

When Hate went Online

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In 1984 hate went online. The source was a small computer bulletin board system (BBS) that carried online articles denouncing Jews and Blacks. Few people noticed. Fewer still even knew what an online computer system was, or how to connect to it. That same year I installed a modem at Midwest Research in Chicago (now Political Research Associates near Boston) to explore the possibility of using online services for transmitting text and data between progressive research organizations. It was a year before I even learned that hate groups were online.¹

Today it is hard to imagine that in 1984 the idea of non-profit organizations sending information between computers over phone lines was considered experimental. For instance, the *Foundation News* published an influential early article in September 1983, "A Certain Electricity in the Air," that included the clearly tentative (and lengthy) subtitle: "Although some think the jury on telecommunications is still out, groups like the Telecommunications Cooperative Network are making believers out of more foundations and nonprofits" (Green, 1983: 32).

This was before there was easy access to what became the Internet. The national network of linked mainframe computers was still a text-only system (with USENET news groups on the side) primarily available to government defense contractors and academics. There were a few commercial online systems during this period such as Delphi, Genie, and The Source; and starting in 1985 there was The Well, one of the first non-profit public online networks that expanded and merged into the Internet.²

Back in 1984, however, a major form of public online communications involved the use of individual, and usually home-based, computer bulletin board systems. BBSs were developed as a way for persons with a computer and a modem attached to a phone line to allow others with the same equipment to directly dial up and log onto a directory of files for downloading. Other features such as posting public messages, reading text, and exchanging groups of files were quickly added.³

While investigating the assassination of Denver radio talk show host Alan Berg by neonazi White supremacists, the FBI began to unravel their telecommunications by tapping the modem telephone line of Robert Miles. This "inspired the computer networking scenes" in the 1988 film *Betrayed* (Sills, 1989: 146). According to Sills, some of the early media coverage of the neonazi BBS network was "exaggerated" (Sills, 1989:

146). The facts were bad enough. They could be found online on the three earliest race hate BBS systems: Info. International Network, Aryan Liberty Net, and White Aryan Resistance (W.A.R.) Net.

Info. International Network

George P. Dietz, a well-known publisher of racist and antisemitic literature, was apparently the first right-wing White supremacist to launch his material into cyberspace on a public BBS. Called variously Info. International Network or Liberty Bell Net, Dietz's BBS probably went online sometime in early March of 1984.⁴ The Info. International Network system was run on an Apple][e. with 64k RAM and a five megabyte hard drive. The system claimed it was "The only computer bulletin board system and uncontrolled information medium in the United States of America dedicated to the dissemination of historical facts--not fiction!"⁵

Dietz, through his Liberty Bell Publications located in West Virginia, had been sending printed neonazi publications throughout the US; and to Europe where much of his material was legally banned. The early text on Dietz's BBS consisted of articles from his monthly *Liberty Bell* magazine, published in print form from September 1973 until February 1999.⁶ One of the major contributors to both the print and online outlets was Revilo P. Oliver—an academic expelled from the John Birch Society (JBS) for making antisemitic and White racist comments in a speech at a JBS rally in 1966 (Mintz, 1985: 172-173).

In June of 1985 Dietz's BBS carried the following sections:

- 1 = Prof.R.P.Oliver's Postscripts
- 2 = Reports and Reviews
- 3 = Letters to "Liberty Bell" Editor
- 4 = Historic Facts & Figures
- 5 = 'Holocaust':Fact or Fiction?
- 6 = Articles from "Liberty Bell"
- 7 = The Jew in Review
- 8 = On Race and Religion
- 9 = Computer store (not implem.)
- 10 = WVA Real Estate Bargains.

Under the section headed "Prof.R.P.Oliver's Postscripts" were the following subtitles:

- 1 = The Businessmen of God
- 2 = Truth is Stranger than Fiction
- 3 = The "Holofoax"

- 4 = The F.B.I. & a White Man
- 5 = Bobby Fischer & the Jews
- 6 = A Ham Actor in the White House
- 7 = The U.S. & Latin America
- 8 = The "Godly" of Cleveland
- 9 = The Jews & Saudi Arabia
- 10 = List of Patriotic Books

Aryan Liberty Net

Better known was the Aryan Nations "Aryan Liberty Net," which went online sometime in the Spring of 1984. The network was implemented by Louis Beam, a leader of various Texas Ku Klux Klan (KKK) factions who worked closely with Richard Butler, the leader of the Aryan Nations Christian Identity compound in Idaho.⁷ Beam may have discussed the idea of a computer network as early as July 1983 at a meeting at Aryan Nations (J. E. Stern, 2000). Liberty Net was announced by Beam in an undated Spring 1984 issue of the *Inter-Klan Newsletter & Survival Alert* published from the Aryan nations compound in Hayden Lake, Idaho. In an article "Computers and the American Patriot," Beam wrote that "It may very well be that American know-how has provided the technology which will allow those who love this country to save it from an ill-deserved fate" (Beam, 1984a). Later, in an article titled "Announcing Aryan Nations/Ku Klux Klan Computer Net," it is claimed that "A special electronic code access available only to Aryan Nations/Ku Klux Klan officers and selected individuals is being implemented" (Beam, 1984b). The article continues:

At last, those who love God and their Race and strive to serve their Nation will be utilizing some of the advanced technology available heretofore only to those in the ZOG (Zionist Occupational Government) government and others who have sought the destruction of the Aryan people. (Ibid.)

Around August 1984 a one-page flyer circulated in Canada, announcing remote access (through the Aryan Liberty Net) to racist material otherwise banned under Canadian laws against hate speech (Wayne King, 1985; Bohy, 1985).⁸ The US-based race hate BBSs allowed people in Canada and in European countries, where distribution of hate literature is often restricted by law, to gain access to these texts through their computer. This was a major goal of the early racist BBS operators, with Beam bragging that his system had "ended Canadian Censorship" (ADL, 1985: 2).

White Aryan Resistance BBS

Next to come online (in late 1984 or early 1985) was the White Aryan Resistance BBS in Fallbrook, California, under the auspices of Tom Metzger. Metzger announced the "W.A.R. Computer Terminal" in *War* '85, the newspaper of his White Aryan

Resistance (Metzger, 1985). It originally ran on a Commodore 64 with a 300 bps modem (Sills, 1989). Today, most modems run at 56,000 bps. According to Metzger, "Already White Aryan comrades of the North have destroyed the free speech blackout to our Canadian comrades" (Metzger, 1985). One of the first messages sent out by Metzger was directed at "any Aryan patriot in America who so desires" to arrange for local cable access channel broadcast of Metzger's new cable TV program "The World as We See It," later renamed "Race and Reason."⁹ During this same period, there were over one dozen call-in telephone hot lines with recorded messages containing racist and antisemitic material.¹⁰

Content on Aryan Liberty Net

In early 1985 Aryan Nations Liberty Net consisted of the Aryan Nations BBS in Hayden Lake, Idaho, a KKK BBS's with two roll-over lines in Dallas, Texas, and a KKK BBS in the Raleigh/Durham area of North Carolina.¹¹ These systems were generally built around relatively inexpensive (for the period) Apple or Radio Shack computers running standard BBS software. The Aryan Liberty Net was in addition to Metzger's War Information Network computer and Dietz's Liberty Bell Network computer, which were single units despite being called networks (Berlet, 1985a).

In June of 1985, the Aryan Liberty Net system was heralded by the message that follows. The original message was transmitted in all caps and formatted for text viewing on a plain black & white computer terminal, unlike modern web browsers that reformat type for display on a modern color monitor.

MSG LEFT BY: SYSTEM OPERATOR

FINALLY, WE ARE ALL GOING TO BE LINKED
TOGETHER AT ONE POINT IN TIME. IMAGINE
IF YOU WILL, ALL OF THE GREAT MINDS OF
THE PATRIOTIC CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT LINKED
TOGETHER AND JOINED INTO ONE COMPUTER.
ALL THE YEARS OF COMBINED EXPERIENCE
AVAILABLE TO THE MOVEMENT. NOW IMAGINE
ANY PATRIOT IN THE COUNTRY BEING ABLE
TO CALL UP AND ACCESS THOSE MINDS, TO
DEAL WITH THE PROBLEMS AND ISSUES THAT
AFFECT HIM. YOU ARE ON LINE WITH THE
ARYAN NATIONS BRAIN TRUST. IT IS HERE
TO SERVE THE FOLK.

Various sections on the system included:

1. NOTICE TO ALL ARYANS
2. AT LAST UNITY!!!
3. ESSAYS OF A KLANSMAN
4. FROM THE MOUNTAIN
5. WHO IS THE U.S. RUN FOR?
6. 1984 IS HERE FOR CANADA
7. NATION IS RACE!
8. MORRIS DEES QUEER
9. JOKE OF THE 20TH CENTURY
10. FROM INSIDE CANADA

The system signed off with this message:

ARYAN NATION LIBERTY NET
(AN ARYAN COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM)
PLEASE CALL AGAIN!

=====

- ONE NATION - ONE RACE - ONE GOD -

+++++ 33/5 +++++

Note the tag line "33/5." The late racist leader Bob Miles explained the meaning of the code "33/5." He wrote that:

"Three times Eleven equals Thirty Three. 33 is the name of the Order. Never anything else. Never speak of it to anyone who is not a member by any other name. Never write of it in any other manner. Computerize its name by converting the initials to 33... The Order is... now one hundred and seventeen years old. It has already passed through four stages in its life. It has concluded the Fourth Era of its existence. It stands on the threshold of a new era, the Fifth Era."

Thus the code for the Fifth era of White supremacist resistance to equality in the U.S. is 33/5.¹²

A new book by Louis Beam was promoted in another posting:

KLAN HISTORY BOOK
MSG LEFT BY: NATHAN B. FORREST

THE NEWLY RELEASED BOOK "ESSAY OF A
KLANSMAN" BY LOUIS BEAM, WILL TELL
YOU EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW
ABOUT THE KU KLUX KLAN - BUT WAS AFRAID
TO ASK. THIS BOOK, LIKE IT'S PREDECE-
SSOR OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION "COMMON
SENSE," IS A CALL FOR THE FINAL SOLUT-
ION TO THE AMERICAN POLITICAL QUAGMIRE
OF 1984. CONTAINS A GRAPH WITH AN
OUTLINE OF WHO THE ENEMY IS, WITH A
PROPOSED POINT SYSTEM FOR THEIR EXEC-
UTION, BASED UPON THEIR TRUE VALUE TO
THE ANTI-CHRIST, PRO-COMMUNIST SYSTEM.

The basic tenets of the racist and antisemitic Christian Identity movement can be found in this 1985 post:

MSG LEFT BY: CHRISTIAN PATRIOT

I AM A WHITE CHRISTIAN DEFENDER OF
THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, AND MY CHRISTIAN RACE.
I AM DESCENDED FROM A LONG LINE AND GLORIOUS
LINEAGE THAT HAS SHED THEIR BLOOD AND TREASURE UPON
THE BATTLEFIELDS THROUGHOUT THIS EARTH.
I AM HEIR TO A GRAND AND ILLUSTRIOUS
RACE OF WHITE MEN, WHO HAVE ERECTED
UPON THIS EARTH ALL OF THE HIGH CUL-
TURES OF HISTORY. I AM HEIR TO THE
COVENANTS, CHARTERS, BLESSINGS, AND
PROMISES OF THE BIBLE. FROM THE DAWN OF
CIVILIZED HISTORY MY RACE HAS CARRIED A
LOVE OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AND LAW TO
THE ENDS OF THE EARTH. I AM PART OF A

GREAT WHITE CHRISTIAN RACE WHOSE SPIRITUAL AND SOUL ESSENCE WAS CREATED IN THE CELESTIAL PLANES OF THE HEAVENS BY YAHWEH, THE EVERLIVING AND ALMIGHTY, THE GREAT I AM OF THE UNIVERSE. I AM GENETICALLY PROGRAMMED IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF YAHWEH AND WAS CREATED AND MADE TO HAVE DOMINION OVER ALL THE EARTH AND LIFE THERE IN. AS A DESCENDANT OF THE WHITE ADAMIC RACE, I AM CALLED FORTH TO BE A CULTURE MAN, A DEFENDER OF THE FAITH, A CUSTODIAN OF THE LAW OF GOD, AND CONQUEROR FOR JESUS CHRIST IN THIS EARTH. I HAVE LIVED IN EVERY GENERATION OF TIME. RESIDING IN THE LOINS OF MY ANCESTORS. AND NOW TAKING MY TURN UPON THE SOIL OF MOTHER EARTH TO DEFEND MY RACE, TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND TO PRESERVE, DEFEND, AND PROTECT OUR WHITE CHRISTIAN RACIAL HERITAGE. TODAY I STAND ON THE LINE FOR CHRIST, RACE, AND THE FAITH ONCE DELIVERED.

A larger collection of excerpts from the 1985 bigoted BBS's is posted online at the Political Research Associates website.¹³

The First Online Response

A small group of anarchist hackers tipped me off to the existence of the racist computer BBS's in late 1984.¹⁴ On January 5, 1985 I issued a one page memo on the "KKK/Aryan Racist Computer Networks," to a group of researchers monitoring the political right (Berlet, 1985a). On January 24, 1985 The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith released a six page study on the subject, "Computerized Networks of Hate," as one

of its periodic Fact Finding Reports (ADL, 1985). The ADL study was the first public report on the subject.

Following these reports, journalist Wayne King, who covered White supremacists for *The New York Times*, sparked major public awareness of online hate. His article "Link by Computer Used by Rightists," in February of 1985 described the three-city Aryan Liberty Network and included its self-description as "a pro-American, pro-White, anti-Communist network of true believers who serve the one and only God--Jesus, the Christ" (King, 1985).

The racist BBS's quickly attracted the attention of anti-racist hackers ("Nazi BBS," 1985). By March of 1985 some hackers were attempting to crash the systems, with some success. At least one BBS posted a message complaining about down time caused by intentional interference. I noted in a memo that I felt "the information gleaned from the systems is more important than shutting them down" (Berlet, 1985b). This idea was discussed in an article in the March/April 1985 Youth International Party (Yippie) newspaper *Overthrow*, reprinted from the computer hacker magazine *2600*. According to the article, "The Nazis are a start. If hackers can uncover a thing or two that nobody else knows about, we'll be on the road to finally being appreciated. Let us know what you find. But be careful out there" ("Nazi BBS," 1985).

At a March 1985 meeting of the National Anti-Klan Network in Kansas City, there was a discussion of setting up a BBS to counter the White supremacists, and in May I circulated a memo on the subject of a progressive BBS to twenty groups (Berlet, 1985c).¹⁵ To a large extent people liked the idea, but nobody wanted to expend the resources to sponsor the system, although the Greens network made an attempt.

In June 1985 I presented a paper on computers and privacy at a national conference on Issues in Technology and Privacy organized by Professor George Trubow of the Center for Information Technology and Privacy Law at the John Marshall Law School in Chicago (Berlet, 1985d).¹⁶ The debate over computer networks and BBSs was so new that Jerry Berman, then with the American Civil Liberties Union, argued that the BBSs and online systems were just public carriers like telephone companies and thus had no First Amendment rights. Our jaws just hit the floor, and several of us argued against this claim.¹⁷ Part of my presentation was an attempt to explain that some of the BBSs were just like magazines or newspapers--a new electronic form of journalism, public information, and debate--and therefore entitled to Constitutional protections. I included examples of racist BBS texts in the appendix to the paper, and during the conference discussion suggested that government censorship was not an appropriate solution. (Berlet, 1985d).¹⁸

At about the same time the Rev. Jesse Jackson issued a call for an anti-racist BBS, and several activists at Midwest conference of progressives, including Lyn Wells, director of the National Anti-Klan Network, issued a call for a "populist" computer news service.¹⁹ With growing fears that the government would restrict the civil liberties of BBSs, the National Lawyers Guild Civil Liberties Committee agreed to fund an anti-racist pro-civil liberties BBS so it could serve as a legal test case if it became necessary. The first planning meeting (in my living room) was attended by Chicago area activists Bill Boardman, Alan Fenske, Mickey Jarvis, Aysha Mibiti, and me. After a few meetings

the system went up in my basement in late July of 1985, running on a tiny Atari game computer.²⁰ Dubbed AMNET BBS, (as in American Network) it was the second progressive BBS system in the U.S., and the first BBS devoted exclusively to challenging the right.²¹ We also may have been the first online system to post a guide to using the federal Freedom of Information Act, using text from a group called FOIA, Inc.²²

Alan Fenske kept the hardware running while I acted as System Operator (SYSOP) and editor. AMNET promoted democracy, pluralism, and civil liberties, while assisting those organizing against racism, fascism, antisemitism, sexism and homophobia. After a few months, we began to upgrade our system, ending up with a reliable refurbished Xerox business computer that lasted several years, before we moved to the ubiquitous PC clone.²³

In 1985 it was difficult to explain to people why they should be concerned about online hate when only a tiny fraction of the population owned a computer with a modem. My solution was to purchase a used briefcase-sized portable thermal printer/terminal with a built-in rubber cuff modem into which one stuffed a telephone handset.²⁴ With no display, it acted like a portable Teletype™ machine, printing out onto paper the text that would normally appear on a screen. I would lug the terminal to my speeches (along with 100 feet of telephone wire), hook up, and go online. While I was talking about the growth of far right recruitment of youth in the Midwest, the printer would be spewing out a continuous roll of thermal paper filled with antisemitic and racist text being downloaded in real time. At the end of the speech I would invite the audience to tear off several feet and bring it home to read and discuss with their children. People were amazed.

Growth, then Collapse

By May of 1986 the Aryan Liberty Net had systems operating in Idaho, Dallas and Houston Texas, North Carolina, and Chicago, and was listing the WAR site in California as an affiliate.²⁵ By the end of 1986, Metzger's *War* newspaper was listing these, minus the original site in Idaho, but with additional BBS's in Wisconsin and Arkansas.²⁶ Other bigoted BBSs began appearing; and BBS's carrying racist, antisemitic, and homophobic material continued to appear well into the mid 1990's. Racist Skinheads started to use BBS's to spread their messages (Sills, 1989). By 1989 Metzger's BBS was running a "multiuser 286-based AT clone with a 40MB hard disk running FidoNet software. (The developer of FidoNet, Bay-area resident Tom Jennings, regrets the group's use of his software. 'I don't like them using FidoNet,' Jennings recently complained, 'but I suppose it's inevitable.')" (Sills, 1989: 146). FidoNet allowed the material on Metzger's BBS to be echoed on numerous other BBS sites.

In 1993 the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that Ryan Wilson of the Pennsylvania American Nationalist Party kept in touch "with other hate groups across the country through a computer network. These groups use the network to update each other on rallies, marches and law enforcement investigators. One of the Nationalist Party's members is now hooking up the group to NaziNet, a computer bulletin board for white supremacists" (Rohr, 1993).

At various times other BBS's with racist material popped up, including The Aryan Resistance Information Exchange Service in Tennessee; the Cyber Space Minutemen in

Illinois (which carried material from the KKK and National Alliance); the Transponder BBS in Pittsburgh (National Alliance material); the Aryan Resistance Center in Sacramento, CA; Our Nation BBS outside Los Angeles; and Don Black's Stormfront BBS in Florida, which would evolve into a major Internet site (Berlet, 1995, 1996).

Online bigotry in public cyberspace was often masked and embedded in elaborate conspiracy theories about secret elites that all-too-often led to antisemitic allegations. A major source of conspiracist antisemitism and Holocaust denial during this period was Dan Gannon's BBS in Portland, Oregon, the "Banished CPU."²⁷

In Denver the New Age BBS sometimes mixed conspiracism with antisemitism, as did the Catacombs BBS in Pittsburgh, Activist BBS in San Francisco, and Searchnet/Searchlight BBS in Massachusetts, among others. Material from the Liberty Lobby's *Spotlight* newspaper appeared on the Logoplex BBS in Virginia and in some sections of the New Age BBS. Text from Lyndon LaRouche's various publications began to appear on the Lincoln BBS in Nebraska. Homophobic material was carried on the Gay Agenda Resistance BBS in Oregon.²⁸

Patriot, armed militia, and other anti-government BBS's were online in the mid-1990s, including the Cellar BBS near Philadelphia, which carried some John Birch Society material; the Sovereignty Workshop near Los Angeles; Liberty Northwest BBS in Idaho; Patriot Information BBS near Los Angeles; Bullet Box BBS near Los Angeles; Patrick Henry BBS in Arizona; Sixth Column BBS in Orange County, CA; and Knowledge is Freedom BBS in North Carolina.²⁹ Militia leaders Linda and Al Thompson of the American Justice Federation in Indianapolis ran the Associated Electronic News BBS. They had previously run The Motherboard BBS in Greenwood, Indiana from 1991-1995.³⁰

Then there were eclectic sites. The anti-environmentalist Borderline BBS ran near Los Angeles. The Prevailing Winds Research BBS south of Los Angeles mixed conspiracy theories of the left and right. William Cooper's BBS in Arizona mixed conspiracism with UFO claims.

As technology advanced, national commercial and non-profit online systems and the Internet began supplanting the BBS's, and by the mid 1990s many BBS's had disappeared or moved onto the Internet. Midwest Research moved to Boston, renaming itself Political Research Associates, but keeping the AMNET BBS online while developing its new online site on the private network Peacenet.

Moving onto the Internet

As direct computer networking and access to the Internet grew, so did online hate.³¹ In the early 1990s, before a graphic interface produced the World Wide Web, hate online was often posted to the USENET news groups, a system of message-based topical conferences. There was vigorous debate over policy within the USENET community, often by critics of hate, but also among far right activists.³² One online skinhead conference was dominated by neonazi skins, but their views were attacked by anti-racist skins.³³

On the USENET news groups, Holocaust revisionists could be found posting in <alt.revisionism> where they were soon isolated by the majority of Internet netizens (citizens of cyberspace) who wished to preserve intellectual freedom but who refused to allow Holocaust deniers even the smallest space to spread their views on other conferences. In <alt.revisionism> there were also rebuttals to the deniers posted by early online human rights activists such as Ken McVay, Jamie McCarthy, Danny Keren, and others. Ted Frank posted scores of carefully researched rebuttals to hard right and conspiracist legal arguments on <alt.conspiracy>. By 1992 McVay had collected over 35 megabytes of rebuttal material available for downloading from his Canadian-based Nizkor Internet site using "gopher" software, and he also maintained an e-mail list server on the subject. McVay later set up the Nizkor website where rebuttals to Holocaust deniers are collected globally.³⁴

As the graphic interface for the Internet evolved into the World Wide Web, a few sporadic web pages carrying racist, antisemitic, or other bigoted material began to appear, and in May 1995 Don Black set up the neonazi Stormfront site, the first major website by a national race hate organization.³⁵

A few bigots also managed to post messages in discussion groups on the commercial services such as America Online (AOL), Compuserve, and Prodigy, although the rhetoric was often muted or coded. A common tactic on both online services and the Internet was to suggest the purchase by mail-order of specific anti-government or conspiracist books and pamphlets with innocuous-sounding titles. When the material arrived in the mail it was often accompanied with a list of other materials with White supremacist or antisemitic themes.

The attempt to hide or encode overt race hate and antisemitism is a common tactic of the ultra-right. Consider the following excerpt from the Pennsylvania-based Christian Posse Comitatus newsletter *The Watchman* was found in 1995 on the World Wide Web home page of Stormfront:³⁶

As we enter the fall season, which is incidentally the best time of the year to recruit new people, I feel it necessary to comment briefly on new developments nationally. ...public servants are supposed to be afraid of the people, [do us] no further harm and all will be well....I regret that it does not appear that government learned this lesson in Oklahoma City. There is currently legislation pending that will effectively outlaw free speech and classify such organizations as Aryan Nations, militias and the Posse as terrorist organizations....

While there is yet a little time arm yourselves and prepare to face some very difficult decisions. Knowledge is power, go to the Gun shows and buy the how-to books and learn the art of war. Live free or die!

"FOURTEEN WORDS!"

An average reader might miss the neonazi subtext of this posting because the post is designed to use a recruitment frame that differs from the frame used for members and leaders (Johnston, 1995). The "Aryan Nations, militias and the Posse" are lumped together and portrayed only as victims of demonization whose free speech rights are threatened by government repression. The Aryan Nations and the Posse Comitatus promote Christian Identity, a vicious antisemitic religious philosophy that often overlaps with neonazi beliefs (Zeskind, 1987; Barkun, 1994).³⁷ The phrase "fourteen words" is a coded reference to White supremacist David Lane's quote: "To secure the existence of the white race and a future for our children" (Lane, 1999).³⁸ The phrase is discussed in the context of its use in the White supremacist movement by Dobratz & Shanks-Meile (1997).

Conclusions

Horizontal electronic media give dissident voices across the political spectrum an increased ability to reach larger audiences more quickly and with less cost.³⁹ By horizontal, I mean media that are non-hierarchical in structure and content, such as the World Wide Web, short-wave radio, and fax broadcast lists. Social movement organizers can now reach vast audiences in an attempt to mobilize people into issue-orientated campaigns in an effort to create more flexible and durable movements. Increased access to mass media by people currently left out of the political system is a positive change for those who value the democratic process.

The relationship between hate on the Web and acts of ethnviolence is complex.⁴⁰ Devin Burghart has observed the far right presence online is disproportional to their actual numbers and influence (Burghart, 1996).⁴¹ Kathleen Blee suggests further study is needed, especially to "differentiate racist display from racist recruitment," (Blee, 2001: 107).

The lack of editorial filtering and attribution on the Internet can cause problems.⁴² The difficulty in judging the accuracy and value of information found on the Web has prompted many study guides.⁴³ More needs to be done. One curriculum that teaches young people about the manipulative techniques used by the enemies of democracy is Facing History and Ourselves which uses as examples the Nazi genocide of Jews and the Roma (Gypsies), US slavery, and the genocide of Armenians by ethno-nationalist Turks.⁴⁴ Melinda Fine has documented the effectiveness of this approach (1995). This and other projects challenging hate are increasing their online presence. Moderated discussions like those at Salon, Alternet, Utne Reader, and Left Business Observer offer a new model for interactive reporting and public discussion.

Cyberdemocracy doesn't need to be feared, it needs to be engaged. A more active citizenship is preferable to more government censorship. Here is how AMNET put it in one of its opening screens:

Fight Hatemongering By Confronting It Not Censoring It!

Home of the File Ferrets database research formats & text files.

Complete text of the federal Freedom of Information Act.

Reliable resources for building democracy, pluralism,

social justice, and human rights. Defending the right to know and
the freedom to act. Fighting political repression, right-wing
attacks on dissent and diversity, racial nationalism & fascism.

Seeking Files on the Following Topics:

Constitutional Rights, Civil Liberties, Civil Rights, Human Rights
Pluralism, Racism, Sexism, Homophobia
Spying, Surveillance, Repression, Intelligence Agency Abuses
Authoritarianism, Fascism, Nazism, Totalitarianism
Freedom, Democracy, Justice, Liberty, Dissent

Epilog: Time to Unplug AMNET

AMNET BBS was online for 15 years, first in Chicago and then outside of Boston. With the Public Eye Internet web pages of Political Research Associates, and numerous websites devoted to challenging prejudice and bigotry and defending online civil liberties, the system was no longer needed. Logins had slowed to a trickle. I unplugged AMNET BBS in January 2001.

Hatewatch, Political Research Associates, and the Center for Democratic Renewal marked this event by launching a joint website, Building Equality, <<http://www.buildingequality.org>>, for those who want to engage in the vital task of moving beyond challenging hate to working to expand democracy and defend diversity. Later, the Gustavus Myers Center became a co-sponsor.⁴⁵

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[A version of the notes and bibliography with hyperlinks for active URL's in this article is at <<http://www.publiceye.org/hate/online.htm>>.]

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Note: all URL's cited were active as of January 30, 2002.

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Notes

¹ See author's Note.

² For more about the early history of The Well: <http://www.thewell.org/aboutwell.html>. For more on the early history of hackers, see Levy, 2001. For a look at the libertarian roots of online systems, see: Borsook, 2000.

³ The first BBS was CBBS (Computerized BBS) created in 1978 by Ward Christensen and Randy Suess who had to solder their computer together and write their own software. Christensen wrote the Xmodem software protocol that allowed single computers to exchange files. Their history of CBBS" is at Suess's website <http://www.chinet.com/html/cbbs.html>.

⁴ Telephone interview with George P. Dietz, June 14, 2000. Dietz, when interviewed, could not recall exactly when his "Info. International Network" went online. He recalls it as perhaps late 1983, but it was not mentioned until the April 1984 print edition of his *Liberty Bell* magazine. A pamphlet titled "Command Guide" issued by Info International Network circa March 1984 contains a section of a printout from

the Liberty Net BBS dated March 7, 1984. Letters dated March 1984 and printed in the April and May editions of *Liberty Bell* discuss the BBS, and there is an ad listing the BBS phone number in the April edition on page 52. As far as I am able to determine, Dietz's Info. International Network preceded Beam's Liberty Net which preceded Metzger's BBS. I apologize for not being able to more accurately determine the exact dates. Documentation nailing down the dates, early text, and other information about these early systems that is sent to the author will be summarized and posted online at <http://www.publiceye.org/hate/earlybbs.html>. Documents on file at PRA.

⁵ Quote and information about hardware from undated pamphlet (circa Spring 1984) circulated by Info International Network, "BBS - Users Groups Listing." Document on file at PRA.

⁶ See *Liberty Bell* at <http://www.lbp2.com/id18.htm>, June 14, 2000.

⁷ For background on this period, see Corcoran, 1995 and Aho, 1990.

⁸ The Canadian flyer is attributed in the Bohy article to Alan Shefman, national director of the League for Human Rights of the B'nai B'rith, Canada. Shefman says "in late summer. ...I think August," p. 20.

⁹ Downloaded from Aryan Liberty Net in 1985; text printout on file at PRA.

¹⁰ See various issues of *WAR* in 1984-1986.

¹¹ Locations for some BBS's listed throughout this chapter are approximate, based on the nearest major city for each areacode.

¹² Miles, Robert E., "33/5." Essay was found online at <http://www.kkk.com/33-5nf.htm>, but that link is now gone.

¹³ For excerpts: http://www.publiceye.org/hate/online_85/hate_online85_TOC.htm

¹⁴ "Nazi BBS," (1985). Ben Masel of the Yippies/US Greens was my contact into the anarchist network.

¹⁵ See excerpt of memo at http://www.publiceye.org/aboutpra/pe_bbshist.html.

¹⁶ The report was prepared for the 1985 national conference on Issues in Technology and Privacy -- sponsored by the Center for Information Technology and Privacy Law John Marshall Law School, Chicago, Illinois, June 21-23 1985. Conference coordinator, Professor George Trubow. A project of the National Bar Association Foundation. Funded by the Benton Foundation

¹⁷ Unsung heroes in the battle to protect BBS rights include attorneys Paul Bernstein and George Trubow, and Professor Jennifer K. Bankier from Dalhousie Law School in Nova Scotia, Canada, all of whom defended BBS rights at the 1985 computer privacy conference in Chicago. Bernstein stayed up all night to write an impassioned defense of BBS rights, which he delivered to the conference before flying off to prepare for the funeral of his father who died the day before. Harry M. Goodman and Donna Hall, coordinators of the Legal Conference on California's Well system

conducted extensive discussions and an educational campaign regarding privacy and computers. Because of these and other efforts by many activists across the country, the ACLU soon adopted a view of BBSs that recognized their First Amendment aspects, and legislation that would have severely restricted those rights failed to gain support on Congress. Bernstein's 1985 conference position paper was revised and reprinted in his *Law Mug Newsletter*. The November 1985 issue of the newsletter also contains the testimony of Thomas S. Warrick before the Senate Committee on Juvenile Justice against the restrictive language in the Tribble Bill.

¹⁸ At the end of the paper there were appendices, including three messages posted by the author to various BBSs in 1985 warning about the pending legislation <http://www.publiceye.org/media/privacy_online_85/bbslaw_all.htm>. For background on hate groups in Chicago during this period see Berlet, 2001.

¹⁹ See the call at <http://www.publiceye.org/aboutpra/pe_bbshist.html>.

²⁰ View a picture of an Atari computer at:
<<http://www.publiceye.org/gallery/Amnet/Atari.jpg>>.

²¹ For more details about the founding of AMNET BBS, see the AMNET History Online <http://www.publiceye.org/aboutpra/pe_bbshist.html>. The first progressive BBS, NEWSBASE, was set up in 1984 by Richard Gaikowski in California; see Blitt, and Bernstein, 1986.

In the late 1980's, the number of progressive BBS's had grown considerably, and discussions were held about setting up a national network of progressive, anti-racist, BBS's. Early attempts at creating a national network of progressive online systems were discussions held on The Well, and a short-lived 1984-1985 network (Greenet) organized by the Yuppies/US Greens was hosted on the Delphi system; see "Greens' Communication Network," (1985). In May of 1984 Johan Carlisle circulated a proposal for a progressive online system to facilitate social change, "Common History Institute (CHI): A Proposal for a New Organization," on file at PRA. Early networking also took place on The Source and Genie.

In 1986 Mark Graham and Michael Shuman set up the Peacenet online system. A number of mainstream social service agencies and non-profits set up other networks, and one successful 1987 venture became Handsnet <<http://www.handsnet.org>>. Graham campaigned among progressive BBS operators and network SYSOPs to consider the alternative of allying with Peacenet (which spawned the Institute for Global Communications or IGC network <<http://www.igc.org>>) instead of setting up separate BBS networks and sections on commercial systems. The Public Eye conference on Peacenet was originally set up with the assistance of Mark Graham, and evolved and grew with the continuing advice and technical support of the staff of Peacenet and the Institute for Global Communications. For several years the Public Eye online was hosted by the IGC networks, with the assistance of web programming consultant George Gundrey. During this period, Amnet BBS continued operation.

²² Ann Mari Buitrago of FOIA, Inc. helped prepare the text for online posting.

²³ For more on AMNET BBS, visit:

<http://www.publiceye.org/aboutpra/pe_bbshist.html>. View a picture of the reliable Xerox computer at <<http://www.publiceye.org/gallery/Amnet/Xerox.jpg>>.

When AMNET quickly outgrew the Atari, Richard Gaikowski, SYSOP of the first progressive BBS system, NEWSBASE BBS in California, offered his BBS software, a redesign of Dennis Recla's original RBBS.COM. Irv Hoff helped with BYE.COM needed to run our first CP/M machine, a Sanyo. AMNET became the sister site for NEWSBASE, mentioned at the end of Blitt, and Bernstein, 1986. AMNET operated on several computers over the years, including a Radio Shack Model II, and a Xerox 16/8 under the CP/M operating system. While moving physically to the Boston area, AMNET was briefly hosted in Chicago on a progressive BBS run by Jerry Olsen. This allowed for continuous operation of AMNET BBS. After moving to Boston, the AMNET BBS was re-named The Public Eye BBS and ran on a rotating series of aging IBM compatible clones relying on a shelf of refurbished hard disk drives.

Over the years the BBS was cosponsored by Political Research Associates, the National Lawyers Guild Civil Liberties Committee, and Chicago's Bill of Rights Foundation. Cooperation and assistance also came from the Center for Democratic Renewal (CDR), and the Fund for Open Information & Accountability, Inc. (FOIA, Inc.). Additional research assistance came from Adele Oltman, and technical assistance from Bill Bowles, SYSOP of the New York Online BBS.

²⁴ View the portable terminal at <<http://www.publiceye.org/gallery/Amnet/Terminal.jpg>>.

²⁵ List downloaded by author from Liberty Net in May 1986.

²⁶ Boxed list, in WAR '86, (1986), Vol. 5, No. 5, no date, (probably late October or early November based on dates in articles), p. 16. Dated as received Dec. 5, 1986 by the Library at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

²⁷ There is an archive of material about the Banished CPU at Nizkor, <<http://www.nizkor.org/ftp.cgi/orgs/american/oregon/banished.cpu>>

²⁸ This list and other BBS's, unless otherwise cited to a specific source, are from the author's contemporaneous downloads, notes and logs.

²⁹ Most of the Patriot sites listed in this section are from an excellent unpublished annotated list of race hate BBS's and Internet sites during the transitional period in 1996 compiled by Devin Burghart in preparation for his article in 1996. On file at PRA.

³⁰ <<http://bbslist.textfiles.com/317/317.txt>>.

³¹ For a detailed look at early bigotry on the Internet, see Burghart, 1996; Madsen, 1996-97; Schroer, 1997, 2001; Back, Keith, and Solomos, 1998; Burris, Smith, and Strahm, 2000; For information on Europe, see Louise Bernstein, (1996). See also periodic print and online reports from the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

- ³² Author's monitoring. On generic differences and struggles within rightist groups, see Dobratz, and Stephanie Shanks-Meile, 1995.
- ³³ Author's monitoring. In the US many skinheads are culturally identified youth rebels who are not explicitly racist, and in some cases are actively anti-racist; see Hamm, 1994.
- ³⁴ <<http://www.nizkor.org>>.
- ³⁵ <<http://www.stormfront.org>>.
- ³⁶ Newsletter from fall 1995, located and downloaded in early 1996 and posted on private e-mail list for persons studying the far right. Stormfront homepage was at the time: <<http://www2.stormfront.org/watchman/watch-on.html>>.
- ³⁷ For more on militias, the hard right, and the far right, see Kenneth Stern, 1996; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile, 1997; Ezekiel, 1995; Hamm, 1997; Berlet and Lyons, 2000.
- ³⁸ According to researchers from the Northwest Coalition for Human Dignity, the phrase "fourteen words" is used as a coded white supremacist greeting that originated with David Lane, a member of the neonazi group, the Order. Another coded phrase is "88," representing the eighth letter in the alphabet as in "HH" for "Heil Hitler."
- ³⁹ The conclusions are adapted from Berlet, 1998.
- ⁴⁰ For more on ethnoviolence, see Levin and McDevitt, 1993; Ferber, Grattet and Jenness, 1999. See also an online version of the ASA report: <http://www.publiceye.org/hate/Hate99ASA_toc.htm>; and a chart with hate crime statistics, <<http://www.publiceye.org/hate/Statistics.htm>>.
- ⁴¹ See also the related issue of government repression in Madsen, 1996-97).
- ⁴² While researching this article, I found the Sills article (1989) posted online without an author, date, or publication cite at <http://www.holysmoke.org/hs00/fasc_bbs.htm> with a note that it had been found at the Pair-O-Dice BBS in Austin, TX. Printout on file at PRA.
- ⁴³ See, for example, "A Student's Guide to Research with the WWW," <<http://www.slu.edu/departments/english/research/>>; and "A Guide to Critical Thinking About What You See on the Web," <<http://www.ithaca.edu/library/Training/hott.html>>.
- ⁴⁴ See the Facing History and Ourselves website: <<http://www.facing.org>>.
- ⁴⁵ Myers Center: <<http://www.bu.edu/ssw/MYERSCENTER/index.htm>>.