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THE DARK SIDE OF THE SUNSHINE STATE: EXTREMISM IN FLORIDA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Florida has been a hotbed of extremist groups and movements for over 15 years. These groups have spread fear and hatred and have frequently engaged in criminal activities, including violent acts. Today, domestic hate groups and anti-government extremist groups can be found in every section of Florida, while threats from Islamic radicals have also emerged in recent years.

Hate Groups

Hate groups are the most common type of extremist group in Florida today; of these, white supremacists are by far the most numerous and active. Every type of white supremacist group appears in Florida.

Neo-Nazis. Among the most devoted and hardcore white supremacists, neo-Nazis have been particularly active in Florida in recent years.

- **National Alliance/National Vanguard.** The National Vanguard (and its predecessor, the National Alliance) has been particularly active in Orlando, Tampa/St. Petersburg, Palm Beach, and Gainesville. Its members have spread virulently racist and anti-Semitic propaganda in a variety of Florida towns and cities, and have distributed racist music CDs. After Hurricane Katrina, National Vanguard members urged people to "Support White Victims of Hurricane Katrina."
- **Stormfront.** The oldest and largest neo-Nazi Web site on the Internet, Stormfront, which has over 63,000 registered users, is actually based in West Palm Beach, Florida, run by a former Klansman, **Don Black**, once convicted for trying to overthrow the government of a small Caribbean island.
- Other neo-Nazi groups that have been active in Florida include the **National Socialist Movement, Creativity Movement, Aryan Nations, White Revolution**, and **Nordwave**. One neo-Nazi publication, the **Aryan Alternative**, is distributed in Florida by **Todd Vanbiber**, released from prison in 2005 after serving a sentence for a terrorist bomb plot in Orlando.

Racist Skinheads. America's racist skinhead subculture is violent and hateful. It is also growing rapidly nationwide, including in Florida. Most racist skinheads are not affiliated with formal groups, but there are still several racist skinhead groups in Florida, including the **Confederate**

Hammerskins, The Hated, and the **South Florida Aryan Alliance**. These groups have organized white power music concerts in Florida cities such as Jacksonville and Ocala.

Ku Klux Klan and “traditional” racist groups. America’s oldest white supremacist group is still the most common, especially in the South. There are numerous Klan groups, several with a presence in Florida. These include the **ORION Knights of the Ku Klux Klan**, the **Imperial Klans of America**, the **National Knights of the KKK**, and the **Empire Knights of the KKK**. In addition, there are essentially “upscale” versions of the Klan that often try to bill themselves as “white rights” organizations. In Florida, these include the **Council of Conservative Citizens**, the **European-American Heritage Foundation**, the **European-American Unity and Rights Organization**, and the **National Association for the Advancement of White People**.

Holocaust Deniers. Holocaust deniers use pseudo-history to “prove” that the Holocaust never happened, typically as part of an anti-Semitic agenda. Many Holocaust deniers have ties to Florida, most notably **David Irving**, a British historian with a second residence in Key West, who became the most notorious Holocaust denier in the world after he unsuccessfully sued scholar Deborah Libstadt for libel in a British court. Irving has made many appearances, including Tampa and West Palm Beach, often for fundraising purposes. Another notable Holocaust denier is the former Waffen SS veteran **Hans Schmidt** from Pensacola.

Other Racist Groups. A variety of other racist groups exist in Florida, including the **Aryan Brotherhood**, **White Aryan Resistance**, **Christian Guard**, and **League of the South**. In addition, there are other hate groups, such as the black separatist **International People’s Democratic Uhuru Movement**.

Other Extremist Groups

Anti-Government Extremist Groups. In the 1990s, Florida was one of the most fertile breeding grounds for extreme anti-government militia and sovereign citizen groups; such groups engaged in activities from terrorist plots to murdering police officers to multi-million-dollar scams and frauds. Although their activities have decreased in Florida in recent years, these movements are still active and have even generated new groups such as the **Little Shell Pembina Band**.

Anti-Abortion Extremism. Florida has long suffered from anti-abortion-related violence. In recent years, these have included arsons and bombings of women’s health clinics in West Palm Beach, Lake Worth, and Tamarac, and a planned bombing campaign against abortion clinics (and gay bars and churches) by **Stephen Jordi** in 2004.

Islamic Radicalism. In addition to older forms of extremism, the U.S. must deal with new forms of radicalism that have crossed its borders in the 21st century; of these, radical Islam is the most important. Twelve of the **9/11 hijackers** carried Florida drivers licenses or identification cards. Recent incidents include the trial of **Sami Al-Arian**, a computer science professor and active supporter of **Palestinian Islamic Jihad**, who was acquitted or deadlocked on charges of financing terrorism; the conference of the **Universal Heritage Foundation** in Kissimmee, who invited a variety of anti-Semitic speakers, including an imam from Mecca who had once prayed for the extermination of the Jews; and **Jose Padilla**, indicted in Miami in November 2005 on charges of providing material support to terrorists and conspiring to murder individuals abroad.

INTRODUCTION

Florida is known for hospitality and friendliness, but within its borders lurk some who have more sinister intentions. With its large population, Florida possesses a significant extremist fringe that frequently poses threats to its citizens, public officials, and law enforcement officers.

In the 1990s, white supremacists and anti-government extremists regularly made headlines in Florida. Two anti-government extremists from Florida murdered a police officer in Alabama, while a Tampa neo-Nazi plotted armed robberies and bomb attacks. A group of anti-government extremists and white supremacists operated a \$500 million pyramid scheme from Florida and, as the century drew to a close, the leader of a Florida militia group plotted to blow up power plants in Florida and Georgia.

The dawn of a new century has not stilled the anger and hatred in Florida's extremist fringe. Today, hate groups and anti-government extremist groups can be found in every section of Florida, from the Panhandle to Key West. Some engage in criminal activity, while others are more active in propaganda distribution, spreading hatred and intolerance among Florida's citizens, including its children.

This report surveys recent extremist activity in Florida, highlighting the groups and individuals most active in Florida, as well as prominent groups from elsewhere that have targeted the state.

HATE GROUPS

By far the most numerous and active hate groups in Florida are white supremacists. From racist skinheads to neo-Nazis to the Klan, virtually every type of white supremacist group in the United States appears in Florida.

Neo-Nazi Groups

Neo-Nazis are among the most devoted and hardcore of white supremacists, and also among the most violent. Neo-Nazi ideology today is dominated by the concept of the "Fourteen Words" (a white supremacist slogan: "We must secure the existence of our race and a future for white children"), and has evolved into a desperate and dangerous ideology predicated on the notion that the white race is being threatened with extinction by a "rising tide of color" manipulated by Jews.

- **National Alliance (NA) and National Vanguard (NV).** Once the largest and most active neo-Nazi organization in the United States, the National Alliance was also the most active neo-Nazi group in Florida for many years, with four chapters: in Orlando, Tampa/St. Petersburg, Palm Beach and Gainesville. Since founder William Pierce's death in July 2002, the group has been led nationally by Shaun Walker and Erich Gliebe from their headquarters in Hillsboro, West Virginia. The NA also owns the white power music label Resistance Records.

In the spring of 2005, a major rift occurred in the NA, with many of its members deserting to join an offshoot rival group, the National Vanguard, led by Kevin Strom from Virginia. The NA's Florida contingent deserted en masse and NA no longer claims any units in the Sunshine state, although it has individual supporters.

Until the NA/NV split, the NA was active in Florida, especially in propaganda distribution, delivering racist fliers and leaflets to a variety of Florida towns and cities. In February 2005, for example, residents of Clearwater, Florida, had their homes leafleted with fliers from the National Alliance and *The Truth at Last*, an anti-Semitic and racist newsletter published by Ed Fields of Marietta, Georgia.

The NA reached out in other ways, as well. In September 2004 it targeted people in Tampa attending Ozzfest, a mainstream showcase of heavy metal and hard rock bands. NA members showed up to distribute CD-ROMs containing 10 tracks of white power music available for sale at Resistance Records, as well as other materials. In February 2005, the same individuals showed up at a St. Patrick's Day parade in Tampa to hand out similar CDs.

Racist literature distribution continued after the NV supplanted the NA in Florida. In September 2005, for instance, NV members from the Tampa unit distributed fliers in Brooksville, Hudson and Dunedin, which urged people to "Support White Victims of Hurricane Katrina." Todd Weingart, the St. Petersburg resident who serves as the NV's Tampa unit coordinator, has become one of the NV's most active leaders.

The NA also conducted a series of publicity stunts in Florida, renting billboards among interstate highways to attract attention. For example, the NA rented a billboard in February 2004 in Sumter County that read "WHO RULE\$ AMERIKA?" and provided the group's Web address. The billboard company received hundreds of complaints, along with a flood of media attention, and the billboard was eventually removed. The NA had made use of billboards in Florida twice before, in Tampa and Old Town. They were also

removed after complaints, but not before the NA had reaped substantial publicity. During the Daytona 500 in 2005, the group also rented an airplane towing a banner over the raceway that displayed the slogan “Love Your Race” and the group’s Web address.

In January 2004, an NA member from New Port Richey, Florida, purchased membership lists and labels for over 2,500 attorneys from the criminal law section of the Florida Bar. Using these addresses, the neo-Nazi group distributed their *National Vanguard* publication with a cover letter from Todd Weingart, inviting the lawyers to join the neo-Nazi group. The president of the Florida Bar apologized to the lawyers for giving their addresses to a neo-Nazi group but said that there was no way to avoid doing so since any individual could ask for this information under current rules.

The *National Vanguard* continued such publicity stunts. Capitalizing on recent concern over immigration, for example, the secretary of the NV’s Tampa unit, Bobby Ammon, organized an anti-immigration rally in Plant City in November 2005. About 20 neo-Nazis and racist skinheads showed up to protest with signs reading “Close the Border!” and “Stop the Invasion.”

In June 2005, NV also hosted a festival near Tampa at which NV leader Kevin Strom delivered a speech and white power musical group “Prussian Blue,” which consists of two adolescent twin girls, sang white power songs.

- **Stormfront.** Stormfront, a Web site run by former Klansman Don Black in West Palm Beach, Florida, is the oldest and largest neo-Nazi site on the Internet, having been in continuous operation since 1995. It attracts racists and anti-Semites from around the world and has become a major center of global neo-Nazi activity. The key feature drawing users to Stormfront is its online forum, which as of October 2005 had over 63,000 registered users. Visitors and members to Stormfront’s forum interact with other white supremacists from around the globe discussing ideologies, upcoming events, and recruitment strategies, among countless other subjects. Don Black was convicted in 1981 for attempting, along with a number of other white supremacists, a coup to overthrow the government of the small island of Dominica.
- **The Aryan Alternative.** A former member of the National Alliance, Todd Vanbiber, who was released from prison in 2005 after serving a sentence for a terrorist bomb plot in Orlando, began distributing a white supremacist publication around that city’s affluent neighborhoods in the fall of 2005. Throughout the fall, Vanbiber distributed thousands of copies of *The Aryan Alternative*, a neo-Nazi publication by Alex Linder of Kirksville, Missouri.

- **National Socialist Movement (NSM).** With contact points throughout the United States, the National Socialist Movement, led by Jeff Schoep from Minneapolis, Minnesota, is a rapidly growing neo-Nazi organization that especially attracts younger people. NSM has a presence in Florida, where the Lakeland-based unit is led by Burt Colucci, who also serves as the Grand Dragon of Florida for the National Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

In March 2005, the *Miami Herald-Tribune* reported that county officials inspecting a small Sarasota daycare center also discovered the building was home to a high profile white supremacist and NSM member, Michael Herbert Blevins, who hosts a racist radio show and operates a racist Web site, www.vonbluvenus.org. Officials said there were no health hazards to the daycare center, operated primarily by Blevins' wife, and that Blevins' right to free speech prohibited them from acting against the center. According to state records, Blevins, who completed the required 3-hour training program for daycare center employees (or owners), was listed as qualified to substitute in the absence of his wife; his name was removed after the news reports surfaced.

- **The Creativity Movement (formerly World Church of the Creator).** The group formerly known as World Church of the Creator has suffered hard times since losing a 2003 trademark dispute and in 2004 losing its Illinois-based leader, Matt Hale, to a 40-year prison sentence for soliciting the murder of a federal judge. However, its presence has always been very strong in Florida, where the group was founded in the 1970s by former Florida state representative Ben Klassen. In late April 2005, members of the Creativity Movement in Seminole, Florida, announced that James Logsdon, head of the elite "White Berets" would become the successor to Hale as Pontifex Maximus. It is yet to be seen if Creators nationwide accept Logsdon as their leader.
- **Aryan Nations.** Aryan Nations was once the United States' most infamous neo-Nazi group, although it has fallen on hard times since the illness and death of its founder, Richard Butler, in 2004. Even before Butler died, Aryan Nations experienced factional fighting and splits due to dissatisfaction with his leadership. One splinter group, still calling itself Aryan Nations, is based in Pennsylvania. However, one of its leaders, August Kreis, moved to Sebring, Florida, in late 2003. Kreis is a follower of Christian Identity, a virulently racist and anti-Semitic version of Christianity, and serves as "High Counsel" for Aryan Nations. Recently featured in the central Florida publication *Highlands Today*, Kreis stated, "If a black man is dating a white woman, then kill them both," which is the same punishment he advocates for homosexuals. Kreis relocated to Lexington, South Carolina, in 2005, but claims to keep in touch with his membership in Florida.

- **White Revolution.** This Arkansas-based group, founded by former National Alliance member Billy Roper, was originally created in 2002 as an “umbrella” organization of various white supremacist groups, although it has largely dropped the “umbrella” aspect. One of the first events the group held was a November 2002 anti-Israel rally at the University of Florida in Gainesville, accompanied by a post-rally white power music concert. Roper was joined by the World Church of the Creator (now known as the Creativity Movement) and other white supremacist groups such as the South Florida Aryan Alliance. White Revolution scheduled, but later cancelled, a rally in Lake City, Florida, on February 15, 2003.
- **Nordwave.** Formerly *Aryan Loyalist*, *Nordwave* is a neo-Nazi newsletter published by Alex Hassinger of Lake Worth, who describes himself as a “German-Polish American family man and cultural innovator.” Typical of the contents of the magazine is its post-9/11 issue, which celebrated the destruction of the “Jude Trade Center.” Editor Hassinger opined of the hijackers that “I only wish our movement had such courageous and dedicated men, as they were.” Hassinger also annually organizes a “Folkfest” at John Dickinson State Park in Martin County, billed as a celebration of “European heritage, Euro-ethnic music, food and drink,” where racists from around Florida can gather together.

Racist Skinheads

Racist or “white power” skinheads represent a growing and violent segment among America’s skinhead subculture. Racist skinheads are particularly prominent along the United States’ West and East Coasts, including Florida, which a number of racist skinhead groups call home. In addition to organized groups, there are larger numbers of unaffiliated or “independent” racist skinheads who are not formally members of any groups.

- **Confederate Hammerskins (CHS).** This regional branch of the Hammerskin Nation, the largest racist skinhead group in the nation, is comprised of members from Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee and Texas, and is headed in Florida by Jeff “Bosco” McManus. In conjunction with the Minneapolis-based white power music company Panzerfaust Records, the Florida CHS organized a white power concert in Jacksonville on March 13, 2004 in celebration of St. Patrick’s Day. The show featured racist bands such as Warfare 88, Final War, Hammerhead, and Red, White & Black. Approximately 100 white supremacists attended the event. The white supremacist organizations represented included the National Alliance, Aryan Nations, National Socialist Movement and Church of the Sons of Yahweh.

On March 19, 2005, CHS hosted another St. Patrick's Day concert, but the venue this time was located in Ocala. About 75 racists attended the gathering.

In 2002, Florida was home to Hammerfest, Hammerskin Nation's yearly white power music festival. The original venue for the event, a bar in Daytona Beach, had to be changed at the last minute after the bar prevented the group from holding the festival. A week before the event, the organizers finally secured a location in Jacksonville, Florida, where approximately 100 attendees gathered.

- **The Hated.** This racist skinhead group is based primarily in Gainesville, Florida, but has a few members in New Jersey and Massachusetts. The Hated have about 30 members and associates, ranging in age from 18 to 28. The group's symbol is a white fist with the word "Hated" written in white and black letters above the fist, which in some cases is tattooed on members' bodies.

In January 2004, two members of The Hated, Eddie F. Demaire III and Troy Stokes, both from Florida, were arrested in New Jersey, charged with possession of a firearm with an obliterated serial number. Police subsequently discovered a sawed-off shotgun with a scratched-off identification number and a knife with a blade over 3 inches inside their truck. Police also searched their apartment, where they found a 12-gauge shotgun, a 9-mm rifle, ammunition, a BB gun, a sword, a machete, brass knuckles and various knives and blades. Additionally, law enforcement officials discovered three taped baseball bats, several Nazi and Confederate flags, some neo-Nazi magazines and two jackets bearing "The Hated" logo. They are still awaiting trial.

In January 2005, The Hated hosted a white power rock concert, including performances by Platoon 14 and No Alibi, in Jacksonville which was attended by several Hammerskins and other racist skinheads.

- **South Florida Aryan Alliance (SFAA).** The SFAA, a racist skinhead group, was founded in April 2001 by Steven Vance Watt, a former Klansman. Based in Bonita Springs, the group drew members and support from a number of Florida cities, including Sanford, Ft. Lauderdale, Sunrise, Loxahatchee, Brooksville, Tampa and Naples. In the early 2000s, the SFAA was very active, both in hosting racist events and supporting those organized by others. In September 2003, SFAA joined about two dozen white supremacists in Immokalee, Florida, to protest against the Immigrant Worker's Freedom Ride (IWFR) rally. The IWFR participants traveled to different cities nationwide, raising awareness and advocating for immigrant workers' rights. SFAA also participated in the Gainesville,

Florida, anti-Israel rally at the University of Florida campus on November 9, 2002, sponsored by the neo-Nazi group White Revolution. By 2004, the SFAA had dissolved for unknown reasons — many of its members eventually joined the Confederate Hammer-skins.

Ku Klux Klan Groups

Today there is no single Ku Klux Klan, but rather around 50 different Klan groups of various sizes, most only local or regional in nature. Strongest in the Midwest and in the South, the Klan remains the most common type of hate group in America, in terms of the number of groups, and in recent years has committed crimes ranging from hate crimes to planned acts of terrorism. A number of different Klan groups have a presence in Florida.

- **ORION Knights of the KKK.** One of the more prominent locally headquartered Klan groups in Florida is the ORION Knights of the KKK (ORION is an acronym for “Our Race Is Our Nation”). The ORION Knights claim to have chapters, or “realms,” in Gainesville, Hollywood, Homosassa, Lake Placid, Milton and Orlando.

The group has been particularly active in propaganda efforts. The ORION Knights carried out a leafleting in Florida on the eve of July 4, 2003, in “honor of Independence Day,” with fliers designed to “wake up white people.” ORION Knights and members of the South Florida Aryan Alliance, a Florida racist skinhead group, were among two dozen white supremacists rallying in Immokalee, Florida, in September 2003, to protest against the Immigrant Worker’s Freedom Ride, a nationwide human rights tour promoting fair treatment for immigrants. The white supremacists gathered with signs that read “Illegal Immigration equals Terrorism.”

Brian Springer, 24, a “klaliff” for the Central Florida chapter of the ORION Knights, and a volunteer fireman with the Four Communities Volunteer Fire Department north of Cocoa Beach, said that he resigned from his job after he learned another volunteer firefighter was going to file a harassment complaint against Springer for trying to recruit him into the Klan in November 2003. He said that he resigned “to keep his record clean, allowing him to pursue his career as a firefighter.” Although Springer says that he does not call minorities “derogatory names,” and would “rescue any person in need,” he posted a message on the Orion Knights Internet message board that referred to immigrants as “mongrels.” He also attended an anti-immigrant rally sponsored by the group.

- **Imperial Klans of America.** Currently the most active Klan group in the United States, the IKA is headquartered in Kentucky. It has a Florida chapter located in Gainesville.
- **National Knights of the KKK.** This Klan group, headquartered in South Bend, Indiana, has an outpost in Lakeland, Florida, where Burt Colucci, also known as Burt Nicosia, serves as Grand Dragon. Colucci has also been associated with the National Socialist Movement, a neo-Nazi group based in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- **Empire Knights of the KKK.** A small Southern Klan group based in Homosassa, Florida. The Imperial Wizard is Ron Vitter, formerly of North Carolina. Vitter had previously been the Grand Dragon of the Florida chapter of the Southern White Knights of the KKK.

'Traditional' Racist Groups

"Traditional" racist groups often have ideologies very similar to that of the Ku Klux Klan, but are more upscale and prefer business suits to Klan paraphernalia. Although some are significantly anti-Semitic, "traditional" racist groups are often primarily anti-black and anti-immigrant. Occasionally, such groups try to bill themselves as "white civil rights" organizations.

- **Council of Conservative Citizens.** The Council of Conservative Citizens has a wide presence in Florida, particularly in the Northern Florida region. The St. Louis-based Council is a large racist organization that traces its roots directly to the racist White Citizens' Councils of the 1950s and 1960s. With a membership in the thousands, mostly in the South, the Council is one of the largest hate groups in the United States. In Florida, the group's "First Coast" chapter is led by George Bashure, a Jacksonville machinist and drag racer, formerly the vice president of the Florida chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of White People. Bashure is also associated with the tiny America First Party.
- **European-American Heritage Foundation.** Headed by Todd Findley of Bunnell, Florida, the European-American Heritage Foundation bills itself as a "white rights" organization. Findley has tried several schemes to create housing developments for whites. Ever the entrepreneur, Findley also attempted, unsuccessfully, to create racist versions of online transaction service PayPal.
- **European-American Unity and Rights Organization (EURO).** Founded by David Duke in January 2000 as NOFEAR (National Organization for European American Rights), it changed its name to EURO in June 2001. Duke describes it as a "civil rights"

organization fighting the “massive discrimination” faced by whites from the nation’s growing population of minorities. Tom Prater of Jacksonville heads EURO’s Florida chapter; formerly, he led the Florida chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of White People.

- **National Association for the Advancement of White People (NAAWP).** Started by David Duke, who abandoned it for other goals, the NAAWP is mostly defunct outside of Florida. Its “national headquarters” are situated in Callahan, Florida. Disputes within the group, as well as negative publicity, drove it to decline; many of its Florida members are now primarily active in the Council of Conservative Citizens or David Duke’s EURO. Its former leader, Reno Wolfe, now publishes a racist newsletter, the *Southern Journal*, and hosts a radio talk show on AM 1530 in Jacksonville. There is also an “NAAWP Florida Chapter Inc.,” led by Tommy Prater of Jacksonville, which claims independence from the “national” group.

Holocaust Denial

There are two main veins of pseudo-intellectual racism in the United States. One adopts pseudo-science to proclaim that whites are intellectually and genetically superior to other races; the other adopts pseudo-history to allege that the Holocaust never actually happened. In Florida, Holocaust deniers are particularly prevalent.

- **David Irving.** The most prominent Holocaust denier with Florida ties, David Irving is a British citizen who has a second residence in Key West. Originally a non-academic historian with an interest in Nazi military history, Irving eventually emerged publicly as a Holocaust denier, attacking Holocaust-related subjects ranging from Auschwitz to Anne Frank. He achieved notoriety in the late 1990s for suing scholar Deborah Lipstadt (who had written a book on Holocaust denial that mentioned Irving) for libel in a British court. In 2000, Irving lost the suit, and was forced to pay extensive court costs. Irving regularly travels around the United States, giving presentations to Holocaust deniers, who are now one of the main audiences for his books (as legitimate publishers will no longer publish or market them). Irving has made a number of appearances in Florida, including Tampa and West Palm Beach, and has been sponsored by the neo-Nazi National Alliance at various speaking engagements in the state. In November 2005, he was arrested by Austrian authorities while trying to enter that country, on charges related to his Holocaust denial activities.
- **Hans Schmidt.** A former soldier in Hitler’s Waffen SS, Schmidt resides in Pensacola, where he has published the virulently anti-Semitic newsletter of the German-American

National Public Affairs Committee (GANPAC). Schmidt is actively engaged in Holocaust denial and has associations with a variety of right-wing extremist groups in the United States and Germany (where he spent several months in jail in the 1990s for making anti-Semitic statements). Schmidt was the keynote speaker at the Georgia National Alliance chapter's state-wide conference in August 2002. He is in ill health.

Other Racist Groups

- **Aryan Brotherhood.** The most significant white supremacist prison gang in Florida is the Aryan Brotherhood, the largest such group nationwide. Federal prosecutors in 2002 indicted 40 alleged members of the group on racketeering charges over a series of 16 murders, 16 attempted murders, and other violent crimes. Among those charged was Jesse Antonio Van Meter of Palm City, Florida, accused of conspiring to murder black inmates and of attempted murder. He is still awaiting trial; if convicted, he is eligible for the death penalty.
- **White Aryan Resistance (WAR).** In March and April 2004, residents of Pompano Beach found literature advertising for White Aryan Resistance, a Fallbrook, California, neo-Nazi group led by Tom Metzger. The leaflets displayed a racial slur and an offensive portrayal of African Americans. In 2005 one or more Metzger sympathizers distributed the publication on a half-dozen occasions around Florida, including in Tampa, Palm Beach, and various locations in Broward and Palm Beach Counties. WAR has not really been a functioning group for a number of years, serving instead largely as a propaganda outlet for Metzger. The hate incidents more likely indicate Metzger sympathizers than an actual active WAR chapter or cell.
- **Christian Guard.** In September 2005, the Christian Guard, a group that practices an anti-Semitic and racist version of Christianity known as Christian Identity, formed in Lakeland, Florida, and claims to hold weekly Bible studies at a private home there. The Christian Guard also has ties to the Blood and Honour American Division, a racist skin-head group.
- **League of the South.** The League of the South is a large neo-Confederate group that seeks to create a south predicated on "Anglo-Celtic" cultural dominance, which is essentially the group's term for "white." It claims, however, not to be racist. Its Florida presence is led by state chairman Dick Crockett of LaBelle and Vice Chairman Dan Gonzales of Wellington, Florida; the group boasts seven chapters in Florida: in Archer, Belleview, Ft. Myers, Jacksonville, Longwood, Panama City, and Pensacola. It seeks to have 10 chapters by 2006.

Non-white Hate Groups

White supremacist groups are the most common type of hate group, but there are other groups that also possess ideologies based on hate and intolerance.

- **International People's Democratic Uhuru Movement.** This group, also known as the Uhuru Movement, is headed by Omali Yeshitela and Chirumenga Waller in the St. Petersburg/Tampa area. The Uhuru Movement is a left-wing, black separatist movement that once called for the execution of the mayor and police chief in St. Petersburg, Florida, according to the *St. Petersburg Times*. It is also anti-Israel, claiming reparations should be paid to Palestinians, who, according to Yeshitela, have been subjected to genocide.

ANTI-GOVERNMENT EXTREMIST GROUPS

For a number of years, the United States has been plagued by a variety of extreme anti-government groups — groups that do not simply want to “reform” the government or reduce it, but have been convinced that all or part of the government is in fact illegitimate, subverted through conspiratorial means. Florida, particularly in the 1990s, was one of the most fertile breeding grounds for such groups and movements. Although some of these groups and individuals may be white supremacists, or have ties to such groups, the movements in general are characterized by their extreme anti-government attitudes and may even include African-American and Hispanic members.

- **The Sovereign Citizen Movement.** The sovereign citizen movement is a loosely organized collection of groups and individuals whose adherents believe that virtually all existing government in the United States is illegitimate and seek to “restore” an idealized, minimalist government that never actually existed. To this end, sovereign citizens wage war against the government and other forms of authority using “paper terrorism” harassment and intimidation tactics, and occasionally resorting to violence. Members of the sovereign citizen movement have committed crimes ranging from major scams and frauds to murdering police officers and acts of terrorism. In the 1990s, Florida, especially central Florida, was one of the hotbeds of sovereign citizen activity. In recent years, such activity has decreased somewhat in Florida, but remains fairly strong.

One relatively new sovereign citizen group, the Little Shell Pembina Band of North America, appears to be gaining adherents in Florida. This group pretends to be a Native American tribal organization, although Native blood is not a prerequisite for membership, and claims to be independent of the United States. It has members around the country, including Florida. One member, Robert Sumner of Charlotte County, read a speech before that county’s Code Enforcement Board in November 2005 in which he demanded that their actions regarding his property “cease and desist,” or else he would “have to take drastic action against each and every one of you...I am declaring here...that if anyone comes on my property again, it will be over my own dead body.”

The sovereign citizen movement is an offshoot of the tax protest movement, a far right movement whose adherents believe that there is a government conspiracy to keep them unaware of the “fact” that they do not have to pay income taxes. This movement, too, is active in Florida, and a number of Florida citizens have been convicted in recent years on tax fraud and tax evasion charges related to their activities in this movement.

- **The Militia Movement.** The militia movement arose in the mid-1990s, devoted to stopping its conspiratorial vision of a “New World Order” from taking power in the United States. Over the years, many members of militia groups have been convicted on a variety of criminal charges ranging from possession of illegal weapons to acts of terrorism. The militia movement was particularly active in Florida, which had many militia groups active in its borders, but the militia movement declined in the late 1990s. In Florida, its decline was precipitous, especially after Florida militia leader Donald Beauregard, a store manager in St. Petersburg, was sentenced to five years in prison in July 2000 on a conspiracy conviction for plotting to steal explosives from a National Guard armory and blow up power plants. After some period of time in which there were no identifiable militia groups in Florida, some militia activists have begun to become active once again, although at a smaller scale and in a less noticeable fashion. One such group is the Lee County Rifle Club, which despite its name is actually a militia group; it has held paramilitary training events near Ft. Myers, including ambush training.

ANTI-ABORTION EXTREMISM

Extremists willing to commit violent acts in the name of their opposition to abortion have been an issue in Florida ever since Paul Hill, associated with the extreme anti-abortion group Army of God, murdered a doctor and his bodyguard outside a women's health clinic in Pensacola in 1994 (Hill was executed for the crime in 2003). In 2004, a group of anti-abortion activists even organized a "Paul Hill Memorial Tour" in Florida in 2004 to defend his violent actions.

Recent violent anti-abortion crimes included the attempted arson of a women's clinic in West Palm Beach in July 2005, the bombing of a women's clinic in Lake Worth in July 2004, and the bombing of the office of a physician associated with a West Palm Beach clinic in 2003. That same year, arsonists also attempted to burn down a clinic in Tamarac. In February 2004, Stephen Jordi of Coconut Creek pleaded guilty to one count of attempted firebombing in a plea bargain after he was arrested for planning an alleged bombing campaign against gay bars, churches, and abortion clinics. He received a five-year sentence in July 2004.

ISLAMIC RADICALISM

In addition to older forms of extremism and terrorism, the United States must deal with new forms of radicalism and extremism that have crossed its borders in the 21st century. Of these, radical Islam has been the greatest concern since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Florida is no exception; in fact, 12 of the 9/11 hijackers carried Florida drivers licenses or identification cards. Recent incidents include:

- **Islamic Jihad.** In December 2005, after 13 days of deliberations, the jury in the trial of former University of South Florida computer science professor Sami Al-Arian, returned not guilty verdicts on many counts against him (and his three co-defendants) and deadlocked on the rest. Al-Arian was arrested in 2003 for allegedly raising money to help Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), a terrorist group responsible for at least 100 killings in Israel, finance terrorism. Since 1995, PIJ has been led by Ramadan Shallah, who worked at a University of South Florida think tank founded by Al-Arian.

A 158-page indictment had charged Al-Arian and others (most of whom live abroad) with racketeering, money laundering, perjury, obstruction of justice and travel-act violations. Although prosecutors presented wiretapped conversations of Al-Arian praising terrorist attacks against Israel, defense attorneys (who called no witnesses during the trial) claimed that his conduct consisted of protected speech, that there was nothing to link him to terrorist attacks, and that the substantial amounts of money he sent to PIJ was for its charitable work. Federal officials must now decide whether to retry him; if they do not, Al-Arian, not a U.S. citizen, may be deported.

- **Universal Heritage Foundation.** A three-day inaugural conference called "Islam for Humanity" was held near Kissimmee, Florida, in December 2003. It was sponsored by the Universal Heritage Foundation, a new Islamic organization in Florida founded by Zulfiqar Ali Saha. Invited speakers at the conference included people who had, on previous occasions, reportedly voiced support for suicide bombers and referred to Jews as "Jewish crackers," "apes" and "pigs." They included chief cleric Sheikh Abdul Rahman al-Sudais, of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, who earlier had prayed to God to "terminate" the Jews, whom he called "the scum of humanity, the rats of the world, prophet killers... pigs and monkeys." Due to adverse publicity about al-Sudais' previous remarks, he did not speak at the conference. Another speaker, Abdul Malik Ali, had previously

expressed support for suicide bombers, on one occasion saying, “That ain’t suicide; that’s martyrdom.”

- **Jose Padilla.** Florida resident Jose Padilla was arrested in May 2002 upon reentering the United States from Pakistan. Padilla was a former Chicago gang member who moved to Florida in 1990 at age 18. After spending time in prison on several occasions on assault and battery charges, Padilla converted to Islam while working at a fast food restaurant in Broward County, gradually becoming more interested in radical versions of Islam. In 2001, Padilla left the United States to travel to Afghanistan, Pakistan and other Muslim countries. He was taken into custody upon his return by the federal government, which accused him of having been seeking radioactive materials with which to construct a so-called “dirty bomb.”

The U.S. government designated Padilla an “enemy combatant,” despite his U.S. citizenship, and held him in controversial military custody since his arrest. In November 2005, however, this status ended when federal officials in Miami unsealed an indictment accusing Padilla of providing material support to terrorists and conspiring to murder individuals abroad. The indictment did not contain any charges related to a “dirty bomb.” Padilla now awaits trial.

Also charged in the same indictment were four other men, including Adham Amin Hassoun and Mohammed Hesham Youssef, both of whom lived in Broward County.