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ENCOUNTERS WITH  
THE CONTEMPORARY  
RADICAL RIGHT

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EDITED BY  
PETER H. MERKL  
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### *New Directions in Comparative Politics*

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TABLE 8.1 Radical Right Groups by Type, Frequency, and Region, 1988

Type	Frequency	Region
Ku Klux Klan	17	East = 4
		South = 9
		Midwest = 2
		West = 2
		17
Neo-Nazi	19	East = 0
		South = 3
		Midwest = 9
		West = 7
		19
Christian Identity	27	East = 0
		South = 4
		Midwest = 5
		West = 18
		27

Note: One group, the Liberty Lobby, headquartered in Washington, D.C., is not easily classifiable by this scheme.

Source: Anti-Defamation League, *Hate Groups in America* (New York: ADL, 1988), pp. 89–90.

The sixty-four groups identified by the ADL in 1988 may be classified in several ways. For one, they appear to belong to three separable species: Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazi, and Christian Identity groups. The KKK organizations, of course, have deep roots in American life, ones dating back to the Reconstruction era. Neo-Nazi organizations and the various groups linked to the Identity religious movement are of far more recent vintage, having emerged in the 1950s and 1970s, respectively.

Table 8.1 records the frequency of each type of group by the region of the country in which it is located. Several observations may be made based on these figures.

First, the most numerous kind of radical right group currently active in the United States is linked to a particular theology, Christian Identity. Second, with a handful of exceptions, there seems to be little organized radical right activity in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states. Although the South, not surprisingly, is the center for the various KKK-related groups, it is not the region where the preponderance of radical right organizations are to be found: That honor goes to the West. To the extent that neonazism manifests itself organizationally, it appears to be concentrated in the Midwest (Chicago, Detroit, and Milwaukee in particular) and the West.

The figures displayed in Table 8.1 do not provide a complete picture, however. Some groups do not fit easily into the three categories. There is an extensive network of organizations around the country composed of the cult followers of Lyndon LaRouche, who, until his recent criminal convic-

tion, directed its operation through his National Caucus of Labor Committees from a heavily guarded estate near Leesburg, Virginia.<sup>13</sup> Originally a leftist of Trotskyite persuasion, and a pacifist, LaRouche turned to right-wing politics during the 1970s. By the end of that decade, he and his supporters had developed a complex and exotic conspiratorial view of the world in which anti-Semitism played a central role.

The Liberty Lobby, organized in 1957 by Willis A. Carto and headquartered in Washington, D.C., defines itself as a “pressure group for patriotism.” In practice the latter word is identified with the promotion and dissemination of racist and anti-Semitic views. Its activities have taken a variety of forms. One is the Institute for Historical Review, an organization devoted to promoting the doctrine of Holocaust revisionism, a perspective that claims the Holocaust never occurred, that it is a hoax whose perpetrators are interested in stimulating unreasonable sympathy for Jews and Zionism.<sup>14</sup> Liberty Lobby also publishes a number of books and periodicals, most prominent of which is the *Spotlight* (whose current circulation is estimated to be 200,000), a weekly offering that exposes the destructive role Jews play in American life. Still another initiative is represented by the Populist party. The latter is a vehicle by which the Liberty Lobby has hoped to exploit the discontents of midwestern farmers by linking them to the designs of international bankers and the Jewish-controlled Federal Reserve system.<sup>15</sup>

Formed more recently and certainly far more colorful than the Liberty Lobby groups are the skinheads. They are gangs of white youth with shaved heads who often wear combat boots and display an affinity for Nazi swastikas and related paraphernalia. The American skinhead gangs are modeled after similar groups organized in Britain in the 1960s: “The skinhead nation was born in London in the mid-1960s, a direct descendant of the ‘hard mod’ subculture of the working class East End. ... The hard mods strove for a tough, clean style, in reaction to the androgynous finery of hippies and the sloppiness of the long-haired bikers known as rockers.”<sup>16</sup> In keeping with their origins, the American skinheads are fond of a particular kind of rock music (there was a skinhead music festival on a farm north of San Francisco in the spring of 1989) started in Britain and known as Oi, whose lyrics stress the virtues of white supremacy and violence. Their favorite songs have such titles as “White Power” and “Nigger, Nigger.”

Since 1986, skinhead gangs have emerged in many U.S. cities. Not all of the groups have become politicized on any consistent basis. For many young people, it is apparently the music, attire, and style that provide the attraction. But some gangs have become both political and violent: the Reich Skins in southern California, Romantic Violence in Chicago, and White American Skinheads in Cincinnati, among others. Furthermore, established Neo-Nazi and Identity groups, starved for youthful adherents, have

conducted recruitment campaigns designed to bring skinhead gangs under their racist and anti-Semitic umbrellas.<sup>17</sup>

How many individuals are caught up in organized radical right activity at present? The available estimates are not precise, but they do provide us with at least a rough approximation. In 1988 the ADL believed that there were somewhere between 4,500 and 5,500 KKK members and that the various Neo-Nazi groups had a combined total of from 400 to 450 adherents.<sup>18</sup> But these estimates do not take into consideration either the skinheads or the followers of Christian Identity, the two fastest-growing components of the movement. (The Center for Democratic Renewal reports a figure of 3,500 for the racist, anti-Semitic segment of the skinheads.)<sup>19</sup> Nor do the accounts take into consideration the approximately 1,000 members of Lyndon LaRouche's organizations.<sup>20</sup> Affiliation with radical right groups is rarely as formalized as, say, membership in the American Medical Association. Observers refer to considerable overlap and turnover. Thus we are probably dealing with a pool of some 10,000 individuals with an unknown but likely much larger number of sympathizers.

There is some evidence concerning the backgrounds of those individuals who lead and publicize the various radical right groups and causes. Based upon biographical accounts the ADL assembled recently for fifty-five prominent radical rightists, the following portrait emerges.<sup>21</sup> We are dealing, first, with a group of males; not one of the individuals identified by the ADL was a woman. Not only are they men, but they are distinctly middle-aged as well; their average age in 1988 was slightly under fifty-two. Most were born in the United States, but a surprisingly high percentage of them (15 percent) were born in Europe. Almost two-thirds of these prominent radical rightists live in small towns. Few of the latter are to be found in the northeastern part of the country; the South is the most common place of residence, followed by the Midwest and West. Most of the leaders seem to hold middle-class jobs as insurance salesmen, real estate agents, high school principals, attorneys, ministers, state legislators, and so on; but a few, such as John R. Harrell, founder of the Christian Patriots Defense League, are independently wealthy. Some, such as Louis Ray Beam, the former grand dragon of the Texas KKK, are serving prison terms for violent crimes they committed in the course of their political careers. Most radical right leaders identified by the ADL are Protestants, though there are several Catholics. And one individual, Harold Von Braunhut, a businessman active in the Aryan Nations movement, was described in a recent *Washington Post* article as someone of Jewish origin.<sup>22</sup>

If the above commentary provides us with at least some sense of the Radical Right's leaders, what of its followers? Who are they? Where do they come from? Unfortunately, there is no easily accessible data on the followers of the various radical right organizations. They likely make up a relatively hetero-

geneous cast of characters. It is possible, nevertheless, to provide sketches of some of the participants' backgrounds.

On December 30, 1988, three teenagers belonging to a skinhead gang were arrested in Reno, Nevada, and accused of having shot a young black man to death; there was no motive other than their hatred of his race. Although their court-appointed attorneys did not wish me to interview their clients, some biographical information was obtained as the result of a conversation with a police detective involved in the case. The two boys (aged eighteen and seventeen) and one girl (aged seventeen) charged with the murder were described as having similar backgrounds. All three had dropped out of high school, left home, and moved from one community to another before coming to Reno. There they had a succession of menial jobs, most of them in fast-food restaurants. All three described themselves as "white working-class youth," but only the oldest boy was able to articulate coherent political views. Evidently acquired as a result of his involvement with the White Aryan Resistance (WAR), a Neo-Nazi group active in the Los Angeles area, these views emphasized a sense of loss and displacement. The United States been stolen from its rightful owners by Jews, blacks, and immigrants—groups that had no right to be in the country, much less seize control of it. Accused of murdering a perfect stranger, the three youths nevertheless felt themselves to be aggrieved and defenseless victims of injustice rather than perpetrators of violence.<sup>23</sup>

‡ The University of Michigan psychologist Raphael Ezekiel recently conducted a series of extended interviews with members of a Detroit-area Neo-Nazi group.<sup>24</sup> These encounters occurred in the run-down, white, working-class neighborhood in which most of his subjects had grown up. The overwhelmingly male group of Neo-Nazis were young (half under twenty) and had been raised in fatherless households by mothers who held such full-time jobs as waitresses and beauticians. Most of his subjects had left school by the tenth grade; few were able to find work or express much optimism about their future prospects. They came to the group with deep feelings of racial hatred toward blacks and romanticized conceptions of nazism, the latter acquired from old films they had seen on television. The impact of group membership was to rationalize and refine these feelings as well as provide a means by which the members could express them. »

Not all radical right activists are as youthful as the ones described above. Several years ago in Phoenix the FBI arrested eight members of the Arizona Patriots, a white supremacist band, and accused them of planning to rob an armored car and use the proceeds to finance the establishment of a paramilitary training camp. The suspects' average age was nearly forty.<sup>25</sup>

Middle-age was also a characteristic of the members of the Order/Silent Brotherhood, several of whom were convicted for Alan Berg's murder. The average age of those eventually arrested and charged with violations of the

gubernatorial campaign. In this contest his background in radical right politics became a central issue. Other examples could be brought to bear. An organized and systematic effort to tap the discontent was mounted in 1984 by the Populist party, a creature of the Liberty Lobby. Emphasizing the plight of the farmer and the U.S. government's refusal to alleviate it—all the while providing financial support to Israel, the Populists waged a presidential campaign on behalf of the Reverend Bob Richards. Richards, a former Olympic athlete, managed to win 10,882 votes (out of more than 11 million cast) in six farm-belt states.<sup>49</sup>

But by all odds the most elaborate and sophisticated effort of this kind was undertaken by the LaRouche organization. In addition to his 1980 and 1984 presidential campaigns, ones aided by federal matching funds as well as a complex credit card fraud, LaRouche formed the National Democratic Policy Committee (NDPC) as a vehicle to field candidates in Democratic primaries all over the country. Between 1982 and 1988, LaRouche-backed candidates contested close to 4,000 Democratic primaries and general elections in over thirty states. During these years his NDPC candidates received over 4 million votes. The most publicity accrued by LaRouche candidates was in Illinois, where two of them won Democratic primary nominations for state treasurer and lieutenant governor.<sup>50</sup> For the most part, though, the candidates achieved their successes when they ran unopposed in districts that were normally Republican and where serious Democratic challengers were, consequently, hard to recruit. No NDPC candidate was ultimately elected to any office higher than that of school board member.

Still, 4 million votes are not to be made light of. Evidence from the Illinois results suggests the LaRouche candidates did best among blue-collar workers living in communities where crime and unemployment were widespread and in areas where farming was an important activity.<sup>51</sup>

It was rare for either LaRouche or his candidates to unveil full-blown versions of the cult's ideology (which involves a theory according to which a global Anglo-Jewish conspiracy exists to weaken Western society, in the face of Soviet subversion, and makes possible its control by international bankers, drug merchants, and Zionists). Instead, they offered relatively specific proposals to deal with concrete problems, for example, repealing environmental protection laws as a way to save jobs in manufacturing.

The voice of the LaRouche organization was not limited to campaign activity on behalf of its candidates. In addition, it mounted publicity campaigns to promote the Strategic Defense Initiative, nuclear energy, as well as an end to U.S. support for Israel. It also sought to stimulate public support for ex-Nazi rocket scientists facing deportation. Using the last word in "dirty tricks," it tried to discredit 1988 presidential candidate Michael Dukakis and former secretary of state Henry Kissinger by disseminating rumors they were, respectively, mentally ill and homosexual. Perhaps the LaRouche or-

ganization's most significant achievement to date was getting 700,000 signatures on a petition in California (in 1986) on behalf of a ballot proposition to have victims of AIDS placed in quarantine.<sup>52</sup>

American radical right political activity is not confined to Americans or limited to the United States. There are international linkages to be considered. Aryan Nations holds an annual world congress at its Idaho compound at which individuals from like-minded groups in Canada and Great Britain have been in attendance. Some years ago when the World Anti-Communist League held a conference in Washington, it brought together delegates representing the Liberty Lobby with representatives of the Crown Commonwealth League of Rights and the Neo-Fascist Italian Social Movement.<sup>53</sup> But as is true for the domestic situation, so too in this case, the LaRouche organization seems to have developed the most extensive international network. There are LaRouche-affiliated groups in Latin America; in particular, there are LaRouche labor parties in Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela, and a rather misnamed LaRouche Club of Life in Colombia. There is also a European Labor party headquartered in Wiesbaden, Germany, that achieved some notoriety as the result of its ties to retired, high-ranking Bundeswehr officers.<sup>54</sup> It remains to be seen, however, whether or not these various international initiatives represent anything more than handfuls of multinational crackpots from isolated fringe groups talking to each other from time to time.

## VIOLENCE

Data are available concerning the frequency of racist and anti-Semitic violence in the United States. For instance, the National Council of Churches issued a statement recently in which it reported that between 1980 and 1986 there were 121 murders, 302 assaults, and over 300 cross burnings carried out for racial motives. The statement went on to say that these figures reflected a dramatic resurgence of antiblack violence during the 1980s.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, the ADL's annual audit of anti-Semitic incidents for 1990 showed an 18 percent rise in their occurrence over the previous year (see Table 8.3). The ADL interpreted these figures to mean that an almost decade-long trend of decline in anti-Semitic violence had been reversed.

Various explanations have been offered to account for these developments. The ones probably mentioned most frequently in the press belong in the realm of atmospherics. The Reagan administration's hostility toward affirmative action and welfare state programs, the Bitburg incident, the Pollard spy case, and Israeli behavior in the Middle East have all been blamed for stimulating or facilitating a racist and anti-Semitic backlash.

No matter the immediate cause(s), it is hard to say how much of this violence is the direct result of radical right groups and of individuals inspired

29. S. Weir, "Youngsters in the Front Line," in *New Society*, April 27, 1978, pp. 190-192; S. Taylor, "Racism and Youth," in *New Society*, August 3, 1978, pp. 249-250.
30. Husbands, 1983, op. cit., p. 101.
31. Whitely, op. cit., pp. 370-381; pp. 250-255; S. Taylor, "The National Front: Anatomy of a Political Movement," in R. Miles and A. Phizacklea (eds.), *Racism and Political Action in Britain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) pp. 139-141.
32. Taylor, pp. 141-144; C. Husbands, "The 'Threat' Hypothesis and Racist Voting in England and the United States," in Miles and Phizacklea, op. cit. pp. 147-181.
33. Husbands, 1983, op. cit., pp. 52-55.
34. J. Williams, E. Dunning, and P. Murphy, *Hooligans Abroad* (London: Routledge and Kegan, Paul, 1984) pp. 149-179.
35. But see D. Baker, "A. K. Chesterton, the Strasser Brothers and the Politics of the National Front," in *Patterns of Prejudice*, (no. 19, 1985) pp. 23-33.
36. R. Cochrane and M. Billig, "I'm Not National Front Myself, But ...," in *New Society*, May 17, 1984, pp. 255-258.

## CHAPTER 8

1. Anti-Defamation League, *Hate Groups in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1988) pp. 4, 24.
2. Sidney Blumenthal, *The Rise of the Counter-Establishment* (New York: Times Books, 1986); and Robert Liebman and Robert Wurthrow, eds., *The New Christian Right* (Hawthorne, N.Y.: Aldine, 1983).
3. For an excellent accounting, see David Bennett, *The Parts of Fear* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).
4. Don DeLillo, "Silhouette City: Hitler, Manson and the Millennium," in *Dimensions*, 4:3 (1989) pp. 29-34.
5. James Aho, "Reification and Sacrifice: The Goldmark Case," in *California Sociologist* (Winter 1987) pp. 79-95.
6. For an account, see Stephen Singular, *Talked to Death* (New York: William Morrow, 1987).
7. *Washington Post* (January 9, 1987) p. 1.
8. Tamara Jones, "Violence by Skinheads Spreads Across Nation," in *Los Angeles Times* (December 19, 1988) p. 22.
9. *Hate Groups in America*, op. cit., pp. 89-90.
10. David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) p. 9; and Arnold Forster, *A Measure of Freedom* (New York: Doubleday, 1950) pp. 222-227.
11. Anti-Defamation League, *Extremism on the Right* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1983) pp. 1-50.
12. See, for example, Seymour Lipset, "Blacks and Jews: How Much Bias?" in *Public Opinion*, 10:2 (1987) pp. 4-5, 57-58.
13. Dennis King and Patricia Lynch, "The Empire of Lyndon LaRouche" in *Wall Street Journal* (May 27, 1986) p. 26; and Anti-Defamation League, *The LaRouche Political Cult* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1986).

14. Gill Seidel, *The Holocaust Denial* (Leeds, England: Beyond the Pale Collective, 1986) pp. 66-92.
15. Anti-Defamation League, *The Populist Party: The Politics of Right Wing Extremism* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1985); and Anti-Defamation League, *The American Farmer and the Extremists* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1986) pp. 2-3.
16. Jeff Coplon, "Skinhead Nation," in *Rolling Stone* (December 1988) p. 62.
17. Anti-Defamation League, *Shaved for Battle: Skinheads Target America's Youth* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1987) pp. 1-6.
18. *Hate Groups in America*, op. cit., pp. 4, 24.
19. Coplon, op. cit., p. 58.
20. John Judis, "The Making of a Madman," in *New Republic* (May 29, 1989) pp. 35-39.
21. *Extremism on the Right*, op. cit., pp. 65-178.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
23. Author interview with Reno police detective David Jenkins, January 18, 1989.
24. Raphael Ezekiel, "Racism, Isolation and Terror: Encounters with Neo-Nazi Youth" (paper delivered at the annual scientific meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology, New York, July 1988).
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27. Simon Winchester, "Hayden Lake," in *Present Tense* (May-June, 1987) pp. 6-13.
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29. Anti-Defamation League, *Extremism Targets the Prisons* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1986) pp. 1-10.
30. Aho, 1990, op. cit., pp. 135-163.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Extremism on the Right*, op. cit., pp. 58-59.
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35. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
36. See, for example, David Bennett, *The Party of Fear* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).
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41. James Guth, "The New Christian Right," in Liebman and Wurthrow, op. cit., pp. 31-45.
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48. Levin, op. cit., pp. 27-72; and Bob Sexter and Tracy Shryer, "Talk Radio Adds Its Voice to Chicago's Racial Split," in *Los Angeles Times* (April 2, 1989) pp. 12-13.
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50. Dennis King, *Lyndon LaRouche and the New American Fascism* (New York: Doubleday, 1989) pp. 85-86.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-108.
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54. *ADL Latin American Report* 7:1 (1989) p. 6.; and King, op. cit., pp. 166-167.
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61. See, for example, Bill Miller, "Supremacists Plead Guilty," in *Idaho Statesman* (September 9, 1988) pp. 1-3.
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64. David Rapoport, "Messianic Sanctions for Terror" in *Comparative Politics* (January 1988) pp. 195-201.

## CONCLUSION

1. Always much closer to the Catholic conservatism of the People's party than to the Nazis, Waldheim seems to have committed two chief offenses—his shameless

wartime careerism under the Third Reich and his nimble cover-up of this wartime record since—rather than specific and demonstrable crimes. See also Hans-Georg Heinrich and Slawomir Wiatr, *Political Culture in Vienna and Warsaw* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991) pp. 66-71.

2. Blas Piñar had once been a member of Youth for Catholic Action and, from the Falangist *Fuerza Nueva*, soon spun off a student group called the Guerrilla Fighters for Christ the King. There were other groups as well, with names like Youth Front and Adolph Hitler Sixth Commando of the New Order. See José Mana Bernaldez, *Ruptura o Reforma?* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janes, 1984). The FN sported blue shirts and red berets, like the old Falange.

3. See especially Sheelagh Ellwood, "The Extreme Right in Spain: A Dying Species," in Luciano Cheles et al., eds., *Neofascism in Europe* (London and New York: Longman, 1991) pp. 147-166, for the gaggle of groups and activities associated with it. The Falange Española de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (Committees for National Syndicalist Attack) received about 24,000 votes each time.

4. See also Antonio Costa Pinto, "The Radical Right in Contemporary Portugal," in Cheles, op. cit., pp. 167-190. On Belgium, see also Christopher T. Husbands's essay in Paul Hainsworth, ed., *The Extreme Right in Europe and America Since 1945* (London: Pinter, 1991); and newspaper reports on the November 1991 elections in which the Vlaams Blok won a plurality of the vote in Antwerp.

5. See also the Neo-Nazi history in Peter H. Merkl, "Rollerball or Neo-Nazi Violence in West Germany," in Merkl, ed., *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986) pp. 233-248.

6. The Republikaner tend to belong to the generation born between about 1945 and 1965, whereas skinheads and soccer hooligans are usually younger and the real ex-Nazis considerably older. See also Markus Wallenbern in *Neues Deutschland*, March 4, 1991, on the foundation of Republikaner organizations in East Berlin. West Berlin had been a location of their early electoral triumphs in West Germany, and they began recruitment among the receptive East Germans as soon as the Wall came down.

7. A dramatic increase of unconventional political participation, including violence, was observed during the 1980s in West Berlin and West Germany as well, but it was neither as abrupt nor of quite the magnitude of the East German right-wing violence. The worst incident to date was a massive skinhead attack on residences for foreign refugees in the coal-mining town of Hoyerswerda in fall 1991, which led to the evacuation of hundreds of asylum seekers. One result of the Hoyerswerda incident and similar occurrences were massive anti-Nazi demonstrations on Crystal Night (November 9) all over Germany. Another upshot was a government plan to house the vast numbers of refugees in more easily guarded camps. *Der Spiegel* magazine often reports details and analyses under titles such as "Geil auf Gewalt?" (Turned on by violence?). Holiday weekends at giant resorts of big cities frequently feature massive brawls involving large groups of skinheads and large police units.

8. To quote the head of the Foreign Residents Office, Almuth Berger, "in GDR schools they thought and spoke far too little about racism, anti-Semitism and about hostility toward other nations." There was no education in tolerance. See the interview in *Der Spiegel* 44, no. 14, April 2, 1990, pp. 106-110. Frequently observed prejudicial incidents included the treatment of foreign students from "fraternal socialist countries" such as Hungary or Czechoslovakia on trains. Identified from their pass-

Radical Museology, or, What's Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art? The future of the public museum, able to represent the interests of the ninety-nine percent rather than to consolidate private privilege, has never seemed bleaker. Or has it? In the face of austerity cuts to public funding, a handful of museums of contemporary art have devised compelling alternatives to the mantra of bigger is better and richer. Radical Museology presents the collection displays of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Museo Nacional de Reina Sofía in Madrid and MSUM in Ljubljana as outlines of a new u Start by marking "Encounters with the Contemporary Radical Right" as Want to Read: Want to Read saving; Want to Read. Currently Reading. Read. Encounters with the Co by Peter Burnell. Other editions. We'd love your help. Let us know what's wrong with this preview of Encounters with the Contemporary Radical Right by Peter Burnell. Problem: It's the wrong book It's the wrong edition Other. Details (if other): Cancel. Thanks for telling us about the problem. Return to Book Page. Not the book you're looking for? Preview "Encounters with the Contemporary Radical Right by Peter Burnell. Encounters with the Contemporary Radical Right. by. Peter Burnell.