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NEW BRAND OF RACIST ODINIST RELIGION ON THE MARCH



A racist brand of neo-Paganism, related to Odinism, spreads among white supremacists.

A neo-Pagan religion drawing on images of fiercely proud, boar-hunting Norsemen and their white-skinned Aryan womenfolk is increasingly taking root among [Skinheads](#), [neo-Nazis](#) and other white supremacists across the nation.

Asatrú leaders have opened prison ministries in at least five states recently, and their many jailed followers are heavily white supremacist. A leading proselytizer, imprisoned terrorist [David Lane](#), has been writing prolifically and influencing many to adopt his racist interpretations.

Bob Mathews, the late founder of The Order, of which Lane was a member, adopted a series of related beliefs. A Denver Skinhead who confessed to the November murder of a man because he was black bears an Asatrú tattoo. Some key Asatrú leaders have known neo-Nazi or anti-Semitic backgrounds.

"Suddenly," says Phil Rodriguez, a gang investigator with the Arizona state prison system, "Asatru's become the new big fad."

Asatru (and Icelandic word meaning "belief in the Aesir," or gods) has been officially recognized as a religion in Iceland since 1972. Historically, its architects have avoided racist interpretations of its Eurocentric cosmology.

But in the United States, where insiders say 15 percent of Asatruers follow an overtly racist version of the theology, a struggle is now going on for the hearts and minds of its followers.

Experts say the religion, an offshoot of Odinism that emphasizes the magical elements of pre-Christian European polytheism, is gaining popularity among young, urban white supremacists who reject the Christian aspects of other theologies.

"Asatru is an effort to make religion more post-Modern, hip and appealing to a generation raised on rock music," says Carl Raschke, a religion professor at the University of Denver who has studied white supremacist groups.

"It is romantic, a kind of Teutonic mythology that gives them a cultural and religious identity."

Norse Gods and the Folk

The religion, which revives a pre-Christian pantheon of Norse gods, is appealing to white supremacists because it mythologizes the virtues of early northern European whites — seen as wandering barbarians, deeply involved in a mystical relationship with nature, struggling heroically against the elements.

It sings the virtues of the tribe, or *folk*, strongly emphasizing genetic closeness. And it credits whites with building civilization and an ethic of individual responsibility, even as they boldly slew

wild boars, fought for their tribes and explored the far reaches of the known world.

This appeal is not a new one.

Odinism, which is closely related to Asatrú, was much favored in Nazi Germany. Its Nordic/Teutonic mythology was a bedrock belief for key Third Reich leaders, and it was an integral part of the initiation rites and cosmology of the elite Schutzstaffel (SS), which supervised Adolf Hitler's network of death camps. Decades later, Odinism also influenced George Lincoln Rockwell's American Nazi Party.

According to Jeffrey Kaplan, who wrote the 1997 study *Radical Religion in America*, an early international promoter was Australian Nazi sympathizer Alexander Rud Mills. Mills, in turn, deeply influenced a key American Odinist, Else Christensen, who published *The Odinist* newsletter in the early 1970s (Christensen was recently released from prison after serving a term for smuggling marijuana).

Stephen McNallen, a Texan, formed the first American Asatrú organization, the Asatrú Free Assembly. But the perception of Nazi connections hurt him.

By 1978, McNallen, while saying he sympathized with the "legitimate frustrations of white men who are concerned for their kind," tried to lessen the "Nazi-Odinist identification." In 1987, these pressures helped convince McNallen to shut down his group.

Nazism and the Number Nine

The key successor organization was the Asatrú Alliance, started after the Free Assembly's demise by Arizonan Michael J. Murray (whose "magical" Asatrú name is "Valgard Murray").

As a teenager, Kaplan writes, Murray had been involved in the American Nazi Party, signing his letters "Heil Hitler!" into the late 1960s. In the 1970s, Murray became vice president of Christensen's Odinist Fellowship.

But by 1988, a year after he started the Asatrú Alliance, Murray found himself facing the same political pressures that McNallen had earlier. When a California neo-Nazi published a list of Murray's followers, implying that they agreed with the Californian's racial views, Murray wrote him an open letter saying the Alliance "does not advocate any type of political or racial extremist views or affiliations."

Also in the 1980s, Bob Mathews, founder of The Order, studied and practiced a variant of Odinism. In 1983, nine men led by Mathews took a "blood oath" over a six-week-old girl to create The Order, which would go on to murder and rob.

The number nine was significant to Mathews, according to a book by Kevin Flynn and Gary Gerhardt, for religious reasons: Odin learned nine songs and hung for nine nights on Yggdrasill, the tree of knowledge; Heimdall, the watchman of the gods, had nine mothers; Thor stumbled nine steps before dying in his final battle.

Today, David Lane, a leading player in The Order and one of the murderers of a Jewish talk show host in Denver, writes prolifically of Odinism in a series of right-wing publications.

"The old gods and the old religion are ours and thus relate to our race-soul," he wrote in one. "Through our myths and legends, we find a link to our past, and a rudder for our floundering race vessel."

Officials say Lane is worshipped as a folk hero by other imprisoned white followers of Asatrú and Odinism.

Also in the prisons, Valgard Murray is now finding a new audience. The Asatrú Alliance's publication, *Vor Trú*, lists seven prison ministries in five states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida and Indiana.

In Arizona alone, prison investigator Rodriguez says, up to 300 inmates have become adherents, and many are violent white supremacists. The lead propagandist, he adds, is Valgard Murray.

In Colorado, six imprisoned white supremacists formed a "kindred," or local Asatrú group, between 1991 and 1996. In federal prisons, an official says, the faith has "taken off" in the last year, growing from a handful of believers to over 100.

'A Racist and Proud of It'

In the mid-1990s, McNallen formed the latest outside group, the Asatrú Folk Assembly. Kaplan writes that McNallen was worried that Asatrú "non-racialists" were making headway "with the message that anybody could be an Asatrúer." McNallen wanted to emphasize that Asatrú was biologically linked to white Europeans.

One leader of the Folk Assembly is a known neo-Nazi. Ronald ("Ragnar") Schuett, guildmaster of the assembly's Teaching Guild, is the former Colorado state organizer of the neo-Nazi SS Action Group.

"I'm a white racist and proud of it," he told a reporter while posing in a Nazi uniform in 1992. Officials say Schuett also is linked to the Rocky Mountain Hammerskins, a Skinhead group, and may have been the outside contact for imprisoned Colorado Asatrúers.

Other Asatrúers have known anti-Semitic connections as well.

For example, Mark Thomas ("Reinhold Gast") Clinton, editor of the Asatru journal *Wolf Age*, sponsored leading Holocaust denier [David Irving](#) at a 1992 gathering of the Siegfried Society in Portland, Ore. Clinton, a lawyer who once posed alongside a dead boar while holding a fearsome-looking spear, also was stopped by police in Portland in the company of two Skinhead leaders of the American Front, a neo-Nazi group. The three were reportedly handing out [Holocaust denial](#) literature.

Now, officials fear Odinism and Asatru are spreading rapidly through the white supremacist movement. Racist material related to both belief systems is hawked in *Resistance*, the leading racist rock magazine (see [Resisting Arrest](#)).

A flyer from the shadowy Erulian Brotherhood, entitled "Hail McVeigh," was emblazoned with runes, the pre-Christian letters favored by Odinists. Denver Skinhead Nathan Thill, who told reporters he murdered a black man, had a "death rune" tattoo.

Some 40 Websites are devoted to forms of Asatru (most of them nonracist). Raschke, the religion professor, says a recent biological terrorism threat in New York City may have come from Asatruers.

Raschke says the heroic tone of racist Asatru helps to bind the white supremacist movement together. "If you want to create an illegal terrorist movement in a tolerant society like ours," he concludes, "you have to create a legend, a myth."
