

Andrew Long

**The Politics of Racism: Tom Metzger and the Creation of the White Aryan
Resistance**

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Introduction

Ever since Europeans first set foot on the American continent, tensions between differing racial, ethnic, religious, and other groups have existed. Those tensions have existed between Europeans and indigenous people, between Europeans and slaves brought over from Africa, and then later their ancestors, between Catholics and Jews. The list is as seemingly long as there are people on the continent. This is particularly apparent in the United States of America. With its ethnically diverse population, it has been as much the global 'melting pot' as it has a racial tinderbox that is liable to ignite at the slightest spark. However, as the United States moves into the twenty-first century, there has been a tendency by many social commentators to state that the attitudes and beliefs that contributed to the existence of slavery, Jim Crow laws and Japanese internment camps have been vanquished from society. While serious advances have been made in the pursuit of harmonious race relations in the United States, it is still an issue that confronts Americans daily, and at times rears its head publicly and more importantly politically. The year 1980 was one such moment in time, when Klansman, and white supremacist Tom Metzger, managed to win the Democratic primary in the nation's most populous district.

This paper examines how it was possible for Metzger to win the Democratic primary in 1980, as well as garner 76,502 votes in the Democratic Senate primary in 1982.¹ Moreover, the role that Metzger played in the rise of the white supremacist skinhead organization, White Aryan

¹ State Department, *Statement of Vote Primary Election June 8, 1982*, compiled by Secretary of State March Fong Eu.

Resistance (WAR), will be discussed. It will be shown that his participation in the 1980 and 1982 elections were directly linked to his formation of WAR. The paper starts by placing WAR in the context of the literature that exists in the field of racial separatist groups. Due to the fact that the events in question are relatively contemporary, little historical analysis has been conducted pertaining to them. However, a correlation exists between the events in the early 1980's in Southern California and the rise of the second Klan in the 1920's. After a brief discussion of the literature, a short biography of Tom Metzger follows. The paper will then examine the first of the two elections, looking at Metzger's break with the Klan, the aspects of society that were conducive to his election, and his eventual expulsion from the Democratic party which was paramount in the eventual rise of WAR. After discussing the 1980 election, the 1982 election will be briefly highlighted as Metzger's last ditch attempt at influencing society through the normal channels. Finally, the rise of WAR is analyzed, its origins explained, and its aims, similarities and differences with the Klan and the recruitment methods that it employed in order to attract members discussed.

In conducting the research for this paper a variety of sources have been used. First, there is Metzger's own testimony, cited in an interview that was conducted on April 25, 2000. Second, newspaper articles proved valuable in attempting to understand public opinion at the time, as did periodicals. When looking at voting statistics, government publications were important, especially in the 1982 election when the voting records were succinctly broken down by region. Third, the minutes of the San Diego County Democratic Central Committee were consulted when examining Metzger's expulsion from the party. Finally, in an examination of the

recruitment techniques that WAR employed, much information was gathered from the cartoons that were distributed depicting racial stereotypes and caricatures.²

Ultimately, this paper shows that given certain conditions, racism, in its most obvious form, can still be supported, tacitly or otherwise, in mainstream society in the United States, despite the advances that the nation has made in eradicating racial prejudice and discrimination. Furthermore, race-based ideology in 1980 was a powerful force and attraction for male youth, when coupled with a leadership that had a strong grasp on the social pulse. This paper will not condemn Tom Metzger for his beliefs and practices, that task will be left to the editorial pages of local newspapers. If the research conducted were to have been used merely in order to attack his ideology and view of the world, there would have been less room for understanding and analysis of racial segregation and white supremacists.

Few scholarly articles have been written on the two California elections of 1980 and 1982, and on the rise of skinhead organizations in Southern California. Of the work that has been written, most are either journalistic pieces that wholeheartedly condemned and attack Metzger and his organizations but do not offer much in the way of understanding and analysis, or they are sociological in nature. The sociological studies, while being valuable contributors to the academic field, largely focus on examining contemporary factors that exist which are helping to contribute towards the formation of such organizations.³

² Tom Metzger, former Klansman and founder of White Aryan Resistance (WAR), interview by author, 25 April 2000, Fallbrook, tape recording. *Los Angeles Times*, May-June 1980. *San Diego Union*, June 1980. *Time Magazine*, 1980. WAR, various cartoons. San Diego County Democratic Central Committee, Minutes of Regular Meeting, October 14, 1980. As reproduced in James Ridgeway, *Blood in the Face*, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991.

³ Some good, contemporary sociological studies include Betty A. Dobratz and Stephanie L. Shanks-Meile, *"White Power, White Pride!": The White Separatist Movement in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), Raphael S. Ezekiel, *The Racist Mind: Portraits of American Neo-Nazis and Klansmen* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1995), Abby L. Ferber, *White Man Falling: Race, Gender and White Supremacy* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield

However, a wealth of material exists that pertains to the subject of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States. This is relevant to this paper as Metzger himself was a Klan member during the 1980 election. Furthermore, many of the social factors that contributed to the success of the Klan in the 1920's and 1930's are applicable in Southern California in the late 1970's and early 1980's. It was these factors that Metzger was able to exploit. Nancy MacLean, writing in *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*, illustrates the path that the historiography of the study of the Klan has taken. Scholars initially debated the polarities of the Klan, whether it was a rural or urban movement, were its causes local or national, and whether its member's were civic crusaders or vigilantes, populists or racists. However, as MacLean points out, these debates detracted from the real question of how was it that the Klan was able to be all these things at once. She claims that the Klan was both mainstream and extreme, hostile to big business and antagonistic to industrial unions, anti-elitist and hateful of blacks and immigrants, pro-law and order and prone to extra-legal violence.⁴

MacLean's analysis of the Klan paralleled the life of Tom Metzger himself.⁵ Many have tried to put him on the edges of the political spectrum, usually to the far right. However, doing so is too simplistic. Metzger is a self-described populist. His rhetoric fits the populist mold and it would appear he is sincere in his populist vision; the only peculiarity is the racist slant that his

Publishers, Inc., 1998), Kevin Flynn and Gary Gerhardt, *The Silent Brotherhood: Inside America's Racist Underground* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), and especially Mark S. Hamm, *American Skinheads: The Criminology and Control of Hate Crime* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1993).

⁴ Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), xiii-xiv.

⁵ For other extensive works on the Klan see David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: F. Watts, 1981; Duke University Press, 1987), Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), and Chester L. Quarles *The Ku Klux Klan and Related American Racialist and Antisemitic Organizations: A History and Analysis* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1999).

particular brand of populism is shaped by. Consequently, the work of Michael Kazin in *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, will also be used to place Metzger in a larger academic context.⁶ Essentially, Kazin examines how politicians, preachers, and public speakers, since the nineteenth century in the United States, have tried to fight for the “middle-class taxpayer” against the “Big Men.” Moreover, Kazin recognizes that the “people” usually took the form of the white working man. This is the position that Metzger held.

This study supports the findings and conclusions reached by MacLean. The appeal of Metzger was multi-faceted, thus enabling him to achieve the success he did. Yet, in doing so, he gave a public face to a level of racism that was already simmering in Southern California society. Moreover, this study contributes to the historiography of separatist movements by illustrating how Metzger’s techniques and methods evolved because of his expulsion from the Democratic Party and mainstream politics. He transformed the white supremacist movement in Southern California from an organization that conducted public rallies and meetings into one which worked underground, and was and still is far less visible and detectable.

Becoming a White Supremacist

Tom Metzger was born in Warsaw, Indiana in 1939⁷. From there he moved around as a child, but spent most of his early years growing up in rural communities. In June 1956, he

⁶ Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

⁷ When the author first met Tom Metzger, in a Fallbrook café, he really did not know what to expect. Naturally, he was not expecting him to turn up in full Klan regalia, or in a neo-Nazi uniform complete with jack boots, but I was expecting some sort of indication that here was a man who held beliefs that were not in line with mainstream society. In some ways his assumptions were correct, in others they were not. At first glance Metzger appeared quite unassuming. He is a short man, maybe five foot six, and was clad in a casual short-sleeved shirt

graduated high school and joined the military. He was sent to Boot Camp in Missouri but attended the military electronics school in Fort Laughlin, New Jersey.⁸ According to Metzger, one of the reasons he joined the military was that he had a desire to travel. He fulfilled this desire when he spent two years in Germany. In 1959 he left the military and then moved to Los Angeles in search of employment in the television industry, as a technician. With his electronic training, he quickly found work at Douglas Aircraft in Santa Monica.⁹ However, after a labor dispute, he quit Douglas Aircraft and began experimenting in politics and radicalism.¹⁰

While working for the Goldwater campaign, he met a reporter from the *Santa Monica Daily Breeze* who was a member of the John Birch Society, which was a far-right political organization that believed a communist infiltration into American government and media had taken place. Metzger joined the John Birch Society and in 1968 moved to Fallbrook, about 40 miles north of San Diego. Once in Fallbrook, he organized a branch of the John Birch Society there, and also supported George Wallace and the American Independent Party in 1968.

Ultimately, he would leave the Society, when the leadership prohibited him from using the organization's name in behalf of his public defilements of Jewish bankers and businessmen. By 1970, Metzger believed that a Jewish conspiracy, led by Henry Kissinger, forced the United

and khaki shorts. A hat also served to shield his shaven head (due to the unfortunate effects of aging as opposed to any organizational significance he claims) from the sun, as it was a particularly warm day. However, upon closer scrutiny the author could not help but notice he carried at his side what appeared to be a sheathed hunting knife, a peculiar accessory for life in a small town in Southern California about 20 minutes drive from the coast and about 30 miles north of San Diego. Upon closer scrutiny, he noticed that a ring with a protruding, snarling wolf's head adorned his finger, this ominous image, coupled with the hunting knife, satisfied some pre-conceptions that Metzger would present himself as a radical racist ready at any moment to take up his cause against the United States and the world.

⁸ His training in electronics would later prove very crucial to the creation of WAR and to the methods it employs to this day in attempting to recruit members.

⁹ When Metzger was working at Douglas Aircraft, at the height of the Cold War, the Sell America Committee showed him anti-Communist propaganda films during his lunchbreak. One can only speculate as to how influential these films were in shaping his later attitudes and beliefs.

States into an Asian war. He also felt that deteriorating conditions in American inner cities could be attributed to minorities.¹¹ Consequently, he formed the White Brotherhood, which was designed to emulate the Ku Klux Klan.¹²

Around this time Metzger experimented with religion, eventually becoming an ordained minister in the New Christian Crusade Church. This was an Identity Church based on an obscure, century-old anti-Semitic doctrine known as British-Israelism that contends God's "chosen people" are not Jews, but descendants of the lost Tribes of Ancient Israel who ultimately became the Anglo-Saxon-Teuton Whites of the British Isles.¹³ By 1975, Metzger met David Ernest Duke, the leader of the Ku Klux Klan, at a meeting in North Hollywood. Duke invited Metzger to join the Klan, which he did by merging them with the White Brotherhood; he was also involved in managing Duke's various political campaigns. However, the relationship between Metzger and Duke did not develop as either would have probably wished. In 1978, despite Metzger proclaiming a high regard for Duke's abilities as a politician, he split with the Klan, citing personal differences between the two, and conducted his own California-based elections that gave him the title of Grand Dragon of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. This angered Duke, the Imperial Wizard of the national Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. In response Metzger separated from Duke and withdrew his membership from the Klan. Metzger proceeded to create an independent chapter of the Klan in California.¹⁴

At this point in his life Metzger was still searching for his cause. He had experimented with a number of political and non-political organizations, but had continuously been dissatisfied

¹⁰ Metzger interview, 25 April 2000.

¹¹ Metzger also fathered John, the first of his six children in 1970, who now helps him run WAR.

¹² Hamm, *American Skinheads: The Criminology and Control of Hate Crime*, 42-44.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Metzger interview, 25 April 2000.

with their level of radicalism. He claimed that the John Birchers were mindlessly patriotic, and had difficulty fitting into the structure of the national Klan. Either consciously, or subconsciously, he was moving towards a populist position with an emphasis on race separatism. He was not alone in this belief.

Political Success and Rejection

Some time in 1979, Metzger made the decision to present himself as a candidate on the Democratic primary ticket in the 1980 election to the House of Representatives in the 43rd District. This coincided with a move by the Klan to push themselves further into politics. The 43rd District was the most populous District in the nation, comprising San Diego County as well as Imperial and Riverside Counties. Metzger managed to win the primary by garnering 32,344 votes. The other two candidates competing with Metzger on the ticket were Ed Skagen, who got 32,026 votes, and Hubert Higgins to garnered 22,940.¹⁵ Strangely, Higgins dropped out of the race several days before the vote, citing a lack of funds, and probably helped bring about a Metzger victory. The main question is how Metzger, who ran as an open Klansman and racist, was able to achieve such a victory. The reasons are multifaceted.

First, the 43rd District was essentially a throwaway district for the Democratic party. Republican Clair Burgener had an exceptionally strong hold over the region, having served for four terms and winning the Republican primary unopposed. He would eventually beat Metzger in the November election by more than 250,000 votes.¹⁶ This is one of the reasons that Metzger

¹⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, 4 June 1980.

¹⁶ Hamm, *American Skinheads...*, 46.

decided to run, believing he had a serious chance of securing the Democratic nomination. He was right.

Despite the fact that Metzger was vying for acceptance in the political arena through the normal channels, it would be too simplistic to label him as a rightist or leftist radical. Instead, he was preaching populism, hoping to secure the votes of the white working man. Metzger promised to speak for the white man by opposing taxes, fighting urban crime and drug use. But, perhaps the best example of Metzger practicing the populism that Kazin looks at occurred on June 21, 1978. Metzger and the Klan issued a press release, and distributed leaflets to residents in Fallbrook, warning them of the release of a sex offender back into their community. The release concludes by stating "Would you really want this person trimming your grass? Call your supervisor....Call the County District Attorney and the news media and express your anger at this terrible miscarriage of justice and the danger it represents to all our local children."¹⁷ Clearly, Metzger and the Klan were attempting to portray themselves as existing on the side of the righteous, protecting the children against the monsters of the world. By the time of the election, Metzger was already adept at playing the role of the common mans savior.

Prior to the election, Metzger had received more media attention by working with fellow Klansmen along the U.S-Mexican border, arresting immigrants who were attempting to come into the United States. Sealing the United States-Mexico border was a major theme in his campaign. He was also the first Democratic politician to openly oppose affirmative action programs and called for a policy that would teach elementary school children rifle marksmanship.¹⁸ Metzger was fervently anti-elitist and behaved as an intelligent, charismatic individual. In the interview with the author, he discussed how he exposed big business scandals

¹⁷ Tom Metzger, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Press Release. Fallbrook, California. June 21, 1978.

that were taking place in Imperial Valley. Clearly, the electorate he was trying to reach were the white workers.

This anti-elitist approach entered into his relationship with the media. Like most politicians Metzger needed the media to reach the people he wanted to vote for him. However, for him the media would prove to be a double-edged sword. On one hand, they were quite happy to give him his fifteen minutes, yet they were unlikely to deviate from his Klan membership and racist ideology. Moreover, the Los Angeles *Times* printed a peculiar disclaimer under its ballot recommendations on the morning of the primary that stated "The Times does not often endorse in partisan primaries, but exceptional circumstances exist....In the 43rd District, former labor official Ed Skagen's chief opponent for the Democratic nomination is Tom Metzger, a California leader of the Ku Klux Klan. Although we endorse... Skagen in the Democratic primaries [sic] we will not announce our preference among the nominees of the two major parties until shortly before the November election."¹⁹ Such a statement by the *Times* would be enough to condemn a candidate to defeat. However, similarities between the success of the Klan in the 1920's and Metzger's victory in this election are noteworthy.

In September of 1921, the New York *World* began a running expose attacking the Klan and its practices, attempting to discredit it with their investigations. However, their attempts were a notable failure; it did nothing to dampen Klan support or membership, although it did successfully boost *World* sales. E. H. Loucks, in his study of the Klan in Pennsylvania, suggested that what the *World* attacked, rural America, with its belligerent character, would stubbornly support. Moreover, Colonel William J. Simmons, the founder of the Second Klan,

¹⁸ Hamm, *American Skinheads...*, 46.

¹⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, 3 June 1980.

stated that "It wasn't until certain newspapers began to attack the Klan that it really grew."²⁰ The relationship between rural America and the New York *World* was mirrored by the relationship that existed on a smaller scale between Los Angeles and the more rural counties of Imperial Valley and Riverside, where Metzger managed to gain most of his support.²¹ The sprawling metropolis of Los Angeles is a long way, if not in physical terms then in cultural terms, from the farming communities that exist in its surrounding counties. Any attempt to secure a defeat for Metzger might have, ironically, worked in his favor.

However, that is not to say Metzger did not have his supporters in San Diego County either. One region that was critical in his victory was the precinct of El Cajon where he beat Ed Skagen by 1,091 votes. The San Diego *Union* interviewed people who voted for Metzger in the precinct. Their reasons for helping Metzger secure victory fell into three patterns. First, Metzger had his loyal supporters who voted for him because of his Klan associations and racist beliefs. Michael Treantafilos told the *Union* "Yeah, I voted for Metzger. Why? Because he don't like niggers. That's a good enough reason." Cleant Coombs, a 62-year-old construction worker, stated "I voted for Metzger and I'd do it again. I'm upset, yeah. All these Cuban and Haitian and Viet Cong refugees coming here."²² Kazin, when discussing the role of nativism in United States history, looks at Terence Powderly of the Knights of Labor, an Irish-Catholic, speaking in 1892. Powderly attacked new immigrants as "unfortunate" creatures whom good Americans must "educate year after year to prevent them from using bombs instead of ballots." While Kazin noted that few populists were as flagrantly nativist as Powderly, all applauded his

²⁰ Colonel William J. Simmons, founder of the Second Klan; quoted in David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, 38.

²¹ It is worth noting that Metzger was informed that he had lost the election to Skagen prior to the Imperial Valley and Riverside votes coming in, as San Diego County had primarily supported Skagen.

²² *San Diego Union*, 15 June 1980.

implication that they were defending national interests. It would appear that Powderly's attitudes were alive and well in San Diego in 1980, almost one hundred years later.²³

Second, others in the electorate claimed they were unaware of Metzger's Klan affiliations. Simon Nieto told the Union reporter, "You mean that 'boo-boo' we all did. Yeah, I voted for him but I wish I never had. We didn't know until we were watching the results on the television that he was a Klanner." Another Metzger voter claimed "I didn't know anything about any of them and I picked him because it said he was a small businessman or something like that." Nieto argued "That guy's name just wasn't publicized enough until after the election." Of this section of the electorate, a significant percentage of those questioned by the Union would cite not knowing Metzger was a Klansman as an excuse for their own guilty conscience. Quite simply, it would be hard not to know of Metzger's ideology, as every single story that mentioned him in the media brought up his Klan associations. Moreover, he was pictured in his political rallies surrounded by supporters who are dressed in Klan regalia and waving confederate flags.²⁴

The third pattern that emerged among those who voted for Metzger were voters who were aware of his Klan ties, claiming not to share them, but voting for him anyway due to dissatisfaction with current politicians. One 24-year-old stated that "I don't share his racial views but at least he's not a politician trying to please everybody. I'm ready to take a chance on someone with a radical background." Of the three groups of voters, this second group were attracted by Metzger's brand of populism, believing that despite his racial attitudes he would best be able to serve their interests.²⁵

Journalist Lance Morres, in an essay that was published in *Time* on March 10, 1980, argued that the United States of America was experiencing a level of patriotism that all too often

²³ Kazin, 37-38.

²⁴ *San Diego Union*, 15 June 1980.

spilled over into xenophobia. Movies were released such as *Midnight Express* and *The Deer Hunter*, that portrayed American youth abroad as wholesome and handsome and lovable people in the grips of evil foreigners. Morres argued that U.S. citizens began to believe that the allegory seen in the movies was confirmed by reality, as U.S. citizens were held hostage in distant, strange lands such as Iran. The outside world was not playing by American rules.²⁶ This belief aided Metzger in the 1980 election; Joy Andrian, who owned a beauty supply business in El Cajon, claimed that "I just may vote for him (in November) because we are all paying taxes on those people he is talking about coming into this country." Clara Harris, who was a member of the Heartland Human Relations Association, echoed that sentiment: "Retired and working people... are scared. They're worried about people crossing the border, they're worried about Cubans and worried about the Vietnamese who are coming to this country to compete for their jobs or be supported by their taxes."²⁷ Clearly, Metzger tapped into this national insecurity that existed at the time, appealing to the fears of the electorate about the strange, distant foreigners hijacking American jobs and taking their tax money. Ultimately, he managed to secure victory in the primary through his populist rhetoric that was attractive to white workers, particularly in the more rural areas of Riverside County and Imperial Valley. He was also aided by a general dissatisfaction with politicians that appeared to exist, and an overriding level of xenophobia that was in a region so close to a national border.

Having secured the Democratic nomination, Metzger was in a position to influence politics in the state in more ways than by simply running in the November election. As the Democratic nominee to appear on the November ballot, Metzger was entitled to appoint three representatives from the County to serve on the Democratic Central Committee and three

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lance Morres, "The Return of Patriotism," *Time Magazine*, 10 March 1980, 88.

representatives to serve on the State Central Committee. However, leading Democrats in the county and state did not wish to associate themselves with Metzger. They devised a method to prevent him from making his appointments. At the San Diego County Democratic Central Committee Meeting on October 14, 1980, the Resolutions Committee voted two to one with one abstention in favor of the resolution to expel Metzger from the Democratic party. A special investigative committee was formed to "investigate the worthiness" of Tom Metzger as a member of the San Diego County Democratic Central Committee.²⁸ Having successfully disassociated itself from Metzger, the Central Committee were free to make their own appointments.²⁹

This point is interesting in itself, Metzger should have been allowed to make his appointments, regardless of his own personal belief. The electorate had given their approval of him as the Democratic candidate. However, the implications of this event run deeper than the Democratic Central Committee could have anticipated. In denying Metzger the right to make his appointments, he became even more disgruntled with the American political system. He already believed that the media was obsessed with his Klan affiliations and stifled his message, and now he was being hounded out of a position that he had legally won. Consequently, he changed his tactics, concluded that success through the ballot box was not possible, and became more radical, fermenting plans that would not be fully realized until later. These plans would be more dangerous than any appointments he could have made to any Democratic Committee.

²⁷ *San Diego Union*, 15 June 1980.

²⁸ It is worth noting that the man Metzger defeated in the primary was a member of the special investigative committee that investigated Metzger's worthiness.

²⁹ San Diego County Democratic Central Committee, Minutes of Regular Meeting, October 14, 1980.

“One Last Ditch Attempt”³⁰

“One last ditch attempt” is how Metzger described his effort in the 1982 Senate election. By 1982, he had already given up hope of achieving success at the ballot box. Prior to being removed from the party in 1980, he was confident about being able to achieve success with his and the Klan’s message and saw future political successes as possible. However, after his expulsion, he realized that he would not be able to achieve political success through the normal channels. He had rejoined the Democratic Party, having left the Klan after the election and formed the White American Political Alliance (WAPA). But he had no illusions that they would accept him as a candidate if he was able to secure any sort of electoral victory.

There were eleven candidates vying for the Democratic nomination to the Senate.³¹ Metzger managed to finish sixth in the vote with 76,502 votes and 2.8 percent of the total votes cast.³² In his campaign, Metzger was unable to reach many districts in California due to financial constraints, yet through name recognition and extensive campaigning he was able to persuade 76,502 Californian voters that he was the best person to represent them in the Senate.³³ Metzger believed that he was successful in both campaigns. In many ways he was right. It would not be foolish to presume that in 1980, a full decade removed from the civil rights successes of the 1960’s, that an open racist and Klansman would have considerable difficulty in achieving any sort of success in a state with a relatively liberal reputation, such as California.

³⁰ Metzger interview, 25 April 2000.

³¹ Interestingly, noted author, Gore Vidal, ran in the 1982 California Senate race and eventually finished second with 15.1% of the vote. The eventual winner was Edmund G. Brown Jr. who garnered 1,392,660 votes and 50.7% of the total vote’s cast.

³² State Department, *Statement of Vote Primary Election June 8, 1982*, compiled by Secretary of State March Fong Eu.

³³ During Metzger’s campaigns in 1980 and in 1982, he would wear bulletproof vests due to death threats and even one assassination attempt.

Yet despite this, Metzger secured a Democratic nomination in the nation's most populous district and had 76,502 supporters throughout the state.

Michael Kazin, writing in *The Populist Persuasion*, examines how Americans perceive the sources of justice and injustice in their society and how they act upon them. Metzger, in both the elections, used and manipulated these perceptions to his advantage. Kazin claims that in 1966 Ronald Reagan was able to win the governorship of California by campaigning as a straight-talking "citizen-politician", who vowed to clamp down on ghetto-rioters, welfare recipients, permissive academics and unpatriotic college students.³⁴ Implicit in the notion of ghetto-rioters and welfare recipients is race. Californians had witnessed the Watts riots in Los Angeles. By invoking these images, Reagan was planting a subconscious, and for some conscious, image in the mind of white voters in California: at the root of the social ills befalling their state were minorities. Metzger sang the exact same tune in 1980 and 1982, and the same people who listened to Reagan in 1966 were listening to Metzger fourteen years later, as well as to Reagan again on a national level. While speculation is a dangerous game for historians to engage in, it appears that had Metzger preached his populism without any Klan affiliations, he would have been even more successful as a politician. After the votes had been counted in 1982, Metzger maintained his beliefs and ideology but adopted different methods and strategies that would be ultimately more radical than anything he had pursued as a Klansman.

White Aryan Resistance

After the 1982 Senate election, Metzger developed an intense hatred for the government that he still holds today. Prior to 1980, he believed that the Klan often worked with the police

when they needed to organize rallies and meetings, but after the campaigns the organization was constantly being infiltrated by the police and FBI.³⁵ As a result, he formed the organization White American Resistance. This later became White Aryan Resistance when he realized that the term American did not necessarily imply that one was white. In many ways WAR was a pioneer in the hate group/supremacist movement, Metzger utilized his skills in the electronics industry to relay his message to the public. Using a Commodore 64 personal computer, which lumbered along at less than 300 bytes per minute, he hooked up a single telephone line so that callers could download his various messages, interpretations, and views of the world.³⁶ After doing this, his telephone line immediately became overloaded. Metzger realized that there was an audience of white supremacists who were willing to listen to what he had to say, as well as knowing how to utilize the technology that was necessary to receive the information.

This electronic bulletin board became a medium that allowed skinheads, neo-Nazis, Klansmen and various other individuals with similar beliefs to share ideas, philosophies and future plans pertaining to possible action against the government and other groups they perceived as the enemy. The messages ranged from the bizarre to prescriptions for murder. Here is one transcript sent by a user:

Title: Killing
From: (User #1)
To: Kinsmen
Date: May-24-1986
Time: 17:15:11.7

³⁴ Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 248.

³⁵ One noted Klan infiltrator was Douglas Seymour who traveled with Metzger and was a card carrying Klansman. Eventually Seymour suffered a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized four times after a "mock trial" was conducted by the Klan when it was discovered he was an informant. The "trial" ended when a variation of Russian roulette was played with the judges holding the pistols.

³⁶ Hamm, *American Skinheads*, 55.

Let's get serious now folks. The fact is that the only way to be free of what threatens you is to kill it. So learn to kill. Quickly. Quietly. Without witnesses.

A very neat trick is to loosen the fittings to a car's master cylinder so there is a gradual loss of brake fluid as the brakes are used. Finally resulting in no brakes and a lot of unchecked inertia.

Another prank is to burn a ZOG [Zionist Occupation Government] newspaper in your adversary's home. You must use some technique though. Cover the floor with one thickness of the unfolded paper, then light it. It causes a surprising amount of damage.

The old standby is to drill a small hole in his lightbulb and fill it with gunpowder. When the light goes on, he goes out. GFTT [Go for the throat].³⁷

It was the anonymity aspect of this new medium, coupled with the accessibility of the computer age that made the new supremacist groups that were forming in the mid-1980's so dangerous.

Metzger was quick to see this, just as he was able to tap into the skinhead movement that was underway.³⁸

In a trip to Britain, Metzger spoke to skinheads there and was impressed by their commitment to their race-based ideology they espoused through their music and other forums.³⁹ He also noted that the skinhead movement was gaining support in the United States, having received communications from many skinheads through the WAR bulletin board. Metzger envisioned the skinheads becoming the "brown shirts" of the racist movement.⁴⁰ He was willing to support them and sought to guide and shape their thoughts and actions. He saw that they already held beliefs conducive to his own, were white and young, and were ready to act upon those beliefs.

Essentially, WAR tried to replace the aging image that the Klan represented. No longer would race-based organizations be concentrated in rural regions and mindlessly patriotic. WAR

³⁷ Ridgeway, *Blood in the Face*, 173.

³⁸ A good history of the origins of the skinhead movement can be found in Jack B. Moore *Skinheads Shaved for Battle: A Cultural History of American Skinheads*, Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993.

³⁹ The skinhead band *Skrewdriver* even dedicated one of their albums to Metzger and his son John. Metzger did not understand British skinhead devotion to the Queen, however.

⁴⁰ Metzger interview, 25 April 2000.

would be international, with the only boundaries existing in one's thoughts and beliefs. It would be dynamic and urban, a place where young white male skinheads could be the champions of the white working class, fighting the crusade against an alleged treasonous white ruling elite.

In order to convey his message to would-be skinheads and WAR sympathizers, Metzger also distributed (and still does today) a newsletter describing the goals of the movement. The newsletter was littered with images depicting WAR skinheads as crusaders; often these appeared in the form of cartoons which showed crude images and stereotypes. One such cartoon depicted a bare-chested, powerfully built youth, wearing spiked gloves and shades, holding a hunting knife in his left hand while he performed a Nazi salute with his right hand. In the background was a silhouette of a city skyline, the United States and British flags, and a large swastika in the center. Above the whole image in large capitalized letters were the words "LET'S KICK SOME ASS!" and below in gothic lettering was the single word 'SKINHEADS'.⁴¹ The macho images purveyed in most of the cartoons were used by WAR as a recruiting tool. Another cartoon showed a bare-breasted lady holding a military style assault weapon with the caption underneath "My man is a White racist. If yours is a whimp, dump him and get a real White man and screw the system."⁴² Clearly the implication was that one was a "whimp" if not a white racist, and that white racists would naturally attract beautiful, big-breasted white women. This appeal to macho instincts was designed to attract young white males in the same way that Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger movies of the mid-1980's were also designed to attract young males with their violent, macho storylines and images.

The other main theme depicted in the cartoons employed by WAR is that of a crude and sick sense of humor, usually at the expense of one of the perceived enemies of the white race.

⁴¹ Ridgeway, *Blood in the Face*, 157.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 189.

One such cartoon shows a crude sketch of a black man with exaggerated lips and elongated arms, he was clearly supposed to represent some sort of primate. He wore a baseball cap on his head backwards, had a handgun tucked down his trousers and what appeared to be a bottle of whiskey in his back pocket. The caption on his T-shirt read "RAP ON MUTHAFUCKA". To complete the "joke" there was a rhyme next to the image that reads:

Coon, Coon...
Black Baboon...
Brutal, Worthless, Thieving Goon...
Often High... Thrives in Jail...
His Welfare Check is in the Mail...
Some 40 Offspring have been had,
Not One Will Ever Call Him Dad...
And Yet He Hollers Day and Night:

"I blames de White Man fo my Plight,
It's Him Spreads Trash All Round My Shack...
It's Him What Makes Me Smoke Dis Crack,
He Push My Kind To Burn And Loot,
An Sends De Po-Lice Dat We Shoot...
But Inch By Inch We Takin' Hold,
Like When De White Bread Starts To Mold...
We'll Overrun Yo Homes And Soon...
Dey Be Only Fit Fo De Blackassed Coon"⁴³

A number of issues in this cartoon were essential in understanding the mentality of the skinheads and youth that WAR was trying to attract. First, the depiction of the black man highlighted the many fears that Metzger employed to his success during his elections. The man carried a gun hidden in his trousers. It followed that minorities were the reason for violence and crime in the inner cities. The whiskey bottle in the back pocket highlighted that minorities were always drunk, thus contributing to social ills. The T-shirt, with the offensive message on it, poisoned the minds of impressionable youth, and the rhyme itself depicted the black man as a primate, a thief, an uncaring father of many, who smoked crack and killed police officers.

⁴³ Ibid., 149.

What is ironic about the cartoon itself is that it works at bringing out the fear in the white man, while at the same time attacking the man in the picture for being a victim : “I blames the white man fo my plight”.⁴⁴

While much of the methods and style that were employed by WAR and Metzger in the mid-1980’s appeared on the surface to be different from that being preached by the second Klan in the 1920’s, the actual content of their rhetoric were remarkably similar. Both preyed on the fears of losing something that was perceived to be sacred, or a rightful possession. It might be the purity of white women, one’s job, or it could be one’s taxes. Regardless, both the Klan and WAR utilized fear in order to accomplish their goals. Whether or not one shaved his head to demonstrate his ideology, or placed a white sheet over himself, the hate and basic belief system were still the same.

Concluding Remarks

The early to mid-1980’s were tumultuous times in the United States. The nation began the decade in recession, the Cold War escalating high with the U.S. and the Soviet Union jockeying for world supremacy, and the cities were experiencing high crime rates, increasing drug use, and high levels of dissatisfaction amongst those who lived there. Tom Metzger realized this. When the author met Metzger he seemed to be a very intelligent man, articulate, engaging, and at times charming. Without knowing anything about his beliefs or ideas, one could easily be drawn to him as a public figure. In 1980 Metzger used his personal qualities, as well as an understanding of what people were afraid of, in order to secure victory in the Democratic primary in the 43rd district. He was not left of center, nor was he right of center. He

⁴⁴ Ibid.

was a man who wanted to represent the white working class. Blacks, immigrants, Jews, homosexuals, elites and "race-traitors" did not fit into his vision of how government and the United States should run. Metzger was out in the open; he literally wore his views on his sleeve. Enough people accepted him and supported him to force his name on the November ballot. However, his views were not acceptable to the politicians that ran the Democratic party. As a result, he was denied, rightly or wrongly depending on one's point of view, the spoils of political victory. Despite one final effort in 1982, Metzger had decided to abandon the pursuit of political success.

After 1982, Metzger was a far more cynical individual and in many respects, a far more dangerous individual. Instead of trying to appeal to the masses, he hoped to garner the attention of young white males, appealing to their insecurities and rallying them to his cause. He encouraged skinheads under his wing to abandon the shaven head, move into the workplace, and maintain the same ideas and principles through contact with him and other like-minded individuals, so that when the moment came they would be able to continue their crusade. One only has to look at recent terrorist activities that have occurred in the United States of America to realize that an individual with a hate-driven motive is capable of a serious level of violence and destruction that is far more harmful than any Klan rally or cross burning.⁴⁵ Moreover, with the increasing accessibility of the computers and the internet and the possibilities for communicating with anonymity to anyone with a modem, the ease at which hate-groups, such as WAR, can get their message out is unprecedented.

Metzger was correct in predicting that he would never have been allowed to operate in the conventional political forum. But his message remains the same; only the techniques he now

advocates are far more radical. If the same conditions exist that enabled him to procure 32,344 votes in 1980 and 76,502 votes in 1982, there is no reason to believe that individuals who hear his message will not take up the cause of WAR. It is difficult to state exactly what those conditions are. Allowing a society to live in irrational fear over such issues as illegal immigration and the perpetuation of the myth of being displaced by another race of people helped bring about Metzger's victory and his successes when recruiting for WAR. Whereas in 1980 racism had a visible face and a pointy hat, the racism that Metzger is pushing forward today, because of his experience in the 1980's, is hidden and transparent. As such, it will not gear itself to the ballot box when deciding to announce itself. The final words that Metzger told the author at the end of the interview in Fallbrook were a quote taken from Lenin: "Worse is better, for now". The author does not know exactly what he meant but hopes that Metzger is wrong anyway.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Three recent examples are the Oklahoma city bomber Timothy McVeigh, the unabomber Ted Kascyzincki, and Buford Furrow, the man who attempted to slaughter children and workers at the Jewish Community Center in Los Angeles.

⁴⁶ Metzger interview, 25 April 2000.

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