Rise Above Movement (R.A.M.)

Key Points

R.A.M. (Rise Above Movement) is a white supremacist group based in Southern California whose members believe they are fighting against a “modern world” corrupted by the “destructive cultural influences” of liberals, Jews, Muslims and non-white immigrants. They refer to themselves as the “premier MMA (mixed martial arts) club of the Alt-Right.” Originally based in Southern California, today their membership is mostly online, and leader Robert Rundo is living in Eastern Europe.

- R.A.M. operates like a street-fighting club. Members train to do physical battle with their ideological foes and have been involved in violent clashes during political rallies and demonstrations.
While they consider themselves part of the alt right, R.A.M.’s membership has deep roots in California’s racist skinhead movement, and includes individuals who have faced serious criminal charges, including assault, robbery and weapon offenses.

Following the arrest of three members after the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, the group’s U.S. activity has been mainly limited to training and propaganda efforts. Meanwhile, group leader Robert Rundo has worked to create a network of white-supremacist groups in Eastern Europe.

Overview

The Rise Above Movement (R.A.M.) is a white supremacist group based in Southern California (predominantly Orange County region) whose members believe they are fighting against a “modern world” corrupted by the “destructive cultural influences” of liberals, Jews, Muslims, and the effects of non-white immigration. Their ostensible goal is to restore European-American (i.e., white) culture to America and create a “conservative counter-culture” that embraces white identity and “traditional Christian” values. They see themselves as patriotic crusaders who are fighting against “communist” forces and advocating on behalf of a victimized white population.

“We want to rise above all of today’s destructive culture and see the rebirth of our people, strong in mental and physical capacities as our forefathers were. In a time when you can be harmed for your political beliefs or shamed for your heritage, we are here to defend our identity and shared goals.” Rise Above Movement, Instagram, June 12, 2017

“The Rise Above Movement is the premier MMA club of the Alt-Right, representing the United States. Their dedication is to promote an active lifestyle and common values among young people and a future for European people. This is achieved through training, creative thinking and activism. The main task of The Rise Above Movement is to revive the spirit of a warrior and to see the rebirth of
values of Western Civilization’s forefathers.” Rise Above Movement, GAB.ai, December 18, 2017.

On October 2, 2018, federal and local law enforcement arrested four individuals allegedly associated with Rise Above Movement, charging them with intent to encourage, promote, incite, participate in, and commit violent acts in furtherance of a riot. Benjamin Drake Daley, 25, of Redondo Beach, Thomas Walter Gillen, 34, of Redondo Beach, Michael Paul Miselis, 29, of Lawndale and Cole Evan White, 24, of Clayton were each charged with one count of violating the federal riots statute and one count of conspiracy to violate the federal riots statute. Each defendant faces up to 10 years in prison. The indictment alleges the four engaged in a coordinated and planned effort to violently attack protesters at political rallies and provides screenshots from video footage of R.A.M. members kicking, punching and headbutting.

They pleaded guilty and were sentenced on July 19, 2019. Daley (who is the group’s co-founder) was sentenced to 37 months in prison, Gillen was sentenced to 33 months in prison and Miselis was sentenced to 27 months in prison. Cole Evan White accepted a plea deal and was sentenced to 14 months, with seven months credit for time served.

Three additional R.A.M. members were also indicted, including group leader Robert Rundo, but a U.S. District Court dismissed the charges, concluding that the federal Anti-Riot Act is “unconstitutionally overbroad in violation of the First Amendment.” Federal prosecutors are currently appealing that ruling to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Following initial accusations of Michael Miselis’ alleged violent misconduct in Charlottesville, R.A.M. came to his defense in a YouTube video, “Fake News Exposed.” They claimed that Miselis was defending himself and “cleared the sidewalk of commie scum.”
Some within the far-right have come to R.A.M.’s defense. On the day of the arrest, white supremacist Juan Cadavid, aka Johnny Benitez, posted on Gab, a social media network popular with white supremacists, “RAM terrifies the FBI because they’re just a bunch of hardworking white guys who stick together in a fraternity and stand up for themselves when Antifa attacks.” The white supremacist organization Northwest Front posted on Gab, “Rise Above Movement is your frontline antifa push back force. Support them! Don’t buy the lies the DOJ and FBI is conjuring up. RAM are clean anti-drug pro-American and pro-work and pro-exercise through the discipline of training mixed martial arts. Support RAM. They support you at Trump rallies and they protect Trump supporters at every gathering. Free RAM Now.”

For much of 2020, the group's activity in the U.S. has been primarily online. This is likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that group leader Robert Rundo moved to Eastern Europe, where he has forged alliances with European white supremacist groups and shared videos with his supporters across the world.

**Leadership**

**Benjamin Daley** of Redondo Beach is a leader in the Rise Above Movement and is featured prominently in the group's recruitment videos. He has traveled not only throughout California to attend rallies but also participated in the August 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Daley has a history of using social media to promote anti-Semitic cartoons and conspiracy theories about Jewish control of the banking, media and legal system. He was indicted in 2018 for intent to encourage, promote, incite, participate in, and commit violent acts in furtherance of a riot at Unite the Right.

**Robert Rundo** of San Clemente, California, is in charge of the group's MMA training program. Law enforcement reports indicate he also runs the group's Twitter page and produces their videos. According to media reports, Rundo has prior convictions in New York, and served an 18-month sentence for assault with a
weapon stemming from a September 2009 stabbing following a gang fight. He was indicted in 2018 for planning and intentionally engaging in violent attacks and assaults against counter-protesters at various political events in Huntington Beach, Berkeley and San Bernardino, California, but a U.S. District Court later dismissed the charges. Since then, Rundo has lived in various Eastern European locations, participating in white supremacist events and making propaganda videos for R.A.M.'s social media accounts.

**Origins**

It is unclear exactly how many R.A.M. members are active in the U.S., but it is believed that the group currently consists of fewer than 20 loosely affiliated neo-Nazis and racist skinheads who were formerly known as DIY Division but rebranded themselves as the Rise Above Movement in the spring of 2017. “The premier MMA club of the alt right,” espouses racism, anti-Semitism and intolerance at events and online. Members have been spotted carrying “Da Goyim Know” signs, a reference to an anti-Semitic trope about Jews trying to keep non-Jews “in the dark” about their plans for world domination. During an anti-Muslim rally in San Bernardino, one member held a sign declaring, “Rapefugees Not Welcome.” Several others held a banner that read, “Defend America. Islamists Out,” and depicted lance-wielding crusaders on horseback chasing after fleeing Muslims.
R.A.M. emerged within the alt-right scene to challenge the “keyboard warriors” and encourage real world action. In a January 2018 Gab post they wrote, “A new year and a new direction for the alt right, time to leave behind online memes and countless hours shitposting and act like we really do want a world that exists beyond discords and edgy websites.”
Propensity for Violence

The group operates like a street-fighting club and promotes physical fitness and strength-training in preparation for altercations with counter-protesters at political rallies and demonstrations. In 2017, R.A.M. members were part of violent clashes at California rallies in Berkeley and Huntington Beach, and at the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Members attend events prepared to fight, concealing their identity with skull masks or American flag themed bandanas, wearing goggles to block pepper spray attacks and wrapping their hands and wrists with gauze or tape to protect themselves from injuries.
In online posts, members romanticize their role of protecting victimized whites against numerous elements that threaten their existence and use that imagined threat to justify force. R.A.M.’s violent ideology is glorified in the group’s recruitment videos and other online propaganda. The videos cut back and forth from footage of members brawling at demonstrations to scenes of members participating in workout sessions.

Antifa plays a prominent role in R.A.M.’s self-definition and provides them with a tangible enemy. Their digital propaganda highlights violence against the left, and features images of members wearing t-shirts emblazoned with phrases like “Kill a Commie for Mommy,” or posing in front of graffiti of the letters GNLS, an acronym for “Good Night Left Side,” a common anti-antifa slogan.
In one message on their Gab account, R.A.M. posted an image of Robert Rundo fighting with a protester, accompanied by the words “Physical Removal.” The caption reads, “The day we got our start. Not many alt-righters can say they not only stood and fought Antifa but actually chased them out of rallies and keep [sic] fellow patriots safe. #warriorspirit #nationalist #morthanmemes.” Another propaganda photo, posted on Twitter, shows members walking through a grassy field, with the words, “Love Nature Hate Antifa.” On August 16, the group posted an image of masked R.A.M. members flashing OK symbols and holding up a banner that reads “anti-Communist action” with the hashtags #antiantifa #anticommunism #rightwing.
The day we got our start. Not many altrighters can say they Not only stood and fought antifa but actually chased them out of rallies and keep fellow patriots safe. #warriorspirit #nationalist #morethanmemes
Several R.A.M. members have violent criminal backgrounds, with convictions for felony assault, robbery and weapon violations. Robert Rundo has prior convictions in New York for assault with a weapon and gang assault 2nd degree. Tyler Laube
of Redondo Beach, California, has a lengthy criminal record that includes convictions for robbery and bladed weapon violations. Robert Bowman of Torrance, California, also has an extensive criminal history, and has been convicted of robbery, theft, battery, vandalism, trespassing and assault.

2018 Indictments and Arrests

On October 24, 2018, Robert Rundo, one of the central figures in the Rise Above Movement, was taken into custody, according to law enforcement. Authorities also arrested Tyler Laube and Robert Boman, while a fourth individual named in a new criminal complaint, Aaron Eason, remains at large. The arrests stem from a criminal complaint filed by the FBI on October 20 in the U.S. District Courts, Central District of California, charging Rundo, Boman, Laube and Eason with criminal conspiracy to riot and commit acts of violence at a political rally.

The complaint alleges Rundo, Boman, Laube and Eason planned and intentionally engaged in violent attacks and assaults against counter-protesters at various political events in Huntington Beach, Berkeley and San Bernardino, among others, and sheds additional light on R.A.M.'s deeply-rooted white supremacist beliefs. Rundo, according to law enforcement, keeps a large framed portrait of Adolf Hitler in his room, and is quoted as saying, "I am a big supporter of the fourteen. I'll say that." "Fourteen" is a reference to the "14 Words," the world's best-known white supremacist slogan. R.A.M. members' private communications, collected by the FBI, further underscore the group's white supremacist ideology. R.A.M. member Ben Daley, who was charged earlier in October for his involvement in Unite the Right wrote (prior to UTR), "Regardless we should all still go. Im [sic] flying out from CA with a handful regardless. Fuck these jews [sic]." In another private communication, former UCLA student Michael Miselis, who was also charged in the earlier indictment, boasted that R.A.M.'s violent actions at the Berkeley rally represented "Total Aryan Victory."
The charges against Rundo et al are separate from the October 2, 2018, indictment of four R.A.M. members for intent to encourage, promote, incite, participate in, and commit violent acts in furtherance of a riot at the Unite the Right (UTR) rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Ben Daley, Thomas Gillen, Michael Miselis and Cole White were each charged with one count of violating the federal riots statute and one count of conspiracy to violate the federal riots statute. Each defendant faces up to 10 years in prison. The indictment alleges the four men engaged in a coordinated and planned effort to violently attack protesters at political rallies, and includes supporting evidence of R.A.M. members kicking, punching and headbutting.

While Daley, Gillen, Miselis and White were convicted, the charges against Rundo, Boman, Laube and Eason were dismissed.

**R.A.M. Brand Building**

In January 2018, R.A.M. launched an online merchandise arm called The Right Brand Clothing company. This appears to be an effort to mainstream and monetize their ideology by selling a range of paraphernalia from clothing to stickers. The Right Brand's motto is "Courage, Activism and Style," with no mention of the white supremacist ideology behind the brand. The enterprise bills itself as “a nationalist apparel company committed to bringing you the highest quality goods... For our people, Made by our people!” RAM members are prominently featured throughout the site, modeling their products, some adorned with Viking imagery and runic letters. The names of their wares underscore their attempts at edgy, counter-culture aesthetic, and include “the disrupter jogger” and “demagogue” pants. Under a section entitled “activism” they sell "FCK Antifa" stickers, highlighting their fixation on the left, and "modern white youth" stickers, which depict the dangers of rap, feminism, homosexuality and “third world” immigration.
In September 2019, the group launched Our Fight Clothing Co. which featured merchandise similar to The Right Brand Clothing Co. The now-defunct website sold not only R.A.M.’s own labels, but also a large collection of European clothing brands catering to white supremacists. This appears to be a key part of R.A.M.’s increasing collaboration with the European white supremacist movement.

In the summer of 2020, R.A.M. launched Media2Rise, a YouTube channel and documentary production outlet, calling it “a chance to have the voices of the censored be heard, and the image we want to be shown.” Through Media2Rise, Rundo and other members have released a steady stream of videos showing viewers how to stencil posters (and avoid getting caught while distributing them), as well as sharing workout routines, ideas on how to travel while on a no-fly list and suggestions on how viewers can start their own crews.
Online platforms have enabled white supremacist groups to tap into a global community, amplifying their racist views and connecting them with like-minded individuals. Real-world connections extending beyond these virtual platforms show a true commitment and investment into their cause. In April 2018 R.A.M. members Robert Rundo, Ben Daley and Robert Smithson embarked on a “European tour” to “bridge the gap between the two nationalist scenes.”

A video posted to their now defunct YouTube channel included highlights from the group’s “European tour,” including footage of stickers that emphasize their xenophobic and anti-leftist views, "rapefugees not welcome" and “fckantifa.” In the same propaganda piece, they flaunt graffiti, presumably their own, which reads "White Boys Club," a catch-phrase of the group, and ACAB (All Cops Are Bastards).

Underscoring their ideological alliance with like-minded international groups, The Right Brand prominently features products from White Rex, a Russian-based mixed martial arts promotion and clothing label company that appeals to fans of combat sports with deep white supremacist underpinnings. On their website they note this is part of a "European American collaboration," reinforcing common themes of nationalism, nativism and xenophobia. In a section called “European Gear," one t-shirt reads “Facing the sun in my uniform. That's how death will find me. White REX.” Other t-shirts emphasize nationalist themes such as “European Brotherhood: Time to Fight. Join the Resistance.”
Rundo's 2020 move to Eastern Europe allowed him to solidify his links to European white supremacist groups. In February 2020, he attended the Lukov march in Sofia, Bulgaria, alongside white supremacists from Germany, France, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Scandinavia. Later that year he and other members of R.A.M. visited Hungary and Serbia, and met with European members of the Hammerskins and other neo-Nazi groups.

Rundo's participation in the Lukov march was the subject of the first documentary released by R.A.M.'s media company Media2Rise.

Rundo and other members have participated in numerous MMA events as well as training camps in Eastern Europe.

**Activity**

In addition to working out and honing their fighting skills, R.A.M. typically participates in California events organized by other far-right groups and individuals, including white supremacist organizations such as Identity Evropa, SoCal Beach Goys, Patriot Front, Juan Benitez Cadavid (aka Johnny Benitez) and
Red Elephant’s Vincent James Foxx, as well as alt lite figures including Kyle Chapman of the Fraternal Order of Alt Knights (FOAK) and Joey Gibson of Patriot Prayer.

Occasionally, R.A.M members will organize their own protest activities. In July 2017, members attempted to disrupt a Committee for Racial Justice meeting in Santa Monica. That same month, they hung this banner over a Torrance freeway: “Secure Borders, Secure Future.”

- **Sofia, Bulgaria, February 2020**: R.A.M. members Robert Rundo and Robert Smithson attended the Lukov march and memorial alongside neo-Nazis from Germany, France, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Scandinavia. Organized by the far-right Bulgarian National Union, the Lukov march is a neo-Nazi procession that honors Hristo Lukov, a Nazi collaborator who propagated xenophobia and antisemitism.

- **February 2020, Hungary/Serbia**: R.A.M. members Robert Rundo and Robert Smithson traveled to Budapest, Hungary, and Belgrade, Serbia, to participate in neo-Nazi events including Festung Budapest, a neo-Nazi concert, and a “Day of Honor,” organized by Hungarian Hammerskins to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Nazi and Hungarian forces killed by the Soviet Army during the 1945 Siege of Budapest. During this same visit, Rundo allegedly met with members of Kormilo, a radical Serbian nationalist organization.

- **Ostriz, Germany, April 2018**: R.A.M. members Robert Rundo, Ben Daley and Robert Smithson traveled to Europe to attend Germany’s white supremacist Schild und Schwert (Shield and Sword) Festival, held on Adolf Hitler's birthday.

- **Kiev, Ukraine, April 27, 2018**: Robert Rundo participated in a white supremacist MMA competition at the “Reconquista Club.” In a Gab post R.A.M. noted “one of our guys has had the honor to be the first American to compete in the pan european [sic] organization Reconquista in Ukraine. This
was a great experience meeting nationalist that came as far as Portugal and Switzerland to take part.

- **Nashville, Tennessee, April 27 – 29, 2018**: One R.A.M member attended the white supremacist American Renaissance conference hosted by Jared Taylor, held at the Montgomery Bell State Park in Tennessee.

- **January 27, 2018**: R.A.M launched an online store called The Right Brand, marketed to fellow white supremacists.

- **Charlottesville, Virginia, August 2017**: R.A.M members attended the “Unite the Right” rally and contributed to violence against counter-protesters.

- **Santa Monica, California, July 2017**: R.A.M. members attempted to disrupt a Committee for Racial Justice meeting.

- **Torrance, California, July 2017**: R.A.M. members hung a “Secure Borders, Secure Future” banner over the 110 Freeway.

- **San Bernardino, California, June 2017**: R.A.M. members participated in an “anti-Sharia law” protest holding signs that read “Defend America Islamists out!” and “RAPEFUGEES stay away NOT WELCOME.”

- **Huntington Beach, California May 2017**: R.A.M. members participated with other white supremacists in book burning. Ben Daley and Tom Gillen are pictured in front of an array of books including “The Diary of Anne Frank,” “The Jewish Book of Why,” “Cultural Pluralism” and “Trapped in Hitler’s Hell” among others.

- **Berkeley, California, April 2017**: R.A.M. members engaged in physical altercations with counter-protesters during a “Say No to Marxism” rally hosted by Kyle Chapman and other far right activists.

- **Huntington Beach, California, March 2017**: Approximately a dozen R.A.M. members attended a “Make America Great Again” rally under the banner of DIY Division. As the event turned violent, RAM members fanned out and began fighting with counter-protesters.
In 2020 R.A.M. appeared to step up their efforts to collaborate with other groups, beginning a prolific campaign of mutual propaganda distributions where members of R.A.M. put up other groups’ stickers groups along with their own, and vice versa.

This has included domestic white supremacist groups like National Socialist Club (NSC 131) and Revolt Through Tradition, but also international groups based in Europe. While it remains unclear to what degree Revolt Through Tradition is an actual group with members or simply a brand created by Rundo and his circle, merchandise and propaganda for the group has turned up in the U.S. and across Europe. Rundo has frequently been featured in ads on Telegram for Serbon Shop, an online store carrying a large range of clothing brands for European white supremacists.