

# BIGOTRY BEHIND BARS: RACIST GROUPS IN U.S. PRISONS

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## INTRODUCTION

Driven by a belief in their superiority, white supremacist prison gangs contribute to increased racial tensions and violence in American penitentiaries.

Not only do their activities undermine prison security, but their extreme rhetoric and animosity toward other races often stay with gang members long after their release.

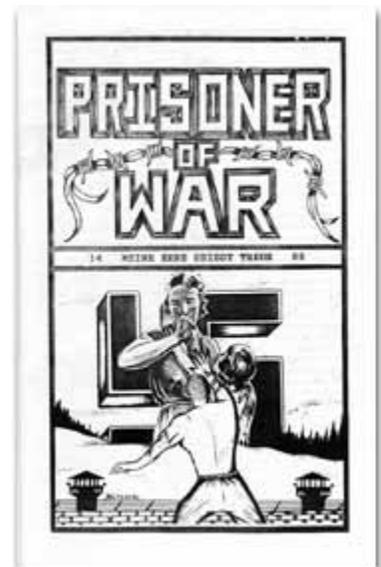
Prison officials estimate that up to 10 percent of the nation's prison population is affiliated with gangs.

Since prisoners tend to segregate themselves by race, white supremacist gangs may appear more attractive to white inmates -- especially those seeking protection -- than they would outside penitentiary walls. Inmates already sympathetic to racist ideology become more radical in their beliefs in the racially charged prison environment.

One of the best-known racist prison gangs is Aryan Brotherhood, which emerged in the 1960s at California's San Quentin Prison. This violent gang has since spread to prisons throughout the United States and has been linked to a number of murders, both in and out of prisons.

A number of racist groups in the U.S. sponsor prison "outreach" programs that send tapes and literature filled with white supremacist propaganda to inmates. These extremist organizations encourage racist inmates by treating them as "martyrs," fueling their racist ideology through violent rhetoric.

White supremacist groups are not the only racist organizations active in prisons. The Nation of Islam, the Black Muslim group led by Minister Louis Farrakhan, has organized an extensive prison outreach program since 1984. NOI has fought, sometimes in court, to have its prison emissaries recognized as chaplains separate from the mainstream Muslim chaplaincy. Supporters of the prison outreach program argue that NOI's message of discipline and morality helps rehabilitate prisoners; moreover, NOI's prison emissaries help inmates find jobs and housing upon their release. However, critics worry that Farrakhan's rhetoric -- including a long



A publication exclusively for racist inmates, *Prisoner of War* features pseudo-scientific articles on racial differences, news about the white supremacist movement and crude anti-Semitic caricatures.

record of anti-Semitic and anti-white statements -- may spill over into NOI's prison outreach program and radicalize prisoners.

### **RACIST PRISON GANGS**

The vicious racist murder in June of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper, Texas, has drawn attention to the disturbing fact that some inmates develop and spread racist ideologies as members of prison gangs. Prison officials estimate that up to 10 percent of the nation's prison population are affiliated with such gangs.

Not only do racist prison gangs jeopardize the stability of the nation's penitentiaries, but when members of these gangs are released, they continue to express violent racist rhetoric and a strong animosity toward other races. Indeed, at least two of the men indicted on capital charges for Byrd's murder are believed to have associated with members of the violent white supremacist prison gang Aryan Brotherhood during their incarceration at a prison in Tennessee Colony, Texas. According to law enforcement estimates, there are 432 Aryan Brotherhood members in Texas penitentiaries.

Inside the prison system, where inmates often segregate themselves according to race, white supremacist groups may prove appealing to white convicts looking for group protection. In turn, these racist prison gangs can raise levels of mutual suspicion and antagonism. Indeed, in the wake of Byrd's murder, friends and neighbors of those charged have said that the alleged killers did not harbor racist feelings before they entered jail.

While it is doubtful that someone with no racist inclinations would become involved with a group like Aryan Brotherhood, it is reasonable to assume that those harboring some racist sentiments -- but who may have never acted on them before -- could become more radical in a racially charged environment like prison, where groups like Aryan Brotherhood offer them group identity and protection from other gangs.

### **BROTHERHOOD OF HATE**

Aryan Brotherhood originated in California's San Quentin Prison in the 1960s and has since spread to other prisons throughout the United States. Aryan Brotherhood reportedly engages in extortion, drug operations and violence in correctional facilities; many members bear the identifying tattoo of a swastika and the Nazi SS lightning bolt.

Aryan Brotherhood is not known to be as systematically organized as other prison gangs (such as the Bloods, Crips or the Mexican Mafia), but its reputation for violence is well documented. In April 1997, John Stojetz, an Aryan Brotherhood leader at an Ohio prison, was convicted of murdering a 17-year-old Black prisoner. In October 1994, Donald Riley, a member of the Brotherhood, was sentenced to life in prison for the murder in Houston of a Black marine who had recently returned from service in Desert Storm. Moreover, of the eight inmates murdered by fellow prisoners at the Pelican Bay State Prison in California since 1996, six have been linked to an internal war within Aryan Brotherhood. A local prosecutor characterized the situation at the prison as a "reign of terror." In Pelican Bay's Security Housing Unit, there are reported to be up to 50 inmates who are members of the group.

Other racist groups have emerged from behind bars as well. One of the men charged with Byrd's murder reportedly has a Klan tattoo depicting the lynching of a Black man, and another that reads "C.K.A.," which

stands for Confederate Knights of America. C.K.A. is a small white supremacist prison gang in Texas penitentiaries.

Like Aryan Brotherhood, the white supremacist gang Nazi Low Riders (NLR) originated inside the California prison system, but also has active members beyond penitentiary walls. Nevertheless, serving a prison term appears to be a requirement for membership. The gang is controlled by the "seniors," all of whom have been NLR members for at least five years and are voted in by other seniors. Only seniors can induct new members, and are responsible for educating the members they recruit. There is reason to believe that Aryan Brotherhood aligned itself with NLR in the late 1970s or early 1980s, when the California Department of Corrections began cracking down on Aryan Brotherhood members, many of whom ended up isolated from the rest of the prison population because of their gang ties. NLR remained a separate gang, but helped promote Aryan Brotherhood's interests within the prison system.

Like Aryan Brotherhood, NLR rallies its members around standard racist propaganda and rhetoric that bolster "white pride" while blaming Jews, Blacks and other minorities for most of the problems in America. Still, their activity is not limited to race-baiting: NLR members reportedly seek to dominate a significant portion of the prison drug trade and other criminal activity within the white penitentiary population. Outside of prisons, NLR members are involved in drug trafficking (especially methamphetamine, or speed) and have been responsible for a number of random attacks on Blacks.

### RACIST OUTREACH TO PRISONERS

Many white supremacist and anti-Semitic groups reach out to prisoners by offering them heavily discounted or free copies of their publications; other readers of these racist magazines and newspapers are encouraged to write to these "prisoners of war." In 1991, the North Carolina Department of Corrections banned copies of the racist World Church of the Creator's *The White Man's Bible*, fearing it might trigger race riots. *Jubilee Newspaper*, a bi-monthly Identity-affiliated newspaper published in Midpines, California, has its own "Jubilee Prison Ministry," which sends reading material to imprisoned subscribers. In addition, Tom Metzger has championed the causes of white supremacist prisoners on his "WAR [White Aryan Resistance] Hotline," often providing listeners with their addresses so they may write letters of support.

There are even racist publications written by and for prisoners. Operating out of Portland, Oregon, *Thule* calls itself a "journal of philosophical, spiritual, historical and political folkish-tribalism, dedicated to the enlightenment and progression of our prisoners." In fact, *Thule* articles idealize Nazis, advocate the racist "theology" of the Identity Church movement and are replete with racist and anti-Semitic propaganda and conspiracy theories. The February 1998 issue of *Thule*, which drew submissions from prisoners around the country, features an article commenting on the conspiracy theories surrounding the Oklahoma City Bombing. Its author was Richard Scutari, one-time member of the terrorist group The Order, who is serving a 60-year sentence for racketeering and robbery. *Thule* also supplies its readers with the addresses of other racist organizations and publications, including Aryan Nations, World Church of the Creator and the *NSV Report*.

*Prisoner of War*, a sporadically produced magazine directed at white supremacist prisoners, is published by the editors of *Storm Watch*, an Owensboro, KY, neo-Nazi publication. A recent issue of *Prisoner of War* featured an editorial by WAR leader Tom Metzger, a history of skinheads and a biography of Ben Klassen, the deceased founder of the Church of the Creator. In addition, *Storm Watch* dedicated the bulk of its

December 1997 issue to a tribute to The Order, including pictures of its jailed members and inmates and essays written by some of them. In one essay, an unrepentant Scutari reflects on his role in The Order and asks himself whether he might have done things differently: "I truly believe that our culture and the survival of our Race are in jeopardy. As a man who holds the virtues of honor, loyalty and duty as the core of my soul, I was duty bound to do no less. In fact, I am amazed that others have not picked up where we left off."

These prison "outreach" programs fill a central role in the life of their target audience: while the prisoners' community has shunned them for their criminal activity, racist groups engage them with white supremacist rhetoric, thereby fostering in them extremist beliefs.

### TREATED AS HEROES

For some right-wing extremists, serving time in jail bolsters their status in the eyes of their supporters. For example, members of The Order (including Scutari and David Lane) are treated as "prisoners of war" in the rhetoric of racist publications. Moreover, *Thule* and other publications continue to provide a forum for such extremists to voice their hate: since his imprisonment in 1985 (for racketeering, conspiracy and for violating the civil rights of slain radio personality Alan Berg), Lane has written for *The New Order*, *WAR*, *Jew Watch*, *Aryan Nations Newsletter* and *The Klansman*, published by the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. In the December 1997 issue of *Storm Watch*, he writes, "When it is truly written that judeo-America [sic] and judeo-Christianity [sic] were the twin murderers of the White race, let the executioner's devices be equally recorded. And let the last generation of the true White men wreak vengeance with death and destruction. For 'tis far better that the great race die with the roar of a lion than the bleat of a judeo-christian [sic] sheep.

"Lane's message of hate is further publicized by his wife, Katya, who set up a small company called 14 Word Press in St. Maries, Idaho, in 1995 to publish "the political writings and religious teachings of David Lane."

Another popular "prisoner of war" in far-right circles is Gary "Gerhard" Lauck, now serving a four-year sentence in a German jail for inciting racial hatred by disseminating anti-Semitic and racist materials. Lauck is head of the Lincoln, Nebraska-based neo-Nazi group NSDAP/AO (the German acronym for National Socialist German Workers Party Overseas Organization) whose publication, *The New Order*, lists Lauck as "Publisher & Political Prisoner." A March 16, 1998 article in *The Spotlight*, probably the most widely read extremist publication in America today, focused on jailed German Holocaust deniers and encouraged readers to write to them as well as to Lauck, whose prison address was supplied.

### NON-WHITE RACISTS IN PRISON

White supremacist groups are not the only racist organizations active in prisons. The Nation of Islam, the Black Muslim group led by Minister Louis Farrakhan, has organized an extensive prison outreach program since 1984. NOI has fought, sometimes in court, to have its prison emissaries recognized as chaplains separate from the mainstream Muslim chaplaincy. Supporters of the prison outreach program argue that NOI's message of discipline and morality helps rehabilitate prisoners; moreover, NOI's prison emissaries help inmates find jobs and housing upon their release. However, critics worry that Farrakhan's rhetoric --

including a long record of anti-Semitic and anti-white statements -- may spill over into NOI's prison outreach program and radicalize prisoners.

Despite efforts to integrate prisons across the country, prison officials and inmates have reported that prisoners identify themselves primarily along racial lines. This makes it easier for racist prison gangs -- with the help of white supremacist "outreach" programs -- to attract new members, especially those seeking protection. In such a racially charged environment, enmity toward members of other races often grows uncontrolled -- a fact which may lead some inmates to commit race-based violent crimes when they are released. This makes prison gangs a problem not only for law enforcement officials, but for the law-abiding general community as well.