

The Introduction and Development of National Socialism in the United States: 1924-1967

by

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Honors Thesis

Appalachian State University

Submitted to

The Honors College

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

May, 2023

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Abstract

This is a research paper on the history of the early National Socialist movement in the United States, from the first German Nazis to immigrate to America in the 1920s up to the assassination of the American Nazi Party's founder in 1967. The paper argues that despite the much greater size of the pre-war American Nazi organizations, the post-war neo-Nazi groups had a far more significant role in influencing the modern American white supremacist movement. Two periods of Nazi activity in America are examined; the pre-war period, from 1924 to 1942, and the post-war period, from 1945-1967. Several Nazi and neo-Nazi organizations founded within the United States are discussed, with particular attention being given to the pre-war German-American Bund and the post-war American Nazi Party. The Bund represents the numerical high-water mark of Nazism in the United States. No other National Socialist organization in American history has come close to the size that the Bund reached at its greatest extent in the late 1930s. However, following the Bund's quick dissolution in the early 1940s, its legacy was quickly forgotten. Instead, the most influential organization in the history of American National Socialism is the American Nazi Party, founded by George Lincoln Rockwell. Rockwell never led more than a few hundred men, but he is widely regarded as the founder of American Nazism and is one of the most important figures in the history of the global neo-Nazi movement. This paper contrasts the Bund and the American Nazi Party using many secondary and primary sources, including numerous newspaper articles and Rockwell's own writings, and demonstrates that the American Nazi party's enduring legacy is due to Rockwell's alterations of National Socialism, which allowed the ideology to draw an enduring American following which the Bund had failed to attract.

Introduction

On February 20, 1939, Nazis filled one of the most famous venues in the United States. Over twenty thousand members of the German-American Bund filled Madison Square Garden in the heart of Manhattan for an event that was, at least on the surface, a celebration of George Washington's birthday. The leaders of the Bund delivered speeches attacking President Roosevelt, Communism and Socialism, racial integration, and above all else, America's Jews. These remarks were delivered before an enthusiastic audience that filled every seat in the house. Outside of the Garden, police held back a crowd of tens of thousands of protesters who had shown up to oppose the rally. In the days afterwards, stories of the event covered the front pages of newspapers across the country. The Bund, already a nationwide organization with chapters in dozens of cities, was the new face of Fascism in America. Three years later it was all gone. The rally, which seemed like the Bund's debut on the national stage, was in fact a last gasp. The group, which boasted thousands of members and possessed considerable assets in 1939, had disintegrated by 1943. Though the Bund has not been forgotten by America's neo-Nazis, its legacy insignificant, far smaller than might be expected for the largest Nazi group in American history.

On August 25, 1967, George Lincoln Rockwell, the founder of the American Nazi party, was assassinated. He was shot in the head in the parking lot of a laundromat, across the street from the house he and his followers had converted into their party headquarters. Rockwell's assassin was not a radical anti-Nazi, but a former supporter of Rockwell, who killed him over a grudge. At the time of his death Rockwell commanded the loyalty of less than 100 followers. While a few were scattered in party "chapters" in Los Angeles and

Illinois, the majority lived with Rockwell in the party headquarters, where members dined on boiled potatoes and struggled to pay the electricity bill with the organization's miniscule income. When Rockwell died, the president of the American Jewish Congress told the *New York Times* that America's most famous Nazi had been "a nuisance, rather than a menace." Rockwell and his party never approached the size or scale of the Bund, but they achieved a different sort of success. The party that Rockwell founded in 1959 still operates today. The most active neo-Nazi groups operating in the country today were founded by Rockwell's followers after his demise. Rockwell's influence also spread outside the United States to influence neo-Nazi movements around the world. Despite his life of failure and unglamorous death, Rockwell is remembered as one of the most important figures in the history of National Socialism after World War Two.¹

It is not a coincidence that America's modern neo-Nazi movement is descended from Rockwell's group and not the much larger, better-established Bund. The difference between the German-American Bund and the American Nazi Party that allowed the latter to endure where the former failed was Rockwell's willingness to adapt National Socialism. While the Bund went to great efforts to seem like a patriotic American organization, it never abandoned its commitment to National Socialism as fundamentally being an ideology of German nationalism. Unlike the Bund, Rockwell and the postwar neo-Nazi movement developed an ideology of Nazism that was not attached to a sense of German identity. Americanized Nazism allowed the ANP and its successors to find an enduring position in America's far-

¹ Fred P. Graham, "Nazi Calls Slaying Defeat for Whites," *The New York Times* (The New York Times, August 26, 1967)

right political environment, while the Bund's adherence to orthodox German Nazism prohibited it from doing the same despite its far greater resources.

Chapter 1: The Arrival of National Socialism in America and the rise and fall of the German-American Bund - 1924-1942

There should not still be American Nazis. To be clear, there never should have been any Nazis anywhere: National Socialism was a hateful and oppressive ideology from its inception. When historians examine the conditions of Germany following World War I, however, the emergence and success of the Nazis in that chaotic environment does not come as a surprise. Germany in the 1920s was an unstable new republic where the specter of defeat hung over every aspect of life, and revanchist attitudes festered. Dozens of radical groups emerged to take advantage of the turmoil, and the triumph of Hitler's *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP) in the 1933 elections, if not inevitable, was hardly inexplicable. What might seem incomprehensible is that the Nazis are still around, in the modern day and spread around the world. An ideology of intense German nationalism, antisemitism, and authoritarianism, which was destroyed by force in its native country, found an audience in the United States.

The first traces of National Socialism emerged in America almost a decade before Hitler took power in Germany, and the first new Nazi organizations appeared in the United States after the fall of the Reich. The United States' domestic Nazi problem was hardly unique, but it was notably pronounced and it developed in a nation with a preexisting political sub-culture of militant white supremacy. The introduction of the National Socialist

ideology to the American white supremacist movement marked a significant turning point in the history of American white supremacy and extreme-right politics. As some Americans embraced Nazism, they lay the foundations for its evolution from an exclusively German political philosophy to one that could be domesticated and propagated anywhere in the world, even in nations founded on ideals that are antithetical to the core principles of Nazi ideology.

It is important to understand what distinguishes National Socialism as a political ideology from broader terms such as Fascism and White Supremacy. National Socialism is most certainly fascist and white supremacist, but it is a very specific formulation of both. White supremacy is defined as “the belief that white people constitute a superior race and should therefore dominate society, typically to the exclusion or detriment of other racial and ethnic groups.”² White supremacist thought comes in many forms, conscious and unconscious, but the forms of white supremacy examined in this thesis almost entirely result from explicit and ideological beliefs in the superiority of white people as a race. Fascism is often described as a political ideology, but more accurately it is a broad category of similar authoritarian ideologies, including National Socialism. Fascist ideologies are defined by “a political philosophy... that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition.”³ All of the characteristics of white supremacy and fascism apply to National Socialism, but it would be wrong to view Nazism as simply one more of history’s many examples of hastily-codified authoritarian

² “White Supremacy” In *Oxford English Dictionary*, April 5, 2023. <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/fascism>.

³ “Definition of Fascism.” In *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, April 5, 2023. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fascism>.

racism. From its obscure origins, National Socialism developed many unique features that distinguished it from the other far right schools of thought in the early 20th century.

Nazism began as the political philosophy of Adolf Hitler. Prior to Hitler taking control, the NSDAP -- then called the *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (German Worker's Party) -- was just another anti-Marxist German nationalist group, one of hundreds active in Germany in the 1920s. Hitler was influenced by several preexisting political currents present in early 20th-century Germany. The older generation of the German right-wing was made up of monarchists and militarists who rejected the Treaty of Versailles and dreamed of restoring Germany's position as the preeminent power of the European continent. Right-wing paramilitaries made up of veterans, such as the *Freikorps*, were highly active in the years immediately after WW1, often engaging in battles with left-wing revolutionaries, union members, and police that foretold the brawls between the Brownshirts and Antifa that would emerge in the early 1930s. These right-wing militias would inspire the first American Nazis to create their own paramilitary wings. The older German nationalists also developed the antisemitic stab-in-the-back myth blaming Germany's Jewish population for its loss in World War 1. Hitler had held antisemitic attitudes from an early age, making the incorporation of this conspiracy into Nazi doctrine a natural step. Unlike these 'establishment' German nationalists, though, Hitler held no love for the monarchy as an institution or a signifier of German identity. Some of his other influences would strike the established nationalists as unconventional, even revolutionary.⁴

⁴ Kershaw, Ian. *Hitler*. Norton and Company, 2010.

Hitler also borrowed from the Völkisch movement, a relatively new form of German nationalism that first emerged in the last decade of the 19th century. The Völkisch movement evolved from interpretations of the esoteric writings of the 19th century Russian occultist Madame Helena Blavatsky, who had written that humanity was descended from various 'root races' of superhuman predecessors, including the Aryans (a term which Blavatsky had picked up during her time spent in India). After Blavatsky's death in 1891 a few pan-Germanist thinkers, most notably the Austrian Guido von List, began calling themselves Völkists and embraced her theories as the basis for their arguments for German unity. Volkist groups such as *Germanenorden* (German Order) and the Thule Society promoted beliefs that the Germanic race were the purest descendants of the superhuman Aryans. Beginning in the 20th century, the movement became increasingly antisemitic as well as nationalistic, labelling German Jews as outsiders and non-Aryans. After the end of WW1, the nationalistic elements of the Völkisch ideology came to the fore as its followers placed greater emphasis on exalting the 'Aryan' race as a form of extreme German patriotism. The extent of Hitler's interest in the occult influences of the Völkists was not great (though some of his closest advisors like Heinrich Himmler and Rudolf Hess were fascinated by the occult) but he was heavily influenced by their conception of a pure German bloodline as something to be exalted and preserved at any cost. While the esoteric components of National Socialism were not of great significance to America's pre-war Nazi movement, racist occult thought would play an important role in many of the post-war American neo-Nazi groups.⁵

⁵ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890-1935* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian-Press, 1985).

National Socialism was also influenced by socialism, though the extent of this influence is a subject of controversy. Hitler himself made frequent attempts to reclaim the term from the Marxist connotations around it, saying “I shall take Socialism away from the Socialists. Socialism is an ancient Aryan, Germanic institution ... Marxism has no right to disguise itself as socialism.” The role of socialism in Nazism is a subject that needs only a brief discussion in relation to American Nazis, primarily because the socialist portions of Nazism were often the first parts of the National Socialist program modified or discarded by Nazism’s American converts. Instead, one of the main appeals of National Socialism to the Americans who embraced it was its ant-Communism. Hitler himself stated in *Mein Kampf* that he wished to “make war upon the Marxist principle that all men are equal.” A more revealing statement of Nazism’s attitudes towards both Marxism and the foundational principles of America would be hard to conceive.⁶

Despite the belligerently reactionary and xenophobic beliefs of Nazism, its bizarre occult influences, and strong opposition from all corners of the German political establishment, Hitler’s ideology continued to grow and find followers. Even an aborted and amateurish coup attempt in Munich, known as the Beer Hall Putsch, in 1923 was insufficient to finish off the Nazi movement. Hitler was sent to prison as a laughing stock, but he would emerge nine months later and begin a political recovery almost as unlikely as it was catastrophic. It was while Hitler was in jail, only a few months after the Beer Hall Putsch and during one of the lowest points in the NSDAP’s history, that the first Nazi organization in the United States emerged.

⁶ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p.343

The first National Socialist immigrants to arrive in the United States created the organization Teutonia in October of 1924. Founded in Chicago, Teutonia was made up entirely of German immigrants to America. Most of these men were very recent arrivals who had developed ties with the NSDAP during its early days, then crossed the Atlantic seeking work or escape from a nation on the brink of economic and political chaos. Teutonia was closer to a social club than a political party. Its main activities were focused on raising funds to send back to the party in Germany, a task at which it was mostly unsuccessful, so much so that one Nazi described his time in America as an “unprofitable begging tour.” The group had a newsletter that was published irregularly, *Amerika's Deutsche Post*, and formed America's first Nazi paramilitary group, an armed wing of Teutonia called the *Ordnungsdienst* (security service) that was based on the Nazi Party's infamous brownshirts. From its foundation in 1924 until the early 1930s, the same years in which the Second Ku Klux Klan reached the peak of its power, Teutonia persisted as an unnoticed and almost entirely inconsequential addition to America's collection of far-right political groups.⁷

The ranks of the American Nazis grew when Teutonia was joined in 1931 by a group known as Gauleitung-USA (District Headquarters USA, Gau-USA for short). Based in New York, Gau-USA and its founders had received the approval of the NSDAP's party foreign secretary. On this basis, Gau-USA claimed to be the legitimate American branch of the Nazi party, as opposed to Teutonia. The two small groups began bickering over issues of legitimacy at a time when their ideology could barely even be called fringe in the United States. This infighting was hardly an anomaly for America's Nazi groups, as shall become

⁷ Bradley W. Hart, *Hitler's American Friends: The Third Reich's Supporters in the United States* (New York, NY: Thomas Dunne Books, an imprint of St. Martin's Press, 2018), p.27.

readily apparent, but it is notable that the issue of internal conflict was present in these groups from the very beginning. Unsurprisingly, the two bickering groups of immigrants, each trying to promote an obscure far-right ideology, were not highly successful. In 1932, the year of the group's dissolution (and one year before the Nazis rose to power), Teutonia counted fewer than 100 members in its ranks. No membership numbers for Gau-USA exist, but it is unlikely they would have been significantly higher. The most impressive achievement of either group was the creation of a second chapter of Teutonia in Detroit, founded by German immigrant Heinz Spanknoebel, who would soon create a more significant Nazi organization in America. Teutonia and Gau-USA were both, for all intents and purposes, semi-formal clubs for Nazis temporarily living in America, rather than functioning organizations. Their successor would mark an evolution for America's Nazis from dysfunctional debating societies to active political groups regularly engaging in public agitation.⁸

The National Socialist movement in America took on a more official, organized status in July of 1933, five months after Hitler took power in Germany. Heinz Spanknoebel received permission from Rudolf Hess, Hitler's Deputy Fuhrer, to form a new Nazi organization in America, the first to bear the official blessing of the new German government. Spanknoebel dubbed this group Friends of the New Germany, and it was comprised of former members of both Teutonia and Gau-USA. Friends of the New Germany began making concerted efforts to reach out to the German-American community, publishing a weekly German-language newspaper titled *Das Neue Deutschland*. The organization,

⁸ Leland V. Bell, *In Hitler's Shadow the Anatomy of American Nazism* (Port Washington, WI: Kennikat Press, 1973), p.12.

headquartered in New York City, quickly found itself regularly drawing 2,000 members to its weekly meetings, and Spanknoebel assumed the title “Fuhrer of the Nazi Party in the United States”.⁹ Friends of the New Germany also absorbed the paramilitary *Ordnungsdienst* from Teutonia, incorporating it as the group’s security service. Within a few months of opening its doors, Friends of the New Germany was already the most visible Nazi organization ever to exist in the United States.

Despite greater membership numbers and better organizational practices, Friends of the New Germany quickly found itself at the center of multiple controversies, in no small part due to Spanknoebel’s leadership. Under the self-proclaimed American Fuhrer (Spanknoebel was only the first of many to claim that meaningless title) the Friends of the New Germany adopted a bombastic, confrontational approach that seemed more designed to draw attention than support. Some of these tactics included hosting a rally at a sports stadium which was attended by over 4,000 people, defending antisemitic graffiti and the vandalism of Jewish businesses, and even attempting to storm the offices of the *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, one of the nation’s longest running German-language newspapers, to try to force the paper to adopt a pro-Hitler line.¹⁰

Friends of the New Germany succeeded in gathering significant attention, especially around New York City where it was based, but much of the attention was negative. Newspaper reports covering the activities of the Friends of the New Germany describe frequent confrontations and brawls between members of the group and the counterdemonstrators that often outnumbered them, with one describing “more than a score

⁹ Bell *In Hitler’s Shadow* p.14

¹⁰ *The Brooklyn Citizen*, 04/07/1934, p.1; *The Times-Union*, 10/28/1933, p.3

of persons... nursing cracked heads and dislocated knuckles... as the result of a free-for-all last night outside the Ridgewood Grove where a meeting was being held by the Friends of new Germany [sic]”.¹¹ Spankenobel gained the attention he’d sought, but the spotlight proved to be far more of a burden for Friends of the New Germany than an asset.

Spanknoebel was quickly becoming an embarrassment for Germany. The leader of the NSDAP’s official American Branch was doing nothing but worsening the perception of the new German government in the United States. In October of 1933, only three months after the official founding of Friends of the New Germany, the federal government ordered Spanknoebel to be deported back to Germany for failing to register as an agent of a foreign government. Spanknoebel returned to Germany that month, leaving behind a power vacuum in the organization he had founded. While Teutonia and Gau-USA had remained mostly dormant during their existence, Friends of the New Germany was an active organization seeking to grow, and the US government had not missed the emergence of this new group on the radical right. As Friends of the New Germany garnered more and more attention, Washington took action.

In 1934 Congressman Samuel Dickstein (D-NY) formed the elaborately titled Special Committee on Un-American Activities Authorized to Investigate National Socialist Propaganda and Certain Other Propaganda Activities. This committee, more often referred to as the McCormick-Dickstein committee after the two congressmen who chaired it (the other being Massachusetts Democratic Rep. John W. McCormick) would form the nucleus of what would later become the House Unamerican Activities Committee, also commonly called by its acronym HUAC. It is worth noting that in 1999 it was revealed that Congressman Dickstein

¹¹ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 04/09/1934, p.3

was receiving monthly payments worth over \$20,000 (in today's money) from the NKVD, the primary secret police organization of the Soviet Union, though the extent to which these payments influenced his decisions to target Nazi groups is unclear. Regardless of the motivation, the McCormick-Dickstein committee began investigating Friends of the New Germany in late 1934, calling its leaders to testify and launching inquiries into their finances.

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Following the deportation of Spanknoebel, Friends of the New Germany had three different leaders, each of whom had brief tenures that were mostly defined by internal squabbles and petty rivalries. The most dramatic occurrence of this period came when the leader of the Friend's chapter in New York, the most active chapter of the several around the nation, staged a revolt and declared the formation of the "American National Labor Party." This descent back into infighting coincided with ongoing incidents of public violence, mounting pressure from the federal government, and a desire by the NSDAP back in Germany to reduce the hostility between the United States and itself. Finally, Deputy Fuhrer Rudolf Hess issued a directive in December of 1935 for all German citizens in the United States, who made up some 60% of Friends of the New Germany's membership, to leave the organization and disassociate from all political groups. The same order recalled the group's leaders back to Germany for assignment to different projects. Friends of the New Germany dissolved almost overnight, but at its peak it had claimed nearly 10,000 members. Even if this number is inflated, as it may well have been, there were now thousands of ideologically

¹² Duffey, Peter, *The Congressman Who Spied for Russia*. POLITICO Magazine, October 6, 2014. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/10/samuel-dickstein-congressman-russian-spy-111641/>.

devoted and politically active Nazis residing inside the United States. It would not take them long to reorganize.¹³

The next organized incarnation of the Nazi movement in America, the *Amerikadeutscher-Volksbund*, better known by its English name, the German-American Bund, is the best-known of the pre-war Nazi groups. Historian Leland Bell described it as “the largest, most influential and outspoken Nazi organization ever to exist in the United States.” While Friends of the New Germany dubiously claimed at most 10,000 members, the Bund verifiably had more than twice that many supporters in 1939 when the organization famously sold out a Nazi rally in the 22,000 seat Madison Square Garden. The German-American Bund picked up almost immediately where Friends of the New Germany had left off, incorporating many members of the former organization while growing and adapting to the failures of the previous iteration of the Nazi experiment in America. One of the final acts of the last head of Friends of the New Germany, a German citizen named Fritz Gissibl, was to proclaim Fritz Kuhn the leader of the American Nazi movement following Gissibl’s return to Germany. It was Kuhn who would lead the Bund, and he would be largely responsible for both its initial surprising successes and its eventual downfall.¹⁴

Fritz Kuhn represented a departure from the previous leaders of Nazi groups in America, as he was a naturalized citizen of the United States. Kuhn had been born in Germany and fought in the German army during WW1. Following the war, he had been a member of the right-wing Freikorps militias that had battled with the police and leftists in the aftermath of Germany’s surrender. He participated in the Nazi party in its early years until he

¹³ Bell *In Hitler’s Shadow* p.15

¹⁴ Bell *In Hitler’s Shadow* p.16

moved to Mexico in 1923, then the United States in 1927, seeking work. His biography was archetypical of the men who made up the core of the various Nazi groups that had emerged in the United States, but in 1934 he took the step of becoming an American citizen, making the United States his adopted home, at least on paper. This was part of Kuhn's new approach that he would put into practice with his organization; foregrounding the American part of the organization's identity. It was hoped this would make it harder to portray the group as foreign-backed rabble-rousers, as had often been (accurately) done to Friends of the New Germany. Kuhn's first step in this plan was giving his group a name in which Germanic culture and American identity were inextricably linked.¹⁵

The Bund's creation marked a significant leap forward in the organization of America's Nazis. The German-American Bund was founded at a convention of former Friends of the New Germany members held in Buffalo, New York, on March 19, 1936, a little over 3 months after Friends of the New Germany dissolved. Fritz Kuhn was elected its first leader and assumed the title of *Bundesfuhrer*. One of Kuhn's most significant early decisions was to base the organization of the Bund on the Nazi party in Germany. This included the adaptation of the *Fuhrerprinzip* (Leader Principle), a key component of National Socialist ideology which held that the leader of the party must have complete control over its organization and operations, as well as total control over the state once power had been taken. For the Bund, this meant that Kuhn had complete control over the group's funds, properties, and facilities, and he had sole authority to set and alter dues and create or disband chapters. The only check on his authority was a token requirement for periodic reelection by the Bund's National Council, most of whom were allies of Kuhn. Each prospective member

¹⁵ Hart, *Hitler's American Friends* p. 29-31.

of the Bund had to accept the Führerprinzip as part of the oath they recited upon joining the group. Though the downsides of this centralization of power would eventually become apparent, Kuhn initially proved capable of wielding his authority to grow the Bund to a much greater size than Friends of the New Germany ever reached.¹⁶

Unlike Friends of the New Germany, the German-American Bund never received the official endorsement of the NSDAP, and this lack of recognition would cause the group significant difficulties in the future. The closest the Bund ever came to an endorsement was when Kuhn had a very brief audience with Hitler during a visit to Berlin during the 1936 Olympic Games. The Führer reportedly told Kuhn to “Go back and carry on your fight.” While Kuhn took this to mean he had Hitler’s personal support, Hitler had many such brief meetings during the 1936 Olympics, which were primarily held for publicity purposes. In effect Hitler had told Kuhn to “keep up the good work.”¹⁷ It was enough of an endorsement for Kuhn to decide to take the initiative in growing the organization. In October of 1936 Kuhn announced that the Bund, previously only open to American citizens, would now accept applications from German citizens living in the United States. This decision directly contradicted the order from Rudolf Hess for all German nationals living in the United States to disassociate from political organizations, an order that had been issued to prevent groups like the Bund from creating diplomatic incidents between America and the Reich. While the Bund still looked to the NSDAP for guidance, Berlin was discovering that it had little direct control over this iteration of the Nazi movement in America.¹⁸

¹⁶ Stephen E. Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), p.73.

¹⁷ Hart *Hitler's American Friends* p.36

¹⁸ Bell *In Hitler's Shadow* p.20

Seeking to grow the Bund quickly, Kuhn built on the foundations laid by Friends of the New Germany, incorporating the regional divisions used by that group into the Bund's organizational structure. This reuse of the Friends' national structure was a clear indication of how much the Bund's rapid establishment relied upon serving as an almost-direct continuation of Friends of the New Germany. The regional divisions, or *Gau*, divided the mainland United States into three areas: An eastern region, overseen by the Bund headquarters in New York City, a central region overseen by the Chicago chapter, and a western region overseen by the Los Angeles chapter. Below this, the *Gau* were subdivided into local units, typically one per city, though New York City had many more. Bund chapters were founded in most major cities in the United States throughout the later 1930s. The largest concentrations were in the northeast and upper midwestern states. New York was home to the most chapters, with 17 (many representing individual neighborhoods or boroughs of New York City), while New Jersey had seven and Connecticut and Indiana both had six. Notably, while every other region of the country was represented to various degrees, few chapters were founded in the southern states, with one chapter in St. Louis and another in Taylor, Texas. The Bund also reincorporated the *Ordnungsdienst*, which had already outlived Teutonia and Friends of the New Germany, to serve as its paramilitary wing.¹⁹

With the structure of his national organization in place, Kuhn began implementing his plan to create a version of National Socialism that could succeed in America by fusing together Nazi ideology with American aesthetics. The hope was to create an identity for the group that retained the style and beliefs of the Nazis while assuming the appearance of a domestic political movement. It would be an extremely difficult balance to strike in a country

¹⁹ Bell *In Hitler's Shadow* p.22

that was still heavily opposed to Hitler and fascism. Kuhn attempted to carry out his plan all the same. At Bund rallies the American flag would be flown side-by-side with the swastika, and the group adopted “Free America” as its slogan. In a press release for the Bund’s 1939 Madison Square Garden rally, the group stated:

“The Bund is opposed to all isms... INCLUDING NAZISM AND FASCISM, regarding these political systems as affairs of the people who live under them (supported... by upheard [sic] of 95 per cent of the electors in nationwide plebiscites) but impracticable and inexpedient innovations in the American system of government.”²⁰

The Bund’s feigned opposition to the ideologies it directly sought to emulate and import to the United States was unconvincing, but it shows that Kuhn was aware of the largest issue facing his group: National Socialism was a German nationalist ideology first and foremost. Unlike many leftist ideologies, there was no appeal to class identities that could cross national boundaries. National Socialism’s principal tenants said nothing about the United States in particular, while being extremely hostile to political concepts such as equality and universal rights that most Americans considered foundational to their country. Despite this, Kuhn was determined to try to carve out a space for Nazism in the American political spectrum.²¹

The Bund’s early recruitment efforts were similar to those used by Friends of the New Germany. The group invested most of its resources and time into publicity efforts, publishing a German-language newspaper (The *Deutscher Weckruf und Beobachter*), hosting

²⁰ *Pro American Rally and George Washington Birthday Exercises*, German-American Bund Pamphlet

²¹ *Hart Hitler’s American Friends* p.31

regular Nazi rallies in public venues, and even adopting an expanded definition of Aryan to try to broaden the group's appeal. Potential members would be considered so long as they were of any northern European ancestry besides Irish, and could prove they had no Jewish or African ancestry. In practice this expanded racial criteria mattered little, as the overwhelming majority of the Bund's members remained either German immigrants who had naturalized, or German citizens residing in the United States. The former group had overtaken the latter by this time though, with American citizens comprising 75% of the Bund's membership in 1938.²²

Youth recruitment was a priority for the Bund, as the pipeline of German immigrants to the United States was rapidly declining by the late 1930s, leaving few sources of new members willing to embrace the German portion of the Bund's identity. The creation of a new generation of German-American Nazis was a project of great personal importance to Kuhn, as he explained in a letter to his lieutenants, writing:

“We must make every conceivable effort to obtain a tight grip on all German-American youngsters. Never mind these American schools; they have to be educated to become useful fighters for our German unity... In this way you will help our youth who are destined to carry forward our Nazi ideals, and who will ultimately bring victory to the glorious German ideals here.”²³

The Bund established a Youth Division which operated several summer camps with programs modeled on the Hitler Youth. The largest of these camps were Camp Siegfried, in New Jersey, and Camp Nordland, on Long Island. In these camps children were taught about

²² Bell *In Hitler's Shadow* p.22

²³ Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History*, p.72.

National Socialist ideology alongside lessons on German history and culture and activities to develop survival skills. The Youth Division had its own monthly magazine, *Junges Volk*, published from the start of 1937 to the end of 1940. The contents of *Junges Volk* highlight the ways in which the Bund hoped to link America to the Nazi conception of German identity. Articles about the successes of Hitler's government were a constant feature of *Junges Volk*, as were stories about the Jewish plot to overthrow the American Constitution. The Bund did everything it could to encourage fears of Communist and Jewish domination in Americans of all ages, believing that the same appeals of Nazism that worked in Germany would prove effective in the United States.²⁴

Kuhn's strategy to focus on aggressive expansion and recruitment to drive up membership worked for a time. Some of the largest unanswered questions around the Bund have to do with its membership numbers, but even the low estimates agree the Bund had far more members than its predecessors. The most reliable accounts, one from the Justice Department and one from Kuhn himself, put the number at close to 8,000 full members with several thousand sympathizers and supporters. The Justice Department reported in 1938 that the Bund had 8,500 members and five or six thousand sympathizers, while Kuhn put the number at 8,000 full members in an internal report from 1939. Later that same year, Kuhn testified before congress that the group had 20,000 members and over 100,000 supporters.²⁵ All evidence points to these numbers from Kuhn being wildly inflated to increase the perceived importance of his group. It is likely that the Bund's membership hovered between eight and ten thousand for most of its history, with several thousand more sympathizers ready

²⁴ Hart *Hitler's American Friends* p.33

²⁵ DeJong, L. *The German Fifth Column in the Second World War*. London, England: Routledge & K. Paul, 1956, p.276; Hart *Hitler's American Friends* p.32

to participate in large events and financially support the Bund. Compared to Friends of the New Germany's upper limit of perhaps 4,000 members, the Bund was thriving. Kuhn's tenure as America's Fuhrer was off to an auspicious start. It would not last.

The federal government had not grown complacent to the threat of domestic Nazis after Friends of the New Germany folded in the winter of 1935. Congressman Dickstein was still monitoring the development of the Nazi movement in America and was keeping an eye on the Bund. In April of 1937 Dickstein proposed the creation of a House Committee to investigate Nazism in the United States, a revival of the committee on which he had previously served as co-chair. This proposal was defeated, but Dickstein was determined. In June of that same year, he became a co-sponsor of legislation introduced by Representative Martin Dies (D-Texas) that called for greater congressional investigation into groups suspected of subversive activities. The following year, in May of 1938, this would come to fruition with the creation of the House Committee on Unamerican Activities.²⁶

The Bund was not content to sit back and allow the government to conduct its investigations unopposed. Kuhn stated, "As a fighting organization, we must welcome every fight" and launched another propaganda campaign aimed at establishing the Bund as patriotic and its critics as the real traitors. Criticism was directed at Congressman Dickstein in particular, due to his Jewish heritage and public dislike for the Bund. Mass rallies were held in New York City under the slogan "Come and Hear our Answer to Dickstein and the Jewish Rabble Rousers," while the Bund's newspaper provided detailed instructions on how to write a letter to one's congressional representative and advised its readers to question Dickstein's

²⁶ Bell *In Hitler's Shadow* p.55

competence and sanity. At the same time, throughout the summer of 1937 the Bund was frequently holding large rallies at Camps Siegfried and Nordland. As well as providing a location for the Bund's youth summer camps, these sites proved to be a valuable source of income for the Bund during its brief heyday. One newspaper article described the "immense crowds who gather there every week and play and sing and drink and spend money enjoying the facilities available."²⁷ Increased attention and income came with increased scrutiny however, and beginning in the summer of 1937 Congressman Dickstein was no longer the Bund's only enemy in the government.²⁸

That August, the Attorney General announced that the FBI was opening an investigation into the Bund's camps. In response Kuhn instituted a new set of directives designed to tightly control perception of the Bund, prohibiting anyone but appointed leaders from speaking to the press and providing prepared answers to questions Bund members were likely to face. Though the FBI's investigation of the camps would conclude in early 1938 without finding any signs of illegal activity, it signaled the start of a series of inquiries into the inner workings of the Bund that would eventually bring down the group. In the meantime, public opposition to America's Nazis was also increasing as their profile grew. Groups such as the Anti-Nazi League, the American Legion, and various labor organizations had begun organizing regular demonstrations and counter-protests at Bund events hosted nearby, creating numerous opportunities for violent encounters between the Bund and its foes. Soon the brawls and riots that had followed Friends of the New Germany began to make their return. One meeting of 200 Bund members in Philadelphia was interrupted by 100

²⁷ Middletown Times Herald, 09/11/1937, P.2

²⁸ Bell *In Hitler's Shadow* p.55-56

counter-protestors who “stormed the building in an attempt to break up the meeting. Nazi sympathizers, including a guard of uniformed “storm troopers” met the invaders with fists.” At a similar event in Buffalo, which descended into what a local paper called a “15-minute free for all” the police riot squad had to be called in to break up a battle between Bundists and the local chapter of the American Legion. The uptick in violent incidents involving the Bund only worsened the group’s existing public image problem, but it was also creating new problems for the Bund’s sponsor across the Atlantic.²⁹

As episodes of violence involving the Bund continued to occur, the American ambassador to Germany, Hugh Wilson, lodged a complaint with the German Foreign Ministry. Surprisingly, he found that he was speaking to a sympathetic audience. The German ambassador to the United States, Hans Dieckhoff, while appreciative of the Bund’s support for Nazism and Germany, was continually frustrated by the group’s independent nature and the damage they were doing to German-American diplomatic relations. He described the Bund’s operations as “stupid and noisy activities” in one message back to Berlin.³⁰ Finally, in February of 1938, the German government issued an order very similar to the one it had issued in December of 1935. Germany informed its citizens living in the United States that they were no longer permitted to be members of the Bund. In effect, Germany was trying to extinguish this group in the same way it had extinguished Friends of the New Germany, now that the Bund too had become a liability.³¹ The Bund was not Friends of the New Germany, however, and Germany’s intervention failed to initiate a collapse as it had hoped. Kuhn’s organization was both larger and more autonomous than its

²⁹ Times Herald, 03/25/1938 p.5; The Daily Messenger, 02/14/1938, Page 1

³⁰ Bell *In Hitler’s Shadow* p.61

³¹ Hart *Hitler’s American Friends* p.43

predecessor, and was able to continue operating independently even as the nation and government the group idolized washed its hands of them.

The persistence of the Bund did not mean Kuhn took the German government's announcement in stride. The Bund's initial reaction to the news from Berlin was a bold proclamation that the group took orders from no one. Despite that claim, Fritz Kuhn traveled shortly afterwards to Berlin, hoping appeal the decision before Hitler personally. Instead, he was rebuffed by Hitler's adjutant and told that he would be expected to follow all American laws upon his return to the United States. While Kuhn was away, one of the most violent incidents of the Bund's history broke out on April 20. 3,500 Bund members had gathered at the Yorkville Casino to celebrate Hitler's birthday. Unbeknownst to them, almost 100 American Legion members had infiltrated the event. A coordinated disruption of the evening's speech began when one veteran yelled "Is this an American or German meeting?" It quickly escalated into a brawl. One newspaper, in an article titled "It Happened in America" categorized the fight as "a serious riot" and the police made multiple arrests.³² This incident resulted in yet another wave of anti-Bund articles in the press, as the group was increasingly seen as a threat to public order.³³

On May 26 1938, Congressman Dickstein's campaign to reform a congressional commission to investigate Nazism in America came to fruition. Congress voted to form the House Committee on Un-American Activities, to be chaired by Congressman Martin Dies. The committee would prove to be the Federal Government's most effective tool against

³² Times Herald, 04/23/1938, p.2; Of somewhat interesting note: This riot resulted in the arrest of Otto Geisler, a 17-year-old German national and Bundist charged with possession of a concealed weapon. Geisler was released on account of the actions of his appointed public defender, Joseph Ellison, who was Jewish (Times Herald, 04/23/1938)

³³ Bell *In Hitler's Shadow* p.64-65

radical groups on the far right and the far left. Congressman Dickstein, despite his support for the committee, was not given a place on the Un-American Activities Committee as there were concerns that he was too partisan and not adequately anti-communist despite his obvious anti-Nazi fervor. Congressman Dies was a conservative southern Democrat who opposed the New Deal and had spent much of his career in Congress investigating Communist infiltration of labor unions. However, Dies told a reporter “I am just as opposed to Nazism and Fascism as I am to Communism. All of these ‘isms’ constitute different forms of dictatorship.”³⁴ Dies would prove true to his word, as his committee began vigorously investigating both the Bund and many of the more ideologically left-wing groups that had opposed it, such as the California-based Anti-Nazi League.³⁵

Events in the wider world had also turned against the Bund. 1938 marked the beginning of Hitler’s territorial expansion, with the Anschluss of Austria in March and the annexation of the Sudetenland in September. As Nazi Germany revealed its expansionist ambition to the world, American opinions of the Bund continued to drop. At the Bund’s 1938 national convention a central theme was the failure of the Bund to persuade more Americans, and particularly more German-Americans, to join. Kuhn declared that the Bund faced a choice: either accept the criticisms of the broader German-American community and address them, or continue operating as it was. When the crowd cheered for the latter option Kuhn declared “We shall go our own way without looking to either side – the way we have gone so far, straight ahead, and we shall let nothing swerve us from it!”³⁶ Despite this commitment to

³⁴ Letter from Congressman Dies to A. J. Sabath, 09/26/1938, Box 15, HUAC Official Correspondence 1938-1940

³⁵ Hart *Hitler’s American Friends* p.39-40

³⁶ “Minutes of the National Convention of the German American Bund” August 30-31, 1941, RG 141, box 2

holding course, the 1938 convention also heralded the introduction of several reforms intended to further ‘Americanize’ the Bund. These reforms included:

Instructing Bund chapters to use English, rather than German, in their speeches and posters;

Advising Bundists to reach out to other antisemitic groups in their local areas;

The publication of a new 8-point plan for the creation of a “Gentile-ruled United States,” and the severance of all relations with the Soviet Union and the League of Nations.

The group also debated whether to drop the Nazi salute before Kuhn declared that it would remain, though he did allow the words “Sieg Heil” to be replaced with “Free America.”³⁷

Kuhn’s motivations for these halfhearted reforms were practical, not ideological.

Despite its rapid early growth, by late 1938 the Bund was stagnating. From July of 1937 to July of 1938, after expenses the Bund had made a profit of only \$244.50 (equivalent to barely 5,000\$ in 2023).³⁸ For an organization attempting to operate nationwide, this was a razor-thin margin. Kuhn had also noticed a rising number of Bundists were losing their jobs due to associating with the Bund, making it impossible for them to pay their monthly membership dues. This was all becoming apparent at a time when the Bund’s expenses were rising due to the mounting legal fees that resulted from each new violent incident. Kuhn believed that the Bund had to broaden its appeal to all “Aryan Americans” to reach the membership required

³⁷ Bell *In Hitler’s Shadow* p.77-79

³⁸ US Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator, www.BLS.gov

to be truly self-sustaining. Americanizing the Bund was the key to achieving this, in his mind. While the reforms enacted at the 1938 convention were a step in this direction, Kuhn's most audacious effort to project patriotism would come in early 1939.³⁹

Fritz Kuhn repeatedly demonstrated a fondness for bombastic acts of publicity in his time as *Bundesfuhrer* of the Bund, so it is hardly surprising that when he felt the need to prove his group's patriotic credentials he did so without any hint of subtlety. In late 1938 the Bund reserved Madison Square Garden for February 20, 1939, ostensibly to host a celebration of George Washington's birthday. The Bund's new slogan of 'Free America' appeared on materials promoting the rally, and anticipation for the event began to build among both the Bund and its opponents who were preparing to counter-protest the event. The New York City police department prepared a 2-block cordon around Madison Square Garden the night of the rally and had 2,000 police officers stationed on the scene to keep the peace. It quickly became apparent that the rally would be the largest Bund event yet, with the 20,000-seat arena selling out. To the outside world the rally looked like proof of growing momentum for America's Nazi organization.⁴⁰

Despite the fears of a massive street battle, the clashes outside the February 20 rally were tame by the standards of a Bund event. One newspaper bore the headline "Army of Police Cuts Bund Rally Casualties to Only Few Injured."⁴¹ In total eight people were wounded in the protests outside the Garden that night, four of them police officers. These injuries were the result of the police holding back the crowd of protestors, who became more unruly as the rally got underway. Inside the hall, the Bundists were greeted with "American

³⁹ Bell *In Hitler's Shadow* p.76

⁴⁰ Hart *Hitler's American Friends* p.44

⁴¹ Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 02/21/1939, p.1

flags, swastikas, and banners carrying such slogans as ‘Stop Jewish Domination of Christian Americans’”. The Garden was filled with three thousand OD members in uniform acting as security and performing ceremonial marches. The rally itself consisted of speeches from the Bund’s leadership. Kuhn declared that “Americanism should be returned to the Christians who founded it. We must defy those who would turn this country into a Bolshevik paradise.” Rudolf Markmann, the leader of the Bund’s eastern *Gau* stated “We have never claimed to be Nazis... Americanism means that we will fight international Jewry, closely interwoven with Bolshevism, and fight for God and country.” Other themes included support for isolationism, the sentiment of America First, and opposition to the Roosevelt administration as a puppet of “international jewry.” Hanging above everything was a 30 ft. tall full body portrait of George Washington, flanked by American flags and swastika banners.⁴²

The spectacle of the rally catapulted the Bund into the national spotlight. Though there had been a growing awareness of the Bund, especially in the cities where it was most active, most Americans knew little or nothing of the group prior to February 20, 1939. The shock value of a Nazi rally in the heart of New York City was too much for the national press to ignore, and it was the headline story in papers as far away as California⁴³. LIFE Magazine published a photo essay documenting the event and a wave of editorial opinions condemning the Bund’s rally began appearing in papers. One such editorial from a paper in Oklahoma eviscerated the Bund, saying

“[T]he promoters of the meeting displayed very little regard for the Americanism they pretend to exalt. They made their meeting as offensive as possible... the propagandist for Mr. Hitler linked their own symbols with that of the United States, and continued

⁴² Dunkirk Evening Observer, 02/21/1939, p.2

⁴³“Germany Protests Rioting at Nazi Bund Rally in N.Y.,” *The Press Democrat*, 02/22/1939. P.1

in nauseating sequence when their speakers proclaimed their adherence to the principles upon which this nation was founded, and in the very next breath mouthed that sickening racial intolerance which is their chief demagogic appeal.”⁴⁴

This editorial is representative of the general reaction to the Bund around the country. Most Americans were surprised and revolted to find that a Nazi group was operating throughout the nation. While the rally dramatically increased public awareness of the Bund there is no evidence that this was accompanied by the upswell in support that Kuhn had desired. Indeed, the press coverage of the event and the backlash point towards the exact opposite occurring.

The rally created other problems for the Bund, and for Fritz Kuhn specifically. The intensity of the backlash to the event galvanized New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia and District Attorney (and 1944 and 1948 Republican presidential candidate) Thomas E. Dewey into investigating the Bund, specifically the organization’s finances. In May state investigators seized records from the Bund’s headquarters and, based on evidence collected from those records, charged Fritz Kuhn with stealing \$14,000 of Bund money that could not be accounted for after the rally.⁴⁵ Throughout the Summer of 1939 the Bund waged a propaganda campaign against the New York County District Attorney’s office. At Kuhn’s trial that November, two months after the outbreak of war in Europe, Kuhn’s lawyer and several Bund witnesses argued that the *Fuhrerprizip* granted Kuhn the authority to do whatever he wanted with the Bund’s finances. The crucial caveat to this, explained on the witness stand by Bund member Gustav Elmer, was that Kuhn could spend the group’s money

⁴⁴ “Thank the Police,” The Enid Morning News, 02/25/1939

⁴⁵ Slightly more than \$301,000 in 2023 – Bureau of Labor Statistics inflation calculator, www.bls.gov; Bell, *In Hitler’s Shadow* p.93

on anything except women. Records that came out in the trial proved he had done exactly that, spending \$717 on one lover and \$60 on a “doctor’s bill” for another that was most likely an abortion.⁴⁶

Kuhn and his legal team employed several far-fetched strategies in court, including forcing Thomas Dewey to testify on his opinion of the Bund. Dewey admitted he viewed Kuhn “as a nuisance to the community” but argued his opinion had no bearing on the case. The Bund’s tactics amounted to little and the prosecution prevailed. Kuhn was found guilty of larceny and forgery. The leader of the Bund was sentenced to 2 ½ to 5 years imprisonment, to be served in Sing-Sing prison.⁴⁷ He would remain behind bars until after the war ended in 1945, when he would be deported to Germany, his citizenship having been revoked in 1943 for failure to register as the agent of a foreign government. While Kuhn’s personal corruption was responsible for his downfall, his imprisonment signaled the rapid decline and collapse of the Bund. On December 6, 1939, the day after Kuhn’s imprisonment, the Bund’s executive committee voted to remove him from power due to his “Dishonorable and disgraceful” actions. In his place Gerhard Wilhelm Kunze, a native-born German American, was elected as the new *Bundesfuhrer* of the organization.⁴⁸

Kunze proved to be a less effective leader than his predecessor. His first actions included threatening to expel any member that violated his instructions, declaring that all potential members would need to undergo a six-month background investigation before joining, and tearing up the Bund’s old constitution which contained the *Fuhrerprinzip*,

⁴⁶ Of little historical relevance but of some interest, letters between Kuhn and the first woman revealed his preferred pet name was ‘Fritzi’

⁴⁷ Bell, *In Hitler’s Shadow* p.95

⁴⁸ Bell, *In Hitler’s Shadow* p.97

replacing it with a series of rules that concentrated power even further into the hands of the *Bundesfuhrer*. This attempt to centralize power resulted in an immediate internal conflict, with many chapters of the Bund refusing to recognize Kunze as their leader. These units ended up rallying around the wife of Fritz Kuhn, who wrote letters to Bund chapters calling on them to reject Kunze and stay loyal to her imprisoned husband. One group to answer her call was the ownership corporation which ran Camp Siegfried, the Bund's large facility in New Jersey and one of its main sources of profit. In a suit filed in June of 1940 the corporation, A.V. Development Co., broke with the Bund and charged it with misusing funds. This latest in a series of blows came at an especially bad time for the Bund, which was struggling with dwindling funds following Kuhn's embezzlement.⁴⁹

In the final two years of its existence, the Bund tried to continue operating even as it was running out of money and in the process of disintegrating due to infighting. To overcome this organizational collapse, Kunze permitted the Bund to begin reaching out to other groups with similar right-wing causes. Nothing would come of this decision. The greatest instance of collaboration came in August of 1940 when over 700 Bundists and close to 300 Klansmen held a joint rally at a Bund camp in New Jersey. This attempt to demonstrate unity between the groups was foiled on two fronts. First, a group of pro-Kuhn Bundists disrupted the event after getting in a fight with members of the OD. Then the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, James Colescott, expelled the two Klansmen of the New Jersey chapter who had organized the event. Explaining his decision, Colescott declared, "[There is] absolutely no connection or link in anyway, shape, or form, between the German-American Bund and the

⁴⁹ Johnson City Press, 06/09/1940. P4., Bell *In Hitler's Shadow* p.98-99.

Klan... There can be no sympathy on the part of the Bund and the Klan.”⁵⁰ This announcement made it clear that even the domestic groups which might have seen kindred spirits in the Bund’s membership recognized that it was now too toxic to acknowledge. The group would continue without any outside assistance until the inevitable end.⁵¹

Following the outbreak of World War Two in Europe, the Bund began heavily emphasizing themes of neutrality and isolationism in its materials, to an even greater extent than they had done previously. Kunze ordered the Bund’s members to write letters of support to every congressman who expressed isolationist sentiments or opposition to Roosevelt’s Lend-Lease act, hoping a flurry of letters from around the country would impress the politicians. The Bund’s newspaper ran articles promoting the America First Committee and especially its most famous speaker, Charles Lindbergh, who the Bund said embodied “the finest qualities of old-time Americanism” that they claimed to embrace.⁵² Lindbergh’s arguments, which the Bund parroted at times nearly word-for-word, centered on the inevitability of Germany’s victory over Britain, America’s inability to change the outcome, and the safety that America’s geographic and diplomatic isolation afforded it. The Bund went further than Lindbergh dared however, openly exalting Germany’s military victories across Europe and alternating between denying reports of German atrocities and defending them. This only served to worsen the group’s image at a time when the American public, shocked by Germany’s rapid advance across Europe, was becoming increasingly paranoid about the potential of a fascist 5th column inside the United States.⁵³

⁵⁰ “Klan Denies Bund Connection” *The Delta Democrat-Times*, p.3, 08/23/1940

⁵¹ Hart, *Hitler’s American Friends*, p.45

⁵² Cole, Wayne S., *America First: The Battle Against Intervention, 1940-1941*, p. 117-119

⁵³ Bell *In Hitler’s Shadow* p.103

In response to the public's concerns, which often and unsurprisingly focused on the Bund as the most visible Nazi group in the nation, another series of investigations and crackdowns targeting the group began. California began its own investigation into the Bund's finances, and the U.S. government expelled the leader of the Bund's western *Gau*, Hermann Schwinn, for forging some of his naturalization papers. The House Un-American Activities Committee made a report on the Bund public in May of 1941 that clearly illustrated the financial ties that had existed between the group and the German government. That same month the governor of New Jersey authorized the closure of Camp Nordland. When the Bund attempted to avoid this by transferring the ownership to a shell corporation, the state seized the camp. Finally, in June, President Roosevelt included the Bund's funds in an executive order freezing the assets of Germany and Italy in the United States. At the national convention held that August, Bund members reported needing to "masquerade as singing or gymnastic societies" in order to avoid harassment, with one member jokingly observing that "we have learned how to sing."⁵⁴ The OD paramilitary group that had existed since 1924 was restructured into an athletic association and dropped the uniform, and the Bund's paper was reduced from 12 pages to 6 to save printing costs.⁵⁵

In November of 1941 Kunze fled to Mexico without warning, likely on the advice of contacts in Germany who already saw that war between America and Germany was highly likely in the near future. The Bund's remaining leadership quickly voted to expel him on the grounds of incompetence, and in his place, they installed the leader of the midwestern *Gau*, George Froboese, as the new *Bundesfuhrer*. Less than a month later, on December 7, 1941,

⁵⁴ "Minutes of the National Convention of the German American Bund" August 30-31, 1941, RG 141, box 2

⁵⁵ Bell *In Hitler's Shadow* p.105

Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. The next day the Bund's leadership voted to disband the organization. Three days later on December 11, after Germany had declared war on the United States, agents of the U.S. Treasury Department raided the Bund's headquarters in New York City and seized every document there. Kunze was arrested in Mexico and extradited to the United States, while his successor Froboese killed himself in June of 1942 rather than answer a subpoena to appear before a federal jury. While several Bundists were tried for sedition and espionage during the war, most former members simply walked away, allowing the group to die out.⁵⁶

In terms of raw numbers, the German-American Bund represents the high-water mark of explicit, organized Nazism in the United States. While the Bund's propaganda and poor record keeping make accurate numbers difficult to establish, there is no doubt that during the Bund's peak period of 1936-1938 there were active chapters in dozens of cities across the entire United States, with possibly over 10,000 proud members and certainly thousands of less vocal supporters as well. Despite this, the Bund encountered the same issues as its predecessors with integrating National Socialism into the American identity. Faced with these challenges the Bund attempted to dress its ideology up in Americanization programs, but these efforts failed to address the key incompatibilities of a fascist ideology with the basic values of America's democratic society. The Nazis themselves were not blind to this issue. The German ambassador to the United States who once described the Bund as "Stupid and noisy," Hans Dieckhoff, outlined the Bund's difficulties in a message to Berlin in 1938;

⁵⁶ Hart *Hitler's American Friends* p.47

“It received negative press publicity; its emulation of the Nazi Party’s forms and ideology angered Americans; and its members had no roots or influence in the United States and could therefore not function realistically in American politics. Of the utmost significance... German America was not an element capable of being exploited for Germany’s benefit. Not only was it a dwindling, weak, and divided community, but the majority of German-Americans had no consciousness of being German.”⁵⁷

Nazism might have been a German ideology, but the Germans could not bring Nazism to America. Dieckhoff saw this was the case, but Kuhn and his followers refused to acknowledge reality. Instead, they focused on achieving notoriety, only to find that national attention did not translate into national support. The more attention the Bund gathered, the faster its collapse accelerated, as more Americans recognized the foreign hate group for what it was and fought one way or another to keep it out of their communities. Despite the Bund’s impressive rallies and nationwide presence, the response the group was met by indicated that most Americans opposed Nazism intensely. When the Bund disbanded and the United States went to war with Nazi Germany, many assumed that it was the end of the brief story of National Socialism in America. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

⁵⁷ Bell *IN Hitler’s Shadow* p.61

Chapter 2: The Revival of National Socialism in the United States and the Origins of American Neo-Nazism - 1945-1967

After defeating Nazi Germany in the largest conflict in history the whole world seemed ready to consign National Socialism to the books as a failed movement of the past. Though the Nazis had been driven from power and Hitler had committed suicide, many of his supporters remained. The guns of the Second World War had barely gone silent when some of these supporters began working to resurrect the Fuhrer's ideology. While World War II was the ultimate defeat of National Socialism, it had also allowed the Nazis to hold the globe's attention for years, and while most people around the world were rightly appalled by what they saw, some were inspired and saw a model to follow. Neo-Nazi groups began to form in nations across Europe and eventually around the world. In the United States the first post-war Nazi organizations emerged quickly and immediately demonstrated an important distinction from the Bund. Even though the majority of the Bund's members were American citizens (most of them naturalized rather than native-born) it was always apparent, despite the group's noisy statements to the contrary, that the Bund considered its German identity of much greater importance than its American one. The post-war National Socialist organizations in the United States abandoned the German nationalism of the Bund and emerged as the first generation of genuine American Nazis.

The first group that could be described as a neo-Nazi organization to appear in the United States called itself the Columbians. The group was organized on August 16, 1946 in Atlanta, Georgia, by Emory Burke and Homer Loomis. Both men had histories of involvement with Nazis. Burke, the official leader of the Columbians, had been associated with members of the Bund when he lived in New York in the 1930s, while Loomis had given

aid to Nazi officers seeking to escape justice during his time as a soldier in occupied Germany. Their followers were mostly working-class Georgians competing with Black workers for jobs in the post-war economy. Many were veterans and some were already members of the Ku Klux Klan. Burke and Loomis sought deeper ties with the Klan but were rebuffed by the Klan's leadership, due to concerns about losing members to the new group and ideological differences between the organizations. The Columbians, unlike the Klan, were committed to the idea of overthrowing the United States government to create a White American ethno-state. Loomis called for a race war targeting Black Americans and Jewish Americans in his speeches, asserting that "if the country were rid of its thirteen million Negroes and its four and one-half million Jews, all its problems would be solved." This association of anti-Black and anti-Jewish racism, while not new to the American Nazi movement, had never been as foundational to the Bund as it was to the Columbians. In the future anti-Black racism would be a core component of every American neo-Nazi group's ideology.⁵⁸

The Columbians actively encouraged violence from its members against the communities it targeted, with the goal of intimidating Atlanta's Black population in particular. The group's members wore brown shirts as a uniform, paraded down Atlanta's streets in military formation, and patrolled neighborhoods considered at risk of becoming integrated, posting signs that read "Zoned as a White Neighborhood."⁵⁹ Common tactics of the Columbians included protesting outside the homes of Black individuals and families moving into White neighborhoods, sending threatening letters to prominent Black and Jewish

⁵⁸ Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History*, p.85

⁵⁹ "Columbians." In *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, March 31, 2023.

<https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/columbians/>

figures or anyone who criticized the group, and attacking Black people who walked into the neighborhoods being patrolled. The group's most dramatic attack came on Halloween night, 1946, when they detonated a bomb on the porch of the Sibleys, a Black couple that had recently moved into an all-White neighborhood. Though no one was killed in the attack, it came in the same week as a violent assault by a 17-year-old member of the Columbians on a Black teenager that ended in the arrest of both. The growing violence and unrest caused by the Columbians, along with their open planning to take control of the local and then the national government, made the group a cause of serious concern for authorities in Georgia.⁶⁰

In November of 1946 the state revoked the Columbian's charter as a nonprofit, which had only been granted that August. This was followed by a series of investigations into the group by Atlanta's police department, conducted on the orders of Atlanta's Mayor, William Hartsfield, who told the *New York Times* that the city of Atlanta would "not countenance such terroristic actions directed at any group of people." The city's investigation led to both Burke and Loomis being convicted of incitement to riot and usurpation of police powers in February of 1947. The trial and the negative publicity that resulted from it proved to be a killing blow. The blowback the group received from the people of Atlanta caused the Columbian's membership (reported to be close to 300 by a reporter who attended a rally) to dissipate as the members, including co-founder Burke, abandoned the short-lived group. By June of 1947, Loomis told reporters in an interview that he was the only Columbian left, though Burke's departure from the Columbians did not mark his exit from America's neo-Nazi movement.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History*, p.87, "Bomb Rips a House in Atlanta Tension," *New York Times*, 11/01/1946, p.2

⁶¹ Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History*, p.88

The Columbians accomplished very little of immediate consequence in their brief existence, but they were the first group in the United States after the Second World War to openly admire Nazi Germany, in addition to the Confederacy which was unsurprisingly the group's other primary source of inspiration. While the group marched with Confederate flags and sang the praises of Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee, *Washington Post* Reporter Edward Folliard described the obvious Nazi influences in his Pulitzer-winning article covering the group:

“The whole aura of the Columbians is Nazi...[They] dress and swagger in the manner of storm troopers. They wear khaki shirts without coats, and on their arms are the red thunderbolt patches suggestive of the Runic insignia of the late Heinrich Himmler's SS bullies. It is a startling experience, the first time, to see them swinging down Bartow Street or Peachtree Street; something like seeing an old newsreel of Munich in the days of the Beer Hall Putsch.”⁶²

The adoption of Nazi aesthetics was a new move for an American organization that gave no special significance to German heritage (if the Columbians showed any preference among Caucasians, it was in their exaltation of the “Anglo-Saxon race”). When Folliard pointed out to Loomis how the Columbians' logo resembled to the SS's runic sigil in an interview, Loomis laughed and told him the similarity was a good thing. However, while the Columbian's admiration of the Nazis and their antisemitism is obvious, their interest in the ideology of National Socialism was limited. To the extent the short-lived hate group possessed an ideology, it could be described as White Southern Fascism with Nazi aesthetics,

⁶² Folliard, Edward T. “Columbians cloud Atlanta with an aura of Nazism.” *Washington Post*, 12/01/1946

lacking most of the features that distinguished National Socialism from other fascist ideologies. The next neo-Nazi group to arise in America would show much more interest in Nazism as a political system and even as an esoteric philosophy.

The National Renaissance Party had much more in common with its pre-war predecessors than the Columbians. Quite like Friends of the New Germany and the German-American Bund, the National Renaissance Party (abbreviated hereafter as NRP) operated out of New York City, where it was founded in January of 1949. The party took its name from a line in Hitler's last will and testament that read "I die with a happy heart aware [that there] will spring up... the seed of a radiant renaissance of the National Socialist movement." The NRP was born out of a merger of several smaller groups that were operating in New York City after the war (the German-American League, the Citizens Protective League, and the Nationalist Action League), all with memberships in the dozens at most. The man who brought these groups together under the umbrella of the NRP was James Madole, whose ideology was almost as bizarre as it was racist. Madole subscribed to a version of National Socialism called Esoteric Nazism that placed great emphasis on the occult theology used to help justify Hitler's racial policies. Madole believed that in vaguely defined "ancient times" the Aryan race had ruled over all other races, and they were worshipped as white gods. Other beliefs of his included that the Aryan race originated from the garden of Eden (which was in North America according to Madole) and that under the leadership of the NRP, the United States would be transformed into a "new Atlantis," as Atlantis had been the home of a pre-human master race that predated even the Aryans.⁶³

⁶³ Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p.83.

Despite his fascination with the occult, Madole had secured his position as the leader of the NRP by 1950 at the age of only 23. He led the party until his death from cancer in 1979, and while the NRP would eventually be overtaken by larger and more active groups such as the American Nazi Party, Madole's group played a crucial role in bridging the gap between the pre-war and post-war generations of the National Socialist movement in America. Several figures with ties to either the German-American Bund or Nazi Germany proper became involved in the National Renaissance Party, including Frederick Weiss, a German veteran of WW1 and an open neo-Nazi, and Harold K. Thompson, a New York businessman and former Bund member. While Madole would serve as the leader for the NRP, Thompson would prove to be its most important organizer and a crucial figure in the history of postwar National Socialism, not just in the United States but around the world.⁶⁴

The biography of Harold K. Thompson represents the meeting point between the NSDAP, the German-American Bund, and the early American neo-Nazi movement. Thompson was born in New Jersey in 1922, and all records of his life point to him becoming involved in the Nazi movement in the United States as soon as he was old enough to do so. As a teenager he became an official member of both Charles Lindbergh's America First Committee and the German-American Bund, saying of the latter "The leadership was not the best, but the spirit was there, and I liked it." At the age of 19 he became a member of a German spy ring inside the United States, operated by Nazi Germany's *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) Overseas Intelligence Unit. No confirmed acts of sabotage can be attributed to Thompson, but he claimed to have operated as a saboteur throughout the war, telling

⁶⁴ Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History*, p.90

historian Susan Canedy in an interview that “a steamship sank, things like that” but refusing to elaborate.⁶⁵

When it became clear that the Axis was heading towards defeat, Thompson began “to set things up quietly” in his words, laying the groundwork for those who were not content to let World War II be the end of National Socialism. As part of this work, he met the infamous SS member Otto Skorzeny, a German officer and special forces operative who’d earned the nickname of “Hitler’s commando.” During the war, Skorzeny had participated in several high-profile operations, including the successful rescue of Benito Mussolini from allied captivity in 1943, and a mission that saw German troops dressed in allied uniforms infiltrate allied lines during the Battle of the Bulge in 1944. After the war, Skorzeny was one of the crucial figures in the operation of the underground networks known as the Rat Lines, which Nazi figures like Adolf Eichmann and Joseph Mengele used to flee justice after the war. Thompson was Skorzeny’s point-man in the United States in the immediate postwar years. Working at Skorzeny’s instruction, Thompson managed a bank account holding funds that were used to help displaced Nazis resettle in places like Spain, Egypt, and Argentina.⁶⁶

In the early 1950s, after graduating from Yale, Thompson became active in the burgeoning neo-Nazi movement, not only in the United States but also in Germany. In 1951 he registered with the Justice Department as the U.S. Representative of the *Sozialistische Reichspartei*, (Socialist Reich Party/SRP). The SRP was the largest neo-Nazi political group to emerge in West Germany after the end of the allied occupation. It was founded in 1949 by

⁶⁵ Canedy, Susan. *America's Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma: A History of the German American Bund*, p.213. Menlo Park, CA: Markgraf Publications Group, 1990.

⁶⁶ Martin A. Lee et al., *The Beast Reawakens Fascism's Resurgence from Hitler's Spymasters to Today's Neo-Nazi Groups and Right-Wing Extremists* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013), p.85-86.

Wehrmacht officer Otto Ernst Remer, who had saved Hitler's life from an assassination plot in 1944. After participating in West Germany's first national elections, the party was banned in that country in 1952 as an illegal neo-Nazi group, and Remer went into hiding to escape imprisonment. Thompson founded what he called the Committee for the Freedom of Major General Remer, which amounted to an unsuccessful solitary crusade to rally support for the SRP within the United States. The SRP remained banned, and the one-man committee eventually disbanded, but shortly thereafter Thompson joined the National Renaissance Party.⁶⁷

Even with the funding and connections of Thompson now supporting him, Madole's group never expanded beyond its base of operations around New York City. Estimates of the NRP's size varied between 50 and 700 members, though historian George Thayer wrote in 1967 that the lower number was probably much closer to the truth, and there is no evidence aside from Madole's own claims that supports anything close to the larger figure.⁶⁸ Even if the higher estimate is accurate, it would represent a far smaller figure than what Friends of the New Germany had managed to attract in the same city two decades earlier. Rather than focusing on recruitment, the NRP had pivoted to publishing neo-Nazi and antisemitic propaganda. The group's most significant contribution to America's extreme right-wing was its publication of *The National Renaissance*, its semi-regular newsletter. While the NRP itself remained confined to a small group of New York-based Nazis, *The National Renaissance* became popular among the radical right fringe of American politics in the mid-to-late 1950s, finding a larger audience than the NRP itself ever did with roughly 1,000 subscribers around

⁶⁷ Martin et al., p.89-90

⁶⁸ George Thayer, *The Farther Shores of Politics: The American Political Fringe Today* (London, England: Allen Lane, 1968), p.72.

the nation. It was through *National Renaissance* that Harold Thompson first found the NRP, and the newsletter was also a favorite of Edward Fields, the leader of the neo-Confederate National States' Rights Party which operated throughout the southern United States and served as a training ground for many future American Nazis. Frederick Weiss, the German veteran who had provided Madole with most of the NRP's funding, offered a revealing quote about how he saw the NRP in an interview:

“Madole is basically honest but fanatical and ignorant. I find him convenient to run errands, and I also can put whatever I please into his Renaissance Bulletin. He sends the publication to a list of about a thousand names. His contributors carry half the cost and I'm saved the bother of distributing.”

This view of Madole as a useful idiot was hardly unique to Weiss, and other figures in the American neo-Nazi movement, including George Lincoln Rockwell, would make similar comments in the future. However, the NRP represented a crucial link between the pre-war and post-war Nazi groups, “a successful intermediary between the prewar German American Bund and the future American Nazi Party” in the words of political historian Steven Atkins. Throughout the 1950s the neo-Nazi movement had remained out of the national spotlight, at times despite their best efforts of the NRP to draw attention to their cause. George Lincoln Rockwell and the American Nazi Party would change that.⁶⁹

In spite of the decades-long history of National Socialists in American history that predated him, if anyone can be described as the father of American Nazism, it is George Lincoln Rockwell. Rockwell had more influence in deciding the course of the neo-Nazi

⁶⁹ Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History*, p.89

movement than any other individual, establishing an agenda and operational strategy that would be copied by every other prominent American Nazi group to emerge throughout the 20th century. While Rockwell's American Nazi Party (ANP) never reached the numbers or scale of the Bund, the ANP was what the Bund always hoped to become, a Nazi organization in America that could stand the test of time. Though it is a ghost of its former self, the organization that Rockwell created in October of 1959 still exists today, operating under its new title of New Order and still engaging in acts of racism and hate. Some of the most influential figures in right-wing extremism, such as Robert Brannen of the National Socialist Movement (the largest neo-Nazi group in America as of 2023) and William Luther Pierce, author of the White Nationalist novel *The Turner Diaries*⁷⁰, began their careers as Rockwell's proteges. The Bund was unable to carve out a position in America's political landscape for its version of unadulterated German Nazism, despite having thousands of members and access to significant (if inconsistent) support from the German government. The American Nazi Party was able to succeed where the Bund failed, without any of the foreign backing and with a tiny fraction of the Bund's members. The country is still contending with the consequences of this success today.⁷¹

The founder of America's modern neo-Nazi movement came from an unusual background. George Lincoln Rockwell was born to a pair of vaudeville performers in Bloomington, Illinois, in 1918. His parents divorced when he was six years old, and Rockwell's childhood was then divided between New Jersey and Maine. He graduated high

⁷⁰ *The Turner Diaries* has become an influential work among White Nationalist groups in the United States and even around the world. Notably, the book was a significant source of inspiration for the perpetrators of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing attack.

⁷¹ Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History*, p.93-94

school and began attending Brown University in 1938 where he studied philosophy. At Brown, Rockwell received poor grades, especially in sociology due to his disagreements with the subject's methodology. Writing about his experiences later, he wrote, "Certain ideas produced apoplexy in the teacher, particularly the suggestion that perhaps some people were no-good biological slobs from the day they were born."⁷² Though not yet a Nazi at this point in his life, Rockwell clearly held deeply prejudiced views from an early age. Rockwell dropped out of Brown to enlist in the Navy in March of 1941. He finished his training as a naval aviator a month after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and quickly went into active duty. Rockwell served in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters during the war. His missions were mostly for the purposes of photo reconnaissance and providing training, but he did take part in combat missions during the Battle of Guadalcanal and in 1944 against Japanese submarines off the Alaskan coast.⁷³ After the war, Rockwell decided that World War 2 had been a war in defense of communism, and wrote that he felt more like a Soviet veteran than an American one.⁷⁴

Rockwell married for the first time in 1943 but the relationship was not a happy one. Despite this, he and his wife Judith would have three children, whom Rockwell abandoned as he pursued his career as a hatemonger. After the war Rockwell returned to Maine, where he worked as an artist while attending the prestigious Pratt Institute of Commercial Art. He developed a strong distaste for modern art while studying there, which he argued was associated with communism. During his studies he demonstrated a talent for illustration and

⁷² Rockwell, George Lincoln, *White Power*, (Decatur Illinois: Aryan Book Center, 1996) p.64

⁷³ Simonelli, Frederick J., *American Fuhrer: George Lincoln Rockwell and the American Nazi Party*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 1999.) p.17-19

⁷⁴ William H. Schmaltz, *Hate: George Lincoln Rockwell and the American Nazi Party* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2001), p.14-16, Rockwell, *White Power* p.41

especially comics, skills he would use in the American Nazi Party's propaganda in the future. While at Pratt, Rockwell won 1st place in a national illustration contest, along with the \$1,000 prize, for an anti-smoking ad he created. Rather than continue his studies, Rockwell dropped out to open his own ad agency in Portland, Maine. His entry into the private sector was interrupted in 1950 when the Korean War began and Rockwell was recalled into active service. Though Rockwell had already demonstrated an ideological belief in racism and already held intense anti-communist sympathies at this point, these attitudes were hardly uncommon in America in the 1950s. The radicalization that pulled him to the furthest extremes of right-wing politics began during the Red Scare of the early 1950s.⁷⁵

Rockwell did not go to Korea, but was relocated to California, where he served as a training instructor for Navy and Marine pilots. While serving in California he became a supporter of Senator Joseph McCarthy's crusade against alleged communist infiltrators. Rockwell already believed that Communists had infiltrated much of Washington and Hollywood, and he was an ideal spectator for McCarthy's high-profile investigations. In 1952 Rockwell began working on a campaign to get General Douglas MacArthur to accept the Republican nomination for President. The moment Rockwell described as his "awakening" came when he met with a couple who also supported the MacArthur campaign. Rockwell told them of his idea to rent out an event to host a pro-MacArthur rally. The couple told him that the plan would not work because he would not be able to book a location. When Rockwell asked why, the wife told him "The Jews... they hate MacArthur." This unnamed woman, whose identity Rockwell kept secret throughout his life, became Rockwell's mentor in the subject of antisemitic conspiracies. She provided him with literature like *The Protocols*

⁷⁵ Schmaltz, *Hate*, p. 18-19

of the *Elders of Zion*, an infamous 19th-century forgery that was presented as a leaked document from a global Zionist conspiracy, and the pamphlet *Common Sense* by Conde McGinley that claimed a Jewish conspiracy had organized the 1917 Russian Revolution and was secretly running the Soviet Union.⁷⁶

Rockwell was fascinated and wanted to learn more. On the recommendation of the White Nationalist radio preacher Gerald L. K. Smith, Rockwell began reading *Mein Kampf*. He would later write that reading Hitler's book offered him a "mental sunshine which bathed all the gray world in the clear light of reason and understanding."⁷⁷ For Rockwell, *Mein Kampf* laid out the peril threatening White western civilization in clear detail, and he became convinced that Hitler's ideology of National Socialism was the only thing that could prevent a collapse into what he referred to as "global racial anarchy." Rockwell's belief that America had fought on the wrong side of World War II was confirmed, and he began believing that the United States should have joined Nazi Germany to crush the Soviet Union instead. While Rockwell was descending into the depths of antisemitic conspiracy, his home life was continuing to deteriorate. In 1952 the military transferred him to Iceland, where his family could not relocate with him. This separation delivered the killing blow to Rockwell's unhappy marriage, and Rockwell became estranged from his wife and three daughters. He channeled his frustrations into his new fascination with Nazism, rereading *Mein Kampf* dozens of times over and annotating his copy with his own thoughts.⁷⁸

While in Iceland, Rockwell met his second wife, Margaret Thora Hallgrímsson, at a diplomatic reception. Hallgrímsson was the niece of Iceland's ambassador to the United

⁷⁶ Schmaltz, *Hate*, p. 21

⁷⁷ Rockwell, George Lincoln, *This Time the World*, (Reedy, WV: Liberty Bell Publications, 1973), p.83

⁷⁸ Simonelli, *American Fuhrer*, p.23

States, and after several months of courtship the two married, honeymooning in the Bavarian Alps where the couple made a detour to visit Hitler's favorite retreat of Berchtesgaden. In 1954 the couple had a son, Lincoln, the first of four children, and later that year they returned to the United States after Rockwell was transferred to inactive duty. Rockwell chose to settle near Washington D.C. in Arlington, Virginia, where he attempted to enter the world of publishing. He started several short-lived magazines that were unrelated to his political beliefs, and worked as a contracted promoter for William F. Buckley's *National Review* on college campuses. When none of these careers went anywhere, he relocated his family to New York and began working as a writer for the conservative magazine *American Mercury*. In 1956 he left the magazine due to disagreements with its editor. On the edge of financial ruin, in 1958 Rockwell travelled to Nashville to attend a meeting of the United White Party, the precursor to the National State's Rights Party. In Nashville he was introduced to Edward Fields and J.B. Stoner, the leaders of the future NSRP, as well as Matthias Koehl, who would eventually succeed Rockwell as leader of the American Nazi Party, and Emory Burke, one of the co-founders of the now-defunct Columbians.^{79 80}

Though Rockwell's relationship with Burke was brief, it was pivotal in his decision to finally begin living publicly as a Nazi, the last step he needed to take before he could create the ANP. Burke and Rockwell began a regular correspondence and Burke even invited Rockwell to speak at several occasions, though he advised Rockwell leave out the Nazi jargon from his speeches. According to Burke, "Most southerners [make] no distinction between National Socialism and Communism." Then, on October 12, 1958, 50 sticks of

⁷⁹ Schmaltz *Hate* p.29

⁸⁰ Stoner would carry out a bombing attack against the Bethel Baptist Church on June 29 of that same year. Luckily nobody was injured. He was caught in 1977 and served 3 ½ years in prison.

dynamite exploded inside the oldest synagogue in Atlanta. Coming on the heels of another synagogue bombing in Peoria, Illinois, the Atlanta attack drew the attention of the national press and the FBI. One article stated that J. Edgar Hoover took a personal interest and “ordered that nothing be spared in the way of cooperation with local authorities.” Emory Burke, though not involved in this particular attack, was at the top of the Atlanta Police Department’s list of suspects due to his history with the Columbians. Because of his connection to Burke, Rockwell was identified as a person of interest in the case, being interviewed by the FBI. His categorization as a “radical Nazi” by the Atlanta police became public knowledge when it was revealed in the press. While his extended family was horrified and his second wife (already estranged and living in Iceland again) left him several months after the revelation, for Rockwell this outing came as a great relief. He now felt free, and even proud, to use the label of Nazi describing himself to others.⁸¹

Rockwell created what would quickly become the ANP as WUFENS, the World Union of Free Enterprise National Socialists, a name he chose to distinguish between National Socialism and the despised ideology of Communism. WUFENS was headquartered in Rockwell’s own home in Arlington. Rockwell’s plan was for WUFENS to eventually function as a sort of National Socialist International, an umbrella organization for which Nazi groups and parties from around the world could participate in. Despite eagerly adopting the Nazi brand, Rockwell took steps to make sure WUFENS was not perceived as a Germanic group. Members were banned from wearing German military uniforms and instead had to wear the party uniform of a khaki shirt, though a swastika armband still featured. Rockwell

⁸¹ Herald and News, “Synagogue Bombings Being Probed,” Kamath Falls, OR, 10/15/1958, p.1, Simonelli *American Fuhrer*, p. 29-30.

also wrote in a pamphlet that rather than follow the example of Hitler's "racist nationalism" WUFENS would instead advocate for "international racism." This international approach to Nazism would be a defining feature of Rockwell's movement in the future.⁸²

WUFENS had reached a membership of 22 people, consisting of Rockwell, nine officers, and twelve members, when in April of 1959 the Arlington County Sheriff Department raided Rockwell's home and confiscated his Nazi paraphernalia, accusing him of being a public nuisance. While the charges against Rockwell were eventually dropped as WUFENS had not broken any laws, the court case proved to be enough to send all but three of Rockwell's followers packing. By June, WUFENS had dwindled to four people, and Rockwell told a reporter he was "giving up on America." After a brief return to Iceland where he tried and failed to reunite with his second wife, Rockwell found himself back in the United States, penniless and alone. It was in this moment of personal crisis that he decided that, rather than abandoning his mission to bring Nazism to America, he would double down. In Rockwell's view, WUFENS had failed because he had tried to present it as a respectable National Socialist group. The restraint he had exercised trying to get WUFENS to appear respectable (avoiding public demonstrations and confrontation, focusing on publishing propaganda.) had crippled the group's ability to draw attention and recruit the sort of members it needed to survive: men who were so committed to Nazism that they were willing to be despised by everyone they met. He took inspiration from a passage in *Mein Kampf* that read: "Whether they laugh at us or swear at us, whether they present us as fools or criminals; the main thing is that they mention us, that they occupy themselves with us again and

⁸² Schmaltz *Hate*, p.49

again.”⁸³ Rockwell, doubtlessly inspired by his upbringing, decided that performative action was the key to his ideology. He dropped the term National Socialist, deciding it was too verbose and lacked in the shock value that he needed. Moving forward, he decided to chase the attention of the nation, forcing his ideology into public as frequently and obnoxiously as he could. In October of 1959 Rockwell founded the American Nazi Party.⁸⁴

Rockwell’s decision for his new party to abandon efforts at persuasion in favor of simply accumulating attention was a tactical one. In his posthumous manifesto *White Power*, Rockwell explained his reasoning:

“Until our appearance on the scene, the Jews have driven every ‘conservative’ opponent into hiding with the fearful accusation, "You're a fascist, a Nazi!"... For the first time, with the arrival... of the American Nazi Party, there is now a spiritual force to look these Jew terrorists in the eye when they start that "You're-a-Nazi"-bit and reply, "You're damned right we're Nazis, and we will soon enough take care of you traitors, thieves, liars, terrorists and communist enemies!”⁸⁵

By inciting as much outrage as possible through non-violent means, Rockwell hoped to provoke his enemies, particularly those in the Jewish and Black communities, into giving him more publicity for free than he could have ever afforded on his own. This would spread the ANP’s message far and wide, and while Rockwell knew most Americans would oppose the ANP, he also knew that a few would be drawn to it once exposed to the party’s message. In November of 1959 the ANP began operating out of the first story of a house in Arlington,

⁸³ Hitler, *Mein Kampf* p.723

⁸⁴ Schmaltz *Hate* 57-58

⁸⁵ Rockwell, *White Power* p.49

and it soon began drawing both attention and members. Though the ANP's membership never exceeded 200, and was significantly lower than that figure throughout most of its existence, Rockwell's talent for bombastic stunts kept the group in the media, generating the perception that the ANP was both larger and more active than the party truly was.

The first of these stunts occurred on February 6, 1960, when Rockwell and two of his followers drove into D.C. to distribute a pamphlet entitled, "White Man! Are You Going to Be Run Out of Your Nation's Capital Without a Fight?" The pamphlet claimed Black people were overtaking White people as the dominant racial group in D.C. and a Jewish plan was behind this demographic change. During the event, one of Rockwell's followers, J.V. Morgan, became engaged in a brief tug-of-war when a Jewish man tried to rip the pamphlets from his hand. The police intervened and arrested both men for disorderly conduct. Still critically low on funds, the ANP was unable to pay for a lawyer to represent Morgan. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) believed the case had implications regarding the 1st Amendment's protections of freedom of speech, and offered to represent Morgan, provided the ANP accepted a Jewish defense attorney. Rather than reject the offer as a poison pill, Rockwell happily accepted the ACLU's terms, knowing that a Jewish lawyer defending a Nazi was a story the press was sure to latch onto. While the mainstream press gave the story only cursory attention, America's Jewish media followed it closely. Papers such as the *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, the *St. Lewis Jewish Light*, and the *Jewish Press* out of Omaha, Nebraska covered the incident and trial in detail, with the *Chronicle* providing weekly

updates on the trial throughout February of 1960.⁸⁶ Rockwell's quest to brand the ANP as the face of modern American antisemitism was already making progress.⁸⁷

The charges against both individuals were dropped after it was decided that the incident did not amount to disorderly conduct, and the Washington D.C. Council of Commissioners released a statement clarifying that if no other laws were broken, the distribution of hate literature by the ANP was not itself illegal and could not be stopped. Rockwell celebrated the episode as a victory and "honored" his Jewish attorney with the Nazi salute as they made their way out of the courthouse. Those who opposed him quickly identified Rockwell's methods and prepared a response. On March 6, 1960, many Jewish organizations assembled in New York City at the request of the National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC), where they developed a plan for dealing with Rockwell. Eventually they decided on a policy of publicity quarantine. The four points of the plan were: "1. Do not play into Rockwell's publicity seeking. 2. Do not telephone or harass him – it only feeds his delusion of self-importance. 3. Do not attend his public meetings. 4. Never use physical force against the Nazis." These four points perfectly addressed the ANP's strategy, and if they could have been enforced nation-wide, Rockwell's group would have been starved of the attention it survived on until it withered away and died. However, getting people to show restraint in the face of the ANP's heinous behavior was much easier said than done.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Newspapers.com - Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle - February 1960 - Keyword "George Lincoln Rockwell" (Newspapers.com), accessed April 1, 2023, <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/search/>.

⁸⁷ Schmaltz, *Hate*, p.65

⁸⁸ Schmaltz *Hate*, p. 69

In June and July of 1960, the ANP incited two different riots in Washington D.C. and New York City, both of which Rockwell considered significant victories for the group. The first took place in New York on June 22, when Rockwell appeared in the state supreme court to advocate for the ANP's constitutional right to hold an Independence Day parade in Union Square. During a recess in the trial, Rockwell gave an interview to television reporters covering the case before a crowd of 200 angry protestors. When one of the reporters asked if Rockwell planned to gas Jews, he said he planned to "gas traitors, Jews or otherwise." When the reporter asked him how many Jews were traitors in his eyes he instantly responded with "eighty percent." This provoked an outcry from the crowd and several members charged through the line of police to get at Rockwell. A brawl ensued and the police whisked Rockwell into a side room, where he was kept until the riot squad arrived and escorted him to a taxi cab. The ANP's parade permit was denied, but the story of the riot was covered in the national press. Rockwell's picture appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* the next day, and he considered that a much better outcome than having been permitted to hold the rally.⁸⁹ The next incident came less than 2 weeks later, on July 3 when protestors interrupted an ANP rally on the National Mall in D.C., engaging in a brief melee with the dozen ANP troopers guarding Rockwell before being dispersed by the police. Rockwell was arrested after this event, but the next day the ANP was featured on the front pages of newspapers across the nation once again, and their national profile continued to grow even as the group's membership remained below 50.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ *New York Times* "Wagner Forbids Rally of Nazis After Leader is Mobbed by 150.", 06/23/1962. p.1

⁹⁰ Simonelli, *American Fuhrer*, p. 47

The clashes of June and July 1960 marked the beginning of the ANP's relentless campaign for the attention of the United States. The party's next several years were characterized by similar events, as well as by political stunts. After a riot that occurred when the ANP picketed the premier of the film *Exodus*, Rockwell told a reporter, "I think this will help my cause. I would have preferred to picket but I get more publicity from a riot." In another scheme that drew national attention, a group of ANP troopers created a hate bus, a Volkswagen van with Rockwell's name and the slogan "We Hate Race Mixing" painted in large lettering on the side. Seven ANP members drove the hate bus to New Orleans in the summer of 1962, in a racist parody of the contemporary actions of the Freedom Riders advocating for the end of Jim Crow in the south.⁹¹

This period also saw the beginning of the ANP's limited expansion beyond its Arlington headquarters. From 1960 to 1962, the ANP opened chapter offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, and Dallas. Riding high on these successes, Rockwell decided to attempt another rally in Union Square in 1961, this time on April 20 to celebrate Adolf Hitler's birthday. The permit was denied as expected, but Rockwell was disappointed to see that no protestors showed up to confront him and his party members, and only a couple of journalists were present, far fewer than on the previous occasion. The NCRAC's quarantine strategy had worked this time. Frustrated, Rockwell decided to try something new, something which was sure to catch the media's eye. The result was perhaps one of the most unexpected and strange political partnerships in American history.⁹²

⁹¹ Schmaltz, *Hate*, p. 117

⁹² Simonelli, *American Fuhrer*, p.53,

In the summer of 1961, Rockwell reached out to Elijah Muhammed, leader of the Nation of Islam, a Black Supremacist religious movement with tens of thousands of members across the United States. To call the partnership an unusual one is an understatement. The Nation of Islam's mythology claimed that the White race was an artificial race created by a Black scientist named Yakub, and that all White people lacked souls. The official ANP doctrine was that Black people were intellectually undeveloped and biologically inferior to White people, and Rockwell's preferred solution to America's racial unrest was to deport the Black population to Africa. Despite these differences, both groups shared similar views about race-mixing and Jews, and these prejudices proved enough of a common ground to build a brief relationship. Like Rockwell, Elijah Muhammed believed that interracial relationships were unnatural and produced weak offspring, and that the integration movement occurring in the United States was a Jewish plot to weaken the races.⁹³

Rockwell was able to secure an invitation for himself and 10 troopers to attend a Nation of Islam event where both Elijah Muhammed and Malcolm X (prior to his 1964 departure from the Nation) were scheduled to speak. At the event Malcolm X gave a speech entitled "Separation or Death," where he called for the total separation of the Black and White races. After the event Rockwell told reporters that the Nation of Islam were "Black Nazis" in his eyes, saying he was fully in agreement with their program, the only discrepancy being "They want a chunk of America and I prefer they go to Africa." The outing proved to be a success for the ANP and Rockwell would go on to speak in favor of racial separation at another Nation of Islam event in 1962. The hatred of both groups for the other's preferred race proved too great to facilitate further cooperation however. After 1962 there were no

⁹³ Schmaltz, *Hate*, p.119

further ANP-Nation of Islam events, and the ANP, still tiny in size despite its national profile, began to look elsewhere for allies.⁹⁴

In July of 1962, Rockwell illegally snuck into England via Ireland. He was there on the invitation of Colin Jordan; the leader of an organization called the British National Socialist Movement. Though the story of Britain's own neo-Nazi movement is outside the scope of this paper, it would not be wrong to label Colin Jordan as Britain's Rockwell. Like Rockwell, Jordan had begun his political career as a nationalist before transitioning into explicit Nazism, a choice which set him apart from Britain's other fascist movements in the 1960s. Jordan and Rockwell were preparing to establish what would become known as the World Union of National Socialists, an international coalition of neo-Nazi parties, based upon Rockwell's original plan for the defunct WUFENS. Great Britain had denied Rockwell's application for a visa, but he had not allowed the refusal to prevent him from meeting with Jordan and Britain's other Nazis. Rockwell was smuggled into the country and made a surprise appearance at a rally at the BNSM's compound in Gloucestershire. There he received a warm welcome and gave a speech on the resurgence of Nazism around the globe.⁹⁵

When word got out that Rockwell was in the country, citizens of the nearby town stormed the Nazi camp trying to find him, but Rockwell had already left by then. He was caught after 4 days in London and deported back to the United States. There he typed up the agreement that he had struck with Jordan, proclaiming the World Union of National Socialists as an alliance between the ANP, the BNSM, and four other entirely fictitious

⁹⁴ Schmaltz, *Hate*, p.120

⁹⁵ Schmaltz, *Hate*, p. 148

groups that Rockwell made up to add weight to the announcement. It seems to have worked, as within the year, the WUNS had participating groups in Chile, France, Japan, South Africa, and Australia. The WUNS is still operating today, claiming member parties in 23 nations around the globe.⁹⁶

After his success negotiating an alliance with the BNSM, in 1963 Rockwell changed his strategy once again, spending less time engineering attention-drawing incidents and more time on the university lecture circuit. It was a decision motivated by financial considerations. While the lectures were still designed to provoke outrage and protests that would draw the public's eye, the main factor behind Rockwell's new focus was the ANP's struggling finances. Though donations and dues had both increased throughout the early 1960s as the party's national profile grew, the ANP was still operating on a shoestring budget. The group often failed to raise enough to keep the power and water on at the Arlington house headquarters, and members dined on rations of soup and boiled potatoes. Lectures provided Rockwell with a more reliable source of income through his speaking fees, allowing him to marginally improve the living conditions of his followers. Rockwell's appearances were treated as exercises of the 1st amendment by the campuses that invited him, and he was often invited to speak by Student Forums or other student body organizations specifically because of the controversy his appearances generated.⁹⁷

These lectures gave Rockwell the largest live audiences of his career. In May of 1963 he spoke before a crowd of 3,000 at the University of Colorado, and June of 1964 he gave a speech to a packed auditorium while a further 2,000 students had to be turned away. The

⁹⁶ Schmaltz, *Hate*, p.151

⁹⁷ Simonelli, *American Fuhrer*, p. 128-

audiences were overwhelmingly hostile to Rockwell's message, and he did not consider universities to be good targets for recruitment, but that did not matter. The money he earned from speaking helped keep the ANP operating and he enjoyed the large platform the events afforded him. Throughout the remaining years of his life, Rockwell would devote a large amount of his time to speaking at colleges across the United States.⁹⁸

By the end of 1964 Rockwell had created a national profile for himself as one of the country's most recognizable racists. With his notoriety secured, the commander of the ANP decided it was time to implement what he called "Phase Two" of the plan to bring National Socialism to the United States. The objective of phase two was to rebrand the ANP as a legitimate political party and begin trying to secure political power by running for office. Rockwell himself took the lead on this, entering the 1965 Virginia Governor's race as an independent candidate. On the campaign trail, Rockwell appeared without his trademark khaki uniform and armband, instead wearing a black suit with a gold swastika pin on the lapel, his version of subtlety. He also made a rhetorical adjustment in his speeches. While antisemitism and references to the Jewish conspiracy behind communism still appeared in the speeches he made during the campaign, these were no longer front-and-center in the platform that Rockwell presented. In their place Rockwell chose to deliver a series of incredibly racist attacks on Black people. In speeches before members of White Citizens' Councils and John Birch Society members, Rockwell promised to use the powers of the governor's office to pardon anyone convicted of murdering a Black man.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Simonelli *American Fuhrer*, p. 129

⁹⁹ Schmaltz, *Hate*, p.255

While in private Rockwell still focused his ire on Jews, he chose to emphasize his anti-Black position during the governor's race due to the rising racial tensions across the United States that year. It was Rockwell's belief that he could position himself as the only credible anti-integration candidate and would therefore have "a 50-50 chance of winning" as he told Colin Jordan in a letter. In the end Rockwell received 5,730 votes, representing 1.02% of all the votes cast in the race. Despite this result being the largest showing of quantifiable support the ANP ever received, Rockwell was disappointed by the result and decided further reforms were needed if his party was ever going to have a chance at national relevance.¹⁰⁰

On January 1, 1967, Rockwell sent out a directive to his followers around the country. Going forward, the American Nazi Party would now be called the National Socialist White People's Party (NSWPP). In addition, the old party greeting of *Sieg Heil* would be dropped. It was replaced by a phrase Rockwell had coined the previous year: "White Power." Rockwell had ripped the slogan off from the Black Power movement, but it had proven popular with the crowd protesting a civil rights march led by Martin Luther King Jr. in Chicago in 1966. Rockwell latched onto the term after seeing its success with those outside the ANP's membership. In the directive announcing the rebranding, Rockwell also laid out the NSWPP's 10 points, an expanded and updated list of the informal tenants that had defined the ANP's official beliefs. The 10 points were:

1. "America must be all white. Blacks must be deported
2. Jewish domination of our cultural, financial, and national affairs must be smashed
3. Communism, Zionism, and all other forms of treason must be exterminated

¹⁰⁰ Simonelli, *American Fuhrer*, p. 99

4. The rights of a man's home, his family, and his private property must be held sacred
5. The right of law-abiding white people to keep and bear arms at all times and all places shall not be infringed
6. Crime and riots in the streets will be smashed by the just and immediate use of power
7. We will fight wars only for America, and then we will fight to total and immediate victory, using all available weapons
8. Productive free enterprise, large and small business, and neighborhood stores must be encouraged and protected
9. Every productive, working American must have a decent job, lifetime economic security, and wholesome living conditions for himself and his family
10. Youth, our future leaders, must have unlimited educational opportunities and help in setting up family-life"

The 10 points were not just a summary of Rockwell's ideology, they were a codification of the core tenants of Nazism's new, Americanized form. Though the ANP's interpretation of National Socialism was certainly less orthodox than that of the Bund, it was the ideological permutations that Rockwell introduced which finally produced what Fritz Kuhn spent so much time and effort failing to create: American Nazism.¹⁰¹

Throughout 1967, Rockwell continued making regular appearances as a speaker on college campuses, often appearing at two universities in the same day to maximize his income. The NSWPP had found an equilibrium that, while not growing the party's numbers by any significant measure, allowed the core of 50-100 supporters to continue operating off a combination of membership dues, Rockwell's speaking fees, and the trickle of donations that always picked up after Rockwell engineered a new way to put the Nazis in the headlines. It got to the point Rockwell bragged that he had more invitations to speak than days he could afford to travel away from the headquarters. The party's focus for the year was the publication and promotion of *White Power*, Rockwell's new manifesto which he hoped

¹⁰¹ Schmaltz, *Hate*, p. 305

would bring in scores of new recruits. Then, on August 25, as he was preparing for a short trip to D.C. to promote the first copies of the book, George Lincoln Rockwell was shot and killed in the parking lot of the laundromat across the street from the Arlington HQ.

Ironically, he had been going back to pick up some bleach he wanted to whiten his clothes before the trip. The assassin was not an anti-Nazi driven to violence, but a former ANP member named John Patler. Patler had killed Rockwell as revenge for being expelled from the party several months prior for “Marxist tendencies.” Unlike the Bund, the loss of their charismatic leader did not spell the end of the NSWPP.¹⁰²

Deputy Party leader of the NSWPP Matthias Koehl quickly took charge of the group. Only hours after Rockwell’s death, before Patler had been apprehended, Koehl addressed a crowd of reporters outside the Arlington headquarters, where he told them “Whoever did it, it is of benefit only to the blacks and the jews of this country, it is a defeat for every white man.” Fittingly, even Rockwell’s funeral became a source of spectacle and conflict. As a veteran Rockwell could have been buried with military honors in Arlington Cemetery, and Koehl wanted to bury him in his Nazi uniform and have party members perform a uniformed tribute before the ceremony. The request was denied and the neo-Nazis had to search around northern Virginia for a cemetery that would accept Rockwell’s body. Eventually the funeral was held at the Culpeper National Cemetery but when the Nazis tried to hold their procession, they were blocked by the military police, who were present to maintain order. After a standoff that lasted all day, Koehl decided to cremate Rockwell and display his ashes

¹⁰² Schmaltz, *Hate*, p.330, Michael E. Miller, “The Shadow of an Assassinated American Nazi Commander Hangs over Charlottesville,” *The Washington Post* (WP Company, November 8, 2021),

at the headquarters instead. After Rockwell's death, control of the party fell to Koehl, who led the NSWPP (renamed again to New Order in 1983) until his own death in 2014.¹⁰³

Koehl's long tenure was marked by numerous splits within the party. Two notable neo-Nazi splinter-groups emerged from the NSWPP in this period. The first was the Chicago-based National Socialist Party of America, whose attempt to march through Skokie, Illinois led to the Supreme Court case *National Socialist Party of America v. Village of Skokie* in 1977. The second splinter of note was the National Alliance, formed in 1974 by William Luther Pierce, another lieutenant of Rockwell. After forming the National Alliance, Pierce went on to write *The Turner Diaries*, a highly racist novel that acquired a cult following in extreme-right circles across the United States. At the time of Pierce's death in 2002, the National Alliance had 2,500 members and an annual income of over 1 million dollars. New Order itself, now under the command of a man named Martin Kerr, has retreated from the public eye, and practices a policy of keeping its members anonymous, focusing all of its efforts on publishing hate material both in print and digital formats. In 2021 members of New Order scattered flyers in several neighborhoods across Greene County, VA.¹⁰⁴ The largest neo-Nazi group currently operating in the United States, the National Socialist Movement, was also founded in 1974 by former ANP members. The World Union of National Socialists is still active though the authority it exerts over the participating parties is next to nil. On its website it claims 40 participating parties from 23 countries, though many of these parties are themselves no longer operating.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History*, p. 90, Fred P. Graham, "Nazi Calls Slaying Defeat for Whites," *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, August 26, 1967),.

¹⁰⁴ Beigie, Terry, *Greene County Report*, "Neo-Nazi Flyers are Scattered," 05/09/2021

¹⁰⁵ Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in modern American History*, p.93-97

By the metrics he set for himself, George Lincoln Rockwell was a failure. He never took power at any meaningful level, or precipitated an antisemitic/anti-Black “awakening” among America’s White population. The American Nazi Party, despite its high profile, had a negligible effect on the progress of the civil rights movement it sought to interrupt. The post-war neo-Nazi movement has never approached even half the size of the pre-war Bund at its height, and it most likely never will. Yet while the legacy of the Bund quickly faded after WW2, Rockwell and the ANP’s influence continue to linger. Rockwell is seen as one of the founding fathers of neo-Nazism and the groups created by him and his followers continue to be the most active Nazi organizations in the 21st century. The difference that allowed the American Nazi Party to succeed where the Bund failed was its ideological flexibility. While the Bund was a National Socialist organization operating inside the United States, the ANP was a truly American Nazi group, and the distinction proved significant. Where the Bund tried to jam the square peg of German National Socialism into the round hole of American society, the ANP adapted Hitler’s ideology so that it could spread and persist within the extreme right fringe of the political landscape of the United States.

Conclusion

The early history of Nazism in the United States is a reminder of the consequences of the freedom of speech, and yet also a testament to the United States' commitment to this foundational principle in spite of those consequences. Before World War II, the Bund grew its membership into the tens of thousands, a size no other American Nazi group is likely to ever reach, but even without the legacy of the holocaust or Hitler's wars of aggression burdening the group, it was vehemently rejected by most Americans as a hate group. When the war came and freedoms were restricted, the Bund and other fascist groups in the country dissolved, either on their own or by Federal intervention.

The United States played a crucial role in the global crusade to destroy Fascism, and Nazism in particular, and it came as a shock when the hateful ideology reemerged immediately after the war on our own soil. The pre-war Nazis had seemed to be foreign agents and their cronies, but the neo-Nazis were undeniably of American origin. It became apparent in the years after World War II that for certain maladjusted members of society, many of whom already harbored deeply prejudicial views, the atrocities of Nazi Germany and the outrage Nazism provokes in most people are appealing, even desirable. Despite being incredibly few in number, these individuals go to great efforts to draw attention to themselves. Their adoption of Nazism is a way of furthering this search for attention from the outside world. Though there may exist plans to incite a mass awakening or take power somehow, Rockwell's American Nazi Party demonstrated that the main priority is always simply to draw as many eyes onto their hate as possible.

In a nation that guarantees the freedom of speech, the Nazis were able to make themselves heard using the same protections that defended the Civil Rights protestors of that

era. Though the Nazis abused this freedom to spew hate and fear, and continue to do so, the fact that they have not been censored is proof of the enduring strength of America's commitment to the freedom of speech. The neo-Nazis have been given every opportunity to show themselves to the American people, and they have never gathered more than a few hundred followers at any point. A National Socialist fringe will exist in the United States for as long as extreme groups of any sort of affiliation are permitted to operate in this country, but it will never be more than an incredibly tiny minority of Americans. Nazism may never be eliminated from the United States, but it has failed here, and not because of government intervention but because the people of the United States have been wise enough to reject it.

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