



In Defense of Democracy & Civil Rights

COALITION FOR HUMAN DIGNITY

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NORTHWEST UPDATE

June 15, 1998

1. TEXAS MURDERERS LINKED TO KLAN/SKINHEAD GROUPS: At least two of the suspects in the brutal murder of James Byrd, an African-American man from Jasper, Texas, are reported to have ties to organized hate groups. Shawn Berry, 23, Lawrence Brewer, 31, and John King, 23, are charged with murdering Byrd after they offered him a ride as he walked home from his sister's house. When King became angry that they had given a ride to an African-American, Brewer and King exited the vehicle and proceeded to kick the 49-year old Byrd unconscious. Byrd was then chained to the vehicle and dragged along concrete and dirt roads for more than two miles, according to a statement made by Berry.

According to Sammy Buentello, assistant director of the Texas prison system's gang task force, King and Brewer had been previously monitored for their possible affiliation with the Ku Klux Klan and the Confederate Knights of America, a neo-Nazi skinhead group. Two of the suspects are reported to have tattoos of the Aryan Brotherhood while a lighter with the emblem of the Klan belonging to one of the accused killers was found along the road where Byrd was dragged. One of the suspects is reported to have wanted to "start the *Turner Diaries* early," referring to the race war depicted in William Pierce's book.

State prosecutors are reportedly looking into whether the three can be charged with a capital murder, an offense which under Texas law requires that a murder be committed during the commission of a felony. Only capital murders are punishable by death in Texas. Attorney General Janet Reno told reporters that the FBI and U.S. Attorney were also looking into whether the case is best pursued under state or federal law (Reuters, June 11, June 10, June 9; AP, June 11, June 10).

2. ARYAN NATIONS' LEADERS ARRESTED: Five members of the Church of Jesus Christ-Christian were arrested May 31 following a confrontation with law officers near the group's Hayden Lake compound. Those arrested, mostly on obstruction and unlawful assembly charges, were Michael R. Teague, 30, Lotan G. Tanaach, 26, Robert J. Gmeiner, 19, Gerald A. Gruidl, 65, and John S. Yeager, 19.

The arrests came after sheriff's deputies responded to a battery-in-progress call at the compound. The Aryan Nations had evicted Tanaach from the compound and police received reports of a man being stalked by another man with an assault rifle. Because of the report of the weapon, after arriving on the scene, a sheriff's deputy had ordered four men who emerged from the bushes to lay on the ground. The confrontation ensued when Aryan Nations leader Richard Butler approached and told the men to stand. As Butler recounted to KHQ News, "I didn't know what was going on, so when I came down to the road I told the guys to get up. You don't lay on the ground like dogs; you're men. So they did."

When the men stood and refused to back away from a patrol car, officers used pepper spray against Butler, Gruidl and Teague. Upon being arrested, Teague resisted efforts by officers to handcuff him, kicking and damaging a window in a patrol car, according to the sheriff's department report. Teague was additionally charged with resisting arrest and malicious injury to property; Yeager, who approached a patrol car with a 12-gauge flare gun hidden in his coat, was charged with possessing a concealed weapon. Sheriff's deputies also requested the county prosecutors issue an arrest warrant for Butler (MSNBC, June 3; *Spokesman Review*, June 3).

3. SUSPECTED COLORADO COP KILLER TIED TO MILITIA: In Colorado one of the men sought in the murder of a Cortez police officer is reported to be a member of the Four Corners Patriots, a Christian Identity-linked militia, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. According to SPLC Alan "Monte" Pilon was an active member of the group who had taken part in at least one militia exercise. Pilon, along with Jason Wayne McVean and Robert Mathew Mason are suspected of killing Cortez police officer Dale Claxton in a hail of automatic gun fire when Claxton stopped the stolen water truck they were driving. Two Montezuma county sheriff's deputies were wounded and seven

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police cars struck with bullets in the shoot-out. Robert Mason was later found dead with a bullet wound between the eyes dressed in camouflage clothes with pipe bombs attached to his body. Police allege that Mason shot himself. A search of Pilon's camper and Mason's pickup truck yielded five additional pipe bombs (AP, June 11, *Durango Herald*, June 5).

4. KOERNKE SOUGHT BY FBI: After he failed to appear at his trial on charges of felonious assault, the FBI has joined the search for Michigan militia leader Mark Koernke, issuing a federal fugitive warrant in the belief that Koernke may have fled the state of Michigan. Koernke faces charges in connection to an October 1997 incident in which he pointed a gun at a process server. If convicted of that charge, he faces up to four years in prison. According to the FBI the group received a report in early June that Koernke was at the home of an Ohio militia supporter, though he was not there when agents arrived at the house (*Ann Arbor News*, June 8).

5. OPERATION RESCUE ACTIVISTS SUED FOR CLINIC BLOCKADE: Operation Rescue national director Phillip "Flip" Benham and 16 other anti-choice activists have been sued by the Justice Department for blocking access to a Washington D.C. clinic during a January 1998 protest. The suit, which seeks to bar the protesters from blocking clinic access in the future, stems from the group's protest at the Capitol Women's Center following a march protesting the 25th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision.

6. FREEMAN TRIAL UNDERWAY: The trial of the infamous Montana "Freemen" got underway in late May with eleven of 14 defendants refusing to attend the trial, watching it instead on a closed-circuit television. The defendants in the case are charged with some 40 offenses, including conspiracy to commit fraud, armed robbery of ABC and NBC news crews, and bank and mail fraud. Defendants include the following:

Freemen ringleaders are LeRoy Schweitzer, Daniel Peterson, Rodney Skurdal and Dale Jacobi. Lesser "Freemen": Cheryl Peterson, Richard Clark, Ralph Clark, Emmet Clark, Russel Dean Landers, Dana Dudley Landers, William Stanton, Agnes Stanton, Cornelious John "Casey" Veldhuizen and John P. McGuire.

As the trial opened, two defendants pleaded guilty. Emmet B. Clark pleaded guilty to threatening federal officials in a plea bargain that requires him to give a full statement about his and his compatriots activity. A plea bargain struck by Dana Dudley for using fraudulent Freeman checks also contains a similar requirement (AP, May 28).

Testimony by U.S. District Court Judge Jack Shanstrom, the chief federal judge for Montana, highlights the impact that the Freeman's repeated threats have had on their targets. In June 9 testimony in the case Shanstrom describes how a letter from the Freeman instructing members of the Freeman "posses" to "shoot to kill any public hireling" led him to begin carrying a weapon. Freeman later issued a "Wanted Dead or Alive" poster with Shanstrom's picture on it (AP, June 10).

On June 3 U.S. District Judge John Coughenour ordered Freeman defendant John P. McGuire to return to jail, calling him a danger to the community after the California far right leader had called on militia members to flock to Billings Montana for the Freeman trial. McGuire had posted a message on the Internet declaring, "As one of the people of posterity and one of the defendants in the federal case...I respectfully call upon the unorganized Militia...to intercede in the violations of Law occurring now in Montana in the Freeman trial." (*Billings Gazette*, June 4)

Other Freeman supporters continued their legalistic antics when in early June Skurdal and Schweitzer again had Yellowstone County Sheriff Chuck Maxwell served with bogus Freeman "writs." Said Maxwell, "It's the same papers served on me I already had...I never abide by orders presented to me by people who are prisoners in my jail" (*Billings Gazette*, June 4).

In related news, four other Montana Freeman who had refused to attend their trial were forcibly wheeled into court June 5 where they were sentenced for being accessories after the fact to the robbery of an NBC television crew that was filming a story about the Freeman. Stephen Hance, 48, was sentenced to 78 months in prison, while his sons James E. Hance, 25, and John R. Hance, 21, were sentenced to 67 and 63 months in prison, respectively. Jon Barry Nelson, who ran a roadblock to enter the Freeman compound following the start of the 81 day standoff, received 71 months. Elvin Ward, a fifth defendant charged with submitting a false claim to the IRS and trying to pass a bogus Freeman check, was sentenced to time served - he has served 21 months (AP, June 6).

7. PETERS' BIBLE CAMP: Christian Identity leader Pete Peters will hold his annual Rocky Mountain Bible Camp June 28-July 5 near Golden, Colorado. Scriptures for America: (307) 742-7582.