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ARTICLE

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Liberty Bell's Electronic Ring

Dissecting the First Computerized Hate Network

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Abstract: *Despite growing research on American hate movements, the history of digital hate prior to 2000 has received little attention. Recent work on American white power movements has identified a rhetorical and organizational tradition of white supremacy in the United States but stopped short of identifying the specific mechanisms by which this rhetoric and organization moved online. Recent web histories, however, have opened the door for inquiry into the online past of white power movements. To recover white power's early digital history, this article focuses on the efforts of George Dietz to operate and maintain Liberty Bell BBS, the first hate site ever put online. While digital hate is often traced back to websites of the early 2000s like Stormfront or viewed as a precursor to the alt-right of the 2010s, Liberty Bell BBS and contemporaneous peer sites demonstrate that digital hate began in the 1980s. Recovering the earliest computerized hate network establishes a direct organizational link between far-right extremists of the digital age and white power organizations of the twentieth century, including the Ku Klux Klan, the Aryan Nations, and the National Alliance.*

Keywords: Liberty Bell BBS, George Dietz, white nationalism, web history, Aryan Liberty Net, Louis Beam, Stormfront

Dear George, can I still send you a “people” letter? Your new computer letter seemed so distant and unreal I am almost afraid to answer it. . . . However, I am really glad you are into it. It is the way of the future and we had all better realize it and get with it or drop out of things completely. . . . Perhaps all this is really a break for us. It could be one way of getting free from the iron control of the enemy.

The above-quoted letter was sent on August 13, 1983, to George Dietz, a prolific publisher of hate materials, and reproduced in the November 1983 edition of his magazine, *Liberty Bell*.¹ Through Liberty Bell Publications, Dietz was one major node

1 Mrs. M. M., letter to the editor, *Liberty Bell* 11, no. 3 (November 1983): 16, https://archive.org/details/LibertyBell_201708/LB-198311/.

of the booming American white nationalist print publications trade that connected geographically disparate but ideologically aligned members of the white power movement. By the 1980s, however, a string of federal, state, and local police actions against Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi networks had curtailed much of their public and political organization. While lynchings, bombings, robberies, and intimidation continued to mark the white power movement, strategies of violence gave way in the 1980s to campaigns of massive resistance to racial integration and the wielding of the carceral state against people of color.²

To those aligned with the Fifth Klan, however, even these minor moderations were a sign of apocalyptic failure on the part of white Americans to impose a regime of state control codifying the privilege of white Christian heterosexual Americans.³ In response, the 1980s were a period of radical reinvention for the American white power movement. Reacting to infiltrations and disruption by federal agents, Louis Beam wrote in a 1983 issue of the *Inter-Klan Newsletter and Survival Alert* that any future structural organization must rely on principles of “Leaderless Resistance” to avoid infiltration through decentralization.⁴ No individual member would have complete knowledge of the larger organizational structure they operated within, making it difficult for state agents to impede the Klan.

Beginning in 1983, a small group of white power activists implemented their own computer networks to avoid police infiltration. Their early experiments, led by George Dietz’s Liberty Bell BBS and the Aryan Nation’s Aryan Liberty Net, allowed for a greater degree of centralization in the dissemination of information. While seemingly contradicting the call for leaderless resistance, Beam’s 1983 text suggested such a structure that gave a small cadre of leaders significant authority within the movement. Though these first bulletin boards had limited interactivity, they provided a decade of experience with computer networks before the World Wide Web went online—experience that was directly parlayed into Don Black’s Stormfront, registered on the Web in 1995. While much academic and public interest has focused on the white power movement’s paramilitary

2 For more on legal white supremacy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, see Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s* (Liveright Publishing, 2021); Elizabeth Gilespeie McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy* (Oxford University Press, 2017); and Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

3 The eras of the Klan are debatable, as they are largely internally constructed, but the 1980s and 1990s are generally interpreted as the fifth era of the Klan, under the influence of Louis Beam, Richard Butler, Robert E. Miles, and many other prominent organizational leaders of the white power movement. See Stephen E. Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History* (ABC-CLIO, 2011), 28–30.

4 Louis Beam, “Leaderless Resistance,” *Inter-Klan Newsletter and Survival Alert* (May 1983): 12–13, box 44, folder 32, “Inter-Klan Newsletter and Survival Alert,” Tufts Archives and Records Collection, Political Research Associates [hereafter TARC/PRA].

reorganization and stochastic violence in the 1980s and 1990s, this reorganization of communications channels using high technology has proven to be the more durable adaptation undertaken in this period of white nationalist reorganization.

Integrating Web Histories and the History of the White Power Movement

Current scholarship suggests that the supposed “lone wolf” white domestic terrorist was the most successful adaptation to emerge from this period. White power leaders hoped that these individuals, or small groups of violent extremists, would establish a period of racial holy war (often shortened to “RAHOWA” in their materials) and bring about the destruction of the federal government. Then, from the ashes of this calamity, they would reclaim the United States as a white ethnostate. Kathleen Belew has identified this reorganization as the impetus for Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols’s 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, perhaps the most prominent example of this genre of violence. She does so by identifying a continuity of action and mission in the distribution of William Luther Pierce’s 1978 novel, *The Turner Diaries*, which laid a blueprint for a nuclear race war within the United States that would ultimately result in the global genocide of non-white peoples.⁵ Crucially, recent scholarship has shown that the “lone wolf” narrative, while failing to bring about RAHOWA, was effective in obscuring the true size, scale, and goals of the white power movement as a whole. As such, histories of late twentieth-century white power activism have largely focused on the movement’s shift toward violent “lone wolf” attacks, while treating their contemporary computer networks as a sophisticated and interesting tool, but one ultimately subordinate to the violent goals of the movement.

James Coates’s 1989 study of the strategic reorganization of American white ethnonationalists was among the earliest of such histories and dedicated a few pages to what he dubbed the “Survivalist Right” computer network.⁶ Coates, like later authors, treated the project of Aryan Liberty Net and other aligned hate networks as a significant though ancillary development designed to feed more violent stochastic terrorism employed by the emerging militia movement. Nearly four decades later, Kathleen Belew’s 2018 examination of Aryan Liberty Net mirrored Coates’s, focusing on how the contents of these bulletin boards fed existing processes of reorganization.⁷ By treating these early computer networks as part of changing strategies of violence, these works do not fully

5 Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Harvard University Press, 2018); Andrew Macdonald [William L. Pierce], *The Turner Diaries* (National Vanguard Books, 1980).

6 James Coates, *Armed and Dangerous: The Rise of the Survivalist Right* (Hill and Wang, 1989), 194, 206–10.

7 Belew, *Bring the War Home*, 103–35, 144, 172.

reckon with the ways white power activists intentionally developed their own proficiencies with digital technologies as a discrete, and ultimately more politically successful, form of strategic reorganization.

Superficial treatment of these early hate networks is a result of the challenge of archival recovery. Materials from before the establishment of the Internet Archive in 1996 often no longer exist, so scholars have focused on materials put online after the introduction of web archives. Comprehensive academic studies of white hate sites emerged in the late 1990s, with Todd Schroer's 1998 investigation of extant Klan sites, though the study "Racism on the Internet" from the same year, by Les Back, Michael Keith, and John Solomos, is considered the first in-depth analysis of the subject.⁸ Both works focus on the rapid growth in the number of hate sites at the end of the millennium. Research in the middle of the 2000s followed this pattern, with studies by Jeffrey Kaplan and Leonard Weinberg, and by Jesse Daniels, mapping the contemporary purpose and use of hate networks.⁹ In a 2022 book, Joan Donovan, Emily Dreyfuss, and Brian Friedberg provided some historicization of white power computer networks, meaningfully connecting Don Black's Stormfront to the alt-right, though their archival work only begins in 2007, despite the site's origins in 1995.¹⁰ Belew's work represents one of the first attempts to historicize white power networks beyond the 1990s, but her focus is on the establishment and origins of the militia movement, making her treatment of networks like Aryan Liberty Net understandably brief.¹¹ Other studies have historicized hate networks, providing excellent contextual information on the multifaceted ways white power activists used computer networks in the 1990s.¹² For example, Robert Billups utilizes early internet sources to

8 Les Back, Michael Keith, and John Solomos, "Racism on the Internet: Mapping Neofascist Subcultures in Cyberspace," in *Nation and Race: The Developing Euro-American Racist Subculture*, ed. Jeffrey Kaplan (Northeastern University Press, 1998), 73–101; Todd J. Schroer, "Issue and Identity Framing Within the White Racist Movement: Internet Dynamics," in *Research in Political Sociology 9: The Politics of Social Inequality*, ed. Betty A. Dobratz, Lisa K. Walder, and Timothy Buzzell (Jai/Elsevier, 2001), 207–31.

9 Jesse Daniels, *Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights* (Rowan and Littlefield, 2009); Jeffrey Kaplan and Leonard Weinberg, *The Emergence of a Euro-American Radical Right* (Rutgers University Press, 2003).

10 Joan Donovan, Emily Dreyfuss, and Brian Friedberg, *Meme Wars: The Untold Story of the Online Battles Upending Democracy in America* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).

11 Belew, *Bring the War Home*, 142–45.

12 Robert William Billups, "Martyred Women and White Power Since the Civil Rights Era: From Kathy Ainsworth to Vicki Weaver," *Journal of American History* 109, no. 4 (2023): 804–27; Sophie Bjork-James, "The Apartheid Conscience: Gender, Race, and Re-imagining the White Nation in Cyberspace," *Ethnic Studies Review* 29 no. 2 (2006): 20–45; Karen M. Douglas, Craig McGarty, Ana-Maria Bluic, and Girish Lala, "Understanding Cyberhate: Social Competition and Social Creativity in Online White Supremacist Groups," *Social Science Computer Review* 23 no. 1 (2005): 68–76; Aaron Winters, "Online Hate: From the Far-Right to the 'Alt-Right' and from the Margins to the Mainstream," in *Online Othering: From the Far-Right to the 'Alt-Right' and from the Margins to the Mainstream*, ed. Karen Lumsden and Emily Harmer (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

demonstrate how white women—specifically Vicki Weaver and Kathy Ainsworth—were commodified on white power sites as “martyrs.”¹³ These works focus almost exclusively on post-1995 materials, however, despite the creation, expansion, and utilization of computer hate networks in the 1980s and early 1990s.

While scholars of the far right often do not include the crucial pre-internet digital past, the nascent field of web histories has frequently omitted analysis of far-right computer networks. Kevin Driscoll dubbed the period discussed in this article the “modem world” for the centrality of modems and phone line connections to the computer networks of the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁴ Driscoll and other historians have recently grappled with the challenges of an ephemeral yet easily duplicated medium, acknowledging the fragile record of pre-1995 materials from bulletin boards, newsgroups, FidoNet, and other pre-internet computer networks. Ian Milligan notes that born-digital materials are in a constant state of degradation and that the establishment of the Internet Archive in 1996 represents a foundational strut in any history of the web.¹⁵

The field of web histories is still emerging, having grown out of several convergent fields, most notably in digital humanities and internet studies. Histories of the internet have existed for decades now, though nearly all studies before 2010 focused on how networks were established, with an emphasis on the implementation of ever more complex connection protocols, and on the private-public finance models that created the broadband lines that transmit the internet. Niels Brügger, John Carey, and Martin C. J. Elton were among the first to look at the history of societies and cultures built on the internet, though they too did so primarily by historicizing various programs and tools rather than the human experiences enabled by this software.¹⁶ In *The Web as History* (2017), Niels Brügger and Ralph Schroeder offered several studies that examined the remnants of Geocities and other early internet sites.¹⁷ Formalizing the name of the field, Brügger and Milligan published an expansive work in 2019 that defines web histories in its present form: the study of social and cultural materials produced by previous users of computer networks, including metadata unique to computer-mediated communications.¹⁸ Since then, the *Journal of Web Histories* and monographs from Milligan, Driscoll, and Avery Dame-Griff,

13 Billups, “Martyred Women.”

14 Kevin Driscoll, *The Modem World: A Prehistory of Social Media* (Yale University Press, 2022).

15 Ian Milligan, *Averting the Digital Dark Age: How Archivists, Librarians, and Technologists Built the Web a Memory* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2024), 1–4.

16 Niels Brügger, ed., *Web History* (P. Lang, 2010); John Carey and Martin C. J. Elton, *When Media Are New: Understanding the Dynamics of New Media Adoption and Use* (University of Michigan Press, 2010).

17 Niels Brügger and Ralph Schroeder, eds., *The Web as History: Using Web Archives to Understand the Past and the Present* (University College London Press, 2017).

18 Niels Brügger and Ian Milligan, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Web History* (SAGE Publications, 2019).

among others, have populated the field with comprehensive works on chatrooms, bulletin boards, and the early internet.¹⁹

When discussing past computer networks, however, these and other works often replicate techno-utopian conceptualizations of the early internet. Among these beliefs is the understanding that digital communities emerged organically: A basic organizational subject anchored an online community—place of residence, academic affiliation, sexual identity, and so forth. As users participated in these sites, they would in turn become moderators, coming to dictate the interests and interactions of their virtual community. Web histories often discuss white hate sites of the 1990s and early 2000s in the same way media from the 1990s discussed violent white power activists, echoing the notion that these malicious actors were largely digital lone wolves who only found each other once online. As this article argues, however, these purveyors of digital hate have a longer, more organized, and more intentional digital presence.

Extant literature on the white power movement of the 1980s and 1990s therefore treats the establishment of computer networks as a fascinating side project, playing only a small part in the violence of the white supremacist movement. Web histories similarly contend that early hate sites were a footnote in the broader utopian vision of democratized knowledge—an unpleasant, but perhaps necessary, perversion of a worthwhile project. Instead, researchers must understand these white supremacist networks alongside other attempts by hate movements at structural reorganization, of similar importance to their formation of militias, prison gangs, political campaigns, and music record labels. These computerized hate networks were a serious experiment undertaken by a movement desperately searching for a path forward. Reconsidering these late twentieth-century developments as a holistic process of uncertain, iterative development can help researchers see why white power computer networks proved to be the most politically and culturally successful product of the Klan's and neo-Nazis' strategic reorganization.

These early hate networks offer context to many of the white nationalist talking points that have become commonplace in contemporary far-right political rhetoric. Current scholarship identifies clear links between Don Black's Stormfront and 4chan, the result of which was the alt-right movement of the 2010s.²⁰ These studies of the contemporary

19 Avery Dame-Griff, *The Two Revolutions: A History of the Transgender Internet* (New York University Press, 2023); Driscoll, *Modem World*; Ian Milligan, *History in the Age of Abundance? How the Web Is Transforming Historical Research* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019); Milligan, *Digital Dark Age*.

20 On continuity in the rhetoric of white power activism on Stormfront and 4chan, including the active transmission of hateful ideology in the mid-2000s as a major contributor to the rise of the alt-right, see Donovan et al., *Meme Wars*; Alexandra Minna Stern, *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate: How the Alt-Right Is Warping the American Imagination* (Beacon Press, 2019); Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "A Recent History of White Supremacy," and Nicole Hemmer, "The Alt-Right in Charlottesville: How an Online Movement Became a Real-World Presence," in *A Field Guide to White Supremacy*, ed. Kathleen Belew and Ramón A. Gutiérrez (University of California Press, 2021), 251–64 and 287–303, respectively.

far-right often omit any historicization beyond the early 2000s. In doing so, they miss the explicit continuity between Stormfront—often cited as the seedbed from which online white hate grew—and the white power movement of the late twentieth-century. Examining the earliest white power networks, which were put online by key white power activists in the 1980s, demonstrates organizational continuity between Liberty Bell BBS, Aryan Liberty Net, and Stormfront.

While direct archival recovery of much of the earliest white power computer networks is challenging and has limited the historicization of online hate to offline contributors, it is possible to discern from extant materials the significant dates, purpose, and operational frameworks of these 1980s networks. Researchers and activists traditionally identify the first three hate sites as Aryan Liberty Net, White Aryan Resistance BBS, and Liberty Bell BBS. The last of these, operated by George Dietz, is also the best documented in surviving primary sources. It is possible to recover substantial information about the operations of the first computerized hate network by relying on materials from Dietz's magazine, *Liberty Bell*; from fact-finding reports published by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and Political Research Associates (PRA); and from contemporary bulletin board operations manuals, printouts of operations manuals for Liberty Bell BBS itself, and printouts of the network, all of which corroborate the site's operations. Similar, though less well-sourced, reconstruction is possible for Aryan Liberty Net (ALN), operated by the Aryan Nations. ALN itself became the largest hate network of the 1980s and featured frequent contributions from both Louis Beam and Robert Miles, two of the most significant Klan leaders in the 1980s. This article therefore seeks to rectify the overreliance on post-1995 internet sources in the historiography of white power activists' computer networks. It demonstrates the complexity and intentionality of their construction by analyzing the materials available from George Dietz's Liberty Bell BBS and, to a lesser extent due to archival limitations, Louis Beam's Aryan Liberty Net.

George Dietz and Liberty Bell BBS

George Dietz was long established in the American and emerging transnational white power movements by the time he created Liberty Bell BBS in August 1983. His central role in the publication of hate materials played a substantial part in why he established the first white power computer network. Much of Dietz's biography comes from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). Freedom of Information Act requests, largely filed by independent researcher and activist Ernie Lazar, provide the basis of Dietz's biography, alongside reporting from the 1980s.

George Dietz was born in the late 1920s in Kassel, Germany, during the Weimar Republic, though little early biographical information about him survives. Dietz's father was a German veteran of the World Wars; less documentary evidence survives about his mother. As a teenager, George Dietz joined the Hitler Youth while his father was again

off at war. Dietz recalled that having seen his father in a storm trooper's uniform helped convince him later of the antisemitic conspiracy theory that argues against the existence of a Holocaust of European Jewry. In 1980, Dietz would claim, "I'm sure my father didn't kill six million Jews." Following World War II and the division of Germany, the younger Dietz resided in West Germany until he emigrated to New Jersey in 1957.²¹

In 1971, Dietz relocated to West Virginia, where he became a farmland real estate broker. A self-avowed "anti-communist," Dietz grew ever more active in the reactionary right-wing politics of the United States. He began publication of *Liberty Bell* in 1973 and joined the John Birch Society in 1974. This association was short-lived, however, and Dietz left the John Birch Society in 1976, claiming the society was insufficiently antisemitic in fighting communism.²² Fellow ex-Bircher Revilo P. Oliver, a prolific author whose "fingerprints showed up on virtually every far right tendency in the post-World War II years," began publishing in *Liberty Bell* in this period.²³ Recent work by Spencer Sunshine has identified that Dietz attempted to finance another racist publisher, James Mason—the author of *SIEGE*, a neo-Nazi "handbook" that advocated for violent stochastic terrorism to dissolve the constitutional bonds of the United States. This alliance was also short-lived, as backbiting between the two dissolved this partnership.²⁴

From the mid-1970s onward, Dietz would focus on his own enterprise, Liberty Bell Publications, to fulfill his larger strategic objective of liberating European and American white people from the supposed yoke of Jewish oppression and the imagined evils of racial integration. Antisemitism and white supremacy dominated Dietz's political objectives. Throughout the print run of *Liberty Bell* and in various interviews, George Dietz made clear that he believed Nazi propaganda claiming a Jewish cabal had captured Western governments and was responsible for the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II.

From the 1970s until the end of his operations in 1999, George Dietz would be a central organizational component of a politically active and ideologically motivated white power movement. Liberty Bell Publications was a crucial American distributor of predominantly antisemitic but broadly hateful works such as *Mein Kampf*, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, *Which Way Western Man?*, *Postscripts*, and *The Turner Diaries*. Both *Mein*

21 Barry Renfrew, "Nazi Germany Is Alive and Well in the U.S.," *Spokane (WA) Review*, March 23, 1980, E6.

22 Chip Berlet and Carol Mason, "Swastikas in Cyberspace," in *Trumping Democracy: From Reagan to the Alt-Right*, ed. Chip Berlet (Routledge, 2020), 50–51; Carol Mason, *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right: Conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County Textbook Controversy* (Cornell University Press, 2009), 57, 60, 74–76.

23 David Austin Walsh, *Taking America Back: The Conservative Movement and the Far Right* (Yale University Press, 2024), 154–79; Leonard Zeskind, *Blood and Politics: The History of the White Nationalist Movement from the Margins to the Mainstream* (Farrar Strauss Giroux, 2009), 393.

24 Spencer Sunshine, *Neo-Nazi Terrorism and Counter-Cultural Fascism: The Origins and Afterlife of James Mason's Siege* (Routledge, 2024).

Kampf and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* had been distributed by Henry Ford before the United States became involved in World War II and curtailed their distribution.²⁵ Dietz's distribution of *Mein Kampf* and the *Protocols* through his own independent press represented the first large-scale reprinting of either work in the United States in over thirty years.

Like many in the white power movement, Dietz understood politics almost exclusively through a zero-sum calculus of race. Any expansion of rights for non-whites in any white-majority country necessarily meant the restriction of rights for whites. The defeat of Nazi Germany, the enactment of civil rights for Black Americans, and the integration of American civic institutions were, to Dietz, not only social catastrophes but political disasters wrought by a malicious Jewish cabal advancing rights for non-whites. Rather than understanding Judaism as a complex identity with overlapping social, cultural, religious, and ethnic components, this philosophy fallaciously construes it as a race necessarily opposed to whiteness.²⁶ Selections from Revilo P. Oliver's *America's Decline*, reproduced in several introductions to *Liberty Bell*, make clear that Dietz's ideal form of politics is the forceful dominance of white people over all other races:

We think Congoids unintelligent, but they feel only contempt for a race so stupid or craven that it fawns on them, gives them votes, lavishly subsidizes them with its own earnings, and even oppresses its own people to curry their favor. . . . The only objective criterion of superiority, among human races as among all other species, is biological: the strong survive, the weak perish. The superior race of mankind today is the one that will emerge victorious—whether by its technology or its fecundity.²⁷

Oliver was a professor of linguistics at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and a frequent contributor to *Liberty Bell*. From the 1960s through the 1990s he wrote

25 See George Dietz's publisher's catalog, *Books for Patriots from Liberty Bell Publications* (Liberty Bell Publications, n.d.), 1–11, box 48, folder 8, "Liberty Bell Publications," TARC/PRA.

26 On the post-1930s inclusion of antisemitic rhetoric in the traditionally anti-Black and nativist Second Klan, see Britt Tevis, "Antisemitism in U.S. History," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, ed. John Butler (Oxford University Press, 2023). Mark Weitzman identifies this specific politicized antisemitism in later online spaces in "'The Internet Is Our Sword,' Aspects of Online Antisemitism," in *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide*, ed. John K. Roth, Elisabeth Maxwell, Margot Levy, and Wendy Whitworth (Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), 911–25.

27 Dietz irregularly contributed his own commentary to his magazine; however, the materials he chose to reproduce also demonstrate his racism and antisemitism. The following are materials reprinted by Dietz that attest to his racism, antisemitism, white supremacy, and fascistic politics: Henry Ford, "The International Jew" and "The Jew and His Fears," *Liberty Bell* 7, no. 7 (1978): 37–49 and 49–52, respectively; Revilo P. Oliver, *America's Decline: The Education of a Conservative* (Liberty Bell Publications, 1981); Charles E. Weber, "The Jewish Problem: An Aryan Survival in the United States, Rational and Irrational Approaches to the Jewish Question," *Liberty Bell* 12, no. 4 (1984): 19–26.

extensive racist and antisemitic tracts decrying the supposedly false narrative of the Holocaust, excoriating the “Zionist Occupational Government” of the United States, and raging against what he saw as the evils of the 1957, 1964, and 1968 Civil Rights Acts. A strong proponent of genocide and the violent establishment of a white ethnostate in the United States, Oliver heavily influenced his protégé William Luther Pierce. Aligned with the patently antisemitic and racist work of his mentor, Pierce would go on to establish the National Alliance—sometimes called National Vanguard—in 1974 and publish *The Turner Diaries* in 1978. Oliver also sat on the editorial board of the Institute for Historical Review, a pseudo-academic global network of tenured academics that publishes a quarterly journal. David Walsh convincingly argues that, despite Oliver’s clearly hateful rhetoric, he maintained close though closeted relations with significant figures in the mainstream American Right, most notably with William F. Buckley Jr., publisher of the *National Review* and doyen of the neoconservative movement of the 1990s and early 2000s.²⁸

If race was politics for this branch of the American white power movement, then the solution to the expansion civil rights for non-white, non-Christian Americans could only be a political one. It was for this reason that Dietz chose the distribution and promotion of print publications as his field. The primary impediment to white political survival, so went their logic, was a lack of racial consciousness among white Americans. Every issue of *Liberty Bell* opened with an appeal for the white race to educate itself about the supposed evils of integration. By the early 1980s, Dietz had established himself and *Liberty Bell* as crucial fixtures in the white power movement.

Dietz would use the distribution base for *Liberty Bell* to attract computer users to Liberty Bell BBS. From its outset, Dietz was clear that Liberty Bell BBS would serve the same purpose as his print magazine—to disseminate white nationalist, racist, and antisemitic materials to as broad an audience as possible.²⁹ Committed to enlightening white Americans regarding their purported subjugation, Dietz understood information as the principal battleground of the white power movement. Electronic communications were therefore a powerful companion to printed materials.

It is in the “Letters to the Editor” section of the August 1983 edition of *Liberty Bell* that we find the first reference to any computerized hate network in the United States. Dietz protected the identity of his readership by initializing the names of his letter writers yet demonstrated the national reach of his publication by providing state-level associations for each letter that he published. Further material such as advertisements and forewords provide information on the infrastructure and distribution of Liberty Bell BBS. The two key events in the evolution of Liberty Bell BBS’s infrastructure are the creation of a second address for the site in 1988, which was hosted in Chicago, and the eventual

28 Walsh, *Taking America Back*, 149–51.

29 George Dietz, *Command Guide* (Liberty Bell Publications, 1984), 4, box 16, folder 43, “Computers-Racists-BBS,” TARC/PRA.

closure of the bulletin board. References to the network's operation end in the early 1990s, though research materials from Political Research Associates and Chip Berlet suggest that Liberty Bell BBS only went offline following Dietz's passing in 1999.

While no digital copies of Liberty Bell BBS have yet been identified, it is possible to recover significant information about the site from materials published by Dietz and contemporary research conducted by the Anti-Defamation League and Political Research Associates. Perhaps the most extensive collection of materials on Liberty Bell BBS is provided by PRA, including two printouts of the network from 1985, later interviews with Dietz conducted by research associate Chip Berlet, physical copies of *Liberty Bell*, and an operations manual that documents Dietz's intentions for the network. The Anti-Defamation League provides insight into the antisemitic politics of Liberty Bell BBS and the material realities of operating the computer network. Finally, Dietz discussed Liberty Bell BBS extensively in the "Letters to the Editor" section of *Liberty Bell*. This latter source base provides the broadest chronology of the network, giving snippets about Liberty Bell BBS's operation up through 1990. Although it is impossible to trawl through a dedicated library of content from Liberty Bell BBS, it is possible to provide detailed qualitative analysis of the site's operations, intentions, and overall impact on the white power movement from the rich scaffolding provided by the abovementioned sources.

Liberty Bell BBS was a complex, secure hate network, with connection and security protocols on par with contemporary bulletin boards. In the February 1988 edition of *Liberty Bell*, a reader identified as R. F. from the state of New York asked Dietz directly about uploading information to Liberty Bell BBS, noting that they "played around with 'Apple Access'" and tried four specifically antisemitic passwords to gain access. Dietz responded to the letter:

We'll make a Password available to any one of our old, established subscribers and/or book customers who own a (any) computer and who may wish to "upload" textfiles into our Data Board System for possible inclusion in Liberty Bell. The phone number of the Data Board is 304-927-1773. . . . A Password is not required to gain access to the system, but is—for obvious reasons—required to enter any data/messages into the system. Any "ASCII" textfile or program file can be sent in directly on Apple //e or IBM diskettes.³⁰

This represents an extensive look at Dietz's management and securitization of Liberty Bell BBS. Dietz's consolidation of permissions for writing materials to the network, while allowing any user unfettered reading permissions, meant he could maintain rigid control over the ideological direction of his computer network. This site did not operate as an open

30 R. F. letter to the editor, *Liberty Bell* 15, no. 8 (February 1988): 51, https://archive.org/details/LibertyBell_201708/LB-198802/.

forum. Keeping hate networks secure, free from subversion, and centralized in production was a key element of Louis Beam's call for a leaderless resistance. It is noteworthy that though this communiqué came just over four years after the start of Liberty Bell BBS, Dietz had already developed a sophisticated means of control for his network.

The most comprehensive material available to document the operations of this computer network is a surviving command guide for Liberty Bell BBS. The command guide is meticulously organized and describes each option, menu, and submenu that a user could input, with resources for those unfamiliar with computers and computer networks. Published by Dietz in March 1984, the command guide was mailed to *Liberty Bell* subscribers as part of a broader marketing campaign for the network. Around the same time, he began including business-card-sized advertisements for the bulletin board, which appeared often but irregularly in editions of *Liberty Bell* until the 1990s.³¹ While much of Berlet's literature on Liberty Bell BBS refers to the site as "Info.International Network," both readers and Dietz frequently referred to the network as Liberty Bell BBS or Liberty Bell Network, and by 1988 the advertising for the site had changed to reflect this convention.

Liberty Bell BBS required significant identifying information from users who wished to use its more advanced functions. Users needed to enter basic demographic data about themselves before they could proceed to the main menu of the bulletin board. This included first and last names, telephone numbers, residential addresses, and the type of computer from which they were connecting. Only then would the system issue a password that granted access to the rest of the site. Then a password validation fee of five dollars was required for continued access to the site under the same username.³² This personal data collection and charge to access the network are corroborated by Dietz's communications in *Liberty Bell* with users who wanted to gain permission to post content to the network. This basic securitization helped Dietz identify frequent users of Liberty Bell BBS while he moderated who was allowed to post messages to the site's forums.

Liberty Bell BBS was no more or less secure than most other computer networks at the time. Whereas Dietz justified these requirements as a level of securitization against potential infiltrators, this protocol was not unusual for accessing most bulletin boards in the 1980s. Password fees helped offset the costs of the equipment and electricity required to run computer networks. Political Research Associates notes that, if a user simply wished to read materials posted to Liberty Bell BBS, entering "New" as a password would grant access to the site, and that potentially false names and addresses were rarely checked against known users. This, coupled with the half-hour session times granted to each individual call to the computer network, would have made the direct policing of access to the site challenging at best. While those opposed to the

31 George Dietz, "Liberty Bell Network Advertisement," *Liberty Bell* 15, no. 3 (November 1987): 39, https://archive.org/details/LibertyBell_201708/LB-198711-partial/.

32 Dietz, *Command Guide*.

white power movement may not have been able to significantly damage or alter the site—though users of Aryan Liberty Net did ascribe frequent downtime to malicious infiltration—it still allowed researchers and civil rights activists nearly unfettered access to the contents of Dietz’s computer network.

Once a user gained access to the site, they would arrive at the top-level menus. Dietz notes in the command guide that only two of the nineteen top-level options would direct users to content, while the rest of the options either set parameters for viewing the site or allowed users to learn more about computers. For example, the first submenu, “A,” directed users to “Apple Tips,” which instructed the caller about more effectively making use of their Apple II computer.³³ Option “D” allowed users to “Download Programs” to their Apple home computer. The structure of Liberty Bell BBS therefore displayed the wonkish, gangly tendencies typical of computer networks of the era. Computer usage in the United States was still relatively low in 1985—fewer than a quarter of Americans reported that they regularly accessed a computer, let alone owned a home computer. An even smaller fraction of those Americans had the capability, in either hardware or technical ability, to access computer networks.³⁴ Dietz, like other system operators of the time, understood he needed to provide extensive information for users who may be accessing a computer network for the very first time. The options on Liberty Bell BBS’s top-level menu were largely redundant or useful only once, setting users’ displays to the proper resolution, text orientation, and text speed. Crucially, however, while redundant or inefficient, these options familiarized members of the white power movement with the operation and maintenance of computer networks.

All of the above-described components were relatively standard for a bulletin board of the mid-1980s; however, in 1984, when a user selected “G” from the top-level menu, it would take them to “General Topics” and produce the following list of options:

- 1 = Prof. R. P. Oliver’s Postscripts
- 2 = WVA Real Estate Bargains
- 3 = Election News/Comments
- 4 = Historic Facts & Figures
- 5 = ‘Holocaust’: Fact or Fiction?
- 6 = List of Patriotic Orgs.
- 7 = List of Patriotic Books
- 8 = Reports and Reviews³⁵

33 Dietz, *Command Guide*, 5–8.

34 Robert Kominsky, “Computer Use in the United States: 1984,” in *US Bureau of the Census: Current Population Reports*, series P-23, no. 155 (US Government Printing Office, 1988).

35 Dietz, *Command Guide*, 1984. Quotes of material from Liberty Bell BBS and other networks

Chip Berlet's archival copies of the site provide the following snapshot of the content menu available to users of Liberty Bell BBS a year later, in June 1985, demonstrating that Dietz maintained, updated, and adapted the site over time:

- 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.³⁶

Berlet's archival copies show that "1 = Prof. R. P. Oliver's Postscripts" contained the following digitized writings from Professor Oliver:

- 1 = The Businessmen of God
- 2 = Truth is Stranger than Fiction
- 3 = The "Holohoax"
- 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 Books³⁷

are reproduced as they originally appeared, including with errors and irregularities.

36 Under "Real Estate Bargains," Dietz listed at least three properties near his home in Reedy, West Virginia, and encouraged buyers to use one twenty-acre property as a "Survival Camp." Alongside Louis Beam's call for a leaderless resistance, many white power organizations were establishing survivalist camps in the 1980s and 1990s. Dietz's inclusion of land sales on a digital communications network for the specific purpose of creating militant white exclaves is a good example. George Dietz, "WVA Real Estate Bargains," Aryan Liberty Net, Liberty Bell BBS, 22, box 16, folder 44, TARC/PRA; Coates, *Armed and Dangerous*; Chip Berlet, "When Hate Went Online," draft chapter adapted from a paper presented at the Northeast Sociological Association Spring Conference, Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT, April 28, 2001, accessed June 29, 2026, https://simson.net/ref/leaderless/berlet_when_hate_went_online.pdf.

37 Berlet, "When Hate Went Online."

These snapshots indicate that Dietz effectively used Liberty Bell BBS as a virtual repository for his printed magazine, with a specific interest in reproducing materials written by Revido P. Oliver. While these captures are limited to a single year that was relatively early in Liberty Bell BBS's operations, they reinforce that this site functioned as another front for both the publication of *Liberty Bell* and Dietz's real estate business. While it is difficult to discern the impact that Liberty Bell BBS had on the white power movement as the first-ever American white power activist hate site, it clearly provided crucial technical proficiencies with computer networks that would become key to the strategic reorganization of the movement.

Liberty Bell BBS's potential audience was limited by several factors, and the overall significance of the content shared on these early sites to the direction of the white power movement is likely minimal. While engagement metrics and metadata corresponding to site access are irrecoverable, it is possible to make some logical extrapolations about the demographics and breadth of Liberty Bell BBS users. A 1988 publication from the United States Census Bureau notes that just under one-fifth of all Americans had regular access to a computer, and that more than two-thirds of home computers were owned by households earning more than \$25,000 per year (~\$72,000 in January 2026), representing the median income of the top one-third of American households.³⁸ Most computer users were therefore predominantly well-off white Americans with at least some technical knowledge about computer networks. Further restricting Liberty Bell BBS's audience is the fact that most computer network users in the 1980s relied on advertisements for networks that listed the specific phone number of a site.³⁹ Dietz did not advertise Liberty Bell BBS in popular magazines like *Computer Shopper*, which listed public bulletin boards, meaning his digital audience was largely limited to those who read *Liberty Bell* or other white power publications that carried Dietz's materials. The anonymity of Liberty Bell BBS was a crucial facet of the network's operation and continues to make the work of reconstructing the site's userbase difficult.

The cost to operate and access a white supremacist network in the 1980s provides a degree of materiality to the ephemeral nature of digital communications. The physical components that facilitate white power organization and communications have historically shaped the scope and scale of the movement. Linda Gordon notes that the Second Klan readily adopted film, radio, print newspapers, and other emerging technologies and effectively grew their movement into the single largest white nationalist organization of the post-Civil War United States. Film, radio, and print newspapers were top-down media

38 Kominsky, "Computer Use." Inflation determined using the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator, <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl> (accessed July 23, 2026).

39 Driscoll, *Modem World*, 58–89.

distribution systems. They allowed the Second Klan to disseminate tightly controlled information to their followers.⁴⁰

While a significant amount of literature discusses the democratizing, bottom-up nature of online communities in the 1980s, Liberty Bell BBS was constructed with a top-down model of information distribution in mind. Dietz relied on popular contributors to his magazine to populate the digital pages of his site. Revilo P. Oliver was a regular contributor and a prolific author whose books were published by Liberty Bell Publications. In December 1985, Dietz circulated an appeal to purchase an electronic word processor for Oliver, crowdsourcing funds so Oliver could more easily publish material to computer networks.⁴¹ In contrast to the narrative that early computer networks formed organically from interested hobbyists, this effort by Dietz replicated within this new digital space the existing top-down hierarchy that hate networks were familiar with in print and physical organization. In the same December 1985 edition of *Liberty Bell*, multiple writers attested to donating sums of money ranging from \$5 to \$88 to acquire a password for Liberty Bell BBS so they could receive “the TRUE MESSAGE of White people from the Liberty Bell Network.”⁴² As notable authors and leading figures in the white power movement began disseminating their ideologies in the networks of the 1980s, the ease of publication and absence of censorious pressures drew other prominent theorists and activists within the white power movement to the nascent internet. Dietz’s own experimentation with computer networks would further inform other prominent hate sites’ operations through this snowballing effect, prompting them to provide digitized access to written works.

In much the same way that Dietz collected money for Oliver’s word processor, Louis Beam and Don Black, Belew claims, utilized funds from The Order and Aryan Nations to help white power leaders purchase computers.⁴³ As Tom Metzger, head of the White Aryan Resistance, corresponded with his subscribers to help them move online, so too did Beam help draw Aryan Nations members to Aryan Liberty Net. Dietz’s Liberty Bell BBS, the very first white power hate site, ran on an Apple IIe microcomputer, was stored on a 10-megabyte hard drive, and was connected to the local phone lines via a Hayes Micromodem IIe. The tools of the digital white power revolution would run the average consumer about \$2,000 in 1985 and could be purchased at the nearest RadioShack.⁴⁴

40 Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (Liveright Publishing, 2017).

41 G. A. H., letter to the editor, *Liberty Bell* 13, no. 4 (December 1985): 53–55, https://archive.org/details/LibertyBell_201708/LB-198512/.

42 See letters to the editor by R. W., H. J. B, Dr. H. I., and K. W., *Liberty Bell* 13, no. 4 (December 1985): 55–57, https://archive.org/details/LibertyBell_201708/LB-198512/.

43 Belew, *Bring the War Home*, 120–24, 127, 133.

44 Dietz, *Command Guide*; Justin J. Finger, *Computerized Networks of Hate: An ADL Fact Finding Report*, Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, New York, NY, January 24, 1985, <https://archive.org/>

While this cost represented ten years' worth of subscriptions to *Liberty Bell*, any home computer owner could access any other hate network either in the United States or abroad. In comparative terms, a home computer represented a capacity of scale for individual white power activists.

Liberty Bell BBS was also set up to be another source of income for Dietz, though it is unclear how much he profited or how much he laid out for operational costs. Several services on the site were locked behind what we would now call paywalls: A password cost \$5; an annual membership of \$20 granted access to an advanced layer of downloadable content and other vague, unverifiable benefits. Dietz called this elevated tier "The Club," and this fee was the same price as an annual subscription to *Liberty Bell*.⁴⁵ While the actual cash flow generated by Liberty Bell BBS is difficult to discern—Dietz left no indication whether the venture generated or lost money overall—at least in 1985, George Dietz saw the potential of protecting information and network usage behind paywalls.

Little evidence of Liberty Bell BBS's operations in the 1990s survives, and it is entirely plausible that the network went offline or was only intermittently available by the mid-1990s. In the late 1980s, Dietz suffered a significant health event, though the details are spotty. Liberty Bell Publications drew down significantly in operations after Dietz's infirmity. Many sections of *Liberty Bell* disappeared—including the "Letters to the Editor" section for almost a year—from which much of the longitudinal information about Liberty Bell BBS is drawn. Whereas in previous editions Dietz had published—and often responded to—up to thirty letters in a single monthly edition, after 1990 he published only a handful of letters irregularly.⁴⁶ Commensurate with this decline in engagement with his readership, Dietz provided less and less information about Liberty Bell BBS. The last missive about Liberty Bell BBS was published in a 1989 letter, and advertisements for the computer network disappeared shortly thereafter.⁴⁷ By the late 1990s, much of the discussion in *Liberty Bell* about computers had shifted to their untrustworthiness and

details/ComputerizedNetworksOfHate/page/n3/mode/2up; Tim Miller, "The Electronic Fringe," *Washington Post*, July 14, 1985, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/magazine/1985/07/14/the-electronic-fringe/17955294-9c94-4b5d-99e4-9af799b45eae/>.

45 Dietz, *Command Guide*, 2, 4, 19.

46 A typical print-run from *Liberty Bell* in the mid-1980s would be volume 13 (1985–1986), in which Dietz published 125 letters across twelve issues. Comparing this with a typical volume from the 1990s, such as volume 19 (1992–1993), there is a 48 percent reduction in published letters, totaling just seventy-eight published letters to the editor across ten issues. There is a significant qualitative difference in these letters as well. Published letters from the 1980s were often original letters sent to Dietz specifically, and to which Dietz often responded. Roughly a third of the letters reproduced in the 1990s were letters submitted to other publications such as the *Journal for Historical Review* and *REMARKS*, but which Dietz found of interest to his readership.

47 M. H., letter to the editor, *Liberty Bell* 16, no. 6 (February 1989): 56, https://archive.org/details/LibertyBell_201708/LB-198902/.

the coming challenges of Y2K.⁴⁸ The primary focus of civil rights organizations and news coverage had shifted to larger computer networks that espoused more violent rhetoric, such as Aryan Liberty Net and Stormfront, the site that would come to dominate the digital footprint of the white power movement by the end of the millennium.

The Influence of Liberty Bell BBS on Aryan Liberty Net

The direct lineage of Stormfront begins with the Aryan Nations' Aryan Liberty Net (ALN). In mid-1984, Louis Beam announced the launch of a computer network for the Aryan Nations, dubbed Aryan Liberty Net. He intended the service to link broadly affiliated forums centered around the ideologies of what Beam deemed the "Patriotic Movement." Established with three regional servers in Idaho, Texas, and Chicago, ALN quickly grew in usage. By August 1985, Political Research Associates had identified at least ten regional terminals that hosted copies of ALN. Most were in existing Klan strongholds: North Carolina alone boasted four discrete terminals all connecting users to the same forums. By noting the number provided by the computer network when users signed off, PRA was able to identify that NCKKK3 (North Carolina KKK, terminal #3) had received nearly two thousand visitors after less than a year of operation.⁴⁹

Aryan Liberty Net suffers from a more severe archival dearth than Liberty Bell BBS—no extant copies of the site are available for research beyond those few remnants preserved in dot-matrix printouts by the civil rights organizations that monitored white power activists in this period. Despite this, many of the same techniques used to reconstruct Liberty Bell BBS can also be employed for ALN. Materials from the same civil rights organizations and publications from AKIA Press—the Aryan Nations' in-house print office—provide detailed information about the operations of the site. Furthermore, the similarity of these materials reinforces contemporary evaluations that George Dietz helped Louis Beam establish Aryan Liberty Net, providing continuity between the two sites.⁵⁰ For example, the operations guide to ALN was published shortly after the manual for Liberty Bell BBS, suggesting either direct communication between Dietz and Beam about what their userbase required or at the very least adoption of best practices based

48 Robert Frens, "The Y2K Cockroach," and Molly Gill, letter to the editor, *Liberty Bell* 28, no. 1 (September 1998): 35–39 and 53–55, respectively, https://archive.org/details/LibertyBell_201708/LB-199809.pdf; letters to the editor by S. R. and R. T., *Liberty Bell* 24, no. 12 (August 1997): 52–53 and 56, respectively, https://archive.org/details/LibertyBell_201708/LB-199708/.

49 "Database," Political Research Associates, box 16, folder 43, "Computers-Racists-BBS," TARC/PRA.

50 Finger, *Computerized Networks*; Miller, "Electronic Fringe"; *Inter-Klan Newsletter and Survival Alert*, 14–15, box 16, folder 43, "Computers-Racists-BBS," TARC/PRA; Aryan Liberty Net, Liberty Bell BBS, 27, 35.

on observation. Dietz's technical expertise and experience in operating Liberty Bell BBS would form a crucial backbone of the computer networks that would go on to inform Stormfront.

Like Dietz, the Aryan Nations established its computer network to coordinate white power activists' actions more effectively through direct communication free from what it identified as Jewish censorship. In mid-1985, the welcome message that preceded Aryan Liberty Net's opening menu stated that the network was explicitly established to elude "[t]he news media, opinion moulders, the federal government and other would be 'thought police' of [the United States]."⁵¹ Further tying the label "thought police" to Jewish civil rights organizations, ALN listed regional Anti-Defamation League branches under the heading "Thought Police Headquarters." This list contained street addresses, phone numbers, and in some cases the names and addresses of regional and national directors of the ADL and allied civil rights organizations.⁵² Aryan Liberty Net was therefore established and operated as an antisemitic answer to the supposed Jewish control of American media and journalism.

The most provocative and well known of ALN's features was its "enemies list." Various printouts of ALN confirm that this list did exist and was divided into distinct categories under the General Interest submenu "Know Your Enemy." Four further submenus populated this regularly updated section:

1. Anti-Defelamation League Offices
2. Communist Party Headquarters
3. Name & Addresses of Race Traitors
4. Names & Adds. of Known ZOG (Zionest Occupational Government) Informers.⁵³

Here, Louis Beam and fellow system operators Robert Miles and Stephen Miller would post all known information about individuals and organizations that the Klan wanted to direct violence against. The submenu on "Race Traitors" and "ZOG Informers" encouraged the extrajudicial killing of those on these lists and noted that once a supposedly "lawful" government returned to the land, those listed would be executed.⁵⁴

The information about individuals on the list was comprehensive and documented known addresses and the physical appearance of potential targets. Few of the names from this list are provided in the extant documentation on ALN, though the case and

51 Aryan Liberty Net, Liberty Bell BBS, 17.

52 Aryan Liberty Net, Liberty Bell BBS, 57–59, 80–81.

53 Aryan Liberty Net, Liberty Bell BBS, 80.

54 Aryan Liberty Net, Liberty Bell BBS, 57–59, 80–81.

fate of a purported Klan infiltrator and federal informant listed as “Buster Keaton” is reproduced in full and offers a glimpse at how the enemies list was used. Keaton was only the second such person of interest on this list, marking him as an early entrant on a list that would eventually have dozens of names. Alongside identifying information such as hair color, vocation, and height, Keaton’s supposed crime against the Klan was given—allegedly using his position as a Great Titan of the North Texas Klan to turn “info over to the Zionist Occupational Government.”⁵⁵ A later update to ALN jubilantly confirmed Keaton’s death, noting that the *Dallas Morning News* reported his death by mail bomb.⁵⁶ It is difficult, however, to verify this information, as no Dallas-based obituaries or reporting for this period discussed this incident, and Buster Keaton was also the name of a famous film actor. These materials were regularly updated by all three of the system operators: Beam, Miles, and Miller. These regular updates demonstrate their deliberate maintenance not just of the enemies list but of Aryan Liberty Net as a whole.

Louis Beam used ALN not only to coordinate violent direct action from users of the bulletin board but also to highlight the Klan’s public presence. A November 1984 post from Beam on ALN directed users to tune into a rebroadcast of Klan leaders’ appearance on a local Dallas TV station.⁵⁷ Other subheadings provided users access to reading materials from Beam, such as his 1983 *Essays of a Klansmen*, digitized in full.⁵⁸ Additional offline white power organizations were also advertised on ALN, helping coordinate this vast and geographically disparate movement—though it charged organizations \$5 to be listed.⁵⁹ One post directed users of the network to a memorial for white supremacist Robert Matthews that would be erected in the Pacific Northwest in 1985, though Beam requested that anyone interested in visiting the monument contact the Aryan Nations directly for information on its location.⁶⁰ The Aryan Nations benefited from the flexibility of digital publications and the ease with which content could be updated, compared to the publication process of AKIA Press and other aligned white power publications.

Digital memorials to white power activists killed by police were a major component of Aryan Liberty Net. Robert Billups notes that, in later and more public white power web forums, Kathy Ainsworth and Vicki Weaver were memorialized as martyrs to emphasize the brutality of police action in killing white women.⁶¹ In the bulletin board era, however,

55 Aryan Liberty Net, Liberty Bell BBS, 83.

56 Aryan Liberty Net, Liberty Bell BBS, 31, 83.

57 Aryan Liberty Net, Liberty Bell BBS, 30.

58 Aryan Liberty Net, Liberty Bell BBS, 18, 39, 45.

59 Aryan Liberty Net, Liberty Bell BBS, 38, 90–92.

60 Aryan Liberty Net, Liberty Bell BBS, 34.

61 Billups, “Martyred Women.”

memorials on ALN commemorated men like Gordon Kahl and Robert Matthews.⁶² While these deaths were more proximate to the establishment of ALN—Kahl, a member of Posse Comitatus, was killed in 1983, and Matthews, leader of The Order, was killed in 1984—this difference can also be explained by a distinction in audience. As Billups notes, later internet sites were established with the understanding that Americans from outside the white power movement may be more sympathetic to memorials of slaughtered women.⁶³ In comparison, Beam hoped that the predominantly male white power community of the 1980s would be driven to action by the violent fates of comrades. Given their early presence on ALN, it is likely that these digital reveries for martyrs of the white power movement originated with Aryan Liberty Net. Tracing this material forward to Billups's sources further reinforces the influence ALN's structures had on the white power movement's later digital projects.

Frequently discussed in the literature about ALN is Louis Beam's possible use of money illegally obtained by The Order in a series of robberies that targeted armored cars and banks to finance the implementation and distribution of this computer network. Kathleen Belew discusses the veracity of this claim, citing a letter from North Carolina Klan leader Glenn Miller as evidence for a \$200,000 fund to establish the computer network.⁶⁴ While the specific items purchased with this illicit capital may never be ascertained, it is possible to discern from Beam's writing on the site and in an associated command guide that the Aryan Nations did not materially assist individual white power activists in obtaining their own home computers. Instead, Beam wrote that the Aryan Nations was willing to provide information on the kind of computer to buy—often either a genuine or “imitation” Apple IIe, as George Dietz also suggested, for its simplicity of use right out of the box—and how to establish a network connection through a modem and router. Even then, Beam cautioned against overspending on a computer, noting: “Currently a new Apple IIe imitation, can be had for \$850. Unless you are an organizational leader, you do not need to spend more than this.”⁶⁵ Thus, though the Aryan Nations may not have provided substantial material support to enable access to ALN, there was a network of informational support and assistance for accessing and operating these computer networks.

While George Dietz was more focused on using *Liberty Bell* and Liberty Bell BBS to disseminate information, Louis Beam, Robert Miles, and Stephen Miller saw Aryan Liberty Net as a powerful tool of group organization that could subvert the supposed “Zionist” control of traditional media. For these men, a white supremacist computer

62 Aryan Liberty Net, Liberty Bell BBS, 29.

63 Billups, “Martyred Women.”

64 Belew, *Bring the War Home*, 144.

65 Louis Beam, “Announcing Aryan Nations / Ku Klux Klan Computer Net,” *Inter-Klan Newsletter and Survival Alert* (April 1985), box 16, folder 43, “Computers-Racists-BBS,” TARC/PRA.

network would only be potent as a political weapon if it could attract ever more users and encourage a plethora of violent and nonviolent actions. The available materials show that ALN maintained an active userbase and was frequently reported on in the media throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. Its utilization clearly dwarfs that of Liberty Bell BBS, though the latter is better attested in archival sources.

The Influence of Liberty Bell BBS and Aryan Liberty Net on Stormfront

As digital communications protocols became more sophisticated throughout the 1990s, white power activists had to adapt to rapidly advancing digital technologies. Hyperlinks, born of more responsive packet switching techniques developed by Tim Berners-Lee in the early 1990s, allowed internet users to effortlessly cycle between links on web pages. In contrast, if users wanted to move between sites on older networks, they had to end their current connection and dial into a new web page.⁶⁶ While Aryan Liberty Net maintained an ever-decreasing digital presence, it was Don Black's Stormfront that would become the most popular site for white power activists on the internet in the 1990s and 2000s. Initially published as both a bulletin board and newsgroup, Stormfront was registered by Black in 1995, and he quickly integrated the contents of his existing sites, including updated copies of Louis Beam's *Essays of a Klansmen*, Arthur Butz's Holocaust-denial tract *Hoax of the Twentieth Century*, and essays by William L. Pierce.⁶⁷ By 1996, Stormfront not only linked to Black's other digital projects but also provided modern web hosting for ALN, quickly making Stormfront the most popular white-hate site on the internet and a direct inheritor of the Aryan Nations' computer network.⁶⁸ The links for ALN soon disappeared from Stormfront's homepage, replaced by a forum interface.

Like George Dietz and Louis Beam, Don Black did not choose web management as his first project to advance the strategic objectives of the white power movement. Black's early white power activism was in violent organization through state-level Klans. As former Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan of Alabama, Black had attempted to overthrow the government of Dominica to establish a white ethnostate in the Caribbean in a 1981 plot dubbed "Operation Red Dog." Black did not embark on his invasion,

66 George P. Landow, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992): 35–70; Martin C.J. Elton and John Carey, "The Prehistory of the Internet and Its Traces in the Present," in *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies*, ed. W. H. Dutton (Oxford University Press, 2013), 27–47.

67 "Links to Other Websites," Stormfront, December 30, 1996, <https://web.archive.org/web/19961230152643/http://www.stormfront.org/>.

68 "Aryan Nations," homepage hosted on Stormfront, November 27, 1996, <https://web.archive.org/web/19961127155648/http://www2.stormfront.org/an.htm>.

however, as he and nine coconspirators were apprehended by federal agents and charged with violating the 1798 Neutrality Act. For his part in the operation, Black was sentenced to three years in federal prison.⁶⁹ Just as federal infiltration had pushed Beam toward establishing Aryan Liberty Net, Black's failed ethnostate project and arrest pushed him toward Stormfront. While serving his three-year sentence, Don Black took courses in computer science, which he later credited with giving him the technical ability to establish Stormfront.⁷⁰ Thus, Black became a nexus of the online white power movement and the successor to ALN. By integrating ALN, along with other legacy hate sites such as the forums of the National Alliance (and its publication *National Vanguard*), Don Black was able to utilize the expertise, experience, and audiences of the bulletin-board era to operate his own site. Relying on a knowledge base that stretches back to George Dietz's establishment of Liberty Bell BBS in August 1983, Black was able to grow Stormfront into the largest internet site dedicated to the spread of white nationalist propaganda and discussion—boasting nearly three hundred thousand monthly users by the mid-2000s.

Conclusion

The limitations of the materials presented in this article must be considered. As noted above, the recovery of usage statistics is nearly impossible. The snapshots available to historians of Liberty Bell BBS and Aryan Liberty Net also provide only a slim chronology for each site. While George Dietz's site is more comprehensively documented in extant primary source material from Dietz himself, ALN received more contemporary study from scholars and civil rights networks. The recovery of any further primary materials from these sites is improbable—though not necessarily impossible—given how quickly older magnetic hard drives deteriorate. While later newsgroups provided more demographic information about specific users, these bulletin boards did not.⁷¹ Despite shortcomings in the archival record, these snapshots and the associated scaffolding material do provide information on the operations, usage, goals, accessibility, and chronology of the earliest hate networks.

69 Stewart Bell, *Bayou of Pigs: The True Story of an Audacious Plot to Turn a Tropical Island into a Criminal Paradise* (John Wiley and Sons, 2008); Robin Lloyd, "Web Trackers Hunt Racist Groups Online," *CNN*, August 12, 1999, <https://www.cnn.com/TECH/computing/9908/12/hate.online/>; Daniels, *Cyber Racism*, 81.

70 David Schwab Abel, "The Racist Next Door," *Broward Palm Beach (FL) New Times*, February 19, 1998, <https://www.browardpalmbeach.com/news/the-racist-next-door-6332282>.

71 Alexis de Coning provides an excellent example of how the metadata provided by later computer network forums that host subversive subjects—in her case, newsgroups for a men's rights movement called "meninism"—can yield significant personal information about network usage in extremist communities. See "A 'Lifetime of Indentured Servitude:' Rights, Labor, and Gender Anxieties in a Dead Men's Rights Newsgroup," *Internet Histories* 6, nos. 1–2 (2022): 223–36.

Grasping the aims and evolution of white power activists' early successes with computer networks can help right-wing studies researchers understand how white power activists' ideologies and rhetoric established a foothold in online spaces, while also complicating the utopian view of early web cultures. Relying on materials from George Dietz's *Liberty Bell*, we can determine that the first computer network published by the organized far right went online sometime in August 1983. Taking seriously the dates of letters published by Dietz that reference the arrival of a "computer letter," it is possible to pin this origin down to sometime between August 11 and August 13, 1983. This is almost a year earlier than the scholarly consensus regarding Klan and neo-Nazi hate networks, including even those reports that were contemporary to the publication of Liberty Bell BBS.

Crucially, this predates Louis Beam's call for a leaderless resistance, and the subsequent shift to a cell-style movement. Louis Beam and Stephen Miller's announcement in the spring of 1984 about the establishment of Aryan Liberty Net appeared shortly after Beam's article in the same publication about the necessity of leaderless resistance, implying they had been developing their own computer network alongside their theories on structural reorganization. Even leaderless resistance must be assessed by the outcome of this reorganization—a more centralized movement driven by a handful of key leaders—rather than by their written materials advocating stochastic terror. With this in mind, we should also recall that ALN was produced concurrently with the establishment of Beam's militia training camp in Texas. Online reproductions of lengthy written materials, including *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and Beam's own *Essays of a Klansmen*, alongside the frequent updating of ALN, demonstrate significant work on this site. While it is impossible to say how much time and capital Beam and Miller expended maintaining and operating ALN, it is clear they devoted considerable attention to it. The revised chronology argued for in this article, and the effort put into early hate sites it demonstrates, means that scholars of the far right must consider the diverse strategies that white power activists employed to evade policing and anti-Klan actions at the end of the twentieth century. The implementation of decentralized but ideologically aligned violence was simply one reform employed by leaders within the white power movement in the 1980s.

Furthermore, the shared competency with computer networks and web forums developed in the evolution from Liberty Bell BBS to Aryan Liberty Net to Stormfront shows that scholars of online white extremism must historicize these movements beyond Stormfront. More fully historicizing Stormfront reveals not just a site operated by a former Klansman but one that had deep roots in the same strategic reorganization of white nationalists that produced devastating acts of terrorism in the 1990s. Connecting these sites paints a radically different picture of Stormfront and its recruitment and harassment campaigns in the mid-2000s. While the work of Les Back, Michael Keith, and John Solomos (1998), Jesse Daniels (2009), Alexandra Minna Stern (2019), and Joan Donovan, Emily Dreyfuss, and Brian Friedberg (2022) all identify stages in the transmission of white nationalist rhetoric on computer networks, connecting these authors' insights to a longer, intentional structural reorganization driven by elite figures within the white

power movement reveals that online white ethnonationalism did not emerge from murky internet subcultures but was instead the product of a deliberate, largely successful offline campaign.

The intentional, structured movement of white power activists onto computer networks also complicates the conventional narrative in web histories that the earliest online communities were composed of hobbyists and enthusiasts who organically developed virtual communities. Instead, this research documents that, at the same time many famous early communities such as the WELL were going online, hate sites were also being established.⁷² Researchers must understand these timelines together, though they offer a competing model of how networked cultures arose. The strict control over messaging and membership on early hate sites contradicts the standard view that these pre-internet sites, communities, and networks flourished because they encouraged freedom of expression and participation.

While online communities did grow organically out of other offline communities and identities, their interactions in virtual space are often discussed as unique to the virtual environment in which they take place. While the information available on Aryan Liberty Net and Liberty Bell BBS is limited, it is also clear that there was little of the social and conversational dynamism present in the vibrant early cyber communities described in Driscoll's account of the "modem world." Instead, these networks appear to have been echo chambers for the leaders of the white power movement—though this was their intended purpose. Leaders such as Beam, Miller, and Miles were not interested in using computer networks to foster debate and discussion; they were interested in using these networks to more effectively disseminate propaganda, strategy, and courses of action crucial to the restructuring of the American white power movement of the 1980s.

Diving into the extant material on these two early sites and their direct continuity with Stormfront therefore provides significant nuance to our understanding of early digital cultures and white supremacists' efforts at reorganization in the 1980s. Focusing on the development of these networks—George Dietz's Liberty Bell BBS and the Aryan Nations' Aryan Liberty Net—as on par with other avenues of structural reform casts the 1980s as a period of trial and error for the white power movement. The popularity of Stormfront, which built upon the lessons learned by Dietz and the Aryan Nations, should prompt researchers of the US far right to consider digital structural reorganization, rather than just violent extremism, as among the successful adaptations to emerge from

72 The WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link) is one of the longest-running, and still active, computer network communities. Originally established in 1985 by as a bulletin board, the WELL survives today as a web community. The WELL is often discussed as a prominent early computer network and received significant journalistic and academic focus in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Susan Aasman notes this is largely due to journalists receiving free subscriptions to the bulletin board, and that "they were neither the first nor the only online community" in the 1980s. Susan Aasman, "The WELL," *The Sage Encyclopedia of the Internet*, ed. Barney Warf (SAGE, 2018), 962–64, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473960367.n282>.

that period of trial and error. When organized violence led to lethal resistance from local, state, and federal law enforcement, the white power movement produced the “lone wolf” domestic terrorist; when state and nonstate actors cracked down on the international distribution of hate materials and Klan affiliation across the United States declined, white nationalist leaders produced some of the earliest computer networks to more effectively, cheaply, and securely organize their movement.