of criminals,” according to Michael Woodworth and his colleagues, “helping to determine whether they fit any particular personality profile, such as psychopathy” (Woodworth, p. 31). Individuals’ language is one of the best ways to glean insight into their thoughts and general outlook.” (Woodworth, p. 29).

The use of linguistic tools to analyze social media output has been an active field of study for about a decade. Tools including the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) can identify emotional states and psychological traits. (Tausczik and Pennebaker). Other research using various social media has begun to predict everything from personality to mental state. We suggest that automatic linguistic analysis programs like LIWC combined with smart search engines trained to recognize the linguistic patterns of terrorists could provide law enforcement a powerful tool in predicting and preventing future attacks. That would be good for us all.

The Pentad itself is a useful rhetorical and semiotic tool as well, since politicians and political parties often analyze events, like mass shootings, focusing on only one element of the Pentad. For example, Democrats often focus on the agency in mass shootings, namely guns, to the exclusion of other elements, then draw narrow or unwarranted conclusions and push legislation to ban certain guns, suggesting that this alone would solve the problem. Republicans often focus on the agent, namely the mental health of the shooter, to the exclusion of the other ratios, again, drawing narrow or unwarranted conclusions, involving sweeping up mentally ill people and institutionalizing them before they commit mass murder. But a full orb ed analysis and description of a mass shooting event requires analysis of all five elements—act, scene, agent, agency and purpose—in order to produce warranted and broad conclusions about these complex phenomena.

In addition, Burke also develops the notion of the “ratios,” noting that the five elements often overlap and actually shed light on others when held in tension. For example, the scene-act and scene-agency ratios for these mass shootings show us that the scenes are carefully selected – “soft targets” – as are the weapons (agency) – most often semi-automatic hand guns and rifles – in order to create the most dramatic carnage and images. Knives or bombs could have been used, as DT3 suggests, but he chose the guns purposefully with an eye to publicity. A pentadic analysis of mass shootings suggests that assessing and addressing future threats involves addressing each of the weaknesses identified by the analysis: hardening soft targets (*scene*), coordinating information and acting quickly before a mass shooting occurs (*act*), conducting background checks and red-flagging where necessary (*agent*), banning certain types of weapons and evaluating the effectiveness of gun buy-back programs (*agency*), and, finally, as we have attempted to do in this paper, confronting the false ideology of White Supremacy (*purpose*) and exposing it for what it actually is – bigotry and racism.

### Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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