

**Right - Wing Extremism in the Texas Prisons:
The Rise and Fall of the
Aryan Brotherhood of Texas**

*Mary E. (Beth) Pelz**
*James W. Marquart***
and
*Terry Pelz****

Introduction

One of the most significant changes in American prisons in the last three decades has been the emergence of inmate organizations. In some states, street gang members imported the identity and power of their gangs into the prisons. The Blackstone Rangers and the Devil's Disciples became important players in the Illinois prison system (Jacobs 1977). Similarly, in California, especially during the 1960s, the Black Guerilla Family espoused a revolutionary doctrine, while Hispanic gangs such as the Nuestra Familia and Mexican Mafia formed to control lucrative prison rackets (Davidson 1974). Indeed, for the last two decades, prisoner gangs have posed a serious challenge for custodial administrators. Despite the role of the gang in the prison power structure, comprehensive national data on the origins and nature of prisoner gangs remains elusive. One study found that in 29 state prison systems, 114 gangs had been officially identified with an estimated membership of some 12,000 members (Camp and Camp 1985).

The research literature on prisoner gangs has shed the most light on black and Hispanic organizations. White prisoner gangs, however, have been given little attention. Irwin (1980) suggests that white convicts have historically not been organizationally minded" because they lack a heritage of oppression to draw them together. Despite the lack of a heritage of oppression, racist Nazi and biker inmates at San Quentin formed, in 1968, the Aryan Brotherhood (AB). Although the group espouses the political philosophy of white supremacy, their prison and free world activities include extortion, contract killings, drug trafficking, and prostitution (Camp and Camp 1985; Irwin 1980; Lonergan 1979; Conrad 1977; California Senate Hearings 1974). The California AB has penetrated other state prison systems as well as the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

To date, no systematic research has documented the process by which this type of group has taken root in penitentiaries outside of California. This paper examines the rise and fall of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas (ABT) prisoner gang. We begin our analysis with a discussion of why Texas prisons offer a unique setting to examine the dynamics of right-wing extremism. Then we briefly discuss Seymour Lipset and Martin Raab's (1978) theoretical model of the origins of right-wing extremism. This model is then used as a means to examine the history of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas. Our aim is not to test a theory but rather to explain how right-wing extremism evolved in Texas prisons.

Research Methods

The data for this study were collected from three primary sources: (1) official documents and records maintained by Texas prison system administrators and unit personnel; (2) documents obtained from members and ex-members of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas; and (3) unstructured interviews with Texas Department of Corrections (TDC) staff and members and ex-members of the ABT.

Information which is officially kept by TDC includes statistics on inmate gang membership, gang assaults, and gang homicides. Lists of suspected and confirmed members of the Aryan Brotherhood from as early as the summer of 1984 through August of 1991 are utilized to compare the size and composition of the membership. These lists are also used to substantiate the timing and length of membership of members who were interviewed. Official gang-related homicide statistics from 1984 through August of 1991 provide documentation of the activities associated with Brotherhood members.

Data collected from unit officials includes memos analyzing specific AB-related assaults, homicides, plans for hits, transcripts of interviews with active AB members, members who wished to turn (resign from the gang), and in-depth descriptions and interpretations of contraband found during searches of Aryan Brotherhood members' cells. Of particular note is a voluminous collection of such information maintained by one of the authors who has been identifying and tracking the Aryan Brotherhood since the spring of 1984.

The most extensive description of the origin, development, and activity of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas is found in the collection of over 3,000 letters from/to AB members and AB associated inmates dating from February of 1984 through August of 1991. These letters are ABT correspondence monitored by one of the authors who was the gang coordinator of a single unit that housed the leaders of most of the gangs within the Texas prisons during 1984 and 1985. This also includes AB correspondence monitored by this coordinator from 1986 to August of 1991 as the supervisor of the gang intelligence department of a different maximum security unit in the southern region of the prison system. This unit is utilized as a gang trouble shooting unit by the entire prison system. Therefore, a great deal of AB activity on other units is chronicled in these data.

Informal interviews with inmates and staff were conducted over a seven-year period, beginning in 1984. Thirty staff system and unit gang coordinators and investigators and over 200 officially designated, suspected, affiliated, or associated Aryan Brotherhood members were interviewed. Many of these interviews were loosely structured, in that a few broad questions were asked of each staff member (i.e., When did you first become involved in gang tracking?) and AB members and ex-members (i.e., Why did you Join?; Why did you withdraw?).

However, the overwhelming majority of inmate interviews were conducted as part of the gang intelligence gathering process of the aforementioned gang coordinator and unit intelligence department. These interviews are routinely transcribed. Therefore, content analysis was possible.

Institutional Factors

Three primary factors make the Texas prison system an ideal setting for examining the rise of the AB of Texas. First, racial tension in the prison units was suppressed by legislatively mandated racial segregation of entire institutions (Prison System of Texas 1921:132). Individual units were desegregated in 1965 but were still segregated by cell blocks and job assignments. This latter practice was finally abolished in 1979 as a result of *LaMar v. Coffield* (C. A. No. 72-H-1393) a class action suit that began in 1977. In other words, as late as 1979, white, black and Hispanic inmates lived in segregated living areas. The field force on the prison farms was also divided along racial/ethnic lines (white line, black line, and Mexican line). The policy of segregation severely restricted interaction between the races.

Second was the Texas system's reliance on inmate agents of social control or building tenders (Marquart & Crouch, 1984), inmate guards whose primary duties were to maintain control in the living areas and protect correctional officers. They also acted as guards' eyes and ears in living quarters. Building tenders were, in reality, institutional snitches who collected and channeled information on prisoner (as well as guard) activities, plots, and plans to the officials. Most important for this paper, these inmate agents of control thwarted clique activity. Building tenders strictly enforced the staff admonition to new inmates (or "drive-ups") to "do your own time" through fear, intimidation, and coercion.

Third, judicial intervention as a result of *Ruiz v. Estelle* (503 F. Supp. 1265 [S.D. Tex. 1980]) ended the old order or inmate social system predominated by building tenders. Between 1979 and 1983, the Texas prison system experienced unprecedented changes within the prisoner and guard subcultures. The prison farms were desegregated, building tenders were removed, and hundreds of new prison guards were hired to take the place of the inmate guards. As a result of these rapid changes, an authority vacuum occurred in which the guards were unsure of, and basically abdicated, their authority (Crouch and Marquart 1990). This anomie situation resulted in heightened racial tension, the emergence of prisoner gangs, and high levels of lethal violence.

James B. Jacobs (1982) points out that violent racial conflict is a reality within correctional institutions and that such racial conflict has coincided with a decline in the custodial staff's ability to maintain order. He suggests that "while racial conflict complicates the security task, the deterioration of order is also attributable to increased programming, court intervention...and overcrowding" (p.121). These were precisely the conditions operating within the Texas prison system that facilitated the Aryan Brotherhood's development.

Explaining the Development of Right-wing Extremism

Lipset and Raab's 1978 book *The Politics of Unreason: Right-wing Extremism in America 1790-1977*, reviews the history of right-wing extremist movements and presents a synthesis of theoretical assumptions about those factors which stimulate development of right-wing movements. They suggest that "the critical ranks in extremist movements are not composed of evil-structured types called extremist, but rather of ordinary people caught in certain kinds of stress" (Lipset and Raab 1978:484). They argue that the more extreme aspects of right-wing movements are not the source of extremism as much as its baggage. In an attempt to develop countermeasures which might be used by society in dealing with extreme right-wing movements,

the authors have developed a model or design of extremism which can be utilized to analyze a variety of right-wing extremist groups. This study incorporates their five basic general concepts.

First are the historical dynamics that facilitate right-wing extremist movements. These refer to social changes which result in the displacement of population groups that previously enjoyed high positions of status (e.g., the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan in the South during reconstruction). At the same time, political disorganization occurs due to a shift in political alignments. One byproduct of disorganization is polarization in which the displaced group views part of the population as being exclusively interested in preserving the past or making radical changes. The real issue of change is soon overshadowed by the reaction of these two groups to their perceptions of each other as a dichotomy of good and evil. Due to this polarization, those looking to the past and those looking to the future begin to react to their perceptions of each other as evil.

Second are population dynamics. The concept of corporate status deprivation refers to a general category of individuals who have a greater investment in their past than their present status. While the individual clings to his group identification, the status of the group continues to decline (Lipset and Raab 1978:461). In order for the right-wing extremists to preserve their previous status, they attempt to reverse the change which has eroded their positions. However, rather than recognizing the true social/political phenomena motivating the change, right-wing extremists focus their hostility upon the perceived source of change--the group which has gained in status.

The third concept is that of the political dynamics, which refers to the stress of the loss of one's previous state, and centers around the cultural baggage of the reference groups of the past. Symbols of the past take on great significance. "Customs, mores, sexual habits, religious habits, and styles of life are seen as specific symbolic content of lost group status" (Lipset and Raab 1978:488). Lipset and Raab argue that rather than being the foundation upon which right-wing movements develop, religious fundamentalism and moralism is utilized (often unknowingly) by those desperately seeking to regain their prior status, as amoral justification of their actions.

Fourth, the political baggage of political moralism, bigotry and conspiracy theory influence the militant process. Because they perceive the present political structure to have deserted them, those suffering from dislocation cease to feel restricted by its formal or informal constraints. Therefore, it is acceptable for members of the group to go beyond that law or to break the law in order to further the cause. The source of status loss, the evil actor within society (i.e., black, Jew) is painted as a member of a generalized group motivated by evil and involved in a conspiratorial attempt to suppress legitimate actors within the system. For this reason, extremists believe that such groups should be excluded from the open marketplace of ideas and policies (Lipset and Raab 1978:490).

Fifth, politicization mobilizes portions of the population under a banner of preservation. The quality of one's attachment to the movement can be analyzed according to the intensity of affiliation. The authors differentiate between individuals who are "joiners, consistent supporters, and expressive approvers". Joiners are involved in right-wing organizations, possess a comprehensive loyalty to the program and seek to educate and agitate. Consistent supporters believe in the movement but do not feel compelled to recruit. Expressive approvers are best

viewed as the audience of "right-wing tendency", with a single issue of loyalty to the program (Lipset and Raab 1978:498).

Different right-wing movements have been built around different combinations of these attachments. Joiners recruit consistent supporters and expressive approvers and, therefore, impact heavily upon the speed with which a movement builds as well as the movement's longevity. As all movements do, right-wing extremist movements follow a natural rise and fall of intensity. The movements' timing depends upon the timing of the social change to which it is reacting and the proportion of joiners, consistent supporters, and expressive approvers.

This particular model was chosen as the framework of analysis of the ABT primarily because it is the only systematic approach to the phenomenon of right-wing extremism which specifically maps out the socio/political dynamics which operate to induce the development of such movements. We will examine each concept as it applies to the Aryan Brotherhood movement in the Texas prisons.

Historical Dynamics

Texas prison administrators cannot pinpoint the origin of the Aryan Brotherhood within their system. The prison's first official memorandum on the subject sent to individual units in late 1984 or early 1985 simply states:

Recently, an illegal organization has emerged within the Texas Department of Corrections, which in some respects can be considered an "off-shoot" of the "Aryan Brotherhood" organization which can be found in various other states (Buentello).

All inmates interviewed indicated that the process by which a single right-wing extremist organization emerged under the title of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas included a synthesis of members from several right-wing groups.

The historical dynamics theorized by Lipset and Raab to be the catalyst for the projection of radical right philosophies are essential to an understanding of the rise of the Aryan Brotherhood in membership and power. Social change, population displacement, and political disorganization are evident in the consequences of the judicial intervention in the cases of *LaMar v. Coffield* and *Ruiz v. Estelle* which resulted in the desegregation of units, dissolution of the building tender system, and the realignment of the formal power structure within the Texas Department of Corrections. The drastic change in the overall social organization of the TDC appears to have impacted heavily upon the power of white inmates. They suddenly found themselves to be socially as well as politically displaced, as the formal political alignment with prison officials shifted to allow the emergence of black assertiveness commensurated with the physical plurality of black inmates.

Although official statistics of the racial make-up of the TDC population from 1979 to 1987 reveal the black plurality to have remained relatively constant within 41%-44% (*TDC Annual Reports 1979-87*), *LaMar* required all units to mirror the overall racial percentages of the TDC inmate population in each of its cell blocks. Coupled with the loss of the control system maintained by the old building tenders (Marquart and Crouch 1984), many radical white inmates perceived their status within the inmate social system to have drastically declined.

The resulting polarization threw black and white inmates to opposite extremes. Rather than reacting to the real issue of displacement, white inmates began reacting to their often distorted perceptions of black inmates and black inmates began to organize in response to attacks by whites. Several gang coordinators interviewed stated that the Mandingo Warriors and Self Defense Family (both black groups) organized in response to the extremist views and actions of the AB. Ideological polarization followed, placing whites on the side of good and blacks on the side of evil. Inmate and staff interviews and inmate correspondence reveal the perception of radical white inmates to be one of persecution by black inmates and abandonment by administrators and staff.

As part of a very brief history of the ABT written for gang coordinators by inmate Red², the author stated that the destruction of the building tender system as a result of *Ruiz v. Estelle*:

brought about the beginning of the AB...because the black inmates, being in the position of numerical superiority, used this superiority of numbers and the fear it caused among most white inmates to start robbing and sexually assaulting the weaker inmates.

During a personal interview with inmate Red, he stated that the building tenders "held the majority of niggers in line" and that when this primarily white dominated disciplinary structure was abolished, black inmates began to disproportionately prey on white inmates. He further stated that "I can't remember ever seeing a wood [white inmate] assault a nigger without being provoked".

Inmate Gold, one of the original founders of the AB in Texas, argues that it was not so much the loss of the building tenders, coupled with desegregation, as it was the change in the demeanor of young black inmates coming from the streets with an "attitude". He states that:

Young black inmates started coming into TDC thinking they could push white inmates around just because they had civil rights now. They were rude and disrespectful to white inmates and in prison all you have is your respect.

Gold agrees with Red's assertion that blacks used the organizational confusion of TDC in the early '80s to prey on young white inmates. The *LaMar* mandated housing scheme placed blacks in the plurality on all cell blocks³. As a result, they used this power to "disrespect all white inmates".

Several references are made in correspondence during spring, summer, and fall of 1984 to the deprivations suffered by "good white boys" due to the cowardly actions and unjustified accusations of "niggers, toads, and congoloids". "Righteous whites" were cuffed, shackled, strip-searched, checked with metal detectors and they were the first of any of the gangs to be placed in security detention administrative segregation⁴ because "white dudes do what is necessary to demand respect".

With this interpretation of the social interactions within the TDC in the late '70s and early '80s, inmates affiliated with or supportive of the Ku Klux Klan in the free world, as well as inmates associated with or interested in the Aryan Nations, began grouping together informally. As a result, groups calling themselves the Ku Klux Klan, the Aryan Society, and the Aryan Brothers, emerged independently in 1981 and 1982. By the beginning of 1983, most Klan members had joined either the Aryan Society or the Aryan Brothers, and the two organizations co-existed

peacefully on many of the major units⁵. It was during this year that the administration of several units investigating numerous inmate assaults by members began referring to the Aryan Brothers as the Aryan Brotherhood.

In July of 1983, a member of the Brothers killed a black inmate accused of "hogging" or taking physical advantage of young white inmates⁶. In April of 1984, a prospect for membership of the Aryan Brotherhood fatally stabbed a black inmate in order to prove his courage, beginning what many felt to be a reign of terror by the ABT which resulted in a total of eight homicides before the year's end. Brotherhood members were responsible for 32% of all inmate homicides within TDC in 1984 and for 40% of all gang homicides⁷. As their reputation for "taking care of business" became widely known, membership within the AB increased.

In correspondence to the chairman of a southern unit in April of 1984, the AB president writes:

All members shipped from here last week have written back and it looks like the family is in the process of growing. I won't discuss numbers in a letter but will say we're in the process of becoming quite a large family.

A second letter to this chairman (also dated April 1984) from a member of the steering committee, or governing body of the AB, ironically states, "We are growing like cancer." The names and locations of members listed in those two letters reveal 11 units housing AB members. Therefore, as early as April of 1984, Brotherhood members were in 41% of the TDC units.

Aryan Brotherhood members began to court members of the Aryan Society (AS) they had come to know while housed in the same units. In the summer of 1984 an agreement was reached between the leaders of the AS and the steering committee of the AB to unite under the better known and more respected name of the Texas Aryan Brotherhood (TAB, ABT, Aryan Brotherhood of Texas)⁸.

Monitored written correspondence between AB members, AS members, and AB and AS members during the spring and summer of 1984 indicates that "the law suit", as it was called, stipulated that those Aryan Society members the Brotherhood felt to be desirable candidates for membership in the AB should join the Brotherhood and those felt to be undesirable should be forced to cover their AS tattoos, as only one white supremacist organization was to be tolerated⁹.

Population Dynamics

Lipset and Raab's population dynamics (status preservation and low-status backlash) more than adequately explain the dislocation of white inmates within the prison social system and the AB's extreme reaction to non-Aryans. Finding their present status to be lacking, many white inmates preferred to relate symbolically to the pre-Ruiz, *pre-LaMar social* organization. In an attempt to reverse the change and build a reputation, these inmates began to utilize extremely violent means of status preservation. The backlash against their positions of lower status was savagely aimed at the perceived source of change--black inmates.

During the period from spring of 1984 through the summer of 1985, the Texas Aryan Brotherhood established itself as "the mad dog" of TDC¹⁰. Unlike the gangs which often waited for an opportunity to "hit" a target when "the man" was not around, the AB appears to have openly courted the reputation as "crazy MFers" as they often wrote to and about each other during this period. Hits were regularly attempted in the presence of staff and other inmates. The

desire to build and keep an extreme reputation was so great that an inmate only two months from parole actually murdered another inmate during an administrative segregation recreation period that he knew was being videotaped. The assailant was a member of another gang making his "bones" in order to get into the AB, and the inmate he stabbed 24 times with an eight inch homemade knife was a Brotherhood member accused of having given written testimony against another AB member in the matter of the homicide of a black inmate almost a year earlier.¹¹

Twenty-five percent of all inmate homicides for the years 1984 and 1985 were committed by Brotherhood members. These 13 homicides constitute 30% of all gang-related homicides for the two-year period¹². As the newspapers heralded the surge in inmate violence as a response to the power void left by the dissolution of the building tender system (Freeland 1985), and the total inmate assaults for the two years topped the 500 mark (the number of gang-related assaults is not known as no official designation was used to identify victims or offenders by gang membership), many previously unaffiliated white inmates felt the need to associate themselves with the Brotherhood. Inmate Red suggests that this was true because the Aryan Brotherhood was made up of men who were, like the Marines, "the proud and the few".

Inmate correspondence and interviews lend evidence to the fact that the growth of the Texas Aryan Brotherhood was firmly based upon that identification with lost status Lipset and Raab refer to as corporate status deprivation. They were not seeking to regain a lost status within a current structure, but to return an entire group to a position of high status. In order to "set things right", the illegitimate actors within the structure had to be eliminated or at least subjugated. The gravity of the situation necessitated extreme measures. Consequently, reference after reference in monitored correspondence is made to "having to deal with niggers who keep messing with whites." and "the Jews who are purposely screwing up our mail, denying us our rights and trying to oppress the true white man."

This low-status backlash is evidenced in the numerous assaults of Brotherhood inmates on blacks for "disrespecting whites". Analysis of written correspondence during this period reveals AB members chasing blacks around recreation yards with knives, harpooning others through open food slots, fire bombing and assaulting blacks on the way to/from showers, recreation, and legal visits, as well as stabbing, beating, and murdering inmates thought to be enemies of the Brotherhood.

The Aryan Brotherhood had definitely become a major power within its own right by the beginning of 1985. The administration of several units placed known AB leaders in "lock-up" during the summer and fall of 1984 as "threats to the safety and security of other inmates and to the institution as a whole"¹³. One member of the steering committee wrote to the president in July of 1984 saying, "Sorry to hear you got slammed. I feel like it's a disease spreading throughout the system" (referring to his being placed in administrative segregation).

Political Dynamics

The cultural baggage, moralism, and fundamentalism outlined by Lipset and Raab as components of the political dynamics of right-wing extremist movements is evidenced in the importance placed on the customs, mores and lifestyles symbolic of the lost group status. The "Creed of the Aryan Brotherhood" romanticizes a philosophy of moral solidarity by stating that an Aryan Brother "walks where the weak and heartless won't dare". The moralistic tone of the creed which also states that "for an Aryan Brother, death holds no fear, vengeance will be his through his brothers still here", symbolically differentiates ABT members from other groups. The ABT tattoo also designates the wearer as a member of a distinctly superior group. The process by which a member is "tacked" is given the symbolic significance of gained status, thereby elevating the group itself to a position of superiority.

The fundamental religious and moral base of the ABT philosophy is evident in its choice of tattoo design. Consisting of a swastika, lightning bolts, and a crowned sword, the tattoo is illustrative of white power and a willingness to die for the cause, as one inmate put it, "because whites are the crowning glory of man .

In a letter to the leader of the Aryan Society (who shortly thereafter became a member of the AB steering committee), a fellow free world right-wing extremist, previously incarcerated in another state, writes that, "prisons are the front line of our endeavor to reinstate the white man to his rightful position of power". Quoting from an undisclosed source, the author of the letter states that he has "escaped the belly of the bitch and continues to buck the system that feeds the whore". He remarks that prisoners are the most likely to finally come to a point of revolt against the system because they are forced to "live, eat, sleep, and work among subhuman Jews and niggers."

The Aryan Brotherhood was viewed by its members as the standard bearer of all that was good and decent in a society gone morally astray. Numerous inmate interviews and monitored correspondence reveal a fundamentalist attitude. One member of the steering committee wrote in October 1984:

The one thing that keeps me going during these times of chaos is the fact that God is with us and even though the administration has abandoned righteous whites God will always champion our cause. He knows the contamination inferior races can cause and He will guide our way.

A compilation of confiscated pamphlets, leaflets, business cards, and drawings from 1983 through 1985 includes publications depicting Jesus as the savior of the white race, minorities as heathens, and whites who fail to support the white supremacist cause as deserters in the holy war of racial purity. One very explicit publication actually provided physical instruction as to how to stab a black to insure death rather than injury. This particular piece also included a psychological primer in overcoming the distasteful effects of killing someone. The reader was warned that "the smell of fresh human blood can be overpowering but killing is like having sex. The first time is not so rewarding, but it gets better and better with practice, especially when one remembers that it's a holy cause."

Political Baggage

The conspiratorial attitude of ABT members toward prison staff and whites sympathetic to the plight of minorities is illustrative of Lipset and Raab's concept of political baggage which includes political moralism and nativist bigotry. The system is seen as having abandoned the white inmate. It is, therefore, an illegitimate system with no restraints upon legitimate actors.

A letter from a member to the ABT president argues that "prisons cater to the niggers", and "the courts fail to act on suits by whites for equal rights because they are traitor whites who will do anything to get along with niggers. Ours is a bondage for allegedly having broken the rules of an alien society." Countless references are made to intelligence staff as being "Jews", "nigger lovers" and "punks" (homosexuals) as well as participants in a conspiracy to "enslave" white inmates for the purpose of victimization by black inmates.

Those ABT members suspected as traitors were not entitled to the due process rights of the legitimate social organization of the Brotherhood. The accessors were empowered to go beyond "the law" which normally governed Brotherhood organization and process in order to weed out illegitimate actors (those thought to have snitched, aided the enemy, or failed to carry out orders). One extreme example of this type of logic was the execution of an otherwise valued ABT member who failed to carry out an order to kill another member he felt had been "bum rapped". In the months following the inmate's murder, the original target was deemed to be trustworthy after all and business went on as usual. Such excessive subversions of process were allowed in order to assure detection of as many "evil actors" as possible.

Politicalization

Mobilization of different portions of the population "under a banner of preservation" (Lipset and Raab:495) politicalized the cause of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas. Some inmates joined the group because they were what Lipset and Raab categorized as joiners interested in educating and agitating others, some were consistent supporters who believed in the cause, were loyal to the group but were not motivated to proselytize and others were expressive approvers with a single issue of loyalty to the program.

Many of the original members (joiners) corresponded with free-world Aryan organizations such as the Aryan Nations, National White Peoples Party, the White American Freedom Fighters, the National Association for the Advancement of White People, and the Aryan Warriors¹⁴. These inmates operated as the driving force of the AB by providing it with a philosophical platform upon which to build its anger as well as its membership. A member of the steering committee writes to the president of the AB in September of 1984, stating:

"Never before in the history of the Aryan race have we been faced with such tremendous obstacles to our continued survival." Another member writes: "I take this serious. This ain't no game. We are fighting for survival of our race."

In response to being chastised for speaking to a TDC gang coordinator and a newspaper reporter, a member of the steering committee replied that education of the population was necessary because:

If we don't give them our requests, demands--how will they know what we want! The reason I saw the reporter was to set things straight 'for the record'. I only said that we were not a bunch of juveniles looking for a rep. to be called a gang! We were basically good folks, mature MEN that formed an organization in order to bring about segregation and a stop to the beasts preying on our race.

Not all of the founding members were "joiners". One founding member best epitomizes the "consistent supporter". This particular inmate was an advocate of the white supremacist philosophy and believed in the entire Brotherhood program but felt no need to educate or agitate others to the cause. In a personal interview with one of the authors, this inmate calmly stated that:

there is no need to incite others to the cause. Simply stand your own ground and make it known that anyone who disrespects you, a brother or a member of your family will be killed, his family will be killed and their house burned to the ground, along with every blade of grass on their property.

Content analysis of intelligence reports, inmate interviews, and inmate correspondence as well as personal inmate interviews, lends support to the assertion that the number of consistent supporters was generally equal to the number of joiners.

The majority of ABT members were expressive approvers who joined the group for protection from what they perceived as a surge in black on white assaults (particularly sexual assaults). Many previously unaffiliated white inmates felt the need to associate themselves with the Brotherhood in response to the unsubstantiated declarations by AB members that black inmates were indiscriminately victimizing white inmates.

Typically, these inmates were racist but became members of the Brotherhood based solely upon the single issue of protection. Absent the cry of victimization these inmates would have chosen to remain unaffiliated. Many of them became snitches for the prison administration hoping to avoid having to murder another inmate for the cause. A couple even became officers in the organization. In October of 1984, a lieutenant in the ABT wrote his girlfriend, "I would rather be busted for having a shank (knife) than have to kill someone just because the committee said to."

Although the supremacist/safety in numbers relationship provided the AB with a consistently growing membership for a period of time, it was the basic difference in the philosophies of those driven to convert, those secure in their own racism, and those primarily interested in self-preservation rather than group preservation that eventually caused the group's decline. Faced with an administration beginning to understand that it could manage violence within the confines of judicial intervention, many members found it difficult to match the ardor of the joiners.

The Decline of the Movement

Increased pressure from the administration to suppress Brotherhood activity led to increased conflict between the three types of members. In the end, the core of the joiners was overcome by the self-interest of the expressive approvers, and the consistent supporters simply bowed out

(withdrew from the group). The right-wing extremist movement within the Texas prisons followed a pattern consistent with Lipset and Raab's analysis of such movements. It slowly faded from prominence.

Although the constitution of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas clearly states that it is a "White Supremacy Group; [and] no pretense is or will be made to the contrary", analysis of correspondence between AB members as early as the fall of 1984 reveals a dichotomous philosophical development. In response to the public declaration of racist goals and segregationist objectives by a Brotherhood captain, a member of the steering committee wrote President Brook (October 1984) declaring:

"This racial shit has the heat on us to begin with... TAB is an organized crime family not the KKK or the Aryan Nations." He further states: "This turmoil from within has got to stop... no more power plays and no more Aryan Nation's shit."

During the same period the captain in question wrote Brooks and two unit members that:

I'm not going to die in some stupid little knife fight on one of these stinking farms. When I go out, I'm going out like Mathews [member of the violent offshoot of the Aryan Nations, the Order, who died in a gun fight with the FBI]... We have to center ourselves around the different racist movements on the outside... if we don't keep our goals in mind, we'll end up losing it.

While the substantive crime syndicate v. white supremacist debate was being waged by some members of the AB, others differed in their interpretation of those procedures specifically required by the constitution. Three of the ex-members interviewed stated that during this period the steering committee (SC) changed the procedure for ordering "hits" on individuals. The change not only involved less than the previously required unanimous vote from the SC but also considered a great many more offenses serious enough to warrant being targeted for murder¹⁵.

As the turmoil within the Brotherhood increased, members began to view the leadership as arbitrary. One of the inmates interviewed recounted that while he was housed on the same unit as a member of the steering committee, that member received a visit from his girlfriend and her "nigger baby". The ex-member argued that this same SC member was the most unreasonable of all the committee members concerning hits, to the extent that he often initiated consideration of "Brothers" as targets of the group on hearsay and unsubstantiated rumor¹⁶. These substantive and procedural inconsistencies caused a great deal of discontent and would ultimately result in open defiance of orders by some members.

Disintegration of the ABT began as inmates became accustomed to the changes within the social organization of the prison. Though many white inmates continued to feel displaced by black inmates, the political disorganization of the system lessened as both inmates and staff adjusted to the legal and organizational requirements of the judicial intervention of the time. White inmates looked less to their status of the past and more to establishing status in the present.

Several ABT members believed that status rested more in economic power than in the group's ability to terrorize blacks. The social dynamics that drove the white extremist movement within the prison system had begun to change. The social organization of the prison no longer provided enough chaos to consistently fuel the ABT as a right-wing extremist movement. By March of

1988, prison gang coordinators were listing one-fifth of the total ABT membership as "ex-members". The group that was once feared as the most violent and unpredictable within the system had degenerated into a very small number of what Lipset and Raab refer to as joiners allied with several groups of expressive approvers who dislike blacks and most other minorities but are not motivated by a comprehensive loyalty to the group.

Conclusion

The origin and development of the Aryan Brotherhood in Texas can be mapped using the design developed by Lipset and Raab (1978). It originated during a period of social change in which many white inmates perceived their status to be declining. As the result of the judicially mandated structural and operational changes of the *Ruiz* and *LaMar* cases, it appeared to white inmates that the administration of the TDC was allying itself with black inmates in opposition to whites.

Seeking to restore their status of the past, right-wing inmates lashed out against that group they felt was responsible for their decline in status--black inmates. Utilizing symbols and rituals interpreted as representative of the past, these right-wing inmates justified their behavior as moralistic. This moralistic base provided a rationalization of AB members as good and all others as engaged in an evil conspiracy against them.

The conspiratorial and moralistic rhetoric was enough to provide the "near group" (Yablonsky 1962), or core membership, with propaganda to recruit less racist and/or extremist inmates for a period of time, but eventually proved inadequate to sustain the movement in the face of internal controversies and external attack.

Membership remained around the 200 mark in 1987 and 1988. Intensification of the internal power struggle resulted in a massive recruitment of expressive approvers in 1989. Most of these members were short timers and failed to remain loyal to the group once released.

The Texas Aryan Brotherhood has failed to accomplish either of the goals of right-wing extremist movements as identified by Lipset and Raab--to maintain itself as a viable power and to influence the formation of public policy. It has, instead, followed the path of all radically right movements and fallen prey to internal disorganization. That is not to say that it has ceased to exist, but that it will either have to make major structural adjustments or depend upon a sudden increase in strain within the inmate social system to rally its support.

This strain may be in the form of increased pressure by the Justice Department for the Texas Prison System to integrate individual cells. Several unit personnel employed at the maximum security unit designated as the test unit indicated that there has been a resurgence of inmates claiming to be ABT members in order to keep themselves from being celled with blacks. The system is still in the process of confirming the legitimacy of these assertions.

It remains to be seen whether the process to increase integration will result in a substantial enough strain to impact the historical dynamics of the prison so much that the Brotherhood experiences a significant resurgence in membership. However, as of July 1992, system and unit prison officials report that racial tension is quite high (as evidenced by a number of assaults within a handful of the systems' units). Several gang intelligence officers fear a significant

resurgence in AB activity.

Footnotes

¹Members of this department are routinely consulted on gang confirmations, violence, and relationships across the system.

²This discussion of the AB is very informative but is written from the viewpoint of a member once associated with the Aryan Society.

³This was stipulated by *LaMar*.

⁴This entails restriction of movement, recreation, eating in a one by nine cell, single showering, and being locked in an individual cage when receiving visits.

⁵Interviews with Coordinator Beta, Warden Alpha and inmates Red, Grey and Gold (pseudonyms).

⁶This was provided by a special prosecutor in one of the regions of TDC funded by the state in order to take the "load" off counties with TDC units due to the increased number of inmate assaults and homicides during 1984 and 1985.

⁷Bureau of Classification statistics.

⁸Several variations of the name are commonly used.

⁹This information comes from a warden (Alpha) who has been coordinating gang intelligence and interdiction for over seven years as well as being the officially designated systemwide gang coordinator.

¹⁰Term used by inmate Grey during personal interview.

¹¹Having been allowed to view the videotape in question, there is no doubt that the inmate knew his actions were being taped.

¹²Bureau of Classification statistics.

¹³Letters to/from AB President Brook (pseudonym).

¹⁴This information came from a file on confiscated literature maintained by Warden Alpha.

¹⁵These changes were not formally considered by the steering committee. The procedures changed over time. An ex-member of this board recounted that although he voted against an individual being targeted for death, the four other members out-voted him.

¹⁶Staff interviewed often use this term.

References

- Buentello, S. (undated) *The Aryan Brotherhood of Texas*. Unpublished confidential report.
- California Senate Hearings. (March 15, 1974) *Gang Violence in Penal Institutions*. Camp, G. and Camp, C. (1985) *Prison Gangs: Their Extent, Nature and Impact on Prisons*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Carroll, L. (1974) *Hacks, Blacks and Cons: Race Relations in a Maximum Security Prison*. Lexington: Lexington Books.
- Conrad, J.P. (1977) *Who's in Charge? Control of Gang Violence in California Prisons*. (NCJRS-46926) Sacramento: American Justice Institute.
- Crouch, B. and Marquart, J. (1990) *An Appeal to Justice*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Davidson, R.T. (1974) *Chicano Prisoners: The Key to San Quentin*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Frelander, D. (September 15, 1985) TDC killings tied to power void. *HoustonPost*, ID-4D.
- House Committee on Internal Affairs. (1973) *Revolutionary Groups in the United States*. Report of the United States House of Representatives.
- Irwin, J. (1980) *Prisons in Turmoil*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Jacobs, J.B. (1977) *Statesville, The Penitentiary in Mass Society*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.
- (1982) The Limits of Racial Integration in Prison. *Criminal Law Journal*, 18:117-153.
- LaMar v. Coffield*. C.A. No. 72-H-1393 (S.D. Tex.). Consent decree and agreed judgment entered July 14, 1977.
- Lipset, S.M. and Raab, M. (1978) *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1977*. Chicago; University of Chicago Press.
- Lonergan, T.F. (1979) Jail and prison gangs. *Proceedings of the 14th Annual Interagency Workshop*. Huntsville, Texas: Criminal Justice Center, Sam Houston State University.
- Marquart, J.W. and Crouch, B.M. (1984) Co-opting the Kept: Using Inmates for Social Control in a Southern Prison. *Justice Quarterly*. 1(4):491-509.
- Prison System of Texas: Rules and Regulations*. (1921) Huntsville, Texas: Texas Prison System.
- Ruiz v. Estelle*. 503 F.Supp. 1265 (S.D. Tex. 1980); stay granted and denied 650 F.2d.555 (5th Cir. 1981); stay granted and denied 679 F.2d. 1115 (5th Cir. 1982).
- (1982). Stipulated modification of Section 11, D and Section 11, A of Amended Decree. Civil Action No. H-78-987 (S.D. Tex. April 21).

Texas Department of Corrections Annual Report. (1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987). Huntsville: Texas Department of Corrections.

Texas Department of Criminal Justice-Institutional Division Annual Gang Report. 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991. Bureau of Classification, Huntsville, Texas.

***Department of Social Science, University of Houston-Downtown, Houston, Texas.**

****College of Criminal Justice, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.**

*****Texas Department of Criminal Justice-Institutional Division, Jester Units I and II, Richmond, Texas.**

Appearing in the Fall-Winter, 1991 edition of *The Prison Journal*