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Holocaust museum shooting signal of increasing violence from threatened whites, some say

JESSE WASHINGTON | AP National Writer
7:34 PM EDT, June 11, 2009

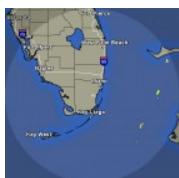
Crazies. Lone nut jobs. Isolated loonies. Those are frequent descriptions of people like [James von Brunn](#), the 88-year-old white supremacist accused of opening fire at the [U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) and killing a black guard.

Others believe he represents something more dangerous: a growing racist movement motivated by a number of converging factors, including the first black president.

The potential for an increase in violence from whites who feel they are slipping from power is high, people from across the ideological spectrum say.

"I believe we are headed for an unprecedented level of conflict and racial turmoil," said Carol Swain, author of the 2002 book "The New White Nationalism in America" and a professor of political science and law at Vanderbilt University.

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Swain cited anger over immigration, growing minority populations, racial preferences, high minority crime rates, the economy and multiculturalism as forces driving white people toward nationalism.

"It seems like the tables have turned for some white people, and they have no recourse except desperation," Swain said.

An April intelligence assessment by the [Department of Homeland Security](#) said that right-wing extremists could use the troubled economy and [the election of President Barack Obama](#) to recruit members.

Former [FBI](#) agent Danny Coulson, who headed the terrorism investigation of 1995's [Oklahoma City](#) bombing and now runs a security firm, said federal agents have increased their monitoring of white supremacist groups since

Obama's election, and have noticed increased chatter and membership.

"These [neo-Nazi](#) groups have been laying in the weeds for a long time," he said. "Then you have a president who comes in who's an African-American and they hate that. And he's tough on guns, and they really hate that."

The movement has broadened beyond neo-Nazis. Advocacy groups for blacks and Hispanics unwittingly provided a blueprint for others to organize and defend the interests of white people.

Louis R. Andrews is chairman of the National Policy Institute, a white advocacy group. He does not advocate violence, but expects to see increased racial animosity that will eventually manifest itself in more physical attacks.

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"There's no such thing as post-racial," Andrews said, when asked about the claim that Obama's election moved American race relations to a better place. "There's conflict, conflict, and continued conflict."

Andrews said he voted for Obama because "I want to see the [Republican Party](#) destroyed, so it can be reborn as a party representing the interests of white people, and not entrenched corporate elites."

Swain argues that many people with "white nationalist" views don't fit the extremist stereotype — they are professors, scientists, elected officials.

"What drives a person to the point where they hate someone?" she asked.

Historically, the answer has been economic trouble, combined with several more factors, scholars say.

"The hate is always there. Social factors have to exacerbate it or bring it out," said Jacques Berlinerblau, associate professor of Jewish civilization at [Georgetown](#) University.

"It's almost as if there is some sort of silent signal, a signal that it's OK, this is necessary, it must be done," he said.

Some people can be "pushed over the edge" by stresses such as the loss of a job or another traumatic event, said psychologist David Eigen.

"Men aren't supposed to feel powerless or helpless," Eigen said. "When a man starts to feel that, he feels angry and ashamed inside, and he can project it outward. For hundreds of years, Jews have been a convenient target. So let's blame the Jews."

"There's something festering in society today," he said. "A boil has been broken. We want to put a Band-Aid on it, but it's too late."

In Pittsburgh, Richard Poplawski was recently charged with gunning down three officers after his mother called the police on him. Poplawski had been upset over losing his job and afraid Obama would ban guns, his friends said.

Poplawski had posted numerous racist messages on an extremist Web site in the months before the attack, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

"I've been a longtime lurker on Stormfront," said one post on an account identified as his, "and I see myself probably ramping up the activism in the near future."

AP National Writer Debroah Hastings and AP Writer Eileen Sullivan contributed to this report.

(This version CORRECTS Corrects capitalization of von Brunn and that he is accused of the killing in lead; UPDATES with additional quotes and information on Pittsburgh police killings.)

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