An American Fascist Faith

Robert Evans

2019

At 9:50 AM, on October 27, 2018, Robert Bowers entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He carried a Colt AR-15, three Glock handguns chambered in 357 sig, body armor, and a substantial amount of ammunition. Bowers proceeded to open fire during a Shabbat morning service. He killed eleven of the 75 people worshipping at the synagogue that morning. In the hours and days that followed, journalists and researchers in the countering violent extremism community began to dig into Mr. Bowers's social media presence and internet footprint. If you read or listened to any coverage about this, it probably focused on his use of the social media website Gab, which is essentially Twitter for Nazis. Gab earned a lot of attention because it's where Bowers chose to announce his attack and his belief that a Jewish conspiracy was responsible for...

[Gab earned most of the attention in the media coverage in the wake of the attack, mainly seen as the place that radicalized him, and was the place where he announced the start of his attack.]

Robert Bowers said other things on the site, stranger things. In various posts, he claimed that people of Anglo-European descent were the "chosen people", with Jews as their ancient enemy. He warned his fellow racists of a coming false flag attack that would be "one of the final desperate attempts by the Jewish international oligarchy to maintain power in the face of collapse of public trust in the media, which he believed they controlled. On the profile page for his account, Bowers included a quote: "Jews are the children of Satan." A little more than two weeks before his rampage, he reposted a link to the Wikipedia page for Christian Identity and wrote, "If the Jews hate it, then it must be truth."

Now, if you haven't heard much about Christian Identity, don't worry, neither had I before Bowers went on his rampage. Christian Identity theology is not widely known in modern America. In fact, the vast majority of people who have been influenced by it have probably never actually heard the term. Bowers is sort of a rare figure in that he was aware of it.

It's been around for so long, and embedded itself so deeply in the consciousness of the far right, that it's woven itself into the DNA of American fascism. Christian Identity, however, did not begin in America. The origin of this philosophy traces back to Britain, in 1791 in a crazy person and retired Navy man named Richard Brothers started having visions. Rather than writing these visions off as a result of bad canned sardines or ergot poisoned bread, he decided these visions were God telling him that he had to lead the Jews back to Palestine.

Now, he also decided that he was a descendent of the Biblical King David for reasons that are slightly less clear. Revelation followed revelation, as they often do for people with this sort of thing going on in their brain and by the time Richard Brothers was done, he concluded that the majority of Jewish people was actually hidden in Britain. This "hidden Israel" became one of the central tenents of British Israelism. All of the Jews are secretly British. Now, Brothers was eventually declared insane by the State, which is probably fair. He was stuck in an institution, which was probably unfair from to 1795 1806. But in the four years before he got locked up, he earned himself some followers. And although his flock didn't stick together until he got out of the asylum, some of his ideas persisted for years amongst the fringes of British society.

In 1840, a writer named John Wilson wrote "Lectures on Our Israelitish Origin" and began lecturing across England and Ireland about the theory that the real Jews were basically everyone but actual Jewish people. According to the book, "Religion and the Right" by Michael Barcun, "The Lectures depended less on the interpretation of Biblical prophecy than on Wilson's attempt to demonstrate empirically that the Lost Tribes had in fact migrated from the Near East to Europe. Like many writers after him, one of his favorite techniques was to look for words in different languages that sounded the same, assuming, usually erroneously, that if the word sounds were similar, then the languages and their speakers had to be connected." Since similar sounds often crop up in otherwise unrelated languages, they allowed Wilson to claim and to believe that he had proved that "many of our most common English words and names of familiar objects are almost pure Hebrew."

British Israelism continued to evolve over the course of the 1800s. A fellow named Hine added the assertion that Germans were really Assyrians because apparently those people had become lost too and wound up in Germany somehow. Hine claimed that the United States was also full of Israelites. Now at that this point actual Jewish people were not seen as bad guys. They were considered part of a greater community called All Israel, which was made up of the

British Israelism continued to evolve over the course of the 1800s. A fellow named Hine added the assertion that Germans were really Assyrians because apparently those people had become lost too and wound up in Germany somehow. Hine claimed that the United States was also full of Israelites. Now at that this point actual Jewish people were not seen as bad guys. They were considered part of a greater community called All Israel, which was made up of the House of Israel, which was Europe, and the House of Judah, which is actual Jewish people. Now, there was no evidence for any of this at any point in time. This was all just the result of a guy's mental illness. This was a sick man who had a dream about leading the Jews back to Palestine and read too much into that.

Now, a fellow named Joseph Wild was the very first American British Israelite. Or, if he wasn't the first, he was the first guy who tried to popularize it here, and the first one we have any records of. Wild was a pastor at the Union Congregational Church in Brooklyn. At this point, the theory, or whatever you would call it, was fundamentally pretty harmless. But as it drifted through the United States, from the frigid to the East, to the also frigid Northwest, something funny happened. British Israelism turned racist as fuck.

Now, the man most responsible for this turn was an Oregonian named Reuben H. Sawyer. In the late 19-teens, he started writing for a monthly magazine called "The Watchmen of Israel", which was dedicated to the idea that "The English speaking peoples of today are the lineal descendents of the Lost 10 Tribes of Israel and must fulfill in these Latter days the responsibilities to creed for them through the Patriarchs and Prophets." Rueben was the pastor of the Eastside

Christian Church in Portland, Oregon. And over the years, he built up a sizable British Israel group in the city of roses. In fact, he was so successful at this that he left his job as a pastor in 1921 to lecture and write about British Israelism full time. Well, not quite full time. He did have one other side gig—as a member of the Oregon Ku Klux Klan. Rueben was big into the Klan for several years.

And in fact, he helped sell his fellow Portlanders on it, addressing 6,000 of them on December 22, 1921 at the Municipal Auditorium. He told them that the KKK sought "a cleansed and purified Americanism where law abiding citizens will be respected and their rights defended irrespective of race, religion, and color, so long as they make an honest effort to be Americans, and Americans only." And at this point, this wasn't totally bullshit. The 20s Klan was more a pyramid scheme than a terrorist organization. It was racist, but not more racist than mainstream American society when it came to skin color. They were, however, more racist than mainstream Americans about certain things. They hated the Catholic, the foreign-born, Asians, and of course, Jews.

This presented an issue for Reuben Sawyer, because British Israelism loved the Jews, or at least it traditionally did. That was part of the whole idea, this kind of veneration of Judaism, that all these British people wanted to be Jews as well. So, Reuben started out kind of on the side of Jewish people, liking them, but over time, exposure to other anti-Semites in the KKK, Reuben radicalized. In his first speech about the Klan, he brought up "the Jewish question", but made a point of noting that some Jews were of ancient and honorable faith, while only a few were objectionable.

According to the book, "Religion and the Right," "by 1922, however, this innuendo had been replaced by full-blown anti-Semitism that was as crude as it was open. "Jews are either Bolshevists undermining our government or are Shilocks (sp?) in finance or commerce who gained commanded control of Christians as borrowers or as employees. It is repugnant to a true American to be bossed by a Sheeney, and in and in some parts of America, the kikes are so thick that a white man can hardly find room to walk on the sidewalk. And where they are so thick, it is Bolshevism there talking. Bolshevism and revolution. The transformation is so startling that one wonders at first if it is the same person speaking."

He started out making a distinction between good Jews and bad Jews, and then eventually just decided that all Jews were terrible. So Reuben became a major force for pushing his fellow American British Israelites toward anti-Semitism. In the early and mid-1920s, the Dearborn Independent, the newspaper funded by Henry Ford, began pushing even more extreme anti-Semitic ideas on the wider American public. Its editor, William Cameron, was a British Israelite.

Thanks to people like Reuben and Cameron, the category of "good Jews" shrank every year, and the dangers of the "bad ones" expanded to something resembling the all-encompassing anti-Semitic conspiracy theory that set Robert Bowers off on his rampage.

From the late 1920s to the 1930s, Howard Rand, a British Israelite from New England became a thought leader in the movement. His goal was to build it into a political organization. In 1933, he formed the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America, that claimed that actual Jewish people were not in fact descended from Judah. By the late 1930s, Rand's ideas had evolved to the point where he began to claim that Jewish people were literally the children of the Devil.

If you're curious how this went down, here's an explanation from the website of a modern Christian Identity group: "Most that call themselves Jews today are in fact the race of Lucifer through his son Cain. Cain was inherently evil from the beginning because he was of Lucifer's seed. Eve was beguiled by Lucifer and did in the carnal sense lay with and begot Cain. It was a

pear on the ground, not an apple on the tree. Eve was deceived by Lucifer and was led to believe that she was laying down with Yahweh God."

So, Howard Rand was the very first person to use the term "Christian Identity". And his thinking had a big impact on a fellow named William Dudley Pelley, who was of course the founder of the American Fascist Silver Shirts movement, who we also talked about on an episode of "Behind the Bastards."

(Intersectional fascism)

By the 1940s, the core of the Christian Identity belief system was more or less formed. It includes three specific ideas: Number one, Aryans are descendants of the Biblical tribes of Israel. Number two, actual Jews are the result of the Devil having sex with Even in the Garden of Eden. And number three, the apocalypse is nigh, and when it comes, Aryans will have to go toe-to-toe with the worldwide Jewish conspiracy in order to save the planet. When he walked into the Tree of Life Synagogue that cold October morning, Robert Bowers saw himself as a soldier taking place in this great apocalyptic battle against the Jews.

Now, Hart and his fellow Christian Identity believers had to be careful during World War II, since their belief system was essentially just Nazism without the swastika. But that didn't stop them from railing against FDR's appointment of the first Jewish Supreme Court Justice, Felix Frankfurter. It also didn't stop them from opposing the admission of Jewish refugees into the United States after 1938. Hart's specific beliefs were always fringe, but they bled over into the mainstream American rightwing due to the Right's obsessive fear of socialism.

I'd like to quote next from a great Tablet magazine article "The Bloody History of America's Christian Identity Movement", "The broader concern of Hart and his allies and the "respectable" wing of anti-Semitism, liberal journalist Casey McWilliams called them the "armchair anti-Semites of the Right" was that liberal and socialist Jews were ultimately behind the hated New Deal and the corresponding transformations in American society. These armchair anti-Semites believed that admitting Holocaust survivors into the United States after World War II would be the first step in dismantling the Immigration Act of 1924 to Preserve the racial character of America. American Jews, many of whom supported easing immigration restrictions broadly, were the boogeymen of the nativist Right, and since Right wing nativists also often subscribed to Judeo Bolshevik conspiracy theories, opposing immigration was a way to strike a blow against communism as well as Judaism to preserve the white Christian character of the United States.

From the beginning, Christian Identity connected more with the dark and violent chunks of the far Right than mainstream conservatism. This started with the Silver Shirts and the KKK, and continued into 1964 when this peculiarly American fascist cult met a little guy named George Lincoln Rockwell.

Rockwell was the founder of the American Nazi Party, not much more than a decade after World War II ended. He was the first post-war Holocaust denier, he was the first fascist to make money by lecturing in American colleges and provoking fights with anti-fascists, he invented the term "white power" and was in general basically the Johnny Appleseed of Nazism in America.

Rockwell was an original thinker, a pioneer of the tactics that fashy folks still use today to get media coverage and play the victim. But he came into the game early enough that he never quite figured out how to "hide his power level", which is a term modern fascists use for hiding their beliefs as garden-valley conservatism. Rockwell was initially somewhat anti-Christian, because, you know, Jesus was Jewish, which was something that didn't play well with 1960s American

conservatives. But in 1964, Rockwell met with Wesley Swift, leader of the Christian Identity Church. Rockwell instantly recognized what an opportunity Christian Identity represented for Nazis in America. As it stood at that point in the party's history, American Nazism was basically just a cheap rip-off of German fascisms. That was good for triggering Jewish war veterans and civil-rights activists, but it didn't click with regular Americans in a way that would allow it to spread. American fascism, Rockwell thought, needed a spiritual core, something esoteric, a little occult, and thoroughly American.

Wherever it arises in the world, fascism takes pieces of different spiritual traditions and hammers them together around its central authoritarian framework. This is part of what allows it to spread in different cultures. Umberto Eco identified this trait as "syncretism". "The Nazi gnosis was nourished by traditionalist, syncretistic, occult elements. The most influential theoretical source of the theories of the new Italian right, Julius Evola, merged the Holy Grail with The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, alchemy with the Holy Roman and Germanic Empire. The very fact that the Italian right, in order to show its open-mindedness, recently broadened its syllabus to include works by De Maistre, Guenon, and Gramsci, is a blatant proof of syncretism. If you browse in the shelves that, in American bookstores, are labeled as New Age, you can find there even Saint Augustine who, as far as I know, was not a fascist. But combining Saint Augustine and Stonehenge — that is a symptom of Ur-Fascism."

Obviously, Eco didn't write his essay until decades after Rockwell's death, but GLR was such a natural fascist and such an instinctive Fuhrer type that he instantly seemed to know that grafting Christian Identity onto American Nazism was going to be critical if it was going to spread. So he appointed Ralph Forbes, head of the California branch of his Nazi party, to be the party Christian Identity Minister. "For Race and Nation", my favorite Rockwell biography, says this about Forbes: "His strident racial views, his flair for the dramatic, and his loyalty to Rockwell made Forbes the perfect man for the job. California was an ideal location, there were numerous Identity ministries successfully operating there. Forbes would be the first Nazi officer to preside over a flock. By fusing Christian Identity and National Socialism, Rockwell hoped to maximize the synergies of the groups and broaden the potential membership for each group. Nazis could find religious justification and legitimization in the Church, Identity members could find political expression for their theology in the ANP. A riot could now be expressed as religion under the guise of the Identity Church. The push was on within the party to legitimize the cause, to de-emphasize Nazism and push racial issues to the forefront. Racial issues could be easily exploited, because the preyed upon nativist fears of the white population."

Thankfully for all of us, Rockwell was assassinated by one of his own men on August 25, 1967...what's important is that Rockwell's marriage with American Nazism with Christian Identity took. It spread throughout the fascist right. Richard Butler, the reverend who founded the Aryans Nations' compound in Idaho, was a Christian Identity preacher. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Aryan Nations acted as one of the lynchpins of American fascism. a place where every kind of violent, right wing extremist would gather and meet and make connections with each other. From the Aryan Nations, Christian Identity beliefs were able to make inroads, not just among Klansmen and neo-Nazis, but into the American militia movement.

Tanya Tolfer Sharp, a researcher with the Journal of Black Studies, was one of the first academics to document the spread of Christian Identity outside of explicit fascists and into the mercurial world of American "patriots". She documented evidence of Christian Identity pamphlets and underground literature spreading in small local gun and knife shows throughout the country

from 1995 to 1999. It had, of course been prominent in that world before 1995. Christian Identity's focus on the inevitable apocalyptic battle against Aryans and satanic Jews meshed well with the apocalyptic fetishism of the survivalist and militia communities.

[It's part of why it's so naturally American…it gives them a reason]

As Tanya Sharp wrote, "Both groups were tied together by their belief that 'reestablishment of white sovereignty depends on the use of organized aggression against the enemies of true Christians. All non-whites and all non-white Protestants. The first two letters of racial holy war make up the battle cry of RAHOWA , often used in Christian Identity speeches and publications."

Christian Identity literature regularly focused on preparing for this apocalyptic battle, which allowed them subtly recruit preppers by focusing on not-explicitly ideological tasks, like acquiring dried food and weaponry, or building anti-personnel traps in order to protect woodland compounds. Y2K was a goldmine for Christian Identity. Fear of the year 2000 brought thousands of new Americans into the world of survivalist magazines, conventions, and online message boards. The worlds of the militia movement and the survivalist communities are of course closely tied into the world of conspiracy theorists. In the late 1990s, guys like Alex Jones weren't preaching overt anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. You would never catch them claiming that Jews were the spawn of Satan, for example. But Jones and his ilk were major proponents of the New World Order, the king of conspiracy theories throughout the 90s and early 2000s.

The NWO took different forms in the mouths of different conspiracy theorists. The most mainstream and least racist version of the theory was that a secret world government of shadowy globalists was slowly taking over the federal government and the governments of the world, with the aim of enforcing total Orwellian control over the populace and killing the majority of the world's population, particularly the Christians. The NWO conspiracy was again, not inherently anti-Semitic or racist, but in practice, most expressions of the theory wound up focusing on beliefs that a Jewish-led cabal of Blacks, homosexuals, Hispanics, immigrants, and liberals was trying to wipe out all straight, white, Christian Americans. Christian Identity believers introduced the term "Zionist Occupied Government", or ZOG, into the lexicon of American fringe politics. It took off like wildfire, entering the vocabularies of countless Americans on the far right who would never have considered calling themselves a Nazi.

Christian Identity beliefs happen to mesh perfectly with every other extremist belief in the United States. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, tax protesting became more common. Christian Identity fit within that too, arguing that paying taxes was really just paying for the demonic Jews to carry out their white genocide aims even faster. In 1997, William Luther Pierce, a former devotee of Rockwell, and head of a Nazi group called the National Alliance, wrote this in a newsletter, "The truth of the matter is that the new world order people ultimately aim to create a new world population of serfs for their global plantation, a homogenous population of coffee-colored serfs, a population of docile, predictable, and interchangeable serfs, and they definitely don't want any large reservoir of white people anywhere who might rebel."

If you take the word "white" out of that sentiment, it almost word-for-word matches with any one of a thousand rants Alex Jones has gone on throughout the years. Under Rockwell, the American Nazi Party never numbered more than a few dozen real, committed members, and its ideas never gained any kind of mainstream penetration. By the late 1990s, American fascists were no less hateful or violent than they'd ever been, but their rhetoric had evolved to fit with the deep conspiratorial undercurrents sweeping through American society. Rockwell had shotgunned out

hardcore racism, and as a result he'd only been able to recruit a small number of the worst people in America.

New American fascism blended with Christian Identity was capable of hiding out in more moderate spaces, and luring in new believers without waving a swastika in their faces. Perhaps the most potent weapon Christian Identity added to the arsenal of American fascism was the idea of white genocide. If you spent much time studying neo-Nazis, you're aware of the significance of the number 14. It stands for the 14 words "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children." This is the invention of David Lane, a neo-Nazi bank robber and, for decades, a Christian Identity believer. While Lane has moved on from Christian identity to a weird sort of bastardized Norse mythology rip-off, he and other Christian Identity believers in the 80s and 90s were largely responsible for seeding the fear of white genocide into American fascism. From Tanya Sharp's article, "The Identity literature is filled with negative images full of white women caring for mixed-race babies. Race mixing in and of itself is a cause for an organized and radical plan to separate the races." The National Vanguard magazine, a leading pro-neo-Nazi publication suggests that the cult of miscegenation, which according to them has proliferated over the past 30 years, has placed the white race on the precipice of biological extinction. Furthermore, they argue that only radical action will end the morality of death.

Now, the urge to protect white babies and ensure the future of the white race, inspired a little guy named Eric Rudolph to bomb an Alabaman abortion clinic in 1996. Rudolph was a Christian Identity believer, and his beliefs led him to bomb Atlanta's Olympic Park the same year, along with a gay nightclub. Rudolph spent more than a year hiding in the woods, eluding federal agents. He killed two and injured more than 120 people over his almost two year long bombing spree. And as we talked in the introduction to this, he also inspired that British bomber who built a series of nail bombs that killed three people and injured dozens more which also inspired the guy who killed Joe Cox.

Now, Eric Rudolph was not the last person moved to violence by this picture of a declining white race. Everyone listening to this will remember of course the 2019 Christchurch massacre, in which a fascist extremist murdered 51 Muslim worshipers at a New Zealand mosque. That shooter did not identify as a Nazi, and his manifesto lacked the expected anti-Semitic rambling, but he ranted at length about the threat of white genocide and what he called The Great Replacement. In between those two terrorists are dozens and dozens of other attacks, with bits of Christian Identity DNA coded into them. John Earnest, the synagogue shooter did not identify himself as a follower of Christian Identity theology, but according to Tablet magazine, "The manifesto left behind by the shooter reads like a hybrid of classical Christian anti-Semitism and contemporary white nationalism. He alternated within paragraphs, sometimes within sentences, from charging the Jews with the responsibility for the death of Jesus and the early Christian saints to declaring that Jews fund politicians and organizations who use mass immigration to displace the European race. The document is riddled with contradictions, and is inarticulate even by white nationalist manifesto standards as it moves between citing the gospels and the killer's love of Freidrich Chopin, with explosive hatred toward Jews. But what it does evince clearly is a grounding of a form of anti-Semitism that's equally in debt to older Christian traditions and more modern secular variants centered on race and soil.

Christian Identity's influence in the fascist right is so deep and so well woven that attacks are now carried out by terrorists who have been inspired by its tenants without ever learning the words "Christian Identity." You'll be hearing about it regularly throughout the rest of this audio

book, and I'll be sure to point out wherever groups or individuals we discuss are Christian Identity believers, but it almost isn't necessary. Christian Identity is now just a part of the furniture of American fascism, no matter whether or not it's referenced directly, it shows up everywhere.

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The War on Everyone — Chapter Two. `http://www.thewaroneveryone.com/`