

JAMES VON BRUNN: AN ADL BACKGROUND

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INTRODUCTION

James Wenneker Von Brunn, the suspect in the June 2009 shooting at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., died at a North Carolina federal prison on January 6, 2010, while awaiting trial.

According to authorities, Von Brunn entered the museum on June 10 and shot and killed Stephen T. Johns, a black security guard, before being shot and wounded by other officers at the scene. Von Brunn could have received the death penalty if convicted of murder and other charges.

Von Brunn was a long-time neo-Nazi and white supremacist who had vehemently expressed his anti-Semitic and racist views for decades—and sometimes acted on them as well. Von Brunn, 89, was a peripheral but well-respected figure among American white supremacists.

BELIEFS AND ACTIVITIES

In the years before the Museum shooting, Von Brunn was most active as an anti-Semitic propagandist. Age had not dampened his racist and anti-Jewish passions. In the early 2000s, Von Brunn even created his own Web site, the Holy Western Empire site, which he used primarily to market his self-published anti-Semitic book.

Von Brunn's anti-Semitism was motivated in part by a nearly life-long conviction that Jews were persecuting him, from hurting his career to burning his house down. "Over my years of adversity," he claimed, "It became clear to me that a JEW strategy had emerged: 'Kill the Best Gentiles!'"

In essays and comments posted to the Web, Von Brunn extended those sentiments about Jewish persecution from himself to the entire United States. "America at the Brink of Extinction" was the title of one such diatribe in 2007, in which Von Brunn informed readers that "historically, JEWS always stab their host-nation in the back while the host is experiencing internal difficulties," and claimed that "JEWS have AMERICA in their grip....The elimination process is now taking place."

In another essay that same year, he told Americans what to do: "It's up to you. Stop talking. Organize. Take action. Targets swarm across the landscape. You know their murderous intent, you know who they are. DO IT." It was not the first time Von Brunn had expressed such sentiments. In 2004, in an issue of the

white supremacist newspaper *WAR*, Von Brunn went so far as to issue a "Declaration of War against Jewry," in which he declared war on "the Jew race" and its "institutions, holdings, and resources."

Much of Von Brunn's anti-Semitism was channeled into the book he wrote and self-published in 2002, [Tob Shebbe Goyim Harog! \(To Kill the Best Gentiles!\)](#), which he described as "the racist guide for the preservation and nurture of the white gene pool." Its thesis was the standard refrain of white supremacists for many decades, that Jews are on a mission of "destruction of all Gentile nations through miscegenation and wars," and the "Zionist Occupied Government" of the United States is welcoming "huge numbers of fecund non-White immigrants" in order to destroy the white race through inter-racial breeding. One white supremacist, after reading his book that year, nominated Von Brunn as a "White Racist Treasure."

In his book, as well as other essays and writings, Von Brunn repeatedly touched on two subjects: the Federal Reserve, which he believed was controlled by Jewish bankers, and the Holocaust, which, like many [Holocaust deniers](#), he believed never occurred.

Central banks were, according to Von Brunn, the "biggest sleight-of-hand trick ever," allowing Jews to buy anything, "including the media, business, and government." Along with a number of other anti-Semites, Von Brunn also tried to capitalize on the economic crisis as a way to push his anti-Semitic views. "Bread is bread," he wrote in an e-mail he sent to like-minded people in November 2008. "Why is the price of a loaf today so much more than it was in 1939? The answer is, Jew central banks are stealing your hard-earned cash."

In September he claimed that "the ongoing financial crises [sic] was manufactured DELIBERATELY by FED Reserve, Treasury officers, and Congressional JEWS seeking One World Zionist Government." He also provided a list of "suggestions" for Congress, including "round-up aliens and traitors" and "TAKE UP ARMS and ROPE!"

To Von Brunn, the Holocaust was another Jewish sleight-of-hand; he was an avid Holocaust denier with connections to a variety of denier groups and individuals. Holocaust denier Jack Wikoff identified Von Brunn in 1995 as one of four "dedicated activists" who helped air the Holocaust denial videos of Canadian Holocaust denier [Ernst Zundel](#) on public access television. In return, Zundel interviewed von Brunn on his radio show, identifying him as an "American artist and businessman."

Sometimes, Von Brunn's sentiments went beyond merely denying the Holocaust and extended to implicit and explicit threats. In 2004, he wrote to an Australian Holocaust denial e-mail list that it was "time to FLUSH all 'Holocaust' Memorials," a chilling foreshadowing of his actions five years later. Von Brunn was fond of repeating the mantra "Hitler's Worst Mistake: He Didn't Gas the Jews."

CONNECTIONS

As a result of his long history as an active white supremacist, Von Brunn developed relationships with and connections to a variety of prominent white supremacists over the years, including Ben Klassen (whose portrait Von Brunn painted), founder of the [Creativity Movement](#); Willis Carto, a longstanding racist and anti-Semitic publisher and Holocaust denier; [Tom Metzger](#), founder of White Aryan Resistance, and many others. One close connection was a retired Navy admiral and white supremacist, John G. Crommelin, who supported Von Brunn for decades (and whom Von Brunn also captured in portraiture).

It was probably with notorious anti-Semite [Willis Carto](#) and Carto's various publications and organizations that Von Brunn had his longest connections. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, according to someone who knew Von Brunn at the time, Von Brunn was a distributor of Carto's racist newspaper, *The Spotlight*. Earlier, he had briefly worked for Carto's Noontide Press publishing company. In 2003, the anti-Semitic *American Free Press*, successor to *The Spotlight*, returned the favor by quoting him in an "investigation" of General Tommy Franks, identifying Von Brunn as an "independent investigator."

Though he flirted with a number of white supremacist groups, von Brunn did not strongly associate himself with any for a long period of time; his connections were often more personal than institutional. There are some indications that at one point he intended to turn his "Holy Western Empire" site into an actual group. In a 2004 issue of Metzger's *WAR* magazine, Von Brunn even identified himself as the "Supreme Archon" of the "Aryan Council" of the Holy Western Empire. However, perhaps because of Von Brunn's advanced age, the Empire never advanced beyond Web page status.

CRIMINAL PAST

One of the reasons why Von Brunn was respected by white supremacists was because he was willing to "walk the walk" as well as "talk the talk." In 1981, he decided to strike at one of his pet enemies, the Federal Reserve system, which he believed was how Jewish international bankers controlled the money system.

On December 7, 1981, he traveled from New Hampshire, where he was living at the time, to Washington, D.C., to the headquarters of the Federal Reserve Board. Carrying several weapons, including a sawed-off shotgun, he ran past guards up to the second floor, where the Board was meeting at the time. However, police caught up with him outside the meeting room and arrested him.

Von Brunn was charged with attempted armed kidnapping, second-degree burglary, assault with a dangerous weapon, carrying a pistol without a license and two counts of possession of a prohibited weapon. In 1983 he was convicted and sentenced to four to 11 years in prison, of which he eventually served six and a half years. John Crommelin, the retired admiral, allegedly told Von Brunn's son that von Brunn deserved "the gratitude and assistance of every White Christian citizen of these United States."

EARLIER LIFE

Born in 1920, Von Brunn grew up in the Midwest, attending college at Washington University in St. Louis. During World War II, he became a lieutenant in the Navy and served as a torpedo boat captain.

After the war ended, Von Brunn became a copywriter at a New York advertising agency. It was in the post-war years that he developed his extremist views and began associating with a variety of prominent right-wing extremists and anti-Semites.

In 1968, Von Brunn moved to Maryland and started a small advertising business there. According to his own account, shortly thereafter he became involved in a barfight with a Jewish patron. After leaving the

bar, Von Brunn was pulled over for driving while intoxicated, resisted arrest, and fractured an officer's jaw. Von Brunn said he was convicted for the assault, sentenced to a year in jail, and served four months.

After getting out of jail, Von Brunn lived variously in Florida, California, New Hampshire, Idaho, and Maryland, sometimes working as a real estate broker, sometimes doing free-lance advertising work, while continuing his racist and anti-Semitic efforts.