The Skinhead Phenomenon

right-wing crazies."

Moreover, their economic situation is crumbling further still. White males in 1984 earned 30 percent less, in constant dollars, than they did in 1973. The decline is a result of changes in the types of jobs

now available to them. Beginning in the 1970's, many higher wage manufacturing jobs were lost to the economy as corporations closed plants and relocated production overseas to take advantage of low wage third world labor. This decreased availability of manufacturing jobs mostly affects young men without extensive education, who historically have held these jobs. As the manufacturing sector narrows, young men have turned to the lower paying but expanding service sector for work, which provides few benefits and almost no opportunity for career advancements.

Not only are young men in the 1980's earning less than they did in the 1970's, but inequality among them is growing. In 1973, among men aged 20-24, high school dropouts earned three quarters of what college graduates earned, and now that fraction has dropped to two thirds. Additionally, fewer men of lower income families attend college today. These trends forecast a lower standard of living over time. Hope for the economic future among Skinheads, who often fall into these categories, is dim.

The Skins' racist behavior is an attempt to place blame for their social and economic conditions. Sally Greenberg, East Coast Civil Rights Counsel of the Anti-Defamation League, has said that the Skinheads have a "simplistic approach to complex social problems," and that they are "interested in scapegoating people for problems of community." According to Tom Metzger, "Skinheads were born in violence. They're pissed off at the system. They're fighting it everyday." He asks, "Why do [the Skinheads] feel this way? What has brought them to this position? What is wrong with this system that white kids across the country are joining up with people like me?"

Of course, many of the reasons that racist Skinheads exist are societal and economic, but that does not change the reality of the crimes that they often commit. Law enforcement agencies should vigorously prosecute them for the crimes they commit. Local and state governments should enact stricter laws that punish hate crimes.

On the other hand, the fact that Skinheads are often violent criminals who embrace a hateful ideology often prompts people to want to silence them. They don't want the Skins to express themselves verbally, in written material, or on television. We must never allow this intolerance. Skinheads or any other group must always be allowed free expression. The passionate fury of the Skinheads is partially due to their perception that they are fighting to remain alive in a society which seeks to pull them down. Oppression through silencing would create even more violence. Even worse, it would be a denial of a basic right based upon purely political and fluctuating criteria.

The Skinheads are provoked by a cycle of poverty, despair, and resulting anger and hatred. They are formally uneducated, unable to find jobs, poor, and frustrated with American society. The method they have employed to combat their situation is that of hatred and violence. While the actions of the Skinheads should be condemned, we must examine their social and economic conditions in order to understand what creates the symptom of hatred in America. Our hope for the future is to look for ways to break the cycle of poverty and social injustice that has created the Skinhead phenomenon.

Examples of propaganda distributed by various white-supremacist organizations.

More information can be found in Rolling Stone issue 540, Utne Reader May/June 1989, and from the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith.

All graphics courtesy of the Anti-Defamation League.

Election Watch: A New Beginning

By David Schenberg

Democrats scored victories in three major races on November 7, prompting many to call the day the beginning of a Democratic resurgence. Indeed, several developments favorable to the Democrats are apparent. Voters cited abortion as a major concern in both New Jersey and Virginia, where Democrats won gubernatorial contests. In New Jersey, Representative Jim Florio won a landslide victory against fellow Rep. Jim Courter. Virginia's Lieutenant Governor Doug Wilder won a slim victory over former Attorney General Marshall Coleman in an election where abortion rights was the major issue discussed. Coleman never recovered from a masterful Wilder ad which portrayed the pro-choice position as part of Virginia's Jeffersonian heritage.

The Supreme Court's decision to politicize the abortion question may have been the best thing to happen to the Democratic Party since the stock market crashed in 1929. Democrats finally find themselves on the same side of a contentious moral issue as the majority of the American public. And voters seem to be rewarding that position with their votes. Furthermore, abortion is the first issue to polarize the Reagan Republican coalition of economic conservatives and religious fundamentalists. Just as race issues destroyed the Democratic coalition in the 1960s, abortion could divide the Republicans in the 1990s. The day after elections, Republican Senator Bob Packwood warned that Republicans would suffer major losses in 1990 if they persisted in aligning with the pro-life side. 1989 election returns and exit polls show that Doug Wilder made significant inroads among traditionally Republican affluent voters in the D.C. suburbs and among Republican women. Clearly, abortion is a powerful issue on which the class of 1989 has proven Democrats can capitalize

Wilder's victory is remarkable, though, for another issue that was all but ignored by the candidates. Doug Wilder is the first Afro-American ever elected governor in the United States. A grandson of slaves, he won the governorship in the cradle of the Confederacy, a state where only 15% of the voters are black. Wilder won by running not as a black candidate but as a Democratic candidate who happens to be black. He emphasized his support for abortion rights, the need for a get-tough drug policy, and his own political experience. His moderate campaign was rewarded with 94% of the black vote and 49% of the white vote. Though this is a large gap, Wilder's percentage of the white vote is not much different from that received in the past by white Democrats. The Old Dominion has proudly become a symbol of the New South.

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If race was the "silent issue" in Virginia, media coverage made it the dominant factor in the New York mayoral election. Nevertheless, America's largest city, with a black population of 25%, elected Democrat David Dinkins the first black mayor of New York. The election was much closer (51-48%), however, than it should have been in a city where Democrats outnumber Republicans 5 to 1. Dinkins received the nearly unanimous support of black voters, but only about one-third of white votes. The numbers present a stark illustration of the city's racial polarization. In his conciliatory concession speech, Republican Rudolf Guiliani had to scream over booing supporters that they must now unite behind their new mayor.

However, Dinkins pledged throughout his campaign that he would strive to bring the city together. His victory offers evidence that there is some foundation on which to build. Dinkins's election, unlike that of other black big city mayors, occurred in a city where blacks are far from a majority of the population. By necessity he had to win a large proportion of white votes. Indeed, Dinkins did better among white voters than have most other black mayors. He won 18% of the white Catholic vote, 27% of the white Protestant vote and 35% of the Jewish vote. Liberal Jewish voters have been important players in electing black mayors throughout the U.S.; they were even more so in New York, where Jews account for 25% of all voters. Dinkins called the Jewish community "a light unto the nation" in his victory speech. Nevertheless, there was a serious drop off in Democratic voting from previous elections for all white groups, reflecting the persistence of racism in New York.

Both Dinkins and Wilder symbolize the slow but steady entrance of blacks into the mainstream of American life. In fact, they represent a new generation of black politicians. Neither Wilder nor Dinkins began his career as a civil rights activist and neither ran as a representative of the black community. Rather, each worked his way up through mainstream Democratic party organizations and up the electoral ladder, amassing the political experience necessary to run for higher office. And both ran as moderate Democrats who could represent the whole of

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