

Perspectives on a Multiracial America Series

Joe R. Feagin, Texas A&M University, series editor

The racial composition of the United States is rapidly changing. Books in the series will explore various aspects of the coming multiracial society, one in which European-Americans are no longer the majority and where issues of white-on-black racism have been joined by many other challenges to white dominance.

Titles:

Melanie Bush, *Breaking the Code of Good Intentions*

Amir Mavasti and Karyn McKinney, *Unwelcome Immigrants:*

Middle Eastern Lives in America

Richard Rees, *Shades of Difference: A History of Ethnicity in America*

Katheryn Russell-Brown, *Protecting Our Own: Race, Crime, and*

African Americans

Adia Harvey Wingfield, *Doing Business with Beauty: Black Women,*

Hair Salons, and the Racial Enclave Economy

Erica Chito Childs, *Fade to Black and White: Interracial Images in*

Popular Culture

Jessie Daniels, *Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on*

Civil Rights

Forthcoming titles:

Elizabeth M. Aranda, *Emotional Bridges to Puerto Rico: Migration,*

Return Migration, and the Struggles of Incorporation

Angela J. Hattery, David G. Embrick, and Earl Smith, *Globalization and*

America: Race, Human Rights, and Inequality

Cyber Racism

*White Supremacy Online
and the New Attack on Civil Rights*

Jessie Daniels

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.
Lanham • Boulder • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.

Published in the United States of America
by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowmanlittlefield.com

Estover Road
Plymouth PL6 7PY
United Kingdom

Copyright © 2009 Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any
means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Daniels, Jessie, 1961–
Cyber racism : white supremacy online and the new attack on civil rights / Jessie
Daniels.
p. cm. — (Perspectives on a multiracial America series)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-7425-6157-1 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-7425-6158-8 (pbk. : alk.
paper) — ISBN 978-0-7425-6525-8 (electronic)
1. White supremacy movements—United States. 2. Cyberbullying. I. Title.
E184.A1D244 2009
305.800973—dc22
2008049962

Printed in the United States of America

©TM The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American
National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library
Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Dedicated to the memory of Alexander Toulouse, 2000–2008

White Supremacist Social Movements Online and in a Global Context

copy (for legal
does not in-
ut the impact

participate in
those in their
extent, blacks
in the victims.

has crimes, see

Social movements in the Information Age are essentially mobilized around cultural values. The struggle to change the codes of meaning in the institutions and practice of the society is the essential struggle in the process of social change in the new historical context, movements to seize the power of the minds, not state power.

—Manuel Castells

The Internet enables social movements to cross national boundaries in ways simply not possible in any previous era. In this new global era the existence of online white supremacist social movements has been scrutinized from three distinct angles. First, scholars such as Manuel Castells have examined how racial identity and globalization are connected in online social movements.¹ Second, others express concern about whether such social movements online threaten the broader political landscape, endangering the public sphere and democratic society.² And third, mainstream press accounts and certain scholars have voiced concern that white supremacist movements online are recruiting. Yet the reality of white supremacist movements online, I posit, is more complex than any of these perspectives suggest. A good place to begin my explanation is with a discussion of race, globalization, and identity.

Translocal Whiteness: Shaping Online White Identity through Global, Networked Social Movements

As Castells indicates in the epigraph opening this chapter, social movements in the digital era are centered on cultural values. For the most part, analyses of social movements and the Internet have concentrated heavily on progressive and left-leaning movements, while there has been far less attention given those of the far right. In the minority, Castells chose to write about the Internet and both progressive movements (e.g., feminism and environmentalism) and far-right social movements. Thus, Castells's voice is central to any discussion of white supremacist social movements on the Internet.

Sociologist Anthony Giddens has favorably compared Castells's three-volume *Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture* to Max Weber's classic *Economy and Society*. Originally published in 1996, Castells's collective work presciently anticipated the enormous impact of the Internet and globalization on everyday life. Given that *The Power of Identity* (volume 2) addresses social movements in the Information Age and specifically refers to the patriot movement in the network society, Castells's work is particularly relevant to this discussion. He conceptualizes globalization and identity formation as conflicting trends,³ a point similar to that made in Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld*. In two possible political futures—"both bleak, neither democratic"—Barber envisions McWorld as a commercialized, homogenized, depoliticized, and bureaucratized future, while Jihad is parochial, tribal, and factious.⁴ For both Castells and Barber globalization is allied with tolerance, pluralism, and cosmic identities, whereas identity is implicated in racism, tribalism, and ethnic identities. In *The Power of Identity* Castells explicitly grapples with white supremacy, globalization, and the Internet in a segment he titles "Up in Arms against the New World Order: The American Militia and the Patriot Movement in the 1990s."⁵ The section's primary source is the Southern Poverty Law Center's *Klanwatch/Militia Task Force* from 1996,⁶ which today the SPLC publishes online and in print as *The Intelligence Report*.⁷ Similarly informing Castells's work is Ken Stern's 1996 *A Force upon the Plain*, which discusses the American militia movement. These two sources buttress Castells's claims (1) that white supremacy is an extreme libertarian trend that identifies the federal government as a primary enemy, (2) that it perceives the new world order (i.e., globalization) to be a greater threat still, (3) that the movement features a backlash against feminism, gays, and racial or ethnic minorities, and (4) that it promotes an "intolerant affirmation of the superiority of Christian values."⁸ Castells's larger point here is that along with the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo—the cult

responsible for the 1995 sarin gas attacks in the Tokyo subway—the patriot movement is *reactive*, reflexively resisting globalization. As such, he considers the movement to be a rebellion against the more cosmopolitan strains of globalization, quite similar to Barber's Jihad, which opposes McWorld.

Considering the global perspective, however, highlights a number of problems with Castells's analysis of online white supremacy. First, he misinterprets the patriot movement to be the umbrella organization under which all other white supremacist groups meet. He says

The militia are the most militant, and organized, wing of a much broader, self-proclaimed "patriot movement," whose ideological galaxy encompasses established, extreme, conservative organizations, such as the John Birch Society; a whole array of traditional, white supremacist, neo-Nazi, and anti-Semitic groups, including the Ku Klux Klan and the Posse Comitatus; fanatic religious groups, such as Christian Identity, an anti-Semitic sect emanating from Victorian England's British Israelism; antifederal groups, such as the Counties' Rights Movements, Wise Use anti-environmental coalition, the National Taxpayers' Union, and the defenders of common-law courts. The patriots' galaxy also extends, in loose forms, to the powerful Christian Coalition, as well as to a number of militant right-to-life groups, and counts on the sympathy of many members of the National Rifle Association and gun advocates.⁹

While the patriot movement in the 1990s was certainly an important "force upon the American plain" for white supremacists, it did not then, and does not now, represent the epicenter of the "ideological galaxy" of white supremacist organizations listed above. Rather, the patriot movement is and always has been a single element, and increasingly insignificant one at that, of the broader white supremacist movement. Indeed, as the SPLC reports, the patriot movement is currently in free fall, suffering dramatically declining participation. According to the SPLC, at its peak in 1996 the patriot movement was comprised of 858 groups, yet by 2001 that number had declined by almost 82 percent to a mere 158 identified groups; even that number, characterized by the SPLC as "anemic," was perhaps inflated.¹⁰ While the patriot and militia branches declined, other offshoots of white supremacy grew. As of the SPLC's spring report of 2008, there were an estimated 888 groups in the United States, up 48 percent since 2000.¹¹ Essentially, Castells mistook a dying limb of white supremacy to be the movement's heart. This first mistake in analysis begets another: for by making the patriot movement his index case study, on which his entire understanding of white supremacy is based, Castells erroneously locates the movement as an exclusively U.S.-based phenomenon, which it is not.

On the contrary, in the Information Age white supremacy is global and quite self-consciously so. Don Black, a white supremacist based in south Florida, established one of the earliest white supremacist websites, Stormfront.org, in 1995. Stormfront's tagline from the beginning has been "white pride worldwide," a motto that speaks to the global vision of the site's creators as well as to the current reach of the site. For some time, Stormfront has featured discussion rooms where supporters from across the globe connect, logging in from Australia, the Baltics, Belgium, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, South Africa, and Switzerland. As valuable a resource as the Southern Poverty Law Center is, its data about white supremacy in the global era are of limited value, since they restrict their scope to activity within the United States. Sources outside the United States, such as the French antiracist group J'Accuse, estimate there may be as many as sixty thousand racist websites worldwide, much higher than the SPLC's calculation of just under nine hundred sites based in the United States. The disparity can be explained in part by the French organization's global focus.¹² It is admittedly difficult for various methodological reasons to accurately estimate the number of white supremacist organizations or their individual supporters. Yet Castells forces an error by culling the primary data in this case exclusively from U.S.-based sources like SPLC and Stern's *Force upon the Plain*—a curious choice, in any case, given that his book is about globalization. White supremacy is a worldwide concern in the Information Age, not merely an American scourge.

Third, while Castells is quite right in his assessment that "identity is people's source for meaning and experience,"¹³ because he situates his understanding of white supremacy by region rather than race, he overlooks the Internet's importance in forming a global white identity that transcends local and regional ties. For instance, following a lengthy discussion of militias,¹⁴ Castells shifts to the role of the Internet:

For conspiracy enthusiasts like militia members, unverified statements from cyberspace reaffirmed their set conclusions by providing an endless stream of additional "evidence." Also the frontier spirit characteristic of the Internet fits well with the freemen, expressing themselves and making their statement without mediation or government control. More importantly, the network structure of the Internet reproduces exactly the autonomous, spontaneous networking of militia groups, and of the patriots at large, without boundaries and without definite plan, but sharing a purpose, a feeling, and most of all an enemy. It is mainly on the Internet (backed up by fax and direct mailing) that the movement thrives and organizes itself.¹⁵

Castells is mostly correct here in terms of the linkages the Internet provides to social movement members, but he neglects an analysis of race, or more specifically, of whiteness and white identity and the way they are central to those linkages. To be fair, when *The Power of Identity* was written in the late 1990s, thinking in terms of linkages characterized popular understanding of the Internet. Since that time, however, a new field of scholarship has emerged that in great part draws on or is influenced by sociologist Sherry Turkle's *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*.¹⁶ This new interdisciplinary field examines the formation and reaffirmation of social identities online,¹⁷ particularly tracing links forged by race and at racially dedicated social-networking sites.¹⁸ This entire area of scholarship is unaccounted for by Castells or anyone who orients their understanding of white supremacy on region to the exclusion of race. Hence, Castells has no way to envision global white identity developing online.

Global white identity, which sociologist Les Back has referred to as *translocal whiteness*,¹⁹ is crucial to understanding cyber racism in the Information Age. Writing about the racially motivated menacing of an Aboriginal community in Sydney, Australia, Suvendrini Perera illuminates the Internet's development of the phenomenon:

The appearance of the "race-mixing" posters . . . was clearly designed to territorialize the long-standing and highly visible Aboriginal community in the area, as well as [to target] other racial minorities and people of color in the vicinity—notably, international students at the nearby universities and English-language colleges. The originating point for the poster was the website of the White Pride Coalition, from where it could be downloaded, along with a variety of other racist literature, images, and regalia. The availability of these materials on the website allows their owners to disclaim responsibility for their dissemination and public display on the street. It also enables individuals or small cells of people to act alone and in anonymity while drawing on the resources of a global white racist cyberspace.²⁰

In Perera's account, a self-consciously white-defined group avails itself of racist materials courtesy of a white supremacist website—part of a global, white, racist cyberspace—to torment nonwhite community members. In the Information Age the Internet facilitates the formation of a transnational, explicitly racist white identity, as it has expedited the establishment of other transnational subcultural identities—queer identities, for instance.²¹ (One of the key differences between these groups is that the formation of white racist identity portends terror for any outside that group,

while the formation of queer identity often means terror for those inside that group.) The point here is that *translocal whiteness* is a racial identity shaped by global information flows, yet Castells's race and ethnicity are territorial identities (i.e., "religious, national, ethnic, territorial"²²). By orienting racial and ethnic identity with a specific region, nation, or territory, Castells's analysis fails to account for the *digital diasporas*—that is, the way online communities shape racial and ethnic identities constructed at the intersection of technologies and globalization.²³ More to the point, Castells's analysis fails to account for the Internet's pivotal role in the formation of global white identities.

Castells further undermines his analysis by asserting that race, in addition to being tied to regional or territorial boundaries, is also configured as a demographic characteristic. For instance, he writes that "there is one clearly predominant characteristic in the patriot movement: in a large majority, they are white, heterosexual males."²⁴

Castells dilutes the importance of racial identity, systemic racism, and the white racial frame when he categorizes race as merely one of many demographic characteristics rather than as a fundamental organizing principle of the movement. While he goes on to acknowledge that the angry-white-male theme "does connect with much older rejection of racial equality by white supremacist groups," his analysis concludes prematurely. Instead, he argues that:

"Rather, they are, fundamentally, a cultural and political movement, defender of the traditions of the country against cosmopolitan values. . . . Right-wing populism is hardly a novelty in the United States; indeed, it is a phenomenon that has played an important role in American politics throughout the country's history. Furthermore, angry popular reactions to economic distress have occurred in both America and Europe in different forms, from classic fascism and Nazism to the xenophobic and ultranationalist movements of recent years. One of the conditions that can help explain the fast spread of the militia, besides the Internet, is growing economic hardship and social inequality in America. Men's average income has deteriorated substantially in the past two decades, particularly during the 1980s."²⁵ (emphasis added)

Once again, Castells limits his examination of white supremacy by focusing on geography—in this instance the United States—and then tying these movements to other forms of "right-wing populism" formed in response to "economic distress." Such class-based analysis is drawn from the classic Marxist view in which race is "epiphenomenal."²⁶ While Castells, a neo-Marxist, is careful in other sections of the chapter to not overinterpret the

patriot movement with the language of class, he does not offer anything that might be considered a robust racial analysis. Indeed, as the passage immediately above illustrates, race is missing from his analysis. And the lack of something as critical as a thorough racial analysis substantially weakens Castells's overall argument, as becomes evident in the passage immediately following, when he asserts that economic inequality cultivated militias in the American West: "For instance, Montana, the seedbed of the new militia, is also one of the favorite destinations of the new billionaires, fond of acquiring thousands of acres of pristine land to build ranches from which to run their global networks. Ranchers in the area resented these moves."²⁷

Perhaps Ted Turner and other billionaires grabbing up land in Montana have fomented resentment among some ranchers in the area, but this geographically specific example hardly seems adequate to the task of understanding white supremacy and globalization as a whole in the Information Age. Castells concludes with the following: "The social movements I have analyzed in this chapter are very different. And yet, under different forms, reflecting their diverse social and cultural roots, they all challenge the current processes of globalization on behalf of their constructed identities, in some instances claiming to represent the interests of their country, or of humankind, as well!"²⁸ (emphasis added).

By drawing parallels between the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo cult and the white patriot movement, Castells asserts that reactive movements respond negatively to globalization, but he fails to explain the Internet's role in the identity formation of those individuals within these groups and demotes the Internet to a mechanism for providing "linkages."

Castells is to be commended for his farsighted sociological vision in recognizing the importance of the coinciding trends of globalization and the Internet for the transformation of social, economic, and cultural life. Yet, the analysis he puts forward in *Power of Identity*, Vol. 2, fails to adequately analyze white supremacy online in the global Information Age. First of all, he mistakenly takes the patriot movement as the ideal type for all other white supremacist organizations. He then uses the patriot movement as his index case study and thus erroneously locates white supremacy as a U.S.-only movement when, in fact, it is global. This focus on the patriot movement leads to a second error that emphasizes region rather than on race as the fundamental organizing category of the white supremacist movement. Thus, Castells misses the extent to which the Internet figures in the formation of a global white identity that transcends local and regional ties. And, finally, by adopting race as one among many demographic "characteristics" rather than a fundamental organizing frame, Castells misses the importance of racial

identity, systemic racism, and the white racial frame for understanding white supremacy online.

White supremacy online in the global information era facilitates the formation of a translocal white identity, which is in turn shaped through global information technologies rather than in opposition to them. Here it is useful to return to Benjamin Barber's conceptualization of *Jihad* vs. *McWorld*. Rather than Castells's oppositional notion of globalization versus identity, Barber (despite the somewhat misleading title of his book) articulates a slightly more nuanced, dialectical view in which Jihad is enacted via *McWorld*; that is, in Barber's view racial, ethnic, and religious identities are constructed and affirmed through various mechanisms of globalization.²⁹ This is relevant to this discussion of white supremacy online as whiteness is constructed and affirmed through global information flows and in racially dedicated online communities committed to "white pride worldwide" (such as Stormfront.org). This leads to my next point of examination: namely, whether this kind of online activism endangers democratic society.

A Threat to Democracy? White Supremacist Social Movement Activism and the Internet in a Global Context

When it comes to political mobilization, the Internet undisputedly amplifies many messages, values, and ideas. People interested in the same ideas can easily connect using the Internet, and, as such, the Internet amplifies those connections and strengthens networks of like-minded people.³⁰ The neologism *cyberactivism* refers to the proliferation of social movement organizations that avail themselves of Internet technologies to further their goals, which often include promoting a more inclusive, democratic society.³¹ Much of the scholarship about new social movements on the Internet is guided by a conviction in the liberatory potential of the Internet to transform society in more democratically³² inclusive ways and therefore tends to focus on progressive movements.³³ For example, a good deal has been written about the Zapatistas uprising,³⁴ antiwar activism,³⁵ and feminist organizing.³⁶ New digital media (like blogs and wikis) and mobile computing technology (like SMS) have made formerly obscure activist subcultures accessible to more people and have created new inroads to political participation for those interested.³⁷ For activists in extremist white supremacist organizations, like others in obscure subcultures, the Internet provides a relatively inexpensive venue for widespread communication of their ideas unimpeded by monitors or wardens.³⁸ Whether or not this wider availability of white supremacy

online politically mobilizes the movement remains to be seen. Jeffery Kaplan and his colleagues are among those who have taken up this question, and I believe their assessment comes closest to offering an answer:

Internet or no Internet, barring some cataclysmic development, WAR, [and similar organizations] . . . currently seeking to take advantage of the new technology are unlikely to become serious political contestants. Nevertheless, the Internet does furnish them with a link, a way of circumventing the gatekeepers of the other channels of mass communication.³⁹

A serious consequence of participatory media is its accessibility to specialist and nonspecialist users alike. And the very openness of the system invites anyone with a nefarious agenda to join in and author their own suspect content. It is key, here, that we parse the *actual* harm from the *potential*. I agree with Kaplan and his colleagues that the likelihood of a white supremacist organization emerging as a serious political contender is remote. However, the issue of communicating without gatekeepers is significant for the epistemology of white supremacy online and a topic to which I will return to in subsequent chapters. For the moment, let me continue to address why the larger political mobilization of white supremacists remains a distant, but nevertheless troubling, possibility.

In order to affect change, social movement organizations must mobilize resources, such as attracting financial backing, garnering media coverage, establishing organizational structures, and forming political alliances with those in power.⁴⁰ The Internet is an important new tool, because it increases the speed at which resources can be marshaled and then utilized to achieve the movement's goals.⁴¹ Adopting a resource-mobilization framework, Noriko Hara and Zilia Estrada compared Stormfront.org's use of the Web with that of MoveOn.org, a website with a liberal-to-progressive political agenda.⁴² They found that while there are some similarities between these two websites in terms of attempts at political mobilization, they are not equally effective: MoveOn.org is more popular and more effective than Stormfront.org for a variety of reasons. For example, Hara and Estrada point to the use of other media, such as print journalism and network news, to drive traffic to the websites and garner support for the respective movements. Both Stormfront.org and MoveOn.org have been featured in mainstream media reports, yet MoveOn.org has been much more aggressive in seeking out this media attention, and, Hara and Estrada argue, it is this strategy rather than content alone that has enabled MoveOn to sustain the broad-based political mobilization that has eluded Stormfront.⁴³ The broader appeal of MoveOn.org is borne out using additional data (figure 4.1).

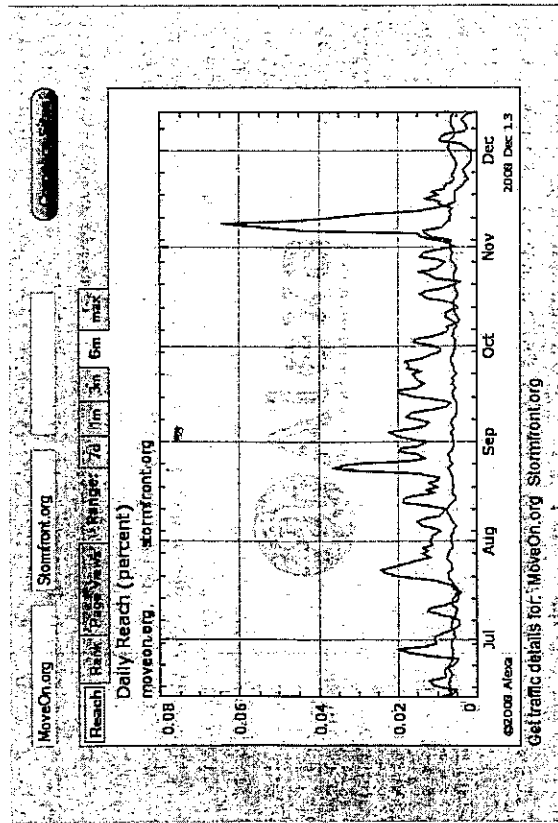


Figure 4.1. Comparative reach in millions for Stormfront and MoveOn.

Source: Alexa Web Service, www.alexa.com, 2008.

A comparison of the Web traffic to the two sites⁴⁴ confirms Hara and Estrada's analysis that MoveOn.org has broader appeal than Stormfront.org. As alarming as the Web traffic at Stormfront is, the fact that MoveOn remains consistently more popular than Stormfront should be heartening for those committed to democratic ideals. However, the fact that there are many people sufficiently interested in white supremacy to register at Stormfront should give those interested in social justice great pause to consider which civil rights goals have been achieved and which goals remain unfilled.

Online Recruitment: Distinguishing between a Registered User and a Member of a Social Movement

In a typical twenty-four-hour period there were 129,717 registered users online at Stormfront.⁴⁵ A number of writers have asserted that the Internet is a *potential* site for recruiting people to white supremacist groups; however, these claims are largely unsupported by empirical evidence. Instead, recruitment rhetoric plays on collective fears about the Internet and particularly fears about children's online activities. For example, in an article for the *Psychiatric News*, Lynne Lamberg writes that "hate websites aggressively pursue impressionable children and teenagers."⁴⁶ Compounding one apprehen-

sion with another, the author adds that "surveys show parents worry most about children's access to Internet sex sites and that many parents know little about hate websites."⁴⁷ Articles such as this suggest that recruitment into organized white supremacy functions like a virus, infecting vulnerable young people through brief, but deleterious, encounters. Given these concerns, what are we to make of the 129,000-plus people logged in at Stormfront? Are some members and others recruits? Or does some of this online involvement mean something else entirely for online social movements? My exploration of these questions and the issue of recruitment into white supremacist-movement organizations via the Internet builds on Abby Ferber's insights in her book *Home Grown Hate* that, taking into account the web, it may be time to rethink what constitutes a social movement.⁴⁸ In the following, I examine the empirical evidence of online white supremacist recruitment and draw distinction between varying types of participation in these groups, for which I suggest an analytic framework for different types of web participation.

Little data exist to support the claim that the Internet is an effective recruiting tool. The handful of research studies that do empirically question whether, and *precisely how*, white supremacists recruit young people online are inconclusive.⁴⁹ For instance, in their valuable study of the effects that hate sites' "persuasive storytelling" have on adolescents, Elissa Lee and Laura Leets found that adolescents who were infrequently exposed to explicit hate messages suffered only minimal effects.⁵⁰ By design their research neither followed adolescents repeatedly exposed to such messages nor examined how adolescents might be exposed in the first place. What the Lee and Leets study does show is that recruitment is a complex social process.

Traditional social movement organizations (formed before the Internet) consist of a formal organizational structure of *leaders* and *members* (think of labor unions, for example). New social movements are very differently organized, however, and are considered by sociologists to be less formal, consisting of loosely organized social networks of *supporters* rather than members, such as the Berkeley Free Speech Movement or the anti-Vietnam War movements. Membership in a social movement suggests formally recognized leaders, a somewhat rigid *member* status perhaps conferred through payment of membership dues, and a formal structure within the social movement or organization. *Supporters*, on the other hand, may never be recognized as official members, may never pay dues, and may be only marginally involved in the activities of the movement but think of themselves as part of the movement. Thus, the *social movement member* has been defined by sociologists to have a narrowly constructed social identity.

This distinction between *supporters* and *members* is significant because it relates to the peripheral involvement of many online social movements. For example, in a well-grounded quantitative study of both online and offline environmental activists in the Netherlands, researchers found that online actions were more popular among those who did not take part in any traditional street actions; researchers thus suggest that online activism may be an easy entry point for more peripheral participants.⁵¹ Whether or not peripheral online participants inevitably, or eventually, become supporters or more-fully involved activists, and what the mechanisms of that evolution might be, remain unclear. In terms of predicting offline collective action by those involved in white supremacy online, there is simply insufficient evidence to make such predictions at this time.

In order to better conceptualize the meaning of 129,000 registered users at Stormfront.org, I suggest the following schema for distinguishing types of Web participants (see table 4.1).⁵² First, in the broadest terms there are *active* and *passive participants*; the primary distinction I draw here is between those who create content in some form or another and those who do not but instead only lurk.⁵³ Online communities in general rather famously suffer from participation inequality, in which an estimated 90 percent of those in any given community do not actively add to the dialogue but instead lurk (or read without posting),⁵⁴ and this trend holds true at Stormfront as well. Within the broad category of *passive* participants, there is a whole range of possible ideological stances, and here I have designated three: *passive supportive lurkers*, *passive curiosity-seeking lurkers*, and *passive oppositional lurkers*. What unites these types is that they are all non-posting, read-only participants. They are not registered users at the site and therefore are not counted as members in the website statistics; they instead appear as guests or visitors. I make no claim that there are only three types of passive lurkers, and there are, no doubt, many other types. Certain participants might, for example, move from one category to another over time. Others might find themselves curious, only to strongly oppose some of the views expressed but

also ardently support others. These are merely suggestive categories rather than an exhaustive taxonomy. My point here is that none of these categories of web participants at Stormfront meets the sociological definition of a *social movement member*, and only one category (the *Passive Supportive Lurkers*) might be considered a supporter in the traditional sense.

Active users comprise the second broad category: these are participants who create content, from building the technological architecture (e.g., creating the discussion board) to maintaining the community (e.g., discussion-board moderator), to creating new threads (e.g., topics of discussions) or fora (e.g., plural, forum), to simply posting (e.g., an individual entry in response to another's theme). Within this broad category exists a range of possible ideological stances slightly less varied than among passive participants. It follows that the active participants are more ideologically similar than passive lurkers, as the people with the energy to devote to participating in the site are likely those most supportive of the site's ideological aims. I have designated four categories: *active innovators*, *creators*, *early adopters*, *active sustaining members*; *active supportive members*; and *active oppositional members*. As previously, I do not mean to pose these as an exhaustive taxonomy but rather a heuristic device for systematically considering Web participation. The first category, *active creators*, *innovators*, *early adopters*, includes people at Stormfront such as Don Black (the creator), David Duke (an early adopter), and Jamie Kelso (an innovator), the latter of whom is senior moderator and, according to at least one report,⁵⁵ is chiefly responsible for Stormfront's success as an online community. The second category, *active sustaining members*, refers to those who, in addition to posting, donate money to the site administrators. Some of these members also serve as moderators who guide the online discussion. The third category, *active supportive members*, includes those who are registered at the site, post regularly, and are generally supportive of Stormfront's ideological aims. And the fourth category, *active oppositional members*, includes the handful of members registered at Stormfront who do not identify as white and/or are not supportive of the site's goals. Of these four categories only the first two (shaded in table 4.1) meet the sociological criteria for social movement membership. In a typical twenty-four-hour period,⁵⁶ at Stormfront there were 129,717 registered users online, and of those 21,413 (approximately 16 percent) were designated active users by the site administrator (meaning they had posted at least once in the last three months) and there were 31,631 visitors (approximately 24 percent). Examining Stormfront's numbers indicates that there are actually more visitors (e.g., passive participants) than supportive, registered users (e.g., active participants). While I do not diminish the significance of over one hundred thousand people having registered

Table 4.1. Distinguishing between Types of Web Participants

Passive (guests or visitors)	Active (registered users)
supportive lurkers	innovators, creators, and early adopters
curiosity-seeking lurkers	sustaining members
oppositional lurkers	supportive members
	oppositional members

at Stormfront, I do believe we need to think more carefully about what we mean when we talk about "recruitment."

The term *recruitment* is perhaps the wrong one here, because it reverses the online dynamic. The underlying issue, and the much more troubling one, is not that white supremacists online may be recruiting but that people are seeking out Stormfront and the message of "white pride worldwide." This speaks to the existence of cultural, embedded, and internal white supremacy rather than to an extremist one, external to the core culture. This embedded white supremacy is part of a white racial frame.⁵⁷ This is further reaching than an individual bigotry and reflects four centuries of systemic racism permeating all of our major societal institutions. The U.S. Constitution, recall, was substantially crafted by white male slaveholders, such as Thomas Jefferson, whose *Notes on the State of Virginia* discuss enslaved African Americans in fiercely racist language.⁵⁸ At Stormfront, one of the regular banner ads at the site (figure 4.2) features Thomas Jefferson and a quotation, which reads "Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than these [the Negro] people are to be free. Nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government."⁵⁹

The fact that some fifty years after the civil rights movement there are more than one hundred thousand registered users at Stormfront suggests that the message of white supremacy, far from being an anachronism, still resonates. Here again, the white racial frame is useful for understanding white supremacist social movements online. As individuals adopt the white racial frame, the racial foundations of the United States, such as these statements by Jefferson, get ignored because to pay attention to such passages would open up the possibility of an analysis of systemic racism. Opportunities for such analysis are forestalled by the white racial frame.

Additionally, there is widespread ignorance about the history of racist oppression extant in four hundred years of U.S. history. The legacy of this racial oppression includes a number of racial disparities in U.S. society, such as significant differences in poverty, educational attainment, and levels of incarceration between blacks and whites. When people who adopt the white racial frame begin to note these racial disparities and have only that frame to draw on to interpret these disparities, they misunderstand racial and social inequality as the result of individual inadequacy rather than the predictable result of systemic racism. Whether one identifies as racially white or not (e.g., Machado), trying to understand the inequality through the white racial frame leads down a cul-de-sac of misinterpretations. Thus the Thomas Jefferson quotation resonates deeply within this broader white racial frame. Jef-



Figure 4.2. Banner featuring Thomas Jefferson.

Source: Stormfront.org.

erson's expressly racist belief that two races cannot coexist under the same government confirms beliefs about persistent racial disparity for many who have adopted the white racial frame. And, having the Jefferson quote as a recurring banner on Stormfront confirms for visitors that they have found a source for true yet otherwise hidden information about race. The Jefferson banner also sends a message that allegiance to the white race above all others is consistent with the core values of the founders of the United States, and in that they are correct. In fact, the discussion forum at Stormfront.org includes a thread called "Thoughts of Thomas Jefferson regarding blacks" and features explicit statements from participants about what they see as the wisdom of the founders. For example, a participant at Stormfront using the screen name *kojac67* writes on April 11, 2006, that he is reading a book about John Adams that includes "real letters from the founding fathers as source material." Based on that reading, this participant concludes the following:

The truth is that when our founding fathers spoke of all men being created equal . . . they had very certain ideas on what constituted "men." To them blacks were more animal in nature, and, therefore, not equal. How we have twisted the words of the constitution is criminal. The founding fathers created the foundation of a great society, with racial divisions. Who are we to say we know better? The more we pay attention to the men and the words of our nation's founders . . . the better off we will be. (*kojac67*)

Here *kojac67* uses moderate-sounding rhetoric and an appeal to the nation's founding ideals to make a point that runs counter to democratic ideals of equality for all. In this way *kojac67* shifts white supremacist rhetoric away from extremist expressions and places it within the more mundane, everyday expressions of white identity. In this passage, the two sit alongside each other. While some would argue we no longer live within an unequal system and that the values of the founders of the United States have been overthrown in favor of equality,⁶⁰ there is a large and growing body of evidence to suggest that the values of the slave-owning founders remain the core

cultural values of this country.⁶¹ In many ways, online participants in white supremacy are responding to core American values and extending them globally by logging onto "white pride worldwide."

The confluence of global linkages facilitated by Internet technologies means that through Stormfront true believers⁶² in white pride can connect with their translocal and white identity. Those who view the world through a white racial frame may find that participating at Stormfront resonates in significant ways with the way they (mis)understand the world, but this is a different dynamic than being recruited into a social movement organization.

In contrast to the frightening, but mostly unrealized, *potential* of recruitment into white supremacy via the online world, *actual* recruitment into organized racism is a complex social process that happens primarily offline in face-to-face interaction. In his seven-year ethnography of white supremacist groups in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States, Blazak found that in face-to-face interactions the groups used "red flags of strain to guide recruiting activity."⁶³ Among these "red flags" are four main areas of strain: racial/ethnic (shifts to multicultural curricula), gender (feminist-activist groups), heterosexuality (gay-pride events), and economic (factory layoffs).⁶⁴ Youths, most often although not exclusively, young white males, experience cultural alienation or anomie,⁶⁵ because shifts in any of these areas of strain make them susceptible to recruitment and targeting by white supremacist groups. As Blazak describes it, this is a years-long process that happens almost entirely offline, in face-to-face social gatherings. The transformation from "white boys" to "terrorist men" also makes clear the ways gender and sexuality, and specifically heteronormative masculinity, are central to white supremacist discourse and recruitment.⁶⁶ This kind of young-white-male alienation predates the advent of digital media; to locate the harm in this we need look no further than to the 168 people killed at the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995.

Conclusion

White supremacist social movements online are a complicated social phenomenon. First, rather than racial identity being constructed as oppositional to forces of globalization, white supremacy online in the global information era facilitates the formation of a translocal white identity. This translocal white identity, rather than being moored to extremist expressions, is often rooted in core American values and draws upon the rhetoric that self-consciously aligns itself with the "founding fathers," while simultaneously

seeking to transcend national boundaries and exert a global reach. And this translocal white identity, as illustrated in the previous chapter about the Machado case, is one that is malleable and may expand to include individuals not considered white in other social or historical contexts.

Second, the likelihood that a white supremacist organization could pose a serious political challenge in a contemporary democracy is remote, though worrisome. The more serious threat to the democratic ideal of equality has to do with the epistemological challenge to the cultural value of racial equality, rather than with political mobilization of an army of extremist white supremacists. The emergence of white supremacy online allows for the possibility of knowledge communities where those who oppose racial equality can gather and affirm for each other their shared ideas about white superiority. And, within these online communities, they can engage in a self-perpetuating cycle of validating those knowledge claims. By asserting ideas in opposition to racial equality, then connecting those ideas to widely respected figures, such as Thomas Jefferson who also opposed racial equality, white supremacists lending further legitimacy to the effort to erode the knowledge base for the idea of racial equality.

Third, white supremacist social movements online cannot be adequately understood by drawing on facile and vague notions of recruitment via the Internet that play on people's fears. Instead, what it means to participate online is multidimensional and may or may not overlap with social movement membership. In this way, participation online in white supremacist forums overlaps with participation in other online forums. Some may participate actively and be true believers or passionate resisters; others may only lurk and may be supportive, nonsupportive, or fall somewhere else on a rubric of possible types of online participation. In general, the relationship between the multifaceted dimensions of online participation and active social movement involvement are not widely understood, and this is no less true for white supremacist social movement organizations. While the *potential* exists for a multinational white-pride social movement that organizes across national and geographic boundaries, this potential has thus far been unrealized.

I agree with Castells that social movements in the Information Age are mobilized around cultural values. White supremacist social movements are organized around the cultural value of whiteness, white identity, and the notion that the white race is distinct from and superior to all others. This is a value that the founders of the United States also shared, and now white supremacists, largely based in the United States, are using the Internet to reach across national boundaries to unite with others who value white identity as a marker of cultural

superiority. Whether or not whiteness remains a core value in the American context or merely represents the values of an oppositional subculture depends on one's standpoint and epistemology for understanding racial equality—subjects I will address in greater detail in subsequent chapters. Next, I turn my analysis to the ways in which white supremacy is connected with gender and sexuality, because these are constitutive elements of cyber racism.

Notes

1. Castells 1997.
2. Tsesis 2002.
3. Castells says, "Our world, and our lives, are being shaped by the conflicting trends of globalization and identity" (1997, 1).
4. Barber 1996.
5. Castells 1997, 84–97; indexed references to white supremacists include pages 86 and 92.
6. According to Castells 1997, 84n18:

The main source of information on the American militia and the "Patriots" is the Southern Poverty Law Center, headquartered in Montgomery, Alabama. . . . As part of its program, it has established a Klanwatch/Militia Task Force, which provides accurate information and analysis to understand and counteract new and old, antigovernment and antipeople, extremist groups. For the most recent information, used in my analysis, see Klanwatch/Militia Task Force (1996, subsequently cited as KMTF). A well-documented account of the American militia in the 1990s is Stern (1996).

7. Kim 2005.
8. Castells 1997, 92–94.
9. Castells 1997, 85–86.
10. According to the SPLC,

In its annual count, the Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Project identified just 158 antigovernment patriot groups that were active in 2001. That is down 19 percent from the year before, when there were 194 such groups, and the fifth consecutive decline since the movement peaked with 858 groups in 1996. And even the current numbers seem to overstate patriot activity, which for several years has been anemic at best. (Southern Poverty Law Center 2002)

11. Southern Poverty Law Center 2008.
12. Of course, these numbers reflect slightly different approaches—while SPLC focuses on groups organized on the ground, in face-to-face interaction, J'Accuse is measuring websites that may only reflect an individual's effort, rather than an entire group. This is an issue which I will return to at another point in the book.
13. Castells 1997, 6.

14. Castells 1997, 87–91.
15. Castells 1997, 91.
16. Turkle 1997.
17. Slater 2002, 533–46.
18. See, for example, Byrne 2007, 15–38. See also the edited collection containing Byrne's article by Everett (2008).
19. Back 2002, 365–77.
20. Perera 2006.
21. Alexander 2002.
22. Castells 1997, 2.
23. The study of digital diasporas is a large and growing field. One of the best volumes in this area is Gajjala's: *Cyber selves: Feminist ethnographies of South Asian women*. 2004. See also Bernal (2006).
24. Castells 1997, 94.
25. Castells 1997, 95–96.
26. For a recent discussion of this long-running sociological debate about whether race is an "essential social fact" or an "epiphenomenal" artifact of class oppression, see Bonilla-Silva (1999). For those interested in additional discussions on this topic, see Cox 1948.
27. Castells 1997, 96–97.
28. Castells 1997, 108–109.
29. Barber 1996, chapters 10 and 11. Barber comes close to using the white supremacist movement as an example of an American-based jihad (see, for example, pages 9 and 165), but this is not explicit in his text. In personal e-mail communication he shared with me, Barber agreed that the white supremacist movement could be considered an example of his conceptualization of jihad.
30. Earl and Schussman 2003, 155–87.
31. McCaughey and Ayers 2003.
32. Jenkins and Thorburn 2003.
33. Bennett 2003.
34. Martinez-Torres 2001.
35. Kahn and Kellner 2004.
36. Sutton and Pollock 2000. See also Everett (2004).
37. Agre 2002c. See also Campbell 2006. And see Kahn and Douglas 2003, 299–314.
38. Brian Levin 2002. See also Thiesmeyer 1999.
39. Kaplan, Weinberg, and Oleson 2003, 155.
40. McCarthy and Zald 1977.
41. Kahn and Kellner 2004.
42. Hara and Estrada 2003.
43. Hara and Estrada 2003.
44. Using Alexa, a Web-trafficking service, found at alexa.com.
45. Numbers posted at Stormfront on April 11, 2008. These are included here as an illustrative example and are not intended to be a representative sample.

46. Lamberg 2001.
47. Lamberg 2001.
48. Ferber 2003b, 7.
49. Ray and Marsh 2001.
50. Lee and Leets 2002.

51. Brunsting and Postmes 2002. This is the kind of study that someone needs to undertake concerning the white supremacist movement but one I leave to future researchers, as it is beyond the scope of the current project. Statzel (2006), for example, argues that recruitment does happen online.

52. This is based on my ethnographic observations at Stormfront.org, where I would classify my own participation there as a *passive oppositional lurker*. While this is based on my observations at Stormfront in particular, it also reflects my *active-support participation* at other websites. Such a schema raises methodological questions about how to study lurking behavior, to which I have no answer at the present time.

53. The term means to *read without posting or commenting*. In online jargon, there are various forms of this word: One who lurks is a *lurker*. One who decides to stop lurking and post may begin that initial post with "Delurking here to say. . . ." Lurking is part of the accepted atmosphere online.

54. See Jakob Nielsen's research on this (2006). Other research confirms this, such as Nonnecke and Preece (2000).

55. Southern Poverty Law Center 2008.

56. Numbers posted at Stormfront on April 11, 2008. These are included here as an illustrative example and are not intended to be a representative sample.

57. Feagin 2006b.

58. Thomas Jefferson 1787. Jefferson writes that enslaved black Americans smell bad, are natural slaves, are less intelligent, are uglier in skin color, are lazy, are oversexed, lack a sophisticated appreciation for serious music, are incapable of advanced learning, and can never be well-integrated into white America. It is for precisely this type of racist language that the white supremacists venerate him.

59. Thomas Jefferson 1821.

60. D'Souza 1995. See also Sowell 1984.

61. See, for example, the bibliography at racismreview.com/blog/bibliographies/.

62. Hoffer 1951.

63. Blazak 2001.

64. Blazak 2001.

65. *Anomie* is a term coined by sociologist Emile Durkheim and refers to a sense of normlessness in which one no longer knows what the rules, or *norms*, for acceptable behavior are. In extreme cases, Durkheim theorized, this condition can lead to anomic suicide.

66. Blazak 2001.