

# The Turner Legacy: The Storied Origins and Enduring Impact of White Nationalism's Deadly Bible

J. M. Berger

## Foreword by Alastair Reed (Director, 2016 - 2018)

It was very difficult to choose just one from the many papers ICCT published during my time as director. The research papers I have chosen to highlight is an early publication in ICCT's wider body of research on understanding and countering extremist propaganda. This paper examined extremist propaganda, but from different ideological spectrums—one on Islamist groups and the second on white nationalists—seeking to shine a light on the strategic logic behind the propaganda and identify the communication mechanisms employed that made the propaganda so seemingly effective. Properly understanding how extremist propaganda worked was the crucial first step in developing effective policy responses.

The first paper “Deciphering the siren call of militant Islamist propaganda: Meaning, credibility & behavioural change”, by Haroro Ingram, was published around the height of ISIS's power, when the effectiveness and impact of ISIS propaganda was starting to become a priority for policy makers. It aimed to shine a light on how ISIS and other Islamist groups' propaganda worked and offered an alternative to the view that ideology is the key to understanding and countering the appeal of militant Islamism. Drawing on studies from the behavioural and social sciences, it analysed how strategies of meaning, credibility, and behavioural change are deployed in militant Islamist propaganda

“The Turner Legacy: The Storied Origins and Enduring Impact of White Nationalism's Deadly Bible”, by J.M. Berger, sought to analyse and explain the enduring legacy of William Pierce's 1978 racist dystopian novel and why it has been so successful in inspiring violence. Pierce's novel has inspired more than 200 murders in at least 40 terrorist attacks, including the Oklahoma Bombings, the single deadliest act of domestic terrorism in the United States. As J.M. Berger explained, “The novel hollows out white nationalist ideology, creating a flexible structure that operates as a call to action for racists with widely varied beliefs, while the dystopian format serves to magnify the book's rational-choice proposition that specific types of violence are urgently necessary.”

The two papers, in their own ways, augmented our insight into and understanding of how extremist propaganda work. Between the two of them, the papers laid the foundation for many future research efforts and collaborations, as well as many additional publications on the topics by ICCT.

*Due to spatial constraints, the editors were only able to include one article. However, you can access Ingram's paper on the ICCT website. You can further read more recent work by Ingram in Vol. II.*

## Abstract

*The Turner Diaries*, the infamous racist dystopian novel by neo-Nazi William Luther Pierce, has inspired more than 200 murders since its publication in 1978, including the single deadliest act of domestic terrorism in U.S. history, the Oklahoma City bombing. The book is arguably the most important single work of white nationalist propaganda in the English language, but it is not a singular artifact. *The Turner Diaries* is part of a genre of racist dystopian propaganda dating back to the U.S. Civil War. This paper will document the books that directly and indirectly inspired *Turner* and examine the extensive violence that the novel has inspired. By comparing and contrasting *The Turner Diaries* to its less-remembered predecessors, this paper analyses the reasons for the novel's lasting impact, including its focus on rational choices over identity choices, its simplification of white nationalist ideology, its repeated calls to action, and the powerfully persuasive nature of dystopian narratives, which can be understood as a secular analogue for religious apocalyptic texts.

**Keywords:** The Turner Diaries, extremist propaganda, white nationalist ideology, dystopian narratives, violent far-right extremism

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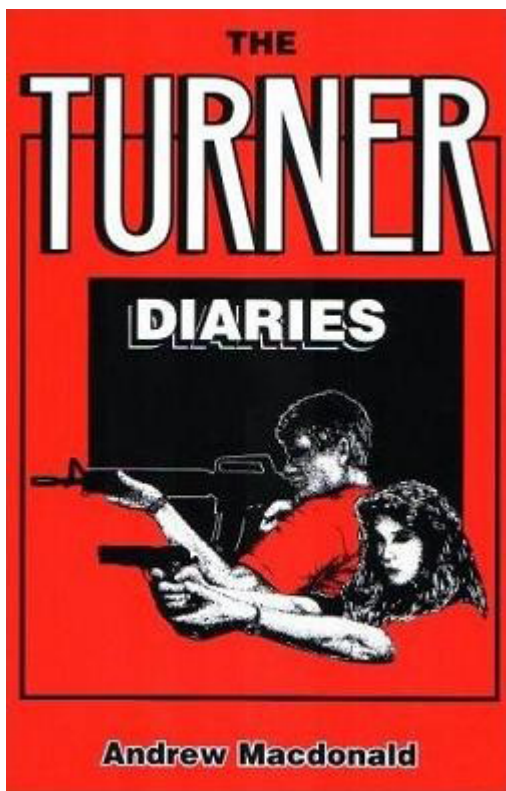


Figure 1: The Turner Diaries, original cover of 1978 collected edition

William Luther Pierce's racist 1978 novel *The Turner Diaries* has been tied to at least 200 murders in at least 40 terrorist attacks and hate crimes, starting in the 1980s and continuing through the present day. The book has established itself as one of the most influential works of violent extremist propaganda in the English language.

*The Turner Diaries* emerged from a long line of dystopian novels with far right or racist themes, starting with pro-slavery narratives prior to the Civil War. The dystopian genre often plays a significant role as propaganda shaping both radical and mainstream politics, but *The Turner Diaries* has been unusually successful at inspiring violence, due to innovations in its content. The novel hollows out white nationalist ideology, creating a flexible structure that operates as a call to action for racists with widely varied beliefs, while the dystopian format serves to magnify the book's rational-choice proposition that specific types of violence are urgently necessary.

## Introduction

Turner Diaries is the best-known racist novel written in the English language and arguably the most influential work of white nationalist propaganda since the fall of Nazi Germany. Since its publication in 1978, at least 200 people have been killed in hate crimes and terrorist attacks by people who were influenced by the book. Most notoriously, the book directly inspired the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, which killed 168 people and injured nearly 700 (see Section 4, Table 2).

The presence of *The Turner Diaries* is often noted in violent extremist cases, but its content and the context around its creation have garnered less scrutiny.

In many ways, despite its outsize impact, *The Turner Diaries* is not a unique literary artifact but rather part of a significant corpus of politically extreme or openly racist dystopian novels dating back to the 19th century. Although now mostly forgotten, these books have often been politically consequential. *The Turner Diaries* is part of this literary tradition, and it was directly inspired by at least one work from that corpus. This paper will:

1. Describe *The Turner Diaries* and its author, William Pierce.
2. Review English-language predecessors and inspirations relevant to Turner.
3. Catalogue the history of violence inspired by *The Turner Diaries*.
4. Analyse *The Turner Diaries*' ideological influence on white nationalism.
5. Compare *The Turner Diaries* to other works in the subgenre and analyse reasons for Turner's enduring impact compared to those works.
6. Briefly discuss the utility of dystopian fiction in extremist propaganda.

### April 19, 1995

As Timothy McVeigh drove away from the smouldering ruins of the Alfred E. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, on April 19, 1995, he carefully placed a white, legal-sized envelope on the front seat of his car.

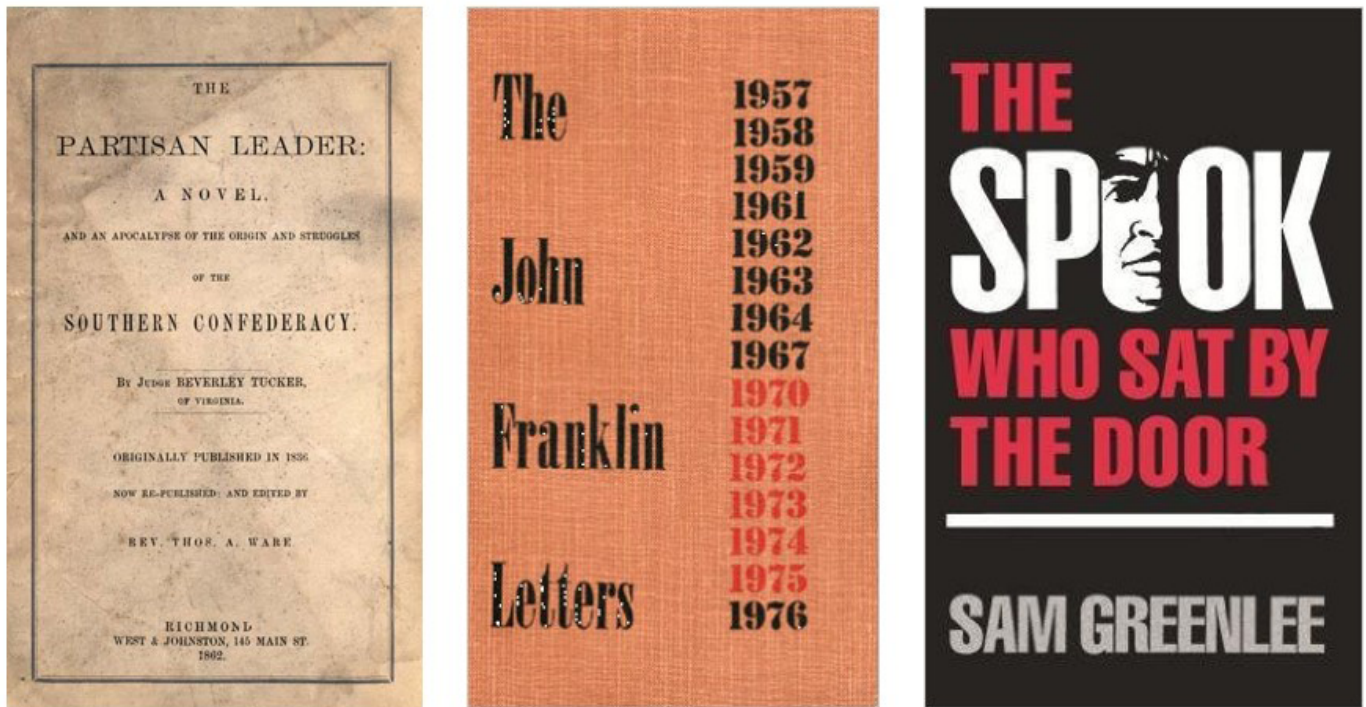


Figure 2: Covers of some of the books discussed in this paper

If anything happened to him, the envelope would ensure people knew why he had carried out the worst act of domestic terrorism in American history.

On the outside of the envelope, he had written “Obey the Constitution of the United States and we won’t shoot you”. Inside were right-wing propaganda pamphlets, and news clippings about gun control and the deadly siege in Waco, Texas, which had happened on the same date two years earlier.

There were also photocopied pages from McVeigh’s favorite book, *The Turner Diaries*.<sup>1</sup>

Little known outside of extremist circles at the time, *The Turner Diaries* is a crudely written dystopian novel about blacks and Jews confiscating guns from white Americans, and the rise of a white supremacist insurgency known as “The Order”. The novel is presented as a “found document”, the diaries of Earl Turner, one of the white supremacists who fought in this conflict, and it is framed with a foreword and afterword written by a future historian who places the diaries in context.

*The Turner Diaries* was written by William Luther

Pierce, founder of the neo-Nazi organisation the National Alliance, and published as a serial in the group’s newsletter, beginning in 1975. The chapters were revised and collected in book form in 1978.<sup>2</sup>

The events of the book begin on September 16, 1991, 25 years ago this month. The story begins after the seizure of all privately owned firearms, as an armed insurrection is launched by The Order, a terrorist cabal turned guerrilla army. The Order initially funds itself through criminal activity, seeking to spark a race war and a general uprising. The book culminates in a white nationalist takeover of the United States and global genocide against non-whites.

## The Author

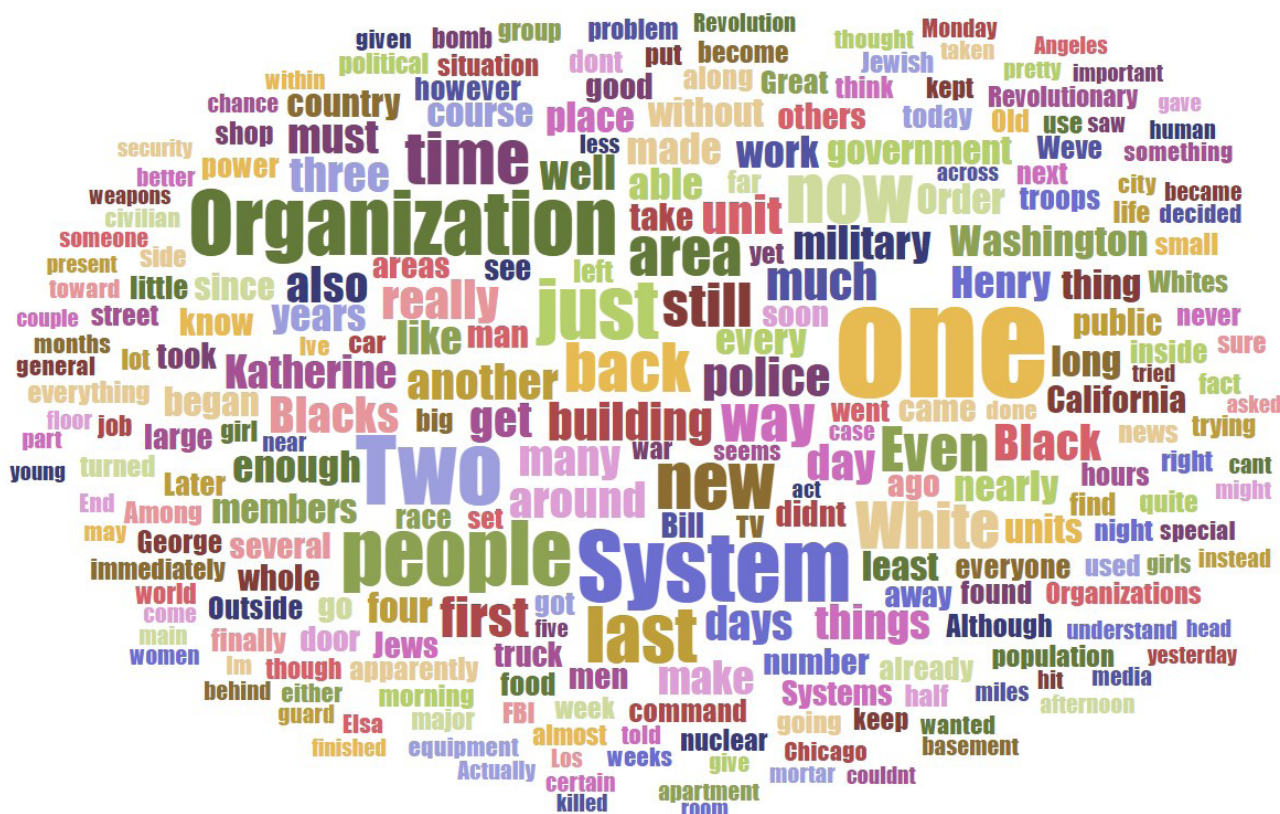
William Luther Pierce had all the makings of a science fiction writer.

Born in Atlanta, on September 11, 1933, his family moved to Texas when he was four. “I was sort of a nerdy kid without social skills”, he recalled. Awkward around girls and counting few friends, Pierce filled his childhood with adventures from the pages of *Planet Stories*, a pulp magazine

<sup>1</sup> Trial transcript, USA v. Terry Lynn Nichols, 96-CR-68, 5 November 1997.

<sup>2</sup> W.L. Pierce, *The Turner Diaries*, online edition, created December 2006 from print book, second edition published by National Vanguard, 1978.





### Figure 3: Most common terms in The Turner Diaries

that featured tales from future luminaries such as Ray Bradbury, Poul Anderson, Isaac Asimov and Philip K. Dick.<sup>3</sup> The magazine's pages were frequently devoted to lurid spectacles, with titles like "Venus Enslaved" and "Warrior-Maid of Mars", its brightly coloured covers featuring illustrations of buxom women in skintight space-age costumes.

As a teenager, Pierce's interest in science fiction gave way to an interest in science. He bought electronics kits and chemistry sets using money earned mowing lawns and traded the fanciful world of pulps for glossy *Scientific American* and *Popular Mechanics*.<sup>4</sup>

When Pierce entered college in Texas in 1951, he studied physics. On graduation, he put his knowledge to work for the government, with research stints at Los Alamos National Laboratory (home of the Manhattan Project) and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, which was focused on

the technology of space exploration.<sup>5</sup> In 1957, he married a colleague, a mathematician, and in 1960, they had twin sons.

Between his family and his demanding studies, Pierce had been living in a bubble for most of his adult life, paying little attention to the outside world. He soon returned to school to complete his doctorate at the University of Colorado in 1962, continuing on at the university as teacher for three years. After graduation, his academic demands lessened and for practically the first time, he widened his gaze beyond the realm of physics. What he saw was the burgeoning civil rights movement.

Pierce claimed he was initially sympathetic to the idea of equal rights for blacks but suspicious of government efforts that he saw as forcing integration on people who should be able to freely choose with whom they associated. He fumed at what he saw as a media bias depicting segregationists as hateful and ignorant. He

3 W.L. Pierce, "The Radicalizing of an American", *National Vanguard* magazine 61 (1978); an index of Planet Stories publications can be found here: [http://www.isfdb.org/wiki/index.php/Magazine:Planet\\_Stories](http://www.isfdb.org/wiki/index.php/Magazine:Planet_Stories).

4 Ibid.

5 Biographical details have been drawn from three sources. First, the previously cited autobiographical article, “The Radicalizing of an American”. Second, an authorised biography of Pierce, *Fame of a Dead Man’s Deeds*, self-published by R. S. Griffin, 2001. Third, a collection of FBI FOIA documents on Pierce and the National Alliance, requested by researcher Ernie Lazar and housed at New York University’s Elmer Holmes Bobst Library. <https://archive.org/details/lazarfoia>.

Rank	Term	Collocate	Count (context)
1	new	york	22
2	organization	members	18
3	white	population	12
4	new	recruits	10
5	new	members	9
6	white	areas	9
7	organization	work	8
8	white	people	8
9	white	girl	8
10	area	units	8
11	just	outside	7
12	new	people	7
13	new	organization	7
14	organization	time	6
15	organization	member	6
16	organization	just	6
17	just	new	6
18	just	finished	6
19	new	just	6
20	new	era	6
21	new	city	6
22	time	organization	6

**Table 1: Two-word phrases occurring in *The Turner Diaries***

claimed he heard whispers among some of his academic colleagues that the bias was being driven by “Jews”, a premise that piqued his interest.

The more he considered racial matters, the uglier his perspective became. On more than one occasion, Pierce recounted the story of a white academic colleague who had married a woman of mixed race, disparagingly describing their children as “awful looking” and wondering how their father could possibly love them. The question nagged at him persistently, and his thoughts about segregation soon grew militant.<sup>6</sup>

By his own admission, Pierce was prone to taking his thoughts to extreme and simplistic conclusions. “I realize that I have a turn of mind that leads me to exaggerate and oversimplify

things for the sake of better understanding, and I know there are dangers in that”, he told his biographer, when reflecting on his radicalisation. “But I think that tendency in me helps me get to the essence of things”.<sup>7</sup>

One of his coworkers put it similarly, when asked by the FBI about this period in Pierce’s life: “He was looking for a simple solution to the problems of the world”.<sup>8</sup>

In 1963, Pierce saw a television clip showing protestors at a speech by George Lincoln Rockwell, founder of the American Nazi Party (ANP). The ANP was a small neo-Nazi organisation that put a high priority on publicity and propaganda, publishing newsletters and parading around in public wearing full Nazi regalia.

<sup>6</sup> R. Griffin, *Fame of a Dead Man’s Deeds* (2001), p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, and W.L. Pierce, “The Radicalizing of an American” (1978).

<sup>8</sup> E. Lazar, FOIA documents.

“You can do nothing until you’ve reached the masses”, Rockwell explained in an interview. “In order to reach them without money, without status, without a public platform, you have to become a dramatic figure”.<sup>9</sup>

Intrigued, Pierce wrote a letter to Rockwell, and they struck up a correspondence. In 1965, Pierce moved from academia to work with a defence contractor in Connecticut, and he began driving on weekends to the Washington, D.C. area, where Rockwell was based. He also spent time at the Yale University library, reading alarmist books about racial trends, many dating back to the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>10</sup>

As his relationship with Rockwell was blooming, Pierce was granted a “secret” government clearance through his job, although he never worked on a classified project. He rarely displayed his racism to coworkers. When the FBI opened an investigation of Rockwell’s American Nazi Party, agents spoke to his former colleagues. Many found him distant and “impenetrable” and “expressed their intense dislike of him as a person”. Nevertheless, they conceded, he was a “first-class physicist”.<sup>11</sup>

But after a few months, his work began to deteriorate. Pierce quit abruptly, after less than a year. He explained to his supervisor that he wanted to be a writer and that he had been writing six hours a night for months. Going forward, the vehicle for his ambition would be a self-published journal, edited and written by Pierce, in collaboration with Rockwell.<sup>12</sup>

Rockwell was assassinated in 1967, by a member of his own group, and Pierce became a top leader of the ANP, which had been renamed the National Socialist White People’s Party. A series of organisational affiliations followed. Pierce was in the thick of the rapidly evolving white nationalist scene, not just as a writer, but as an organiser and thought leader. The FBI’s file on Pierce would eventually stretch into

hundreds of pages, but he was never charged with a crime.

After falling out with Rockwell’s successors over the prolific display of Nazi branding, which Pierce felt was counterproductive to recruitment, the former physicist founded his own group, the National Alliance, in 1974. At the beginning of 1975, in an effort to boost circulation of the National Alliance’s racist newspaper *Attack!*, Pierce launched the first chapter of a serialised “future history” novel entitled *The Turner Diaries*, perhaps harkening back to the pulp magazines of his youth.

Pierce would lead the National Alliance until his death in 2002, producing hours of audio recordings and overseeing the production of thousands of pages of white nationalist publications over the course of decades.<sup>13</sup> But for all his busy years of frenetic activism, *The Turner Diaries* would be Pierce’s primary legacy, inspiring the worst act of domestic terrorism in the history of the United States and prompting dozens of others to act out steps from its violent programme of racial genocide.

## The Book

Beginning in January 1975, *Attack!* published one chapter of *The Turner Diaries* per issue for about three and a half years, under the pseudonym Andrew Macdonald.

The book is framed by a foreword and afterword written by a future historian, looking back on “the Great Revolution” as chronicled in the recently discovered diaries of a key figure, Earl Turner. As is common in such “found document” narratives, the future historian praises the authenticity of the source. The main story was originally set in the 1980s, but Pierce revised it to the 1990s when the serialised work was collected as a book in 1978.<sup>14</sup>

The diaries begin 12 years before the founding of the “New Era” brought on by the “Great

9 R. Griffin, *Fame of a Dead Man’s Deeds* (2001), p. 98.

10 Ibid., p. 99.

11 E. Lazar, FOIA documents.

12 Ibid.

13 Anti-Defamation League, “Extremism in America: William Pierce”. Undated, updated July 2002, [http://archive.adl.org/learn/ext\\_us/pierce.html?LEARN\\_Cat=Extremism&LEARN\\_SubCat=Extremism\\_in\\_America&xpicked=2&item=wp](http://archive.adl.org/learn/ext_us/pierce.html?LEARN_Cat=Extremism&LEARN_SubCat=Extremism_in_America&xpicked=2&item=wp).

14 National Alliance, *Action: Internal Bulletin of the National Youth Alliance*. No. 39 (February 1975).

Revolution". The preface is almost completely vague as to the nature of the New Era, save to note that the Revolution "saved our race in its time of greatest peril".<sup>15</sup>

Earl Turner describes an America in which private gun ownership has been banned and the guns of most Americans confiscated by the government, using deputised "Negroes" armed with baseball bats and kitchen knives. The raids are targeted based on previously implemented mandatory gun registration records. The system is overwhelmed by the number of gun owners arrested, and most of those swept up in the first raids are released after a few days.<sup>16</sup>

Turner explains that the government is controlled by a Jewish conspiracy, with blacks and other minorities in subordinate positions of power, abetted by white liberals and people of mixed race. As the story progresses, the government and paragovernmental minority organisations – referred to collectively as The System – introduce increasingly repressive measures to suppress dissent and uprisings, while America's economy and infrastructure collapses under pressure from a white nationalist insurgency.

The System implements a series of laws sure to sound absurd to anyone not seized by white racial paranoia – ranging from preferential tax breaks for mixed-race couples to the repeal of rape laws (on the basis that they were an affront to race and gender equality). The narrator takes pains to describe the increasingly sordid consequences of these developments, all attuned to white racial fears. Life becomes "uglier and uglier these days", Turner's diary states, "more and more Jewish".<sup>17</sup>

Immediately after the gun confiscation, a surge of terrorism erupts, carried out by members of "The Organization", a nebulous group to which Turner belongs. The first wave of resistance is swiftly crushed. Turner complains bitterly about the quality of most of The Organization's recruits, who choose not to act due to a

combination of cowardice, complacency and corruption. Some of Turner's most vituperative condemnation is reserved for "conservatives" who lack the will to stand up for their values – the "talkers" who do not act.

After the initial attacks fail to produce a popular revolution, The Organization steps up its rhetoric and planning, seeking to purge "the fainthearts and hobbyists – 'the talkers.'" The Organization infiltrates the police and the government, with the bulk of its members organising in semi-autonomous cells, including "underground" units made up of people who are already known to the authorities as subversive, and "legal" units consisting of people whose affiliation to the group remains secret.<sup>18</sup>

Turner walks readers through his cell's preparations, step by step, and often in very specific detail, from how to store and conceal weapons caches to secure communications to the construction of bombs. The book falls only a little short of being a "how to" manual for terrorism and insurgency.

The Organization begins assassinating law enforcement officials and politicians, using everything from shotguns to axes. At the start, the Organization targets mostly non-whites in positions of power, but it soon turns its attention to white collaborators. Based in the Washington, D.C., area, Turner's cell initially funds itself through robberies, aided by elaborate disguises, and later through counterfeiting operations, which have a dual-purpose of raising funds and damaging the System's economy – a tactic that would later be emulated by real-world readers of *The Turner Diaries*.<sup>19</sup>

The cell's first major operation is the bombing of FBI headquarters, an act directed by the Organization's Revolutionary Command. The construction of the explosive device is described in painstaking detail, an improvised truck bomb powered by 4,400 pounds of ammonium nitrate, a volatile substance used as

<sup>15</sup> W.L. Pierce, *The Turner Diaries*. Online edition (PDF). Forward.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapters 4, 15.



a commercial fertiliser. Combined with fuel oil and a high-energy detonator, it forms a powerful explosive. The bomb described is very similar in size and design to the improvised explosive used by Timothy McVeigh in Oklahoma City, although McVeigh made changes to increase the explosive yield of his device.<sup>20</sup>

The explosion kills more than 700 people, including many whites, which Turner justifies by the extremity of the political problem and peril to the existence of the white race. The Organization subsequently bombs a Washington TV transmitter and the printing presses of the Washington Post, seen as a liberal ally of The System, then assassinates the Post's editorial page editor. Turner and his fellow cell members continue on a spree of bombings and mortar attacks targeting the media and federal government buildings. Turner reflects that these activities hurt The System but do not help The Organization win the hearts and minds of other white Americans.<sup>21</sup>

The Organization fires mortars on a crowd gathered to hear a presidential address against the "racist, terrorist" killing spree and shoots down an Israel-bound airliner full of "mostly Jews". This, in turn, leads to more and more crackdowns, even as the Organization's activities inspire imitators from unconnected groups.

"Every nut with an ax to grind seems to have gotten into the act", Turner notes.<sup>22</sup>

Turner is eventually inducted into the inner sanctum of The Organization. After being vetted, he is given a book to read. Its contents are described in only the vaguest and most mystical terms, but its effects are clear:

For the first time I understand the deepest meaning of what we are doing. I understand now why we cannot fail, no matter what we must do to win and no matter how many of

us must perish in doing it. Everything that has been and everything that is yet to be depend on us. We are truly the instruments of God in the fulfillment of His Grand Design.<sup>23</sup>

Based on the overwhelming persuasiveness of this otherwise undescribed text, Turner is "born again" with a new fervour for the movement and is invited to join an organisation within the Organization. In a cult-like ceremony, he is inducted into "The Order", a secretive cabal that controls The Organization.<sup>24</sup>

As a consequence of his new status, Turner is given a poison pill and instructed to commit suicide rather than be captured by the government. But when his cell is raided by the System, he is apprehended and tortured extensively by black and Jewish captors, as described in graphic detail. After confessing everything he knows, except for the existence of The Order and the contents of the mystery book, Turner is thrown into solitary confinement.

In solitary, "it was nice not to have to worry about Blacks", he notes.<sup>25</sup>

While Turner is in prison, The Organization shifts its focus to economic targets, including terrorist bombings in Houston that kill more than 4,000 people, moving on to telephone exchanges and nuclear power plants.

After more than a year passes, his compatriots break him out of prison, but Turner faces an internal tribunal for breaking his oath to die before capture. He is sentenced to carry out a suicide mission on behalf of The Order at some point in the future. Turner is relocated to the West Coast, where he helps The Organization seize a significant amount of territory in California, including an Air Force base equipped with nuclear weapons.<sup>26</sup>

The Organization ethnically cleanses the area under its control, killing or relocating all nonwhites and people it suspects might be

20 Trial transcript, USA v. Timothy James McVeigh, No. 96-CR-68, 1 May 1997.

21 W.L. Pierce, *The Turner Diaries*. Online edition (PDF). Chapters 5, 7, 27.

22 Ibid., Chapter 12.

23 Ibid., Chapter 10.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., Chapter 15.

26 Ibid., Chapter 21.

of mixed parentage. Turner details what The Organization finds when it takes control of nonwhite areas, including cannibalism and a host of other graphic atrocities.

“But even the tiny beginning we have already made fills me with joy and pride. What a miracle it is to walk streets which only a few weeks ago were filled with non-Whites lounging at every street corner and in every doorway and to see only White faces -- clean, happy, enthusiastic White faces, determined and hopeful for the future!” Turner writes, in one of his tamer reflections.<sup>27</sup>

All this culminates in what Turner calls the Day of the Rope, in which white “race traitors” are summarily lynched, including “the politicians, the lawyers, the businessmen, the TV newscasters, the newspaper reporters and editors, the judges, the teachers, the school officials, the ‘civic leaders,’ the bureaucrats, the preachers”, actors and musicians, and anyone else who cooperated with the system, as well as anyone who took part in an interracial sexual relationship. After a wave of public executions by The Organization, private citizens rise up in mobs to kill still more blacks and Jews who escaped the initial purge.

“I am sure that, without the forceful lesson of this Day of the Rope, we would not have so quickly elicited this sort of citizen cooperation”, Turner writes. “The hangings have helped everyone get off the fence in a hurry”.<sup>28</sup>

The Organization smuggles nuclear missiles out of California before the System can launch a counterstrike and detonates several in New York City. It launches the rest of its missiles from the air base at both Israel and the Soviet Union, forcing the U.S. government to launch full-scale strikes on the Soviets to pre-empt retaliation. The Soviets respond by wiping out Baltimore and Detroit, while the U.S. government nukes The Organization in Los Angeles.<sup>29</sup>

In the chaos, other Organization members seize territory and create an all-white armed

enclave in Maryland, but its gains are tenuous and the war remains stalemated. To shift the balance of power, the secretive leaders of The Order assign Turner to a suicide mission to crash a plane carrying a nuclear weapon into the Pentagon, in completion of his sentence for oath-breaking.<sup>30</sup>

The diary comes to an end. The future historian’s epilogue notes that Turner’s attack succeeded, turning the momentum of the insurgency toward The Organization. In 1999, six gruesome years after the diary ends, The Organization takes control of the United States, and by the dawn of 2000, the world, although it takes The Organization some additional time to exterminate all non-whites on the planet.

In the epilogue, the future historian notes that the turning point came in 1999, after Turner’s death and “110 years after the birth of the Great One”, an oblique reference to Adolf Hitler and a signal about the ultimate nature of the New Era.<sup>31</sup>

## Key Themes

While *The Turner Diaries* is fundamentally a novel, written in a very crude and simplistic style, it is also a highly efficient work of propaganda, including an array of elements and techniques designed to maximise its impact on readers. These include:

- Call to action
- Emphasis on authenticity
- The objectives of terrorism
- Practical guidance

## Call to Action

Perhaps the primary theme of *The Turner Diaries* is the urgency of action. Earl Turner articulates a litany of missed opportunities that precede the book’s apocalyptic events, explicitly stating that earlier action would have produced a better outcome:

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Chapter 22.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Chapter 23.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Chapter 26.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., Chapter 28.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., Epilog.

We have allowed a diabolically clever, alien minority to put chains on our souls and our minds. These spiritual chains are a truer mark of slavery than the iron chains which are yet to come.

Why didn't we rebel 35 years ago, when they took our schools away from us and began converting them into racially mixed jungles?

Why didn't we throw them all out of the country 50 years ago, instead of letting them use us as cannon fodder in their war to subjugate Europe?

More to the point, why didn't we rise up three years ago, when they started taking our guns away? Why didn't we rise up in righteous fury and drag these arrogant aliens into the streets and cut their throats then? Why didn't we roast them over bonfires at every street-corner in America? Why didn't we make a final end to this obnoxious and eternally pushy clan, this pestilence from the sewers of the East, instead of meekly allowing ourselves to be disarmed?

Some of the book's harshest criticisms are aimed at those who share The Organization's white racial identity but fail to act:

We had hoped that when we set the example of resisting the System's tyranny, others would resist too. We had hoped that by making dramatic strikes against top System personalities and important System facilities, we would inspire Americans everywhere to initiate similar actions of their own. But, for the most part, the bastards just sat on their asses. [...]

Of all the segments of the population from which we had hoped to draw new members, the "conservatives" and "right wingers" have been the biggest disappointment. They are the world's worst conspiracy-mongers—and also the world's greatest cowards. [...]

Woe betide any whining conservative, "responsible" or otherwise, who gets in the way of our revolution when I am around! I will listen to no more excuses from these self-serving collaborators but will simply reach for my pistol.

As discussed in greater detail in Section 5, "Why Turner", *The Turner Diaries* does not attempt to

persuade readers that they should be racists. Rather, it assumes readers have already made an identity choice (broadly defined as "white"). Instead, it seeks to persuade readers that imminent violent action is a rational choice. The overriding message of the book, accentuated to some extent by the urgency embedded in a dystopian-apocalyptic storyline, is that the hour for action is now. As discussed in detail below, this call to action has been answered repeatedly, at the cost of many lives.

## Emphasis on Authenticity

As other authors (discussed in more detail below) discovered, the epistolary format of *The Turner Diaries* offers several advantages to propagandists. Epistolary novels present a narrative in the form of "found documents" such as letters, diaries or news reports. The format offers a number of advantages to propagandists.

Epistolary fiction adopts the voice of a protagonist. Readers can attribute awkward or crude language to the narrator rather than the author, and the lack of polish can even enhance the feeling of authenticity. The format also allows for looser plotting, as the narrator is not required to be omniscient.

The format is also more natural for political commentary compared to other formats, such as Socratic dialogue (in which views are expounded by characters having conversations). In a diary or a letter, the protagonist can express opinions directly to readers, without contrivance and without breaking the flow of the narrative.

Framing mechanisms, such as forewords and afterwords, also magnify the impact of epistolary works, particularly dystopian narratives that describe wars or unrest. In *The Turner Diaries*, and in some of the works that preceded it, a "future historian" can put a grim narrative in context by explaining that the dark times depicted in the primary story ultimately produce a utopian outcome, without having to provide potentially implausible details that might detract from the authenticity.

## The Objectives of Terrorism

*The Turner Diaries* contains several astute insights into the mechanics and effects of terrorism. For instance, Turner discusses how The System helps The Organization by overreacting to its terrorist threat – instituting emergency powers and doubling down on the provocations that started the conflict in the first place.

Turner also holds forth on the idea of terrorism as the “propaganda of the deed”, a concept that originated with anarchists in the early days of modern terrorism and is still relevant in the current age of jihadist terrorism. Terrorism is not just about blowing things up, the book explains, it’s about setting an example for others.

Another passage was highlighted in the photocopies that Timothy McVeigh carried with him on the day of the Oklahoma City bombing, taken from Earl Turner’s diary entry after the cell carries out a critical mortar attack on Washington, D.C.:

The real value of our attacks today lies in the psychological impact, not in the immediate casualties. More important, though, is what we taught the politicians and the bureaucrats. They learned this afternoon that not one of them is beyond our reach. They can huddle behind barbed wire and tanks in the city, and they can hide behind the concrete walls of their country estates, but we can still find them and kill them.<sup>32</sup>

Turner also repeatedly discusses the importance of strategic action, a message that appears to have resonated less with its violent readers. After an initial attack on the Washington Post yields only a minimal result, Turner writes:

We have resolved that, in the future, we will undertake no mission on our own initiative until we have carefully evaluated its objective and convinced ourselves that it is worth the risk. We cannot afford to strike the System simply

for the sake of striking, or we will become like an army of gnats trying to bite an elephant to death. Each blow must be carefully calculated for its effect.<sup>33</sup>

As the story progresses, each attack is discussed not just for its body count or operational details, but for its desired strategic effect. For instance, terrorist attacks that cause economic damage are prioritised, because the audience The Organization wishes to radicalise will not respond unless they are made uncomfortable.

“What is really precious to the average American is not his freedom or his honor or the future of his race, but his pay check. He complained when the System began busing his kids to Black schools 20 years ago, but he was allowed to keep his station wagon and his fiberglass speedboat, so he didn’t fight”, Turner writes.<sup>34</sup>

## Practical Guidance

Finally, *The Turner Diaries* is meant to serve as a practical guide to carrying out a terrorist insurgency. In this respect, *Turner* follows the template of previous works, discussed in the following section, which were written with the same objective and which directly inspired Pierce’s writing.

Most memorably, the book provided detailed guidance on building a truck bomb very similar to the device detonated in Oklahoma City in 1995.<sup>35</sup>

Additionally, the book outlines a plan of action, including an initial phase of criminal activity to finance the cause, which several readers of the book have specifically emulated (detailed in Section 4, “A Legacy of Violence”, page 24). It also offers advice on storing and stockpiling weapons, lessons on how to structure a covert organisation and conduct secure communications, and instructions on target selection.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Chapter 9.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Chapter 7.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Chapter 14.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., Chapter 5.



## The Turner Lineage

*The Turner Diaries* is an example of the dystopian fiction genre, stories and novels which are overtly concerned with the corruption and/or collapse of human society at some point in the foreseeable future. The genre emerged in response to the concept of “utopia”, a mythical perfect society, as articulated by Sir Thomas More in the 1516 novel of the same name.<sup>36</sup> Dystopia is the word for the opposite of utopia, describing a society that is profoundly broken.

Dystopian novels began to emerge as a literary force in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and today the concept ranks among the most popular literary genres. In its earliest incarnations and repeatedly through the history of the genre, dystopian stories and novels have served as propaganda tools, often at the service of radical or extremist causes. Racism is a recurrent theme in the history of the dystopian genre, with dozens of racially charged dystopian works published before and after the writing of *The Turner Diaries*.<sup>37</sup>

The earliest popular dystopian novels aimed to defend the institution of slavery in the United States and promote the idea of secession from the Union. *The Turner Diaries*’ dystopian family tree stretches back to these first rumblings of the American Civil War.

The section that follows will briefly describe several works that influenced the development of *Turner*, whether directly (works likely read by Pierce) or indirectly (works that inspired works read by Pierce). The conclusion of the paper will consider the critical components responsible for *Turner*’s influence as an evolution and advancement of the narratives, themes and techniques used in earlier works.

## The Fire Eaters

The modern dystopian genre first flowered as a response to the seething tensions of the American abolitionist movement in the mid-1800s. As conflict brewed between Northern and Southern states over the issue of slavery, a public debate erupted, including dueling pamphlets, newspaper opinion articles and books. Much of this material was ephemeral, and some has been lost to time. While it is not possible to create a comprehensive record, several major works have survived.

Novels presented a compelling format for both sides of the slavery debate to explore issues in a powerful and emotional way. The most famous example, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 anti-slavery tale *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, was the best-selling novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is credited with playing an important role in pushing abolition to the forefront of American cultural debate in the run-up to the Civil War.<sup>38</sup> The novel inspired direct responses casting slavery in a positive light, such as *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin* and *Life at the South; or, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” As It Is*.<sup>39</sup>

But even before the success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, pro-slavery authors turned to the relatively new genre of dystopian fiction – imagining a future world where white racial supremacy was replaced with the horrors of racial equality, race-mixing and civil war.

In 1835, an obscure author named Jerome B. Holgate wrote a remarkably vituperative book called *A Sojourn in the City of Amalgamation*, under the pseudonym “Oliver Bolokitten”, the earliest example I could find of a racist dystopia and ranks as one of the very first examples of the modern dystopian genre more broadly. The book imagines a 20<sup>th</sup> century society in which miscegenation is not only accepted but enforced as a solution to racial inequality. The book focuses on the physical horrors of race-mixing, including lengthy and lurid descriptions of the revulsion that future

36 T. More, *Utopia*. 1516, <http://theopenutopia.org/full-text/introduction-open-utopia/>.

37 Some of the most significant examples include *The Red Napoleon* (1929), *Sown in Darkness AD 2000* (1941), *The Camp of the Saints* (1973), and numerous novels published by white nationalist Harold Covington starting in the 1980s.

38 W. Kaufman, *The Civil War in American Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 18-20; “Slave narratives and Uncle Tom’s Cabin”, *Africans in America*. PBS.org. Undated, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2958.html>.

39 Ibid.; J.R. Tandy, “Pro-Slavery Propaganda in American Fiction of the Fifties”, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1922), p. 41.

whites must suppress in order to breed with grotesquely caricatured blacks.<sup>40</sup>

One year later, *The Partisan Leader; A Tale of The Future* presented a more political take on tensions between North and South. The book's author, Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, was known as one of the "Fire-Eaters", a group of fanatical pro-slavery extremists who had long lobbied in favor of secession.<sup>41</sup> As a literary figure, Tucker famously mentored Edgar Allen Poe.<sup>42</sup> As a politician, he wrote extensively on secession. Eric H. Walther, writing in *The Fire Eaters*, explained Tucker's role as one of several important secessionist propagandists who "indoctrinated people with arguments for state sovereignty, issued warnings about hostile sectional majorities, and argued for the necessity of perpetuating and protecting slavery".<sup>43</sup>

Set 13 years in the future, *The Partisan Leader* follows the battles of an underground guerrilla movement formed in Virginia to fight the tyrannical four-term President Martin Van Buren, who has spearheaded a Northern conspiracy to "subdue the spirit" of the South. The fictional Van Buren bears comically little resemblance to his real world counterpart, who was elected in 1836 and soundly defeated after a single term. The deep Southern states secede and form a Confederacy, while Virginia struggles to throw off the federal yoke through a guerrilla war waged by irregular militias.

In the North, the book was republished in 1861 with a new title page, adding the phrase "A Key to the Disunion Conspiracy", and "Secretly Printed in Washington (in the year 1836) ... but afterwards suppressed". It was touted as proof the Southern states had been planning secession for almost 30 years. The *New York Times* noted its republication, calling it a

"curious book, prophetic of the whole secession movement", and "a work of very great interest at the present moment". In the South, the book was retitled to suggest it contained literal prophecy -- *The Partisan Leader: A Novel, and an Apocalypse of the Origin and Struggles of the Southern Confederacy*.<sup>44</sup>

In 1859, popular adventure writer John Beauchamp published a 502-page novel called *Wild Southern Scenes: A Tale of Disunion! And Border War!* A pop-culture confection despite its dark social undertones of support for slavery and a notable streak of anti-Semitism, the story gets the imminent Civil War almost perfectly wrong, tracing the exploits and romances of Southern families against the backdrop of a Northern secessionist rebellion, while a Southern president struggles to keep the Union together.<sup>45</sup>

One of that book's most influential readers was Virginia plantation owner Edmund Ruffin, another a member of the Fire-Eaters.<sup>46</sup> Ruffin was so committed to the Southern cause that when the war broke out, he enlisted as a Confederate soldier, despite being over 60 years old. He committed suicide in 1865, according to contemporary news accounts, having "declared it impossible for him to live under the [Union] government". His obituary credited him with firing the literal first shot of the Civil War at Fort Sumter, "an act of which he always spoke with pride and exultation".<sup>47</sup>

"Finished reading 'Wild Scenes of the South,' a very foolish book which I regret having bought or spent time in reading", Ruffin wrote in 1860. But the concept appealed to him. "The idea might be carried out to good purpose", he added. Ruffin had also read *The Partisan Leader*. He took to his writing desk, and composed his own dystopian propaganda

40 O. Bolokitten, "Jerome B. Holgate", *A Sojourn in the City of Amalgamation*, in the Year of Our Lord 19 (1835).

41 Although secession was a complex issue that went beyond slavery and white supremacy, racial issues were key to the politics of the day as well as to white nationalists of later generations.

42 E. H. Walther, *The Fire-Eaters* (LSU Press, 1992), pp. 30-47; N. B. Tucker, *The Partisan Leader* (New York: 1836; Reprinted by Rudd & Carleton, 1861).

43 E. H. Walther, *The Fire-Eaters*, p. 10.

44 "The Partisan Leader," *New York Times*, May 18, 1861. N. B. Tucker, *The Partisan Leader: A novel, and an apocalypse of the origin and struggles of the Southern Confederacy* (West & Johnston, 1862).

45 J.B. Jones, *Wild Southern Scenes A Tale of Disunion and Border War* (T.B. Peterson and Bros: Philadelphia, 1859).

46 E. H. Walther, *The Fire-Eaters*, Chapter Seven.

47 "THE SUICIDE OF RUFFIN.; The Man who Fired the First Gun on Fort Sumter Blows His Brains Out He Prefers Death to Living Under the Government of the United States," *The New York Times*, 22 June 1865.

epic, *Anticipations of the Future*, published in 1860.<sup>48</sup>

*Anticipations* opens four years from its present-day, 1864, and continues through 1870, tracing a fictional path for real-life political figures. In the book, William Seward, the former governor of New York and a committed abolitionist, defeats Abraham Lincoln in his bid for re-election, ushering in a war of the states.

Ruffin fuses political complaints about overweening federal government power with arguments in favor of white racial supremacy. The narrative describes the legalisation of black citizenship and the appointment of African-Americans to government offices starting in 1866. As war erupts, a Northern army contingent made up largely of black soldiers crosses into Kentucky. Most white families flee its advance, but those who cannot, suffer a bloody fate, foreshadowing some of *Turner's* more lurid passages.

“The consequences were too horrible to be described in detail”, Ruffin wrote, leaving details to the fervid imagination of his readers. “All the men, women and children so captured were butchered — after the infliction of still greater horrors”. Later, he specifies that the army’s crimes included “acts of murder, rape, or arson”. The advance fails because many of the black soldiers are escaped slaves who enlisted only so that they could defect and return to their masters.

As the tide of the war continues to turn against the North, unrest breaks out in New York, Philadelphia and Boston, with widespread, alcohol-fueled outbreaks of looting and murder among the poorest whites, then eventually both blacks and whites. By the end, New York is burned to the ground (another plot point that would be echoed in *Turner*), and the other cities ravaged.

*Anticipations* is not a traditional novel, entirely forgoing the “foolish” melodrama of *Wild Southern Scenes* that Ruffin disdained.

Presented as a series of dispatches from a British resident of the United States to the *Times of London*, the book is essentially a series of future newspaper stories summarising the course of an imagined Civil War, without a protagonist or any individual drama whatsoever. Among the striking similarities between *Anticipations* and *Turner* is their shared epistolary format.

## The Iron Heel

*The Iron Heel* is a 1907 dystopian novel by Jack London, the author best known for *The Call of the Wild*, in which the United States is corrupted by a fascist Oligarchy, in response to which a socialist resistance movement emerges. The book is frequently mentioned as a possible inspiration for *The Turner Diaries*, due to similarities in plot and structure.<sup>49</sup> London was deeply involved with socialist parties in the United States, and he published several propaganda works in support of his beliefs.<sup>50</sup>

In *The Iron Heel*, London depicts the rise of a fascistic capitalist dictatorship known as The Oligarchy and the seeds of its ultimate defeat, a revolution that eventually ushers in an age of socialist utopia. Like *Turner*, *The Iron Heel* opens with a future historian describing the rediscovery of the book’s main contents, “The Everhard Manuscript”, about 700 years after the early 20<sup>th</sup> century events depicted.

The main body of London’s book is set in the not-too-distant future, starting in 1912 and running through 1932. The similar plot and nearly identical framing mechanism have led many to speculate that *The Iron Heel* directly inspired *The Turner Diaries*.

Where the language of *Turner* is sparse and crude, *The Iron Heel* is a floridly overwritten seminar in remedial socialist doctrine, delivered via the Socratic Method in a seemingly endless series of arguments among the characters. Although the plot follows the collapse of democracy in the United States, the rise of a

48 I. Binnington, *Confederate Visions: Nationalism, Symbolism, and the Imagined South in the Civil War* (University of Virginia Press: 2013); E. Ruffin, *Anticipations of the Future* (Richmond: J.W. Randolph, 1860).

49 “Did Dr. William Pierce ‘Plagiarise’ The Turner Diaries?” Online forum Church of Creativity, <http://creativityalliance.com/forum/index.php/topic,3898.0.html?PHPSESSID=3-fauAPOjNTytKwQ6ueD,3>.

50 A. Kershaw, *Jack London: A Life* (Macmillan, 1999), pp. 45, 159, 271.

brutal dictatorship, and the socialists' doomed first revolt against the system, these events are mostly depicted in lengthy conversations among the story's characters. As the framing text explains, it would take hundreds of years more to finally overthrow the Oligarchy. Mercifully, London did not feel obliged to recount all of them.

Some socialists – then and now – took issue with the idea that *The Iron Heel* is fairly characterised as a pro-socialist work, given the generally pessimistic tone of the book and London's racial politics (he once wrote a dystopian story celebrating an American racial genocide carried out against Asians).<sup>51</sup> Although left-wing in orientation, *The Iron Heel's* protagonist, Ernest Everhard, is described as a “superman, a blond beast such as Nietzsche had described”. As the dystopia unfolds, Asian countries embark on racial-nationalist wars, with Japan “aiding the yellow and brown races against the white”.

## The John Franklin Letters

In his authorised biography, Pierce pointed to a specific inspiration for *The Turner Diaries*: a 1959 novel called *The John Franklin Letters*, by an anonymous author.<sup>52</sup>

Set mostly in the 1970s, *The John Franklin Letters* is again framed with a preface written by a future historian. The main document is made up of letters from the title character to his elderly uncle.<sup>53</sup>

Unabashedly right-wing in orientation, *Franklin* depicts a United States destroyed by the New Deal and a “takeover” by its liberal successors. America is occupied by foreign fighters under the auspices of the United Nations, imposing a system of crushing government bureaucracy, the Buros. In the first year of the takeover, “about twenty million American men, women and children were either killed or carried to

slavery in Africa or Asia”, with “tailored” atomic bombs used to wipe out entire cities.

The regime is opposed by the “Rangers”, a secretive, informally organised group that foresaw the coming troubles and laid plans for a counter-revolution. Prior to the rise of the Buros, the Rangers stockpiled weapons, hiding caches around the country, trained in combat and guerrilla techniques, and made plans for secure communications. Like Turner, *Franklin* is filled with tips and tricks about how to actually do these things and soon earned a reputation as a sort of “how to” manual for insurgency, with an emphasis on preparation and strategic patience.<sup>54</sup>

Like *The Iron Heel*, *Franklin* has a component of ideological explanation, although the author is admirably succinct in outlining his anti-Communist, anti-liberal views. Similar to *Anticipations of the Future*, the plot focuses primarily on politics at the national level.

*The John Franklin Letters* was foremost a work of anti-Communist propaganda, distributed and popularised by the John Birch Society soon after its establishment, and likely written by one of its members.<sup>55</sup> A former Bircher sent Pierce a copy of *Franklin*, directly inspiring *Turner* in much the same way that *Wild Southern Scenes* inspired *Anticipations of the Future*.<sup>56</sup>

## The Spook Who Sat by the Door

One intriguing possible influence that deserves a measure of consideration is *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, a 1969 novel by African-American writer Sam Greenlee.<sup>57</sup>

Greenlee was a military veteran and former government propagandist. His novel tells the story of a black CIA agent who takes his spycraft training to the streets to lead a black revolution. The book was adapted as a movie amid some controversy in 1973, roughly a year

51 J. London, “The Unparalleled Invasion,” McClure's (magazine), July 1910; S. Trott, “Jack London's *The Iron Heel*,” *Socialist Standard*, January 2008, <http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/2000s/2008/no-1241-january-2008/jack-londons-iron-heel>.

52 R. Griffin, *Fame of a Dead Man's Deeds* (2001), p. 145.

53 Anonymous (The John Birch Society), *The John Franklin Letters* (New York: The Bookmailer, 1959).

54 D. Russell, *The Man who Knew Too Much* (Carroll & Graf, 2003) pp. 111, 494.

55 S. E. Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), p. 186.

56 R. Griffin, *Fame of a Dead Man's Deeds* (2001), p. 146.

57 S. Greenlee, *The Spook Who Sat by the Door: A Novel* (Wayne State University Press, 1990).



before Pierce began work on *Turner*. The race-obsessed Pierce could certainly have noticed the controversy surrounding the film, which was abruptly pulled from American movie theaters (a move that Greenlee attributed to FBI dirty tricks).<sup>58</sup>

The book tells the story of Dan Freeman, the first black CIA agent, recruited as a token to address a politically inspired controversy over the Agency's lack of integration. Freeman is placed in a highly visible post with little responsibility; the title of the book is a play on words referring to his job (to sit by the door and be seen), with the word "spook" as double-entendre – a common slang term for "spy" and, in a different context, a racial epithet.

From the very start, Dan Freeman's real agenda in taking the job, is to receive training in spycraft and violence as a CIA officer and to use his position to study global insurgencies, then take that knowledge back to the Chicago ghettos where he grew up.

He seeds and guides a black insurgency by recruiting and training gang members, whom he organises into covert cells that spread out nationally, following the same insurgency strategy described in *The John Franklin Letters* and *The Turner Diaries*. As in those books, attacks that create economic pressure are key to the strategy, in this case with the intent of making white politicians choose between maintaining racist policies and maintaining the United States as a global superpower.

As in *Turner*, the insurgents rob banks to fund their operations and rob armouries to gain access to deadly munitions in preparation for revolution. The book follows the insurgency through its successful launch, against the backdrop of riots in Chicago. The narrative ends abruptly in the middle of the revolution, shedding no light on the movement's tangible goals or its anticipated end game – except, as Freeman argues toward the end of the book, to be left alone.

"I don't want to change this system", he says, "just get it off my back".

Like *The Turner Diaries*, *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* declines to put a label on its ideology. It describes intensive efforts to create propaganda, but gives little insight into its contents. "What are you?" one of Freeman's recruits asks, during a discussion of the propaganda plan. "A Muslim, nationalist, black power advocate? What?"

"Why can't I just be a man who wants to be free, who wants to walk tall and proud on his own turf as a black man?" Freeman says. "Why can't it be as simple as that?"

In a 2003 interview, Greenlee said his intention was not far removed from the authors of *Franklin* and *Turner*. "It's a training manual for guerrilla warfare", Greenlee said. "That's why it scared the white folks so much".<sup>59</sup>

Both *The Turner Diaries* and *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* make for uncomfortable reading, but the latter emanates from a very different social and historical context – the perspective of a disadvantaged minority, rather than a privileged majority. Its racial grievances are articulated clearly and mostly grounded in the real, contemporary world of its author, as opposed to *Turner's* paranoid fears about bat-wielding gun-grabbers.

Because of these factors, among others, the book tends to get a pass on racism, at least among those who determine literary standing. It won several awards, including "Book of the Year" from *The Sunday Times* in London. Some contemporaneous reviews of the film adaptation note that "the film makes it clear that the revolution arose not out of hate toward whites, but out of love for the black people and their liberation".<sup>60</sup>

Yet hatred for whites can be found in the book, in ample supply. Greenlee's depiction of white characters is unsparing. Whites in *The Spook*

58 Greenlee's suspicions are not easily dismissed as paranoia, given the activities of the FBI under the COINTELPRO program at the time. The claim is more fully explored in the documentary, "Infiltrating Hollywood: The Spook Who Sat by the Door" (ChiTrini Productions, 2011).

59 L. L. Joiner, "After 30 Years, a Controversial Film Re-emerges", *The Crisis*, November/December 2003, p. 41.

60 C. Rogers, "How the Riots Might Have Turned Out", *Chicken Bones: A Journal*, Undated, <http://www.nathanielturner.com/spookbythedor.htm>.

*Who Sat by the Door* are either overt racists or barely covert racists, without exception. No exchange between Freeman and a white character takes place without an expression of hostility and a critical racial commentary, sometimes nuanced, sometimes less so. But unlike *The Order* in *Turner*, Freeman's movement never expresses or acts on genocidal intentions.

A November 1973 review of the film adaptation by *The New York Times*, published just over a year before *The Turner Diaries* was written, judged the film harshly:

[T]here is a lack of respect in the film for human life that makes the skin crawl. ... No true revolutionary, past or present, would countenance the kind of slaughter that is presented in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*. It is devoid of reason; it is killing just to kill.

But, if only in comparison to *Turner's* celebration of genocide, Freeman's carefully targeted violence looks almost charitable. The use of violence in *Spook* is framed as necessary, justified and inevitable, but it is also predicated on provocation. Freeman's gang recruits, the Cobras, wait to strike until a police shooting of a teenager brews a riot and subsequent crackdown in the Chicago ghetto.

They bomb the mayor's office in the middle of the night to avoid casualties. "No one would want to make that ass a martyr", Freeman says during a phone call claiming responsibility. A series of nonviolent protests follow. The Cobras only start shooting when the National Guard is deployed to control the rioting, and their targets are almost exclusively armed combatants.

The framing of violence and race in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* raises challenging questions about its literary status, made more acute by the extensive parallels between the book and *The Turner Diaries*, which carries Greenlee's themes to further extremes. Recent racially charged military-style attacks on police in Dallas and Baton Rouge in 2016 also create uncomfortable resonances for modern readers.

## Hunter and Serpent's Walk

*The Turner Diaries* is the best-known racial nationalist dystopia, and it is Pierce's best-known work by far. But it was not his final effort to master the genre.

Hoping to recapture *Turner's* popularity, the National Alliance published a second novel with dystopian elements by Pierce titled *Hunter*, which follows a white nationalist "lone wolf" who progresses from murdering mixed-race couples to a more ambitious assassination campaign. The book's crude style and violent content clearly mirror the approach taken in *Turner*.

*Hunter's* protagonist, Oscar Yeager, begins as a serial killer and is eventually drawn into battle with a conspiracy of Jewish- and African-Americans within the government, joining forces with a white nationalist organisation, the National League.

Some readers consider *Hunter* to be a prequel to *The Turner Diaries*, with the National League eventually becoming the Organization, and – as discussed in more detail below – many of those who carried out violence after reading *Turner* are also documented as having owned and read *Hunter*.

In 1991, the National Alliance returned to the dystopian well with *Serpent's Walk*, by Randolph D. Calverhall, believed by some to be another pseudonym for Pierce, although the book is not attributed to him in his authorised biography.<sup>61</sup> *Serpent's Walk* is a much more ambitious novel than *The Turner Diaries*, with a heavier focus on science fiction and a much more sophisticated writing style.

Opening in the year 2041, it posits that key leaders of the SS survived the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II, biding their time and building an international network with the intention of returning to political power.

The book features mercenaries armed with lasers and an artificial intelligence with a holographic body, among other science fiction conceits, and traces the outbreak of global

<sup>61</sup> R. Griffin, *Fame of a Dead Man's Deeds* (2001), p. 61; R. D. Calverhall, *Serpent's Walk* (National Vanguard Books, 1991).

biological warfare. Unlike *Turner*, *Serpent's Walk* is also a polemical work, following the progression its protagonist, Alan Lessing, from racial agnosticism and generally accepting attitudes toward non-whites to a full-blown embrace of Nazism. Reminiscent of *The Iron Heel*, the book features lengthy and tedious Socratic discussions of Nazi ideology, interspersed with violent action sequences and intrigues.

Both *Hunter* and *Serpent's Walk* frequently surface on extremist reading lists, and both books were found in the possession of Oklahoma City bombing conspirators,<sup>62</sup> but neither novel has come close to the influence and impact of *The Turner Diaries*.

## Earl Turner's Family Tree

As the works discussed in this section illustrate, dystopian fiction has long been a vehicle for political propaganda, including the advancement of racist and anti-government views, from the earliest days of the genre. These works do not exist in a vacuum. They represent an evolving approach to incitement and persuasion.

Anti-abolitionists were the first political movement to instrumentalise dystopia for political purposes, presenting fictional scenarios of miscegenation and lurid racial violence, while arguing for the inevitability of secession if abolitionists continued to make gains.

Ruffin's *Anticipations of the Future* introduced this form of argumentation in the form of an epistolary narrative, a conceit that was revived in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Jack London in *The Iron Heel*, featuring a very similar narrative of American collapse and adding an element of validation in the form of comments from a future historian on the book's "found document".

All of these elements were then fused into *The John Franklin Letters*, which Pierce cited as the most important direct influence on *Turner*. That book added a crucial instructive element,

offering practical advice on how to emulate the protagonist's struggle against the dystopian future regime.

In part due to this addition, *Franklin* inspired direct action in ways that its predecessors did not. Distributed by the John Birch Society, the book was at least partially responsible for inspiring the birth of the Patriot movement, including the creation of a short-lived paramilitary group named after and based on the fictional Rangers.<sup>63</sup> The book has also been cited as the inspiration for the creation of the Minutemen, one of the first and most important antigovernment militia groups in the United States.<sup>64</sup>

Sam Greenlee, who in his early career wrote anti-Communist propaganda for the government, was in a position where he could easily have encountered the anti-Communist *Franklin* and its inclusion of guerrilla warfare tips and tricks. His book, *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, abandoned the epistolary format, but incorporated the how-to element, and added a more traditional action-story plot absent from its predecessors. Greenlee's book is not as clearly documented to have inspired violent actors, but that prospect raised alarms with law enforcement. For a time, *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* was reputedly required reading for FBI trainees.

William Pierce was directly inspired by *Franklin*, but he began writing *The Turner Diaries* soon after the film adaptation of *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* created a national controversy. *Turner* incorporates Greenlee's focus on action, layering in still more violence on a genocidal and apocalyptic scale. Pierce's addition of explicit exhortations for action by readers, along with the emphasis on authenticity provided by the epistolary format, further distinguish *The Turner Diaries* from *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, and the combination of elements helps explain the former's outsize impact.

It is possible that these works represent parallel literary strains rather than a transmission of ideas and techniques. But the similarities are striking,

<sup>62</sup> "Re: Michael Fortier Fingerprint Evidence", Terry Nichols Defense Attorney Memorandum, 26 September 1996.

<sup>63</sup> D. Russell, *The Man who Knew Too Much* (Carroll & Graf, 2003) pp. 111, 494.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73; R. B. DePugh, *Blueprint for Victory* (Self-Published, 1966).

and reading the corpus as a whole, it is difficult to conclude that the continuity of themes and narrative techniques are wholly coincidental, even if direct paths of transmission cannot be definitively established. *The Turner Diaries* can be seen as an evolutionary refinement of a propaganda approach dating back to before the Civil War.

## A Legacy of Violence

*The Turner Diaries* would be a footnote in a literary subgenre of racist and political dystopian fiction, if not for the acts of violence it has inspired.

Within a few years of its publication, *The Turner Diaries* started to inspire imitators, people who were influenced by the book and other factors to take up arms and commit horrific crimes, which are discussed in detail below.

Some important caveats pertain to this discussion as regards the reporting of ideological influences. The incidents documented below are based on media reports. The notoriety of *The Turner Diaries* after the Oklahoma City bombing ensured that its influence would be more frequently noted by news reporters.

On the one hand, this means the influence of *Turner* may be overreported relative to a book like *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, whose relevance would not be as immediately relevant to journalists or law enforcement investigators.

On the other hand, reporting on hate crimes is extremely inconsistent. Smaller incidents, such as racially motivated murders committed by people who do not openly identify with a specific white nationalist ideology, receive little investigative and journalistic scrutiny, especially when the facts of the case are not in dispute (for instance, a fight outside a bar with many witnesses).

It is likely therefore that *Turner's* influence has been somewhat overreported compared to other works, while being underreported on an

absolute basis. This imbalance, of course, only serves to increase the book's reputation and thus its readership.

## The Order

One of the first imitators of *The Turner Diaries* was Robert Jay Mathews, who took an interest in the John Birch Society at the precocious age of 11. Born in Texas and raised in Arizona, he began leading militia groups as a teenager, bolstered by the conviction that the United States was on the brink of collapse.<sup>65</sup>

After his initial foray – a Mormon survivalist group called the “Sons of Liberty” – fell apart in 1974, he moved to a rural tract of land in Metaline Falls, Washington. For a while, it seemed like Mathews had lost his militant edge, but he soon drifted toward white supremacy, and the National Alliance, whose literature he consumed avidly. After taking part as a follower for a while, he felt the urge to lead.

In the early 1980s, he founded an “action group” that at first called itself “The Organization”, and then “The Order”, both names that were used to describe the terrorists in *The Turner Diaries*.

When he recruited a former Klansman, Thomas Martinez, to the group, he did so by handing over a copy of *Turner* – one of scores that he kept in storage. Members of the group referred to the book as their “Bible”. “Tom, in there is what the future will be”, Mathews told Martinez. “You must read it. You must”.

Mathews and his Order embarked on a series of robberies, very loosely following the self-financing model of Earl Turner and his resistance cell. They started by robbing stores and eventually graduated to banks and armoured cars. Like the fictional Turner and his compatriots, the real-world Order later expanded into counterfeiting operations. The group was responsible for at least three murders, including the assassination of outspoken Jewish radio host Alan Berg, in 1984.<sup>66</sup>

65 Mathews biographical details are drawn from T. Martinez and J. Guinther, *Brotherhood of Murder* (iUniverse, 1999); and K. Flynn and G. Gerhardt, *Silent Brotherhood* (Signet Book, 1990).

66 W. Turner, “5 Neo-Nazis Get Stiff Sentences for Crime Spree”, *New York Times*, 7 February 1986.



The FBI infiltrated The Order, a dozen men strong at its height, and finally moved to arrest Mathews, who went down fighting, killed in a fire after a 36-hour standoff. By the time its reign of terror ended, the Order's illegal activities had netted millions of dollars, more than \$1 million of which was never recovered. The FBI believed Mathews had distributed much of the cash to white nationalist leaders and organisations, including *Turner* author William Pierce and the National Alliance.<sup>67</sup>

The investigation of The Order resulted in a large number of arrests, including a sedition prosecution against 13 white supremacist leaders accused of receiving money from Mathews for purposes of overthrowing the U.S. government.<sup>68</sup>

The trial ended in acquittal in 1988, but the FBI continued to search for the money for years and launched an extensive undercover investigation of the Patriot movement on persistent rumors that some associated with the original Order were seeking to re-create its glory.<sup>69</sup>

The investigative documents are filled with references to "The Second Order" and "The New Order". The investigation found plots aplenty; conspiracies in multiple states, brimming with sinister figures who claimed to have known Mathews and to be continuing his work. In the early 1990s, the FBI even created a sting operation consisting of undercover agents pretending to do the very same thing. But its efforts were largely for naught, resulting in almost no arrests or indictments.<sup>70</sup>

The FBI worried that extremists might try to emulate other plots contained in *The Turner Diaries*. In a 1991 memo, an agent in the San Antonio field office cited the fact that the real-world dates of fictional events in the book were approaching, writing:

Although the... novel is similar in nature to the futuristic "1984" by [George] Orwell, we are equally aware, as is [FBI headquarters] of the prior manifestations from the "Turner Diaries" of aspects such as "the Order" and acts of violence such as assassinations (ALAN BERG) and armored car robberies by "the Order". These exact actions came from the fictional accounts of the "Turner Diaries".<sup>71</sup>

In 1994, a Christian Identity-linked gang known as the Aryan Republican Army began a spree of bank robberies inspired by The Order – both the fictional version and Mathews' real-life creation. Members of the group have been credibly linked to the Oklahoma City bombing conspiracy, although the extent of their involvement is unclear.<sup>72</sup>

At one point, the group recorded a bizarre rambling two-hour video statement that espoused Christian Identity beliefs and urged listeners to read *The Turner Diaries*.

"For you budding young revolutionaries, a good book to read is *The Turner Diaries*", a masked gang member said, holding up a copy. "Now it's the fictional account of a race warrior that gives you a good idea of what is to be expected as the struggle heats up". Interested viewers can pick it up "at your local seditious conspiracy bookstore".<sup>73</sup>

Another gang member appears later in the video, recommending *The Silent Brotherhood*, a nonfiction book about Mathews and his Order.

The Aryan Republican Army committed at least 22 armed robberies, frequently employing improvised explosives, in at least seven states before the FBI rolled it up. The conspirators had crisscrossed the country, meeting a number of people involved in Mathews' Order and other luminaries of white supremacy and the Patriot movement.

67 The SAGE Encyclopedia of Terrorism, Second Edition, (Sage, 2011), p. 450.

68 K. Bishop, "Conspiracy Trial of 14 White Supremacists Begins", New York Times, 18 February 1988.

69 J.M. Berger, "PATCON: The FBI's Secret War Against the 'Patriot' Movement, and How Infiltration Tactics Relate to Radicalizing Influences", New America Foundation, 2012.

70 J.M. Berger, "PATCON" (2012).

71 FBI Letterhead Memorandum, August 20, 1991, Obtained via Freedom of Information Act.

72 M. S. Hamm, In Bad Company: America's Terrorist Underground (Upne, 2002).

73 Aryan Republican Army propaganda video, undated, 45:09, 1:05.

Several ARA members landed for a time in an armed Christian Identity compound in rural Oklahoma known as Elohim City, where members of the security detachment were required to read both *The Turner Diaries* and *The Silent Brotherhood*.<sup>74</sup>

A number of extremists passed through Elohim City, including Chevie Kehoe, who -- after reading *Turner* and *The Silent Brotherhood* -- formed a small group called the Aryan People's Republic, and embarked on a murder, bombing and armed robbery spree that eventually left five dead and ended in a violent shootout with Ohio police in 1997. Kehoe was captured and given three life sentences without parole.<sup>75</sup>

## Oklahoma City

During the mid-1980s, a young college dropout named Timothy McVeigh saw an ad for the book in *Soldier of Fortune*, a right-wing pro-gun magazine devoted to the business of mercenaries, but also often read by teenagers who imagined themselves as future men of action. He was attracted to the tagline used to promote the book: "What will you do if the government comes for your guns?"<sup>76</sup>

Worried about growing sentiment for some kind of gun control in the wake of the 1981 assassination attempt on President Reagan, McVeigh found something credible and compelling in *Turner's* improbable narrative.

McVeigh became obsessed with the book, loaning and gifting copies to his friends, and recommending it to just about everyone else he met. He sent a copy of the book to his sister with sections highlighted, then sent her clippings to highlight sections again. When he joined the Army, he shared copies of the book with his fellow soldiers and carried it with him in his pack on maneuvers, until he was ordered to stop.<sup>77</sup>

*The Turner Diaries* was McVeigh's constant

companion. When he left the Army in 1992, disaffected and depressed, the book came with him. He traveled the country, selling various wares at gun shows. Stacks of the red-covered tome were always for sale on his table, always available to start a conversation.<sup>78</sup>

The world of Earl Turner was dark and brutish, full of fear and anger, and McVeigh's psyche was never far from that vision of the imminent future. He claimed that the book's gun-rights message was the core of its appeal. But while McVeigh was not especially known for vocalising overt racism, or embracing a specific racist ideology, it is difficult to understand his romance with the book in any other context. *The Turner Diaries* does not hold up as a story of colour-blind revolution.

McVeigh's associates, and co-readers, ran the gamut of ideological racism. His travels took him deep into Patriot and white supremacist circles, where he found many others who shared his love for the book. He met the security director for Elohim City, who also swore by the novel, and he may have visited the Oklahoma compound. He was rumoured to have met and possibly even collaborated with the Aryan Republican Army bank robbers, and circumstantial evidence suggests this could be true.<sup>79</sup>

McVeigh also passed through the same Patriot circles that the FBI suspected of trying to resuscitate the Order. It is still not clear how deep those relationships went. What was clear, however, was his commitment to the imagined reality of the book.<sup>80</sup>

On April 19, 1995, McVeigh detonated a truck bomb in a parking area next to the Alfred E. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people and wounding hundreds more. The date had wide resonance in the Patriot movement, most notably for being the anniversary of the siege of Waco, in which 76 people were killed when the FBI stormed

74 M. S. Hamm, *In Bad Company* (2002), pp. 190.

75 M. S. Hamm, *In Bad Company* (2002), pp. 157.

76 L. Michel and D. Herbeck, *American Terrorist: Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City Bombing* (New York: Harper, 2001), p. 38.

77 *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

78 Trial transcript, *USA v. Terry Lynn Nichols*, 96-CR-68, Nov. 17, 1997.

79 J.M. Berger, "PATCON" (2012).

80 *Ibid.*

a compound filled with apocalyptic cultists. McVeigh had followed the siege closely, and was outraged by the government's actions, which he and other Patriots saw as a trial run for a wider federal gun confiscation.<sup>81</sup>

McVeigh's improvised bomb was made from ammonium nitrate, similar in size and design to a bomb that Earl Turner uses to destroy FBI headquarters in the book, although not identical. McVeigh drew on other sources as well, keeping to the same basic concept, but tweaking the ingredients to increase the explosive power.<sup>82</sup>

Mechanically, however, the device was nearly identical to *Turner*. When McVeigh and his coconspirator Terry Nichols built the bomb, they walked through precisely the same steps described in the book, recreating Earl Turner's acts in the real world, but with themselves as the protagonists.

The process of building the bomb took hours; it is unimaginable that the parallels escaped McVeigh, who had kept the book by his side so obsessively, and for so many years. He likely imagined his actions would touch off its long-prophesied revolution.<sup>83</sup>

A few hours after the bombing, when McVeigh was arrested, police found anti-government propaganda in his car, including highlighted photocopies of pages from *Turner*, similar to those he had sent his sister. One passage in particular stood out, taken from Earl Turner's diary entry after the cell carries out a critical mortar attack on Washington, D.C.:

The real value of our attacks today lies in the psychological impact, not in the immediate casualties. More important, though, is what we taught the politicians and the bureaucrats. They learned this afternoon that not one of them is beyond our reach. They can huddle behind barbed wire and tanks in the city, and they can hide behind the concrete walls of their country estates, but we can still find them

and kill them.

The impact of McVeigh's mass murder was ultimately detrimental to the movement he was trying to inspire. Many in the then-thriving Patriot movement were appalled by the attack, particularly the deaths of 19 children in a daycare centre within the federal building, directly adjacent to where McVeigh parked his truck. Other Patriots and white supremacists feared that a government crackdown would follow the attack.

Instead of the explosive uprising McVeigh had imagined, the bombing caused an implosion of the domestic right-wing extremist underground. Those who stayed involved went further underground. Others simply dropped out. Within two short years, the movement had nearly collapsed. Only one extremist cause managed to benefit from the bombing -- *The Turner Diaries* itself.

Pierce claimed the book, which in 1995 sold for \$4.95, had already sold 185,000 copies, a figure that could not be independently verified. It was, at least, already well-known to the authorities. "This book is a constant", an FBI domestic terror expert told *The New York Times* in 1995. "It's everywhere you turn".<sup>84</sup>

The controversy around the book fueled new interest, and Pierce was happy to exploit the tragedy. A New York publisher gave the book its first mainstream print run. The new edition trumpeted its connection to the bombing on the cover, along with its newly enhanced taboo chic. "MANY WOULD LIKE IT BANNED", the cover read, in blood-red block letters. "IT IS BEING PUBLISHED TO ALERT AND WARN AMERICA".<sup>85</sup>

After the Order was crushed by the FBI in 1984, Pierce had been happy to embrace Mathews' cause, lionising him as an example to be emulated. Pierce had known Mathews personally.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> M. S. Hamm, In Bad Company (2002), pp. 226-227; FBI FD-302, record of interview, Terry Nichols, 28 April 2005.

<sup>83</sup> M. S. Hamm, In Bad Company (2002), pp. 229.

<sup>84</sup> J. Kifner, "THE GUN NETWORK: McVeigh's World -- A special report; Bomb Suspect Felt at Home Riding the Gun-Show Circuit", New York Times, 5 July 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/07/05/us/gun-network-mcveigh-s-world-special-report-bomb-suspect-felt-home-riding-gun.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>85</sup> Publisher: Barricade Books; Second Edition (1 May 1996).

Perpetrators	Victims killed	Arrested or killed
The Order	3	1984
Timothy McVeigh, Terry Nichols	168	1995
Larry Wayne Shoemaker	1	1996
Aryan Republican Army	No fatalities	1996
Chevie Kehoe/Aryan People's Republic	5	1997
Shawn Berry, Lawrence Russell Brewer, and John King (Jasper, Texas dragging attack)	1	1998
David Copeland	3	1999
Jason Robida	1	2006
Paul Ross Evans (Texas abortion clinic bomber)	0	2006
Peter Mangs	3	2010
National Socialist Underground	10	2011
Pavlo Lapshyn	1	2013
Frazier Glenn Cross	3	2014
Zack Davies	No fatalities	2015
Thomas Mair	1	2016

Table 2: People reportedly killed by readers of *The Turner Diaries* documented in this paper

“Bob was a very intense young man, and quite different from the weaklings I see so many of in America today”, Pierce told his biographer. “Bob was obviously very much taken with *The Turner Diaries*, and it was clear he drew a lot of the elements from the book in the way he did things and the terminology he used and so on”.<sup>86</sup> Pierce eulogised Mathews repeatedly in interviews and on shortwave broadcasts of the National Alliance’s radio programme.

With McVeigh, the calculus was more complicated, the backlash more severe. Pierce took pains to say he had never met McVeigh, and there is no evidence to say otherwise, although McVeigh’s telephone records, presented in court, showed that he made efforts to contact the National Alliance prior to the bombing.

Pierce was defensive about whether and how specifically McVeigh’s actions could be said

to have been inspired by the book, despite a mountain of evidence pointing toward its relevance. Waco was the inspiration for Oklahoma City, Pierce argued, not his book, which simply depicted the world as it was. “I guess the old idea about blaming the bearer of bad news is still valid”, he said.<sup>87</sup>

At the same time, Pierce sometimes said McVeigh reminded him of Bob Mathews. He waffled as to whether he approved of the bombing, sometimes saying yes, sometimes no, and sometimes commenting that the time was simply not right for such tactics. Both his approval and his disapproval were qualified.

“It was the only way he knew to get people to look up from their ball games for a minute and pay attention to what’s happening to their world”, Pierce said in 2000, two years before his death from cancer. “There are Americans who care about these things as much as I do. And by God, we intend to do something about these things, even if we have to do it Timothy

<sup>86</sup> R. Griffin, *Fame of a Dead Man’s Deeds* (2001), p. 213.

<sup>87</sup> Radio Broadcast, *American Dissident Voices*. 19 April 1997.



McVeigh's way".<sup>88</sup>

And other readers of the book would try to do it McVeigh's way.

## Reign of Terror

Copies of *Turner* have been found in the possession of many perpetrators of hate crimes. The list is long and bloody, and it continues through the present-day. At least 200 murders have been committed by readers of *The Turner Diaries* to date, including the 168 killed in the Oklahoma City bombing, and at least 33 people killed by other readers of the book (see Table 2, next page).

## 20th Century Incidents

On April 12, 1996, Larry Wayne Shoemake of Jackson, Mississippi, shot and killed one person, wounding 10 more. All of his victims were black. His friends and family said he had changed dramatically after reading *The Turner Diaries*. He also reportedly read Pierce's *Hunter*.<sup>89</sup>

In 1998, three white men in Jasper, Texas, chained a disabled black man to the back of a pickup truck and dragged him down the road, horribly mutilating and killing him. In a statement to police, one of the men said "We're starting *The Turner Diaries* early". In reality, they were starting late. The events of the book begin in 1991.<sup>90</sup>

The influence of *The Turner Diaries* soon reached beyond America's shores. In 1999, David Copeland, a British reader, targeted blacks and gays with shrapnel-bomb attacks in London that killed three and maimed and injured 140 more.

"If you've read *The Turner Diaries*, you know [in] the year 2000 there'll be the uprising and all that racial violence on the streets", Copeland said in his confession to police. "My aim was political. It was to cause a racial war in this country".<sup>91</sup>

## 21st Century Incidents

Starting in 2000, a German neo-Nazi group called the National Socialist Underground began a terror spree that lasted for more than a decade, including at least 10 murders, multiple bombings and 15 armed robberies. A copy of *The Turner Diaries* was found on a computer used by the group, and it was believed that most members of the cell had read it.<sup>92</sup>

In 2006, a Massachusetts teenager named Jason Robida went into a gay bar, ordered a drink, and then began swinging a hatchet at the other patrons. When they rushed him and seized the weapon, he pulled out a gun. Four people were seriously wounded by the time he escaped. He fled to Arkansas, where he killed a police officer and an ex-girlfriend, before shooting himself in the head. In his home, investigators found Nazi paraphernalia and a copy of *The Turner Diaries*.<sup>93</sup>

The same year, a Texas abortion clinic bomber was arrested after his device failed to detonate; the book was found in his apartment.<sup>94</sup>

Between 2009 and 2010, serial shooter Peter Mangs killed three people and shot at a dozen more in Sweden, targeting immigrants and their friends. Mangs was initially drawn in by *The Turner Diaries*, and later read *Hunter*.<sup>95</sup>

Ukrainian fanatic Pavlo "Pasha" Lapshyn

<sup>88</sup> American Dissident Voices. 1 July 2000.

<sup>89</sup> J. Mitchell, "National Alliance Founder William Pierce's Writing Inspires Slaughter", Southern Poverty Law Center, 15 March 1999, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/1999/national-alliance-founder-william-pierce%E2%80%99s-writing-inspires-slaughter>.

<sup>90</sup> P. Miller, "Black man's killer said: 'We're starting *The Turner Diaries* early,'" *The Scotsman*, 23 February 2000.

<sup>91</sup> "The Nailbomber", BBC Panorama, 30 June 2000.

<sup>92</sup> J. Jüttner, "Neo-Nazi Trio: What Have We Learned about the NSU?", Spiegel Online, 7 August 2013. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/nsu-neo-nazi-terror-trial-enters-summer-recess-a-915356.html>; C. Arnowski, "Die Turner-Tagebücher und der NSU," BR, 4 February 2016, <http://www.br.de/nachrichten/nsu-prozess/160204-tagebuch-gerichtsreporter-100.html>.

<sup>93</sup> "Inspired by Neo-Nazi Tracts, Youth's Rampage ends in Death", SPLC Intelligence Report, 19 April 2006, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2006/inspired-neo-nazi-tracts-youths-rampage-ends-death>.

<sup>94</sup> "Would-Be Clinic Bomber Gets 40 Years", SPLC Intelligence Report, 1 October 2007, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2007/would-be-clinic-bomber-gets-40-years>.

<sup>95</sup> C. Anderson, "A Murder Trial in Sweden, With Echoes of Norway," *New York Times*, May 15, 2012; G. Ramnefjell, "Hvem er den «smarteste» rasistiske morderen - svenske Peter Mangs eller Anders Behring Breivik?" *Dagbladet*, 30 November 2015.

emigrated to England in 2013 and wasted no time waging a race war. Within days of his arrival, Lapshyn murdered an elderly Asian Muslim, stabbing him in the back as he walked home from prayers. He then began a bombing spree against UK mosques. Through a combination of luck and Lapshyn's incompetence, no one was killed. When he was arrested, authorities discovered he had linked to *The Turner Diaries* from a social media post. He had an audiobook of *Turner* on his computer when he was arrested, and a copy of a Russian translation of *Hunter*.<sup>96</sup>

In 2014, at the age of 73, Frazier Glenn Miller Jr., a notorious American white supremacist, shot and killed three people at a Jewish community centre in Overland Park, Kansas. Years before the attack, Miller had published white nationalist newsletters praising *Turner*, and he even claimed to have received \$200,000 from Bob Mathews and The Order back in the 1980s.<sup>97</sup>

In 2015, British neo-Nazi Zack Davies tried to behead a Sikh man (mistaking him for Muslim) in North Wales. Police discovered a wealth of racist literature in his home, including *Turner* and *Hunter*.<sup>98</sup>

Links to *Turner* have been the subject of speculation in a number of other prominent 21<sup>st</sup> century terrorism cases, including the 2011 Norway terror attack by Anders Breivik that left 77 people dead, and the case of Dylann Roof, who killed nine African-Americans in South Carolina in 2015. However, both men wrote manifestos that did not reference the book, and the links remain speculative.<sup>99</sup>

In 2016, British nationalist Thomas Mair was arrested for the murder of UK Member of Parliament Jo Cox. Subsequently, Mair was revealed to have ordered literature from Pierce's National Alliance, but investigators have not, to date, directly cited evidence that *The Turner Diaries* influenced the alleged killer.<sup>100</sup>

## Why Turner?

While many of the books discussed in this paper had a political impact in their day, few of them are remembered, except by non-historians and historically minded white nationalists. They are no longer relevant.

Why has *The Turner Diaries* endured? Surely not because of its literary merits. Even Pierce admitted that it was poorly written, telling his biographer that he would have spent more time on the writing if he had known how much attention it would receive.<sup>101</sup> It is not a sophisticated book, and its characters are not well realised, except for the titular diarist, who is still at best only a rough sketch of a man.

But *The Turner Diaries* continues to inspire violence 25 years after its prophesied dystopia failed to materialise and nearly 40 years after it was written.

The Civil War-era racist dystopias played a role in the crises of their day, but they are largely forgotten. Some socialists still speak glowingly of *The Iron Heel*,<sup>102</sup> and *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* is remembered as a niche product of considerable interest, due in part to the movie adaptation and its attendant controversy.<sup>103</sup> But it is extremely difficult to argue for the lasting

96 "Ukrainian admits UK terrorism", Hate Speech International, 24 October 2013, <https://www.hate-speech.org/ukrainian-student-admits-anti-muslim-terror-in-the-uk/>.

97 "Frazier Glenn Miller", SPLC Extremist Files, Undated, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/frazier-glenn-miller>.

98 <http://religiousreader.org/neo-nazi-found-guilty-attempted-murder-sikh-dentist-revenge-lee-rigbys-murder/>.

99 J. Kay, "How a 2011 Norwegian massacre echoes a 1978 American novel," National Post, 24 July 2011, <http://news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/jonathan-kay-on-breiviks-norwegian-massacre-and-the-turner-diaries-how-a-2011-crime-was-plucked-straight-from-a-1978-novel>.

100 "Alleged killer of British MP was a longtime supporter of the neo-Nazi National Alliance", Southern Poverty Law Center. Hatewatch, 16 June 2016, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/06/16/alleged-killer-british-mp-was-longtime-supporter-neo-nazi-national-alliance>.

101 R. Griffin, *Fame of a Dead Man's Deeds* (2001), p. 141.

102 E. Vincentelli, "Review: 'The Iron Heel' Reworks a Jack London Dystopia", New York Times, 31 July 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/01/theater/review-the-iron-heel-reworks-a-jack-london-dystopia.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/01/theater/review-the-iron-heel-reworks-a-jack-london-dystopia.html?_r=0).

103 D. Somerset, "The Battle of Chicago: The Spook Who Sat by the Door", British Film Institute, 31 March 2015, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/battle-chicago-spook-who-sat-door>.

political impact of either work.

At the time of its publication, *The John Franklin Letters* won favourable notices from *The National Review* and angry denunciation from the political left, but it was not a mainstream publication.<sup>104</sup> Its legacy is somewhat more substantial than the other works reviewed here, in part because of its role inspiring ongoing American antigovernment movements. But the book itself has dropped out of sight and out of print.

What makes *Turner* different?

## Narrative Simplification

By their nature, dystopian stories look into the future, and they are often situated in the “not-too-distant” future. This creates risks for their shelf life, and many of *Turner’s* predecessors were rendered obsolete by the march of history.

The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century secessionist dystopias fell victim to this dynamic. Each of them imagined a slightly different path to secession, most of them used real political figures as characters, and all of them were substantially wrong in their forecasts. Once secession had become a reality, their relevance quickly faded, although they are remembered by some white nationalists, mostly as historical curiosities.<sup>105</sup> But more importantly, these historical intricacies reflect a complexity in narrative, with Tucker and Ruffin labouring to provide a credible political argument for the possibility of the events they foretold. *The Iron Heel* is similarly polemical, its lengthy Socratic dialogues explaining socialist tenets making for difficult, almost painful, reading.

While *The Turner Diaries* is set in a specific not-too-distant future time frame that has now passed, it largely avoids the pitfalls that dated its predecessors. Because the book opens

with the first shots of the revolution, its events do not emerge from a detailed political context so much as a paranoid fear of gun confiscation, which has not ebbed over time. The book does not fictionalise real political figures, and its warring factions are blurry portraits of carefully generic archetypes – The Organization and The System.

This lack of detail, whether intentional or the product of lazy writing, results in a bare-bones story that is not especially dependent on current political conditions. This generic quality is enhanced by what was almost certainly a deliberate choice by the author to ground the story in broad racial hate and not in a specific ideology.

Perhaps most importantly, the lack of grounding in contemporary events or complicated political polemics makes *The Turner Diaries* a simple read that depicts a world of stark contrasts and few subtleties. It does not seek to explain its politics (as detailed in the following section), it instead seeks to polarise its audience with visceral horror stories. This simplicity of the narrative reflects and helps to foster an extremist worldview in which shades of gray do not exist.<sup>106</sup>

## Ideological Vacuum

When studying racist violence, it is useful to distinguish between ideological racism and pedestrian racism. The former relies on elaborate belief structures to explain and justify racism, the latter is garden-variety bigotry that does not seek justification. Most racism in society is pedestrian, but violent racism is often ideological.

Prior to the rise of Pierce’s National Alliance, Christian Identity – a movement championed by William Gale – was the gold standard of American ideological racism. Sprung from the obscure roots of a 19<sup>th</sup> century historical conspiracy theory that argued white Europeans

104 M. Newberry, *The Yahoos* (New York: Marzani and Munsell, 1964), pp. 20-21; *The National Review* 7, 1959; *The National Review* 11, 1961; More recently, Franklin has been credited with popularising the National Rifle Association slogan “No dictatorship has ever been imposed on a nation of free men who have not been first required to register their privately owned weapons”, but in fact, the line had been circulating in pro-gun circles, verbatim, since no later than 1953.

105 See, for instance, <http://www.occidentaldissent.com/2012/04/17/confederate-history-month-2012-nathaniel-beverly-tucker-on-race-and-secession/> and <https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t70576-5/>.

106 J. Kaplan and L. Weinberg, *The Emergence of a Euro-American Radical Right Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), p. 11.

were the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel described in the Bible,<sup>107</sup> the concept was refined in America into a convoluted argument that the people currently known as Jews were not God's chosen Israelites from Biblical times, but instead subhuman descendants of Satan, along with all other non-white races.<sup>108</sup>

William Pierce was not an Identity adherent, and his National Alliance took pains to disassociate itself from Christianity for various reasons (he eventually invented his own pseudo-religion, known as Cosmotheism<sup>109</sup>). But many of his close associates were involved with religious justifications for racism. Although Pierce's racist activism began with the flamboyant American Nazi Party, he eventually adopted the view that the trappings and the name of the Nazi Party were counterproductive to white nationalist recruitment. As Pierce told his biographer:

If you put on a show as he was doing, calling yourself the American Nazi Party and waving swastika banners around in front of the White House, if you come on with an incendiary approach, most level-headed people, even if they think of themselves as National Socialists, are going to be hesitant to get involved with that kind of circus.

This view strongly suggests that the narrative decision to avoid an ideological explanation within *The Turner Diaries* was deliberate. Pierce's carefully vague description of the Order's magically persuasive book of ideology in *The Turner Diaries* leaves a wide opening for ideological racists to bring their own justifications to the table, while drawing in people who have not committed to an ideology.

As Haroro Ingram writes, successful propaganda typically combines appeals to rational choices (based on a cost-benefit proposition for the desired outcome) and identity choices (decisions based on one's identification with a group or organisation).<sup>110</sup>

Part of *Turner's* unique impact derives from its assumption that its readers have already made an identity choice, and that this identity choice is primarily "white". Secondarily, readers may identify with a white nationalist ideology, but the text does not limit readers to any specific organisation or belief system.

The use of language within the text subtly reinforces this presumption. For instance, whites are frequently described using modifiers (for example, "white people", "white women") while blacks and Jews are simply "blacks" and "Jews". The phrase "black people" appears only once, in a quote attributed to a black person. Racially offensive terms for African-Americans are used in the text, with the word "Negro" occurring more frequently in the first half of the book, and the word "nigger" appearing more frequently in the last quarter of the text, after readers have been desensitised.<sup>111</sup>

While Pierce's decision to forgo an overt identity-choice appeal marginalises the book for popular audiences and limits its readership, the lack of a specific ideological orientation maximises the audience of potential racist extremists to include the adherents of any white nationalist faction, as well as pedestrian racists who identify simply as "white". The reader can fill *Turner's* ideological vacuum with a specific set of beliefs, or simply with racial animus or anxiety. In this context, it is noteworthy that Timothy McVeigh showed no clear indication that he subscribed to any specific white nationalist ideology, despite his fixation on the text.

Ultimately, *The Turner Diaries* drips with racial animus but contains little rhetoric explaining the reasons for its views on race. It is instead a call to immediate, violent action, with specific ideas for how to carry out such action.

Although the social prevalence of pedestrian racism creates a space for non-ideological

107 Among many others, W.H. Poole (Rev.), *History, The True Key to Prophecy, in Which the Saxon Race is Known to be the Lost Tribes of Israel* (Brooklyn: George W. Greenwood, 1880).

108 W.P. Gale, *The Faith of Our Fathers* (Ministry of Christ Church, 1963); see also Anti-Defamation League, "Christian Identity", undated, [http://archive.adl.org/learn/ext\\_us/christian\\_identity.html](http://archive.adl.org/learn/ext_us/christian_identity.html).

109 W. L. Pierce, *Cosmotheism Trilogy*, Published online at <https://archive.org/details/CosmotheismTrilogyByWilliamLutherPierce> and on the National Alliance's National Vanguard website.

110 H.J. Ingram, "A Brief History of Propaganda During Conflict: Lessons for Counter-Terrorism Strategic Communications", *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 7. no. 6 (2016).

111 Word analysis performed with Voyant Tools, 21 August 2016, <http://voyant-tools.org>.



propaganda, it is not the only arena in which a hollowed-out appeal can produce real-world mobilisation.

*V for Vendetta*, a dystopian graphic novel with an anti-fascist and pro-anarchist message, was adapted for film in 2006. Author Alan Moore complained that the movie stripped out his political message and replaced it with “a thwarted and frustrated and perhaps largely impotent American liberal fantasy”. The film valorises its terrorist protagonist and replaces the book’s discussions of anarchism with vague references to freedom.

As a result, *V for Vendetta*’s iconic image of a Guy Fawkes mask (worn by the protagonist and others) has become a generic symbol of radicalism and revolution, adopted by a variety of movements, from the cyber-activists of Anonymous to the protestors of the Arab Spring. The mask has even been used by pro-ISIS hackers.<sup>112</sup> The power of a strong story and vivid image can transcend its original context – amply illustrated by the fact that the historical Guy Fawkes was an anti-Protestant extremist, far removed from the context in which his name is now used.<sup>113</sup>

## Action Orientation

The lack of ideological persuasion in *The Turner Diaries* empowers a singular narrative focus on rational choices – specifically the necessity of immediate, violent action.

*The John Franklin Letters* and *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* each aspired to guide readers in adopting a specific strategy of violence, but both approached that challenge in a careful way, leading readers through a series of ideological justifications. Violence is necessary and present in each narrative, but at some remove from the narrative.

*Turner* also includes the how-to element but dramatically ups the ante in its depiction and glorification of violence – the latter a deliberate choice by Pierce, who told his biographer that the violence was primarily intended to keep readers coming back to his serialised story month after month.<sup>114</sup> But Pierce articulates another explanation within the book itself, when Earl Turner discusses The Organization’s propaganda:

In fact, we intensified it and deliberately made our propaganda as provocative as possible. The purpose was not only to attract new members with a militant disposition, but at the

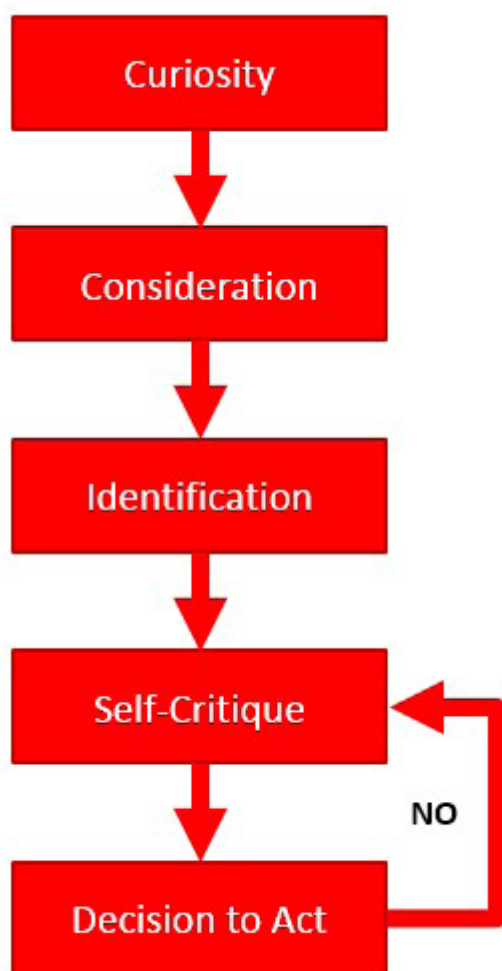


Figure 4: Radicalisation Process

<sup>112</sup> “Alan Moore: The Last Angry Man”, MTV News, 2006, [http://www.mtv.com/shared/movies/interviews/m/moore\\_alan\\_060315/](http://www.mtv.com/shared/movies/interviews/m/moore_alan_060315/); “There is Nothing Libertarian about ‘V for Vendetta’”, The Anarchist Notebook, 8 January 2006, <https://anarchistnotebook.com/2015/01/08/v/>; T. Ough, “Anonymous: How the Guy Fawkes mask became an icon of the protest movement”, The Independent, 4 November 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/anonymous-how-the-guy-fawkes-mask-became-an-icon-of-the-protest-movement-a6720831.html>; A.E. Garrison, “The impersonal politics of the Guy Fawkes mask”, The Conversation, 23 December 2015, <https://theconversation.com/the-impersonal-politics-of-the-guy-fawkes-mask-51091>.

<sup>113</sup> C. Turner, “9 things you never knew about Guy Fawkes”, The Telegraph, 5 November 2004, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/11209784/9-things-you-never-knew-about-Guy-Fawkes.html>.

<sup>114</sup> R. Griffin, *Fame of a Dead Man’s Deeds* (2001), p. 141.

same time to purge the Organization of the fainthearts and hobbyists—the “talkers”.

The book repeatedly and explicitly recriminates “cowards” and “talkers”, those who “were never able to screw up the courage to look the obvious solutions in the face”.

People who engage in violent extremism (VE) often go through several stages of radicalisation that can be usefully defined in the context of recruitment and messaging.<sup>115</sup> These include:

1. Curiosity – recruitment target’s first contact with a VE ideology.
2. Consideration – target evaluates the VE ideology for credibility, relevance.
3. Identification – target identifies him/herself as an adherent of VE ideology.
4. Self-critique – target asks whether he or she is doing enough for the cause. If the answer is yes, the self-critique repeats periodically. If the answer is no, the target proceeds to the next step.
5. Decision to act – target decides whether to undertake violent or material action on behalf of VE ideology. If the decision is made to act, the target proceeds to Movement-critique. If decision is not to act, the target either disengages from the radicalisation process or revisits an earlier stage.

As discussed in the preceding sections, *The Turner Diaries* assumes that readers have either gone through these steps already or do not otherwise require them. The book’s argument is instead focused on the penultimate stage in radicalisation to violent extremism – self-critique.

*The Turner Diaries* repeatedly prompts readers to ask if they are doing enough to prevent a dystopian racial future. It repeatedly contrasts the actions of Turner and his compatriots with the cowardice and complacency of most

“right wingers”. This direct critique challenges engaged readers to ask whether they are the “cowards”, “talkers”, “fainthearts and hobbyists”.

*The Turner Diaries* distinguishes itself from all of the other works examined in this paper with this heavy focus on shaming people who lack the courage to act on their convictions. In combination with the other factors discussed, this theme helps account for the book’s track record of galvanising violence by lone actors.

With respect to the call for action, it is also worth considering the intrinsic nature of dystopian fiction, which inherently elicits fear, and succeeds when it forces readers to ask, “What if this could really happen?” That was the pitch that drew in Timothy McVeigh, the lure that prompted him to send money in response to a magazine ad.

## Dystopia and Cosmic War

Dystopian fiction is a natural vehicle for political and especially extremist propaganda, since its intrinsic nature is a depiction and critique of a society gone profoundly wrong in the foreseeable future, based on trends that the author believes are reflective of current conditions.

Most extremist movements believe their waking reality has already become dystopian and they are participants in what Mark Juergensmeyer calls a “cosmic war”. For jihadist groups like al Qaeda and ISIS, this belief is articulated as a global “war on Islam”.<sup>116</sup> For anarchists and socialists, a fascist oligarchy controls free market societies.<sup>117</sup> In the case of white nationalism, the “white race” is threatened with extinction due to widespread miscegenation and the erosion of white supremacist social norms.<sup>118</sup> As Juergensmeyer notes, *The Turner Diaries* is an exemplary proponent of the white

115 J.M. Berger, “Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption”, The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 7. no. 5 (2016).

116 M. Slackman, “Bin Laden Says West Is Waging War Against Islam”, New York Times, 24 April 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/24/world/middleeast/bin-laden-says-west-is-waging-war-against-islam.html>; “The Evolution of a Radical Cleric: Quotes from Anwar al-Awlaki”, New York Times, 8 May 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/09/world/09quotes.html>.

117 A. Damon, “The American oligarchy”, World Socialist Web Site, 18 October 2014, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/10/18/pers-o18.html>.

118 See, for instance, “About White Genocide”, Undated, <http://whitegenocideproject.com/about-white-genocide/>.

nationalist conception of this “cosmic war”.<sup>119</sup>

For extremist readers, dystopian fiction can amplify existing fears about the direction of society, and it can also introduce and illustrate such fears to mainstream readers. *Turner* advances trends seen in the real world – including discussions of gun control and the increasing diversity of American society – and twists them into a worst-case outcome.

If a reader can be led to feel a whole-of-society disaster is imminent, then undertaking extreme action to prevent that outcome becomes a rational choice. The advantage of fiction in this context is that it can produce such feelings based on purely hypothetical scenarios. The author argues from the hypothetical and does not have to marshal factual support.

When an author successfully immerses the reader in a dystopian vision’s emotional content, it empowers a range of persuasive arguments that would not otherwise be possible. For some extremists, fear of a looming dystopia can provide the justification for violent action, provided the depiction is adequately lurid and visceral. Here, *Turner* outperforms its better-written and more thoughtfully plotted predecessors.

A dystopian premise, if seen as plausible, may simulate the intensity and character of religious apocalyptic beliefs, without requiring readers to subscribe to a specific religious ideology. In many apocalyptic texts, spiritually aligned forces align to wage “cosmic war” in which supernatural enemy combatants are “intent on destroying life and reducing the ordered world to chaos”, invoking an archetypical “combat myth” but imbuing it with absolute existential stakes.<sup>120</sup>

Similarly, dystopias typically warn of an

imminent cosmic war – fought by secular figures but constructed on a platform of similarly existential magnitude. Invoking these archetypes in a cautionary tale provides radical political actors with latitude to take extreme, system-disruptive action, and in rarer cases, they can justify the erasure of normal taboos against prohibited violence.<sup>121</sup>

Antinomianism – the religious concept that certain extreme conditions lead to the reversal of ordinary moral norms – is often a characteristic of millenarian movements.<sup>122</sup> *The Turner Diaries* is a textbook millenarian narrative, predicting an imminent apocalyptic change in the world with cosmic war as violent precursor to a utopian era of peace (the New Era described in the foreword and afterword). As such, engaged readers may feel it sanctions a departure from conventional morality.

## Conclusions

*The Turner Diaries* presents a substantial challenge for those concerned with countering violent extremism and strategic counterterrorism communications. It is part of a long legacy of racial and political dystopian fiction, yet its hold on the extremist imagination is extraordinary and unusual. It has displayed a lasting impact that outstrips similar works that are better written and more thoughtful. Several white nationalist and antigovernment authors have attempted to emulate William Pierce’s template, but thus far, none of their works has remotely approached *Turner’s* impact.<sup>123</sup>

By understanding the text in the context of similar works that preceded and, to a greater or lesser extent, inspired *The Turner Diaries*, we can identify a combination of characteristics that make it effective and enduring. These include:

119 M. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the mind of God: The global rise of religious violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 149-150.

120 N. Cohn, *Cosmos. Chaos. and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (Yale University Press, 2001), Kindle Edition, locations 972, 2274.

121 R. Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

122 Y. Talmon, “Millenarian movements”, *European Journal of Sociology* 7. no. 02 (1966), pp. 159-200; Landes, *Heaven on Earth* (2011), p. 16.

123 K. Hicks, “Neo-Nazi Harold Covington Authors Cheesy Occult Novels”, *Intelligence Report*, Southern Poverty Law Center, 15 August 2003, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/neo-nazi-harold-covington-authors-cheesy-occult-novels>; J.M. Berger, “The Patriot Movement’s New Bestseller Tests Their Anti-Racism”, *Daily Beast*, 8 June 2012, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/06/08/the-patriot-movement-s-new-bestseller-tests-their-anti-racism.html>.

- A dystopian scenario, predicted for the not-too-distant future.
- A social context described vaguely enough to avoid being made obsolete by historical developments.
- A simplified narrative featuring intense violence.
- The decision to avoid articulating a specific ideology, allowing readers to project their own expectations onto the text.
- A focus on rational-choice appeals, at the expense of identity-choice appeals, maximising the book's potential extremist audience while limiting its mainstream audience.
- Repeated calls to action and strong recriminations for inaction.

After an initial wave of violent incidents in the 1980s and 1990s, connected by a web of personal relationships and a shared social context, *Turner* has subsequently been linked to a significant and growing number of largely unconnected terrorist attacks and hate crimes, including nearly three dozen documented incidents involving at least 10 perpetrators since 2000, and more than one attack per year since 2013.<sup>124</sup>

There is little reason to hope this trend will abate or reverse itself any time soon, especially in light of recent changes in the American and European white nationalist landscape that favour the book's continued influence.

Since the 1990s, ideological white nationalism in the United States has declined. But since 2008, recruitment based on less-defined racial fear and hostility has risen to take its place, emphasising ideologically neutral concepts such as "white genocide"<sup>125</sup> and shifting toward less clearly delineated movements (such as

the "alt right").<sup>126</sup> Users participating in these new movements on social media routinely and selectively highlight incidents of racial unrest and black crime as evidence that "*The Turner Diaries* are coming true".<sup>127</sup>

These trends reflect – and may be inspired by – Pierce's strategy for both the National Alliance and *The Turner Diaries*, downplaying ideological complexities or flamboyant Nazi affiliations in favor of more conservative language and symbolism designed to appeal to a much wider audience identifying as "white" before "white nationalist".

Immediately after *Turner's* publication, its primary effect resembled that of *The John Franklin Letters* – inspiring the creation of new (albeit small) organisations, such as The Order, the Aryan Republican Army and the Aryan People's Republic. But these groups were significantly influenced by social networks surrounding Pierce and other bricks-and-mortar centres of ideological racism, most notably the Christian Identity compound in Elohim City, Oklahoma.

Promoting groups was likely Pierce's intent, as the most common phrases in the text pertain to organising – including "organization members", "new recruits", "new members" and "organization work". But in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing, *Turner* took on a new mystique as an inspiration for "lone wolf" attacks (in part due to misreporting that downplayed the depth of McVeigh's involvement with antigovernment movements<sup>128</sup>). Since the first wave of organisational inspirations faded with the arrest of most remaining members in 1997, the book has been linked to at least nine lone actors, but only one small terrorist cell.<sup>129</sup>

For now, *The Turner Diaries* presents a singularly difficult challenge for those seeking to counter violent extremism. It is a

124 See section 4, A Legacy of Violence, of this paper for details.

125 J.M. Berger, "Nazis vs. ISIS on Twitter: A Comparative Study of White Nationalist and ISIS Online Social Media Networks". George Washington University Program on Extremism. September 2016, [https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/Nazis%20v.%20ISIS%20Final\\_0.pdf](https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/Nazis%20v.%20ISIS%20Final_0.pdf).

126 R. Gray, "How 2015 Fueled The Rise Of The Freewheeling, White Nationalist Alt Right Movement", BuzzFeed, 27 December 2015, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/rosiegray/how-2015-fueled-the-rise-of-the-freewheeling-white-nationali>.

127 See, for instance, <https://twitter.com/JeffKaos/status/751451425503342592>, <https://twitter.com/2shyscorpio/status/752199263405285376> and [https://twitter.com/Eukodol\\_gonzo/status/633824074913972224](https://twitter.com/Eukodol_gonzo/status/633824074913972224).

128 J.M. Berger, "PATCON" (2012).

129 Section 4, A Legacy of Violence.



standalone text with high name-recognition, widely circulated online and off. It offers few ideological arguments to refute, and as fiction, it is relatively immune to factual refutation due to its carefully generic and simplified narrative. The book draws an audience of both committed and casual racists, making it difficult to define a target audience for countermessaging.

The book resonates most dangerously with people who have reached the self-critique stage of radicalisation, where few avenues for intervention have much chance of success.<sup>130</sup> Efforts to counter the message *The Turner Diaries* and other similar works must therefore take the approach of discouraging violent action rather than targeting extremist beliefs,<sup>131</sup> in accordance with other data suggesting that a war of ideologies may not be an effective approach to preventing extremist violence.<sup>132</sup>

Within the limited range of possible messaging initiatives, a possibly fruitful avenue is to emphasise the failure of the book and its previous emulators – including The Order, the Aryan Republican Army and the perpetrators of the Oklahoma City bombing – to accomplish any significant social change.

However, the current political climate in the United States and Europe may provide new hope to those who seek to spark a racial cosmic war, as mainstream politicians ratify white racial fear and white nationalist beliefs predicated on worries about terrorism and immigration, resulting in new waves of overt harassment and hate crimes targeting people

of colour, immigrants, Muslims, and the LGBTQ community.<sup>133</sup>

In the United States specifically, rising racial tensions stemming from the presidential campaign, police killings of African-Americans, and the related targeting of police by black extremists in Dallas and Baton Rouge<sup>134</sup> all serve to reinforce *Turner's* mythology of an impending race war, a prospect of overwhelming interest to domestic extremists. And U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump has fanned fears of gun confiscation, one of the most resonant elements in *Turner's* plot, even going so far as to suggest that gun owners should take matters into their own hands if his opponent wins.<sup>135</sup>

In this highly charged social climate, in which tensions appear to be escalating rather than diminishing, the book is likely to find traction with a new generation of readers, a dynamic further empowered by its wide availability as a free text online.

*The Turner Diaries* is destined to be found on the computers and bookshelves of violent extremists for years to come. And while white nationalism is particularly suited to *Turner's* blend of fearmongering and ideological flexibility, it is likely that future authors will succeed in crafting similarly potent brews in the service of other causes.

The rising popularity of dystopian fiction as a mainstream genre<sup>136</sup> may further encourage future extremist ventures in this space.

130 J.M. Berger, "Making CVE Work" (2016).

131 A. Norton, "A new frame for CVE: Analyze beliefs. but counter behavior", The Brookings Institution, Markaz blog, 17 March 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/03/17-lawfare-foreign-policy-essay-norton-cve>.

132 J. Mort et al., "Role of Ideology and/or Religion as They Impact or Motivate Terrorism or Violence against Civilians", White paper: Protecting the Homeland from International and Domestic Terrorism Threats, Air Force Research Laboratory, January 2010.

133 P. Holley, "Top Nazi leader: Trump will be a 'real opportunity' for white nationalists", Washington Post, 7 August 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/08/07/top-nazi-leader-trump-will-be-a-real-opportunity-for-white-nationalists/?utm\\_term=.bee07b683778](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/08/07/top-nazi-leader-trump-will-be-a-real-opportunity-for-white-nationalists/?utm_term=.bee07b683778); H. Smith and N. Lancefield, "'Race hate' crimes on UK railways increase sharply after Brexit vote", The Independent, 21 August 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/race-hate-crimes-uk-railways-increase-brexit-vote-eu-referendum-a7202121.html>; H. Khaleeli, "'A frenzy of hatred': how to understand Brexit racism", The Guardian, 29 June 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/29/frenzy-hatred-brexit-racism-abuse-referendum-celebratory-lasting-damage>; A. Do, "Anti-Muslim and LGBT bias reports on the rise in OC hate crimes report", LA Times, 4 August 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-oc-hate-crimes-20160804-snap-story.html>.

134 "Investigation: People Shot by Police in 2016 to date", Washington Post, Undated, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings-2016/>; "Times Topic: Attacks on Police". New York Times, Undated, [http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/a/attacks\\_on\\_police/index.html](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/a/attacks_on_police/index.html).

135 N. Corasaniti and M. Haberman, "Donald Trump Suggests 'Second Amendment People' Could Act Against Hillary Clinton", New York Times, 9 August 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/10/us/politics/donald-trump-hillary-clinton.html>.

136 A. Campbell, "Why is dystopian fiction still so popular?", The Guardian, 18 November 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/nov/18/hunger-games-dystopian-fiction-appeal-to-teenagers-alex-campbell>.

Additional study of the history and utility of dystopian visions in the service of radical political causes may point the way to a better understanding of how and why these works resonate.

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