

NAZI LOW RIDERS

A PRISON GANG EMERGES IN CALIFORNIA

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BACKGROUND

In March 1999, in Lancaster, California, two reputed members of the Nazi Low Riders (NLR), a vicious neo-Nazi skinhead prison and street gang, attacked an African-American Wal-Mart employee with a hammer. The two, Shaun Broderick and Christopher Crawford, were charged with attempted murder and two counts of assault. This was not an isolated incident -- NLR members have committed a number of violent racially motivated attacks in Lancaster.

Danny Edward Williams, another NLR member, was apparently on a mission to "rid the streets of Lancaster of African Americans," according to the *Los Angeles Times*. In April 1996, Williams and fellow NLR member Eric Lance Dillard used a baseball bat to beat a Black teen-ager on the streets of this municipality located in Los Angeles County. In July of the same year, Williams and Dillard attacked two African-American men, stabbing one of them several times in the back. In June 1998, Williams and Dillard received prison sentences for their role in the two attacks.

In 1996, NLR members also committed several crimes in the Orange County city of Costa Mesa. In one incident, teen-age NLR members Daniel Batoosing, Robert Harris, Kevin Camp, Matt Estrada and John Savino attacked a 12-year-old Hispanic male in a video arcade with a metal pipe and other deadly weapons. The five teens were eventually incarcerated, but the gang continues to have a presence in Costa Mesa and other parts of Orange County.

NLR members were involved in a number of brutal incidents in 1995 as well, including a machete attack on two Black teen-agers, the bludgeoning of a Black homeless man to death, and the firing of a weapon at a car occupied by African Americans.

A GROWING MENACE

Although the Nazi Low Riders originated in the California prison system and still derive much of their power from inside corrections facilities, the group has also become a vicious street gang in several areas in California.

The Nazi Low Riders first gained recognition as a street gang in Costa Mesa in the early 1990s. Since then, NLR street units have sprung up in other cities and areas throughout Southern California. More recently, NLR members, who are mostly in their teens and early 20s, have begun moving into Central and Northern California and are slowly traveling east when they are released on parole. Today, NLR is probably the

fastest-growing white gang in California, and the group is already spilling beyond state lines. While the group is still considered to be in its formative stages, it is continually expanding. In 1996, there were only 28 confirmed NLR members. In 1998, that number had risen to 331, with an estimated additional 1,000 members.

The gang's explosive growth is a concern for several reasons. First, some members have been known to be heavily involved in the production and trade of methamphetamine, a highly addictive stimulant that promotes violent tendencies in users. Second, gang members have also developed a reputation for being ruthlessly violent. Finally, and perhaps most disturbing, the Nazi Low Riders are vicious white supremacists.

NLR members exhibit extremely violent criminal behavior both in prison and on the streets. They have developed a strong network within their own ranks and with other white power gangs. Unlike earlier loosely affiliated racist skinheads, NLR is organized and motivated by profit. Over the past seven years, NLR's tight criminal operations have helped to position it as the "gang of gangs" among white supremacists and a major force in the West Coast criminal world.

HATE-FILLED ORIGINS

While the gang's beginnings are uncertain, one fact is clear: the Nazi Low Riders trace their roots to the Aryan Brotherhood (AB), a notoriously violent white supremacist prison gang. John Stinson, an AB member, was instrumental in the formation of NLR. In the late 1970s or early 1980s, looking for people to act as middlemen for the AB's criminal operations, Stinson turned to young skinheads incarcerated by the California Youth Authority at the Preston facility and in Chino at the Youth Training School. At that point, NLR was just beginning to establish itself as a white gang for inmates, and AB was still the leading white gang in prisons. The term Nazi Low Riders is a perverse twist on the use of "low riders," a common slang phrase for Hispanic gang members.

With a limited membership, NLR led a quiet existence for several years and eluded the watchful eye of law enforcement until the early 1990s. By then, the California Department of Corrections had successfully disrupted and virtually suppressed AB activities. NLR's role as middlemen for AB's criminal operations allowed it to begin filling AB's shoes within the prison system, and gave NLR the opportunity to become the principal white gang within the prisons.

Several NLR members come from families with a gang history. It is not uncommon for an NLR member's father to have been a member of a motorcycle gang. Furthermore, many NLR members have grown up in families that preached intolerance and white supremacy.

ROLE OF RACIST IDEOLOGY

Although some observers argue that NLR's actions are based more on criminal motivation than racist ideology, both play an important role in the gang's profile. The two fundamental requirements for NLR membership are that an individual is a proven criminal and that he or she is willing to show loyalty to the white race. The gang's white power message has also become an integral factor in the violent acts members commit. As one NLR member said, "Hate is survival."

NLR members generally tend to focus their hatred on Blacks and "race traitors," defined as people who are involved in interracial relationships. They have also expressed hatred for Jews, Asians and other minorities. There appears to be an unusual paradox within the NLR a few NLR members have Hispanic surnames and members who have Hispanic girlfriends or wives are accepted into the ranks. However, this is true only for Hispanics. Blacks and other non-whites are not tolerated. Some authorities have attributed this "alliance" between whites and Hispanics to a shared hatred of Blacks. Others have concluded that NLR opposes only Northern Californian Hispanics because of criminal gang rivalries. The alliance might also be explained by the fact that NLR members often live in primarily Latino neighborhoods where they are outnumbered. One former NLR member explained, "You must have at least half white blood but no Black blood."

THE LOOK

Like most of those in gangs, NLR members have created a self-contained culture that includes graffiti, hand signals, tattoos, a dress code and language. Much of it is based on Nazi symbolism and icons but the exact symbols of the gang vary from place to place. For example, an NLR member in Huntington Beach might dress differently from one in Lancaster. Unlike other skinheads, Nazi Low Riders do not adhere to specific rules on tattoos or dress, making immediate identification of gang members more difficult for law enforcement.

Although there is no single tattoo required of NLR members, symbols like the swastika, "SS" lightning bolts and other Nazi-related images, including pictures of Hitler, are widespread in the gang. Some NLR members prefer eagles, skulls and demons. Tattoos or patches with the numeral "88" (the eighth letter of the alphabet is H, hence 88 signifies "HH" or Heil Hitler) and "WP" (White Power) are also popular. Abbreviations representing white power phrases such as "WSU" (White Student Union) and "AYM" (Aryan Youth Movement) are common, as well.



The "NLR" tattoo can be found on almost every part of a gang member's body, including the back of the head.

In addition to Nazi and white power-related tattoos that have been popular among other white supremacist gang members, NLR has its own versions. A tattoo consisting of the letters "NLR" is quite common and often appears on the stomach, back and neck or in small letters above the eyebrows and on the knuckles. Some prefer the full words "Nazi Low Riders," often written in Old English script. For some, the runic alphabet (characters of any of several alphabets used by the Germanic peoples from about the third to the 13th centuries) is becoming a popular way of encoding a message about their white power gang affiliation. Recently, NLR members have been more reticent about admitting their NLR association, realizing that it can be a liability. Some have claimed that NLR signifies "never lose respect" or "no longer racist." Although most members tend to wear their tattoos proudly in visible places, some now opt for smaller, less conspicuous images in less visible spots.

With regard to dress, NLR members frequently wear white supremacist or Nazi paraphernalia such as T-shirts printed with a white power band logo, but they are becoming savvy enough to hide such clothes from law enforcement officials and the public.

LIFESTYLE AND ORGANIZATION

NLR'S ROLE IN PRISON VIOLENCE

NLR members often become career criminals who float in and out of the prisons. In prison, survival depends, in part, upon gang affiliation. Prison gangs are drawn strictly along racial lines, especially since the balance of whites, Blacks and Hispanics in California state prisons has evened out at about 30 percent for each group. Reportedly, NLR also acts as an umbrella group for other white gangs in various prisons.

According to recent estimates, the Nazi Low Riders account for 80 percent of the violence in California prisons. California prison authorities recently gave NLR official "disruptive gang status" because the group has quickly become such a visible source of violence and criminal activity. This violence is generally related to the drug trade, but NLR members also have been known to lead revolts and instigate violent confrontations among inmates and with officials in correction facilities. Most NLR members feel that all other white gangs in prison are subordinate to NLR, with the exception of AB.

Today, in many prisons, a strong link remains between NLR and AB, but a growing number of NLR members vehemently oppose such an alliance and want to achieve an independent status as the only major white gang. Some feel that older AB members are not in touch with current trends and are using outdated criminal tactics that will make AB obsolete. Most NLR leaders, however, remain loyal to their roots. NLR members who advocated breaking ties with AB have been kicked out of the gang.

STRUCTURE OF THE NLR IN PRISON

NLR membership in prison is based on a three-tier hierarchy consisting of "seniors," "juniors" and "kids." The typical NLR unit is led by seniors, some of whom have been connected to the gang since its early days in the California Youth Authority. To attain "senior" status, NLR members must have been active for at least five years, and must be elected a senior by three other senior members. In the NLR hierarchy, "juniors," who are just below seniors, cannot induct new members, but they can and do recruit potential members. Only a senior can confer membership. The senior who inducts a "kid" becomes his mentor and disciplinarian. "Kids" usually come from smaller white power gangs like the Peni-skins and Insane White Boys.



New NLR members are frequently recruited from smaller California skinhead gangs like the Insane White Boys.

LIFESTYLE ON THE STREETS

NLR members tend to congregate in pool halls, bars, fast-food joints, video arcades and high schools, where they try to recruit new members. These sites have sometimes been the scenes of NLR attacks, as was the

case in the video arcade incident in Costa Mesa. NLR members have been known to strike at innocent people who become the targets of their racially motivated rage.

In some communities, NLR members live together in the same apartment buildings. These NLR clusters often serve as family-like units for alienated individuals who have no other sense of belonging. Although NLR does not fight other gangs over "turf," it does tend to dominate the areas where members live. When NLR members move into a residential complex, they often establish themselves by harassing, and even threatening, other residents.

ORGANIZATION ON THE STREETS

Many NLR members consider the streets their second home after prison. In contrast to NLR's well-defined structure in prison, it is much more difficult to determine how NLR members relate to leadership on the streets. An NLR member who "calls the shots" on the street probably earned his position by demonstrating "leadership" qualities.

NLR has been expanding on the streets. As is the case in prisons, many recruits come from smaller existing white gangs. Most members are indoctrinated into the group by NLR leaders in prison. Few individuals have tried to claim membership without validation from established NLR leaders out of fear of retribution. NLR also has undergone a series of freezes and controls in response to the group's explosive growth and as a way of limiting potentially unacceptable members.

NLR is considered dangerous because it is well organized and tightly knit. Its criminal operations are run efficiently through excellent means of communication. Letters called "kites" are exchanged between NLR members in prison and their counterparts outside. The letters often use the runic alphabet, making them more difficult for law enforcement to monitor.

On the streets, other white gangs such as Insane White Boys, La Mirada Punks, Independent Skins, and Orange County Skins are subservient to NLR's authority. Some law enforcement officials believe that NLR hopes to unite all white gangs under its umbrella and tax their proceeds from criminal operations in order to aid incarcerated NLR members. Currently, a frail alliance among various white gangs, known as the Southern California Skinhead Alliance or So. Cal Skins, is in operation. Public Enemy Number One Skins (Peni-skins) leads the coalition with NLR.

In 1995, the Police Department in Upland, (a suburb east of Los Angeles), also identified a link between NLR and a gang called the Vicious Circle (VC). It also became evident that NLR was closely associated with other white criminally active individuals in Upland whom law enforcement officials refer to as "peckerwoods." The term "peckerwood" is a reference both to white youths who have loose ties to white power gangs, as well as actual skinhead gangs who have adopted the term "peckerwood" in their name.

THE DRUG TRADE

As noted, NLR members are particularly dominant in the trade and production of methamphetamine

(also called "meth" or "speed"). Speed is relatively easy to produce and is both high in demand and very profitable. NLR members have established themselves in the business of running "meth labs" out of any place they can find, from million-dollar homes to motel rooms. In San Bernardino, NLR has created numerous meth labs. In Orange County, in Antelope Valley and Riverside, the gang has become a major distributor of the drug. It is also likely that NLR is working with some motorcycle gangs in meth production and distribution. NLR members are often addicted to speed, a factor that increases their proclivity towards violence. On the other hand, their use of drugs may keep them from organizing more effectively than they already have.

ROLE OF FEMALE NLR MEMBERS

One unique aspect of NLR is the participation of females, who form the backbone of the gang. NLR depends on females not only for personal and financial support, but also for the continuation of business operations when male members are incarcerated. According to an Upland law enforcement report, female members act as liaisons to speed users unaffiliated with the NLR. The females supply these addicts with drugs and sexual favors. Eventually, NLR members recruit these drug users through force and intimidation and coerce them to commit crimes. In addition, these addicts are often targets of NLR-organized robberies, whose profits go towards the gang's expenses and lifestyle. Since the victims engage in illegal activity, the crimes often go unreported.

OTHER CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Nazi Low Riders have participated in a wide variety of crimes outside of the drug trade, including credit card fraud, assault and illegal gun trafficking. Unlike traditional skinhead groups, NLR members are armed with much more than steel-toed boots and fists. Today, they often carry handguns, rifles and automatic weapons, many of which are illegal.

While trying to prove themselves, gain "honor" and build a vicious image in the gang world, NLR has also proved to be a threat to law enforcement. In the spring of 1998, armed NLR members attacked two police officers in Torrance. When one reached for an officer's gun, the officer's partner shot and killed him.

DANGEROUS ALLIANCE

Clearly, NLR's ability to attract members from smaller white power gangs poses a danger. However, an even more sinister trend is NLR's alliance with other better-established white supremacist organizations. The anger, hostility and racism of NLR members make them perfect candidates to act as foot soldiers for the racist agendas of these organizations. White power groups such as World Church of the Creator (WCOTC), White Aryan Resistance (WAR), and Aryan Nations seek to exploit NLR members' disillusionment and frustration by enticing them with the idea that they will gain a sense of purpose by



In addition to blatant Nazi imagery, NLR members' tattoos often contain letters from the runic alphabet, which they associate with Germanic culture.

joining the greater battle for "Aryan supremacy." White supremacist organizations manipulatively feed on NLR members' appetite for hatred of other races by bombarding them with literature that describes the "white racialist struggle." These organizations only recently have begun to tap into NLR for possible recruits to their cause, but the potential threat of an alliance is alarming. The idea of a "racial war" gives the gang members another excuse and outlet for their deep-seated rage, and provides them with a certain discipline, albeit misguided, in their lives.

The relationship between white supremacist groups and NLR has not always been amicable. Some members of the white power movement feel that the Nazi Low Riders are a detriment to the struggle. In his online newsletter, San Diego racist activist Alex Curtis has said that NLR members "are worthless white people" because they are drug dealers. Other white supremacists have described NLR members as a disgrace to the white race, and the NLR-run dope and speed trade as degrading since, they say, it brings whites down to the level of Hispanic gang members. Regardless of these more negative views, NLR has the potential to play a significant role in the white power movement.



A NLR member's "SWP" tattoo, signifying "Supreme White Power," clearly depicts his racist ideology.

KEEPING TABS ON THE NLR

NLR is a criminal force to reckon with in California and the gang could evolve into a national problem over the next few years. While NLR is predominantly in California, some members have already settled in Reno and Las Vegas, Nevada, and Lake Havasu City, Arizona. Authorities anticipate that NLR members will continue their eastward migration. Law enforcement's vigilant efforts in confronting the dangers NLR poses to public order and safety have been commendable. This report is intended to increase public awareness about the growing menace of this gang.