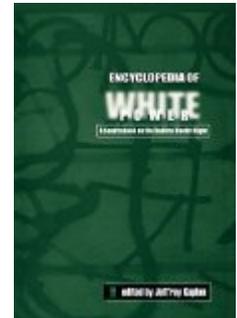


**Jeffrey Kaplan, ed.** *Encyclopedia of White Power: A Sourcebook on the Radical Racist Right*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2000. x + 585 pp. \$99.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7425-0340-3.



**Reviewed by** Stephanie Shanks-Meile

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#### Toward A Global Panorama of White Power

In *The Encyclopedia of White Power: A Sourcebook on the Radical Racist Right*, Jeffrey Kaplan has gathered an exhaustive collection of entries chronicling the international breadth of white separatist/white supremacist philosophies, organizations, and leaders. Although he contributed a considerable number of the articles, this reference has relied upon the expertise of several other researchers, historians, and sociologists. Kaplan's volume takes a different perspective than the few other encyclopedias of the far right, most of which are out of print, by focusing on white separatism in the United States and its relationship to contemporary European fascist movements. As Kaplan noted, "In recent years, there appears to have been a sea change in the world of the radical-right-wing. Heretofore, ideas and leadership had flowed from east to west, from the fascist movements of Europe to a small but enthusiastic audience of American aficionados who were drawn into the dream by shared political beliefs or by ties of ethnicity to their nations of origin." Recently, however, far right groups in the United

States have "exported" American philosophies with organizations such as the KKK, Christian Identity, and the Church of the Creator making "strong inroads into the European radical right" (p. xix).

Kaplan's orientation toward a social scientific study of the far right has required a detached or dispassionate treatment of the subject. He quoted George Santayana (1863-1952) when approaching contributors to this volume requiring the authors to "write an entry that would 'neither demonize nor proselytize, but would leave an accurate and unbiased historical record.'" Kaplan reminded himself, the contributors, and the reader to "neither laugh, nor to cry, but to understand." In keeping with that commitment, a number of essays written by white power leaders, such as Rick Cooper (the editor of the *National Socialist Vanguard*), were included in the volume allowing them to speak for themselves. After conducting interviews in field research over the years, Kaplan concluded that "each of these true believers has much of value to say, if only one were prepared to

listen" and he "wanted to give them a chance to speak."

Unlike many encyclopedias, the entries in this volume are analytical, historical, and highly detailed. While George and Wilcox's *Nazis, Communists, Klansmen, and Others on the Fringe* (Prometheus Books, 1992) was useful to give readers an idea of the breadth of the "far right," their descriptions of organizations were much more brief. While there are more general encyclopedias on race relations, such as Martin and Sullivan's, eds., *Civil Rights in the United States* (Simon and Schuster, 1999), which included a few entries on white separatism, Kaplan's volume provides a comprehensive analysis of the organizations and philosophies in the white power movement and the inter-relationships that exist between the movement's leaders and groups. A detailed listing of related keywords and mini-bibliographies follows each entry on the subject. This feature facilitates an understanding of historical changes and inter-organizational relationships and philosophies.

One of the points that Kaplan struggled with in the preface was the definition of "far-right" groups. While he acknowledged the relationship between what he termed the far-right and mainstream socio-political structures, Kaplan decided to include groups and ideologies that emphasized the primacy of race and that advocate racial revolution rather than more mainstream conservative routes to social change. He acknowledged that it is difficult to know where to draw the line, but some of the choices that he made magnify the problems of placing groups along a left-right political continuum. For example, Willis Carto is difficult to classify due to his involvement in the Populist Party, which has made numerous attempts in presidential races. In addition, Carto's recently defunct *Spotlight* has contained some favorable stories over the years on ultraconservative mainstream politicians such as Pat Buchanan, who came out of the Republican Party. Although Ka-

plan acknowledges Bellant's book *Old Nazis, The New Right, and the Republican Party* (South End Press, 1991), which chronicles the close ties between the Republican Party and fascist groups, his working assumption that racialism and a revolutionary attitude delineate "far-right" groups from the mainstream remains problematic.

There is a new and growing re-examination of the left-right political continuum and whether "non-mainstream" groups are marginalized or tied to the center. Berlet and Lyons' *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort* (Guilford Press, 2000) and Dobratz and Shanks-Meile's *"White Power, White Pride!" The White Power Movement in the United States* (Twayne Publishers, 1997; Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) questioned the usefulness of marginalizing philosophies with ideological and organizational links to the mainstream. Some research has suggested that conceptualizing these groups as "far-right" has been a convenient way to distance ourselves from the racism prevalent throughout our society. Members of "far-right" groups then become the scapegoats for all of the racism in society, which in turn lets the mainstream "off of the hook" from examining the role that mainstream institutions and actors play in the reproduction and maintenance of racism. In this view, "mainstream" social forces express racism more subtly and mask themselves behind the cloak of social class differences. Emergent White Studies literature points out the implication of the failure of the mainstream to analyze the relationship between income inequality and racism, making poor whites appear anomalous through generalized notions of white skin privilege rather than as a natural outcome of capitalist inequality. For greater clarity on this issue than a book review will allow, one should examine Wray and Newitz's edited volume *White Trash: Race and Class in America* (Routledge, 1997), which contains numerous analytical articles deconstructing the historical relationship between whiteness and capital. Kaplan does acknowledge that the delineation be-

tween the "far-right" and the mainstream becomes subjective, but it would have been useful to delve more deeply into the distinction bringing in other relevant issues from the contemporary debate over marginalization.

Kaplan's preface is a worthwhile read unto itself. He is particularly courageous in his intellectual autobiography chronicling his evolving orientation toward the study of white separatism. It was particularly helpful to this reader as many people have a difficult time understanding the dispassionate eye of social scientific research. His detached journey led him into the "terra incognita" of the religious "far-right" and he emerged with a humanistic understanding of these people who "upon closer examination, were not really monsters at all. They held political views that were repugnant, and religious views based on fantastically eccentric interpretations of sacred. But whatever their belief structure, these were not monsters. They are not the violent and hate filled people I had expected to find." Instead, Kaplan found them to be "dispirited and confused" human beings relying on biblical wars between good and evil as preached from Christian pulpits in their childhoods (p. xxxii).

This reviewer has been studying white separatism for eighteen years, conducting field research for the past nine years. Kaplan's words strike to the heart of the dilemma for the researcher. It is difficult to remain true to the ethics and process of social science discourse in order to understand the social construction of reality, as understood by America's most currently hated pariahs, while maintaining the delicate balance between a jaundiced eye and a sympathetic over-identification with the research subjects that could lead the researcher toward "going native." Although social science research on white separatism is still relatively scarce, Kaplan's commitment to a dispassionate approach to the subject is refreshing. He notes the distinction between the goals and values of watchdog organizations and

those of independent researchers. It is essential that scholarly research maintain its analytical distinction from more politically oriented groups monitoring "far-right" activity.

This reviewer would highly recommend Kaplan's encyclopedia for library reference collections. In addition, this volume would serve as a helpful compendium to students and researchers trying to deal with the breadth of philosophies and organizations in the white power movement. I am teaching a course on the Sociology of Political and Religious Movements this fall and will place a copy of this encyclopedia on reserve in the library so that students can learn more about specific organizations and leaders who are referred to in other monographs. This volume is a must for researchers in the field who certainly know the general information about certain groups but may have the need on occasion to readily access more specific information without searching through a mountain of monographs. Kaplan's volume is an accessible way to see the movement through well-organized materials that emphasize the historical, cross-cultural, philosophical, and sociological aspects toward understanding the "far right."

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