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Jessie Daniels

*CUNY Graduate Center*

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## Race, Civil Rights, and Hate Speech in the Digital Era

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### Introduction

The emergence of the digital era has had unintended consequences for race, civil rights, and hate speech. The notion prevalent in the early days of new media, either that race does not exist on the Internet or that cyberspace represents some sort of halcyon realm of “colorblindness,” is a myth. At the same time MCI was airing its infamous commercial proclaiming “there is no race” on the Internet,<sup>1</sup> some were already practiced at adapting white supremacy to the new online environment, creating Web sites that showcase hate speech along with more sophisticated Web sites that intentionally disguise their hateful purpose. Yet, there has been relatively little academic attention focused on racism in cyberspace.<sup>2</sup> Here I take up the issue of racism and white supremacy online with the goal of offering a more nuanced understanding of both racism and digital media, particularly as they relate to youth. Specifically, I address two broad categories of white supremacy online: (1) *overt* hate Web sites that target individuals or groups, showcase racist propaganda, or offer online community for white supremacists; and (2) *cloaked* Web sites that intentionally seek to deceive the casual Web user. I then explore the implications for youth who are, increasingly, growing up immersed in digital media.

Overt hate speech includes the kind of racial epithets and explicitly racist language that are widely regarded as unacceptable public expressions of racism in the contemporary political climate in the United States and throughout much of the world.<sup>3</sup> Cloaked Web sites, on the other hand, are those published by individuals or groups who deliberately disguise a hidden political agenda.<sup>4</sup> With regard to race, cloaked Web sites contain virulent anti-Semitism and hate propaganda not usually explicit or expressly on the surface. But they do reveal their racism several page-layers down, or they provide links to such information. And while arguing intent can be problematic, it is the case that these Web sites intentionally conceal their racism either on the entry page or throughout the Web site. While the two forms of online hate speech (overt and cloaked) may seem disparate, they are both grounded in an epistemology of white supremacy, which seeks to undermine hard-won political battles for racial and ethnic equality by rearticulating an essentialist notion of white racial purity, and an attitude of entitled privilege based on this notion. Most striking is these Web sites’ audacious deployment of the rhetoric of civil rights.

At the same time, the epistemology of white supremacy is, as philosopher Charles W. Mills has noted, “an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance,” which produces the ironic outcome that whites in general are “unable to understand the world that they

themselves have made.”<sup>5</sup> The presence of white supremacy online reinforces this epistemology of white supremacy offline by allowing whites to retreat from civic engagement and into a whites-only chimera. Thus, the early emergence and persistent presence of white supremacy online calls for multiple literacies: a literacy of digital media and new literacies not merely of “tolerance,” but literacies of social justice that offer a depth of understanding about race, racism, and multiple intersecting forms of oppression.

For young people today, there is nothing “new” about digital media; for them, digital media have always existed. According to a July 2005 report by researchers at the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 87 percent of youth aged 12–17 now use the Internet, which amounts to nearly 21 million youth.<sup>6</sup> A report by the Kaiser Family Foundation concerning eight- to eighteen-year-olds released the same year found that “Generation M” (for media), makes extensive and overlapping use of all kinds of media, spending six to six-and-a-half hours a day engaged in some kind of media use.<sup>7</sup> Whether accessing the Internet through a desktop computer or connecting through short message services (SMS) via mobile phones, digital media are ubiquitous in many young people’s lives. Futurist and Internet pioneer Howard Rheingold has observed that “search engines have replaced libraries” for young people in the digital age, and indeed they have.<sup>8</sup> This has real consequences for race, civil rights, and hate speech, because it means that the first, perhaps the *only*, place that young people go to “do research” about race is the Internet. Whether youth of color are looking for information about the history and political struggles connected to their racial and ethnic heritages, or white youth are looking to find out more about diverse “others,” or youth of whatever ethnicity are searching out clues about how to craft their own identities, often the first and only information destination is to a search engine to look for information online. Guiding young people’s development of a new set of literacy skills to evaluate this pervasive digital environment critically is a key challenge facing parents, educators, scholars, and activists in the twenty-first century. However, youth’s acquisition of digital media literacy alone is not sufficient for addressing the new white supremacy online; it is also necessary to help young people develop critical thinking about racism in digital media environments.

White supremacy in the United States, as I use the term here, is a central organizing principle of culture, politics, and the economy rather than merely an isolated social movement.<sup>9</sup> In previous research, I noted that there are striking similarities between extremist rhetoric and more mainstream expressions of white supremacy,<sup>10</sup> and research by others has confirmed this.<sup>11</sup> Joe Feagin has written extensively about this and what he calls “the white racist frame.”<sup>12</sup> In response to a query about the connection between new media and his concept of the “white racist frame” during a recent MacArthur Foundation–sponsored online forum, Feagin’s comments were instructive and bear quoting at length:

This framing of society goes back to at least the 1600s. It is nearly four centuries old now. This nation was founded in extensive slavery, and those whites that founded it soon rationalized that racial oppression (enslavement of Africans and killing of Indians) with this well-developed white racial frame. That frame, then and now, is full of racist stereotypes (such as lazy and dumb African Americans, uncivilized Indians, white culture is civilized and superior, etc), prejudices, and emotions that have been perpetuated by all forms of mass media since the first century of slavery. (We had 246 years of slavery in our first 258 years after the founding of Jamestown, VA in 1607; this was followed by nearly 100 years of legal segregation from 1870s to late 1960s). Thus, we have only been an officially “free” country that is free of legal racial apartheid, since the last civil rights law went into effect in 1969. About 90 percent of our history has been one of overt and extreme racial oppression. Ten percent has been free. The early mass media spreading the white racist frame (which was and is white supremacist in many ways) included ministers

speaking from pulpits and early pamphlets and newspapers. Later on in the 1900s many new magazines came in, then radio in the 1920s, and television by the 1950s. Then, the email system and the Internet [emerged] in the 1990s. Each new technology has mostly just extended the ability of those, mostly whites, interested in spreading that white racist frame to more people. It has not changed the white racist frame itself.<sup>13</sup>

If most adult whites are not aware of this long history of white supremacy embedded in the institutions of the United States; what, then, can we expect of their children? If they think of racism at all, many whites think of racism as a social problem rooted in a distant past, and located mostly in the South. They regard the post–Civil Rights era of colorblindness as a period in which the United States solved the issue of racism, led by enlightened white Northerners who battled ignorant white Southerners in order to liberate poor blacks. Today, too many white liberals embrace the belief that any lingering racial differences and racist consequences are rooted in economic class, and therefore are “not really” about racism. However, people of color have a very different experience of racism and white supremacy. For most people of color, regardless of class background or position, living with everyday racism is a shared group experience that is part of the toll society extracted from living in a white-dominated society. Examples of these dissimilar experiences with race abound, but perhaps the arena of criminal justice highlights this duality most aptly. Between 1992 and 2001, police brutality complaints in New York City rose 62 percent; approximately 80–97 percent of these victims were people of color, while the overwhelming majority of the officers involved were white. In addition, in 75 percent of the cases where the police killed someone, the person killed was unarmed.<sup>14</sup> And these alarming experiences result in very different contexts of race and racism. So when I use the term *white supremacy* here, I mean a kind of tenacious white supremacy that is cemented in the very architecture of the culture and political structures of the United States. Given this level of structural, systemic white supremacy, it should not be surprising that overt racism, especially racist speech, has found both an ease of expression and a broader audience in the United States via the Internet.

### Overt Hate Speech Online and Youth

Hate speech is easiest to see and examine online in its most overt forms. In the following section, I sketch the contours of three distinct articulations of overt hate speech online and the consequences for youth. First, I explore an instance of a woman who was targeted by a white supremacist hate site. Second, I discuss Don Black’s long-running Stormfront.org; then I turn to the tactics of committed extremists who use both the public features of the Web to showcase hate, and the quasi-private features of the Internet for what Michael Whine refers to as “communication, command and control.”<sup>15</sup> Finally, I take up the issue of cloaked Web sites.

### Hate Speech OL, Hate IRL

Hate speech online (OL) can have very real consequences in real life (IRL). In fact, it “offers a new way to harass women and people of color, including youth of color.”<sup>16</sup> Take, for example, the illustrative case of Bonnie Jouhari, a white mother of a biracial child who was harassed, forced from her home, stalked, and terrorized for years by a white supremacist. Jouhari, an employee of a fair housing organization in the United States, worked to fulfill the mission of the housing organization and advocated for nondiscriminatory housing practices;

this apparently enraged a white supremacist. In March of 1998, a white supremacist Web site in the United States began posting pictures of Jouhari's workplace exploding amid animated .gif flames. The Web site featuring Jouhari was modified a few months later to include hate speech attacking Jouhari's child, describing her as a "mongrel." Soon after, a car began regularly following Jouhari home, she received harassing phone calls at work and at home, and she has moved several times to get away from this ongoing threat to her life and the life of her child.<sup>17</sup>

The hate-filled targeting of an individual as in this instance is not unique. Similarly, Fred Phelps' hate site ([www.godhatesfags.com](http://www.godhatesfags.com)) features animated .gif flames surrounding a picture of murdered hate-crime victim Matthew Shepard, with a daily counter marking Matthew's "number of days in hell." While the Web site in this case appeared after Shepard's murder and so did not contribute directly to his death, Phelps' rhetoric serves to justify similar hate crimes, and is certainly a source of ongoing harassment for Dennis and Judy Shepard, Matthew's surviving parents. The Web site threatening Bonnie Jouhari and her daughter received over 97,000 visits in a three-year time period. Thus, the Internet in both these instances functions as a mechanism of harassment and as a force multiplier, expanding the reach of that harassment.<sup>18</sup> If Jouhari's case had occurred in any one of a number of European nations—say, Germany or Norway—she would have had legal recourse under antiracism laws.

In 2002, a Norwegian citizen was sentenced to prison for posting racist and anti-Semitic propaganda on a Web site, even though the server for the Web site was outside Norway.<sup>19</sup> Since her case happened in the United States, which has no comparable antiracism statutes, Jouhari's attempts to obtain assistance from local, state, and federal law enforcement and other agencies have proven futile. Jouhari and her daughter have moved several times, including cross-country, and continue to be the target of these online threats and offline harassment.<sup>20</sup> The experience of Bonnie Jouhari is distressing on two fronts. First, it illustrates the way hate speech online can—and does—have real consequences for peoples' lives. Her position as a relatively powerless member of society (a woman and a mother of a biracial child) disadvantages her both as one who is a vulnerable target for hate speech and as one whose attempts to get protection from the legal system has proven ineffective. Second, Jouhari's inability to get legal protection from online hate speech illustrates the frustrations with and consequences of a judicial system that, by upholding First Amendment protections, also functions to sustain and extend white supremacy.

Fortunately, it seems that most youth online today do not face the kind of targeted harassment that Bonnie Jouhari and her daughter faced. However, there is growing apprehension about the all-too-common practice of schoolyard bullying moving online. In what some have termed "cyberbullying,"<sup>21</sup> bullies target other young people for online harassment based on physical characteristics (like size, disability, or age) or social identities (such as gender, sexuality, race, or ethnicity). While the initial research in this area suggests that the targets of harassment are most often women and girls,<sup>22</sup> the fact is that the perpetrators of cyberbullying tend to be *white males*, both kids and adults. Similarly, in both the Shepard and Jouhari cases, the online harassers are white males.

### **Don Black's Stormfront.org**

One of the earliest and longest continually published Web sites of any kind is Don Black's [www.stormfront.org](http://www.stormfront.org). With its tagline "White Pride World Wide," the site has been a portal for online white supremacist activity since 1999 (see Figure 1). Don Black is a former Grand

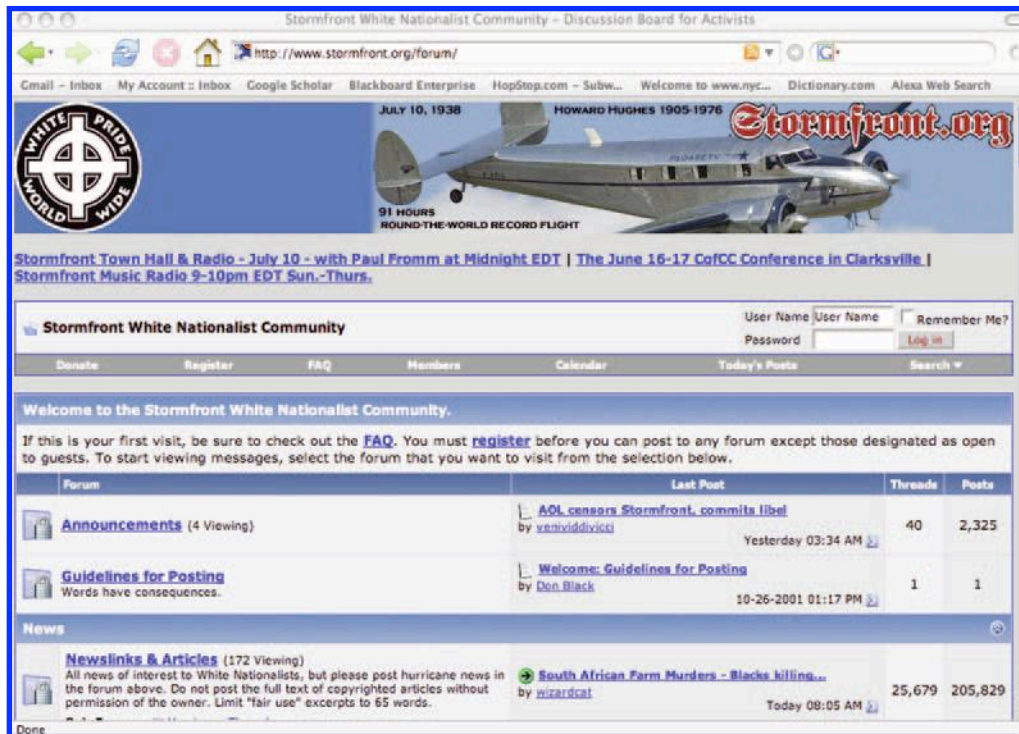


Figure 1  
Don Black's "White Pride World Wide," www.stormfront.org.

Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, and spent time in federal prison for an armed attack. Using job training he received in prison, Black has worked since his release primarily as a computer software engineer based in West Palm Beach, Florida. A follower of David Duke (and actually married to Duke's ex-wife, Chloe), Black has long been an advocate for "mainstreaming" the white supremacist movement, and the Internet is his preferred medium for doing so.<sup>23</sup> His first and primary online presence is Stormfront.org, and it has long been organized primarily as a discussion forum with multiple thematic message boards. The boards make it possible for members to post, read, and respond to others. This feature distinguishes Stormfront.org in significant and qualitative ways from sites that function as one-way transfers of information, such as the site that targeted Jouhari and her child.

While the possibility of white supremacists posting on message boards may suggest an onslaught of racist slurs, this is not the case at Stormfront.org. The tone of the rhetoric is quite muted; members are warned against using racial epithets or slurs, and are specifically prohibited from describing anything illegal or posting violent threats. Strategies like these, along with other rather standard online community-building tactics, have proven quite effective for Stormfront.org. As T. K. Kim puts it, writing for Southern Poverty Law Center's *Intelligence Report*:

Using everything from good manners to "white scholarships" to such catchy gimmicks as highlighting its members' birthdays, . . . [Don Black has] built something that very few people on the entire Internet have—a genuine and very large cyber-community.<sup>24</sup>

Further evidence of Black's savvy with online community building can be seen in a few of the relevant statistics on the site's registered users. In January 2002, Stormfront.org had 5,000 registered users. A year later, the number of users reached 11,000; and a year after that, in early 2004, there were 23,000 registered users. By January 2005, the number of registered users hit about 42,000, and it topped 52,566 in June of that year (the latest date for which numbers are available). Traffic to the site estimated by Alexa (the Web monitoring service) ranked Stormfront.org in June 2005 as the 8,682nd most visited site on the Internet—a rank well above that of most civil rights sites.<sup>25</sup>

Even though this sort of online community building can create and sustain life-affirming rituals,<sup>26</sup> it also offers the possibility of community rituals that affirm white identity and white supremacy.<sup>27</sup> As many online community experts will attest, it is no small accomplishment to sustain a community this large for this length of time. One of the first rules of operation is having a precision about what type of community this is to be, why it is being built, and for whom it is being built.<sup>28</sup> Don Black has exercised this sort of clarity of vision about his online community building in that he has constructed Stormfront.org as a community with the explicit purpose of “defending the white race,” primarily *for* white men who feel disaffected *as white men*.<sup>29</sup> This form of community building relies on “a virtual tribal identity of white masculinity to attract white men,” who define themselves and their online community by their vocal opposition to minorities, particularly Jews.<sup>30</sup> It is certainly not the case that white women are any less racist or any less implicated in the system of white supremacy than white men.<sup>31</sup> However, given the overlapping hierarchies of gender and race which convey cultural messages that code technology as a “male” domain of expertise<sup>32</sup> and an economic system in which whites hold disproportionate access to technological resources,<sup>33</sup> the net result is that white men have been at the forefront of establishing white supremacy online.

### **Not Just One “Web”: Showcasing Hate in Public and C<sup>3</sup> in Private**

For committed extremists, the Internet has been useful for showcasing racist propaganda and for what Michael Whine refers to as “communication, command and control” (C<sup>3</sup>).<sup>34</sup> The distinction here between the capacity for public showcasing and the ability to communicate in quasi-private ways through chat rooms, e-mail lists, and encrypted and/or password-protected Web spaces highlights what many commentators have noted are the limitations of using monolithic terms like “the Internet” or “the Web,” or even “cyberspace.”<sup>35</sup> In fact, there is not just one “Web,” but rather multiple forms of communication media contained under that umbrella term, some of them public and some of them quasi-private or anonymous.<sup>36</sup>

Using the public Web to showcase racist propaganda has certainly been the most common application of digital media by extremists. Many of the old-school white supremacist groups that were active before the emergence of the digital era have simply moved their rhetoric virtually unaltered from print-based newsletters to Web sites. A prime example of this shift is Tom Metzger, a former Ku Klux Klan leader, a television repairman by trade, and a one-time candidate for Congress.<sup>37</sup> After a falling out with the Klan about political ideology, Metzger broke with the KKK and created his own hate group, “WAR,” an acronym for “White Aryan Resistance.” WAR featured a more radical analysis of political economy than the KKK, and dropped all references to Christianity. To spread the message of WAR, Metzger created both print and broadcast vehicles: a newsletter, entitled *WAR*, a cable access television show called “Race and Reason,” and a radio broadcast.<sup>38</sup> All these media are now showcased and available via Metzger's Web site, “The Insurgent” located at the URL [www.resist.com](http://www.resist.com) (see Figure 2).



Figure 2  
Tom Metzger's "The Insurgent," [www.resist.com](http://www.resist.com).

The Web site includes position statements about a variety of topics, including immigration, international conflicts (most often involving Israel), homosexuality, and women. Prominently featured on the Web site is a link to purchase Aryan-branded merchandise (t-shirts, caps, key chains). The merchandise page includes the use of some forms that require a user login, but to actually place an order, the end user has to print out and mail in an order form with a check or money order. Aside from these forms, most of the features on the Web site are primarily static, and function as one-way transfers of information.

One of the noteworthy features on Metzger's Web site—because it is unique to the digital media environment intended to appeal to youth, and was not available during the print-era—is the selection of hate-filled computer games like *Drive By 2*, where players can experience *What It Is Like in the Ghetto*, *African Detroit Cop*, *Watch Out Behind You Hunter*, a game where players are instructed to “shoot the fags before they rape you,” and a game called *Border Patrol*, with the tag line, “Don't let those Spics cross our border” (see Figure 3). The games allow individual users to download and play the games on their desktop PCs. In addition to being violently racist and homophobic, the computer games are also deeply gendered in ways that are consistent with more mainstream games; that is, the games socialize boys into misogyny and exclude girls from all but the most stereotypical roles.<sup>39</sup> Research clearly demonstrates that adolescents are more likely to play computer games than adults; among adolescents, boys are more likely than girls to be gamers.<sup>40</sup> Adolescents are also



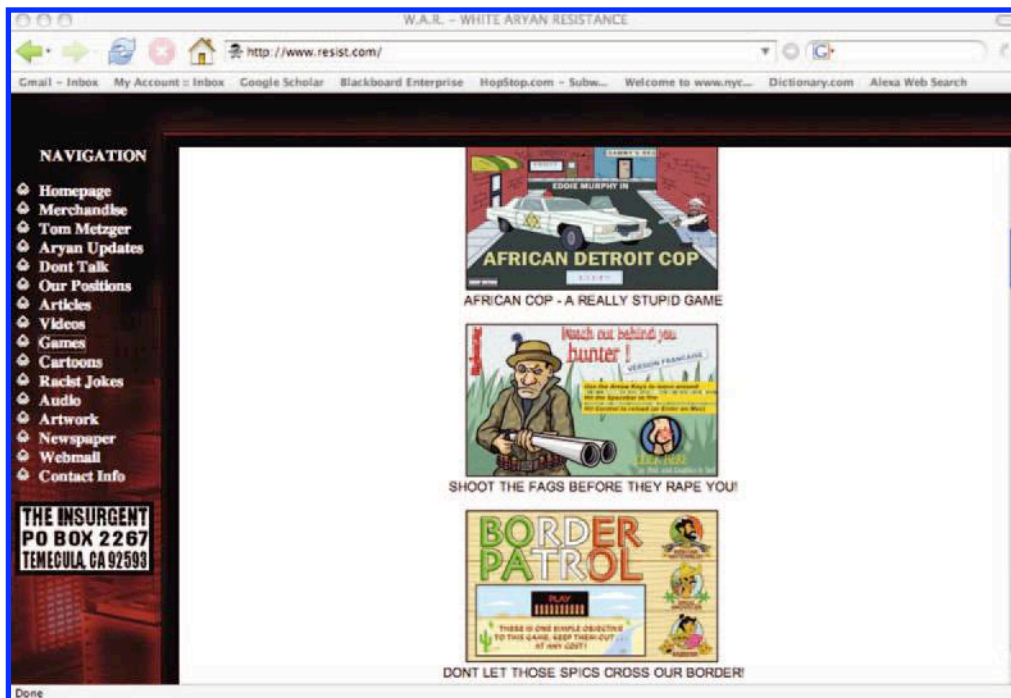


Figure 3  
Metzger's hate-filled computer games.

significantly more likely than adults to say that violence is their favorite part of gaming.<sup>41</sup> Metzger has included these computer games on his Web site to appeal to his core audience: young white males. However, Metzger's computer games are crude bits of gaming code that barely adhere to standards in gaming<sup>42</sup> and seem unlikely to meet the minimum demands of sophisticated gamers who have grown up playing *Everquest*, *Mortal Kombat*, and *Grand Theft Auto*. Without an evaluation of his internal Web site statistics, it is impossible to know how effective Metzger's racist games are, but there are indications these games have been unsuccessful in reaching a wider audience, since he recently removed them from the site.

Visitors to the site are invited to sign up for a listserv and to get an e-mail address with an "@resist.com" suffix, hosted by Metzger himself. This type of feature points to the quasi-private Web technology of e-mail listservs, password-protected Web spaces, and encrypted communications. These are only "quasi-private" because the privacy used in these sorts of communication tools is easily breached; and, I use this term to distinguish these modes of Internet-facilitated communication from the World Wide Web. It is this use of encrypted Internet technology that Michael Whine intends when he refers to "communication, command, and control" used by extremists and terrorists.<sup>43</sup> The capacity of the Internet to facilitate relatively inexpensive means of communication between and among people in dispersed geographic regions of the world is certainly one of the primary benefits white supremacists see in the medium. Further, the fact that this communication can be encrypted

and anonymous is appealing for many white supremacists,<sup>44</sup> although certainly not all, such as Metzger, who clearly relishes the spotlight.<sup>45</sup> Ironically, at the same time that anonymity is appealing for some, networked communication also reinforces what Back has referred to as a *translocal whiteness*<sup>46</sup>; that is, a form of white identity not tied to a specific location, but reimagined as an identity that transcends geography and is linked via a global network.

The idea of “command and control” is based on a military style of leadership in which a designated authority-figure “commands and controls” troops or followers. While encrypted communications provide the capacity for using the communication technology for command and control purposes, the reality is that this potentiality is mitigated against in some very real ways by fissures in the movement along ideological, often religious, lines.<sup>47</sup> Metzger’s split from the KKK over religion was no small matter within the movement, and religion is still a hotly contested issue that countervails the power of the communication technology.<sup>48</sup> The “command and control” model is further weakened by the strategy of leaderless resistance advocated by other white supremacists. Metzger describes the philosophy behind “The Insurgent” in this way:

THE INSURGENT is a NETWORK of highly motivated White Racists. Each person is an individual leader in his or her own right. THE INSURGENT promotes the Lone Wolf tactical concept. Made up of individuals and small cells. Each INSURGENT associate serves the Idea that what’s good for the White European Race is the highest virtue. Whatever is bad for the White European Race is the ultimate Evil. Each Associate works at whatever his or her talents allow.<sup>12</sup>

The notion of a “leaderless resistance,” in which small, covert cells acting independently work toward one shared political goal, has been popularized by another white supremacist, Louis Beam, and widely adopted within the movement.<sup>49</sup> The presence of quasi-private hate speech online, and the sort of overt hate speech that Metzger showcases, is disturbing because of the potential for translating into, or justifying, violence; however, the connection between hate speech and hate crimes is far from clearly established. Perhaps more germane for those interested in youth and digital media is the possibility that young people might stumble upon this sort of hate speech.

The threat of inadvertent exposure to overt hate speech is a misplaced cause for apprehension, but one that gets reiterated often. This statement is typical of this sort of alarm: “Millions of people are being exposed to virulent anti-Semitism and hate propaganda at the flick of a switch on their computers.”<sup>50</sup> This sort of assessment misjudges the harm of hate speech online. In a critique of this assertion, Best writes:

Who are these millions of people who are somehow running accidentally into “virulent anti-Semitism and hate propaganda?” I have been online since the 1980s and have never seen such hate material on the net. I am quite certain I can seek it out. But it does not come at the “flick of a switch.” I would view this material only because I actively sought it.<sup>51</sup>

Best makes a number of excellent points here. First, it is highly improbable that a casual Web user would stumble upon the kind of virulent anti-Semitism, racism, and homophobia of Metzger’s Resist.com or even Black’s Stormfront.org. The “flick of a switch” metaphor suggests a misapprehension of the way the Web works; the only “switch” flicked is the one to turn on a computer, and most of these are now buttons to be pressed rather than switches to be flicked. It also belies the presence of quasi-private Web spaces that are nearly impossible to stumble upon inadvertently. Beyond that, the notion that a young person

could stumble upon such hate speech fails to take into account that there are a number of steps required to find information online, usually involving a search engine with specific search terms typed in. Best's assessment that he is "certain" he could seek out hate speech is a more accurate reference to how one encounters this material online. A few keystrokes in any search engine can yield hundreds of results for hate speech. However, I want to suggest a reevaluation of Best's claim that he would view this material "only because I actively sought it." This statement, like the "flip of a switch" metaphor, suggests a misunderstanding about the way white supremacist rhetoric operates online. There is credible evidence to suggest that the unsuspecting Web user may actually happen upon white supremacist Web sites when looking specifically for legitimate civil rights information. Again, the implications for youth have a special pertinence here.

### Covert Hate Speech: Cloaked Web Sites

Unsuspecting Internet users looking for civil rights information online may inadvertently encounter white supremacist rhetoric through *cloaked* Web sites. Indeed, a number of these sites deliberately seek to disguise the racist motives of the Web site's author by using carefully chosen domain names, deceptive graphic user interface (GUI) and language that is less strident than what appears in overt hate speech online. One example of a cloaked site is [www.AmericanCivilRightsReview.com](http://www.AmericanCivilRightsReview.com), a Web site owned and operated by Frank Weltner, a member of the National Alliance, a neo-Nazi organization. Weltner also maintains the hate Web site [www.Jewwatch.com](http://www.Jewwatch.com).<sup>52</sup> The animated .gifs and crude graphic design of [AmericanCivilRightsReview.com](http://www.AmericanCivilRightsReview.com) give this site away as a first-generation Web site (featuring unappealing background colors and default font settings that were characteristic of early Web sites of 1993–1995) created by an amateur, but the racism and anti-Semitism of the site are cloaked in fairly sophisticated ways. For instance, on an interior page image-linked through a reproduction of a Currier & Ives painting, the author describes the "high self-esteem for many slaves" and goes on to make an argument for slavery as an "idyllic" social system. The argument in favor of slavery is not new, but the sophistication comes in the way Weltner chooses to make this argument, which is to draw on oral histories of former slaves recorded by WPA workers in the 1930s. He then compiles selectively chosen excerpts on a page entitled "Forgotten Black Voices," such as this quote from Adeline, 91: "I wants to be in heaven with all my white folks, just to wait on them and love them, and serve them, sorta like I did in slavery time." With this site, Weltner is one good graphic designer away from having a much more pernicious Web site for, while the annoying audio file and rudimentary graphic design betray the amateur origins, the racism is harder to discern when it is cloaked by a recondite, if sinister, use of oral history source material.

Another example of a cloaked site is [IHR.org](http://IHR.org), the online home of the Institute for Historical Review. Here, the GUI is much more polished than on Weltner's site and there are no audio files or animated .gifs. The rhetoric on the site is presented, at first glance, as dedicated to exploring "truth and free speech." There are books and tapes available for sale on the left and right sides of the page, and down the center is a list of brief, paragraph-long descriptions of various news stories, each accompanied by a hyperlink and a photo. Across the top is a row of links to other pages on the site. The structure, graphic design, and text on this page look completely benign; of course, they are not. [IHR.org](http://IHR.org), as critically aware readers will know, is an organization that seeks to deny the existence of the Holocaust and is published by Mark Weber out of Orange County, California. [IHR.org](http://IHR.org) touts itself as a source of scholarly

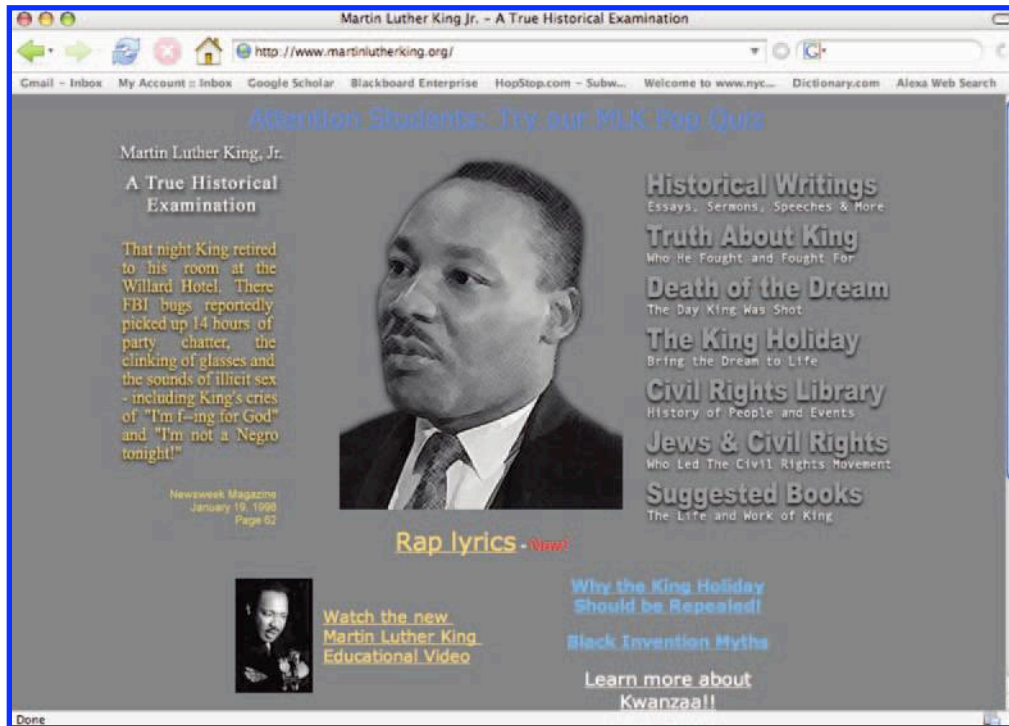


Figure 4  
Cloaked Web site, www.martinlutherking.org.

information and claims that “countless scholars, researchers and journalists have turned to the IHR for solid and reliable information” (<http://www.ihr.org/main/about.shtml>). The Web users who are already aware of the mission and deceptive nature of the Institute for Historical Review will not be misled by the cloaked Web site but, for the uninitiated and many youths, it is very likely that the combination of professional-looking graphic design and non-extremist-sounding rhetoric can be disarming and delusory.

Don Black, the white supremacist discussed above who maintains Stormfront.org, also publishes a number of cloaked sites, including one with the URL [www.martinlutherking.org](http://www.martinlutherking.org) (see Figure 4). At first glance, this Web site appears to be a tribute site to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., albeit one intended for a younger audience as indicated by the link at the top, “Attention Students: Try our MLK Pop Quiz,” and the one further down the page indicating “Rap Lyrics.” Using a standard search engine and the search terms “Martin Luther King” this Web site regularly appears third or fourth in the results returned by Google. Before even viewing the content of this site, the URL makes it appear to be legitimate, in part because the main Web reference is made up of only the domain name “martinlutherking,” and the URL ends with the suffix “.org.” There are a number of clues that something is amiss. The first clue is the description of the Web site that appears in the search engine returns and on the Web site itself: “A True Historical Examination”; the use of the word “true” here suggests an “uncovering” of a heretofore untold truth about Dr. King.

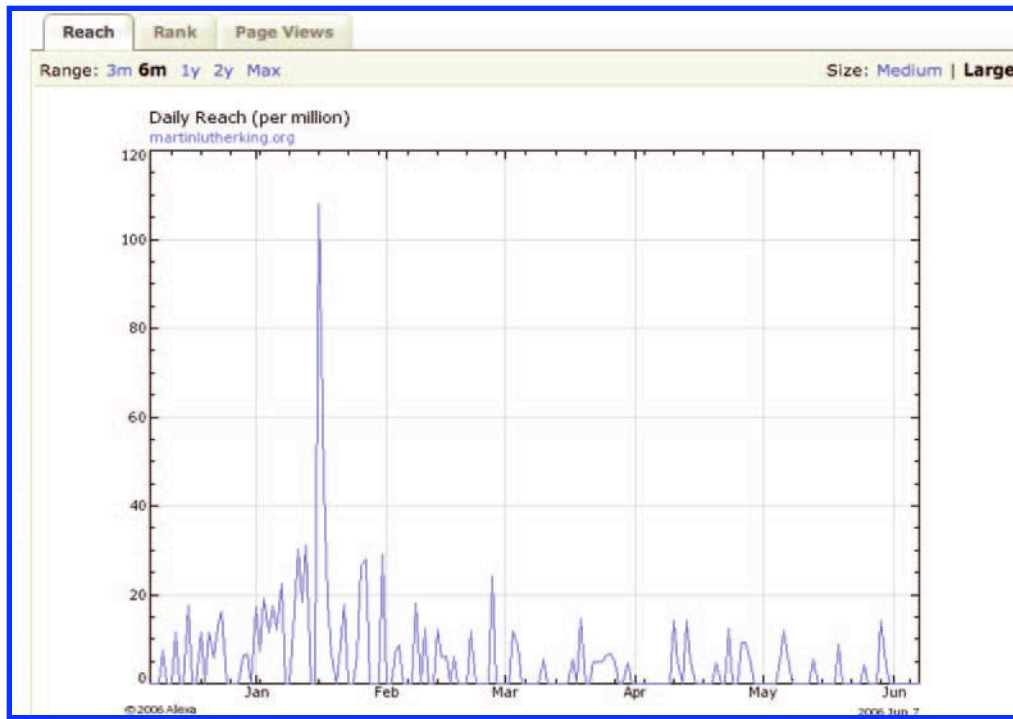
Once on the Web site, there are a number of additional indications as to the source of the information, including a link in the right margin that reads “Jews and Civil Rights,” which is suggestive of anti-Semitism.<sup>53</sup> Clicking on that link leads to a page that more than suggests anti-Semitism, as it includes a chapter called “Jews, Communism and Civil Rights” from white supremacist David Duke’s book *My Awakening*. For the astute Web user, this is a giveaway about the ideological orientation of the Web site’s author. Still, for many younger or less experienced Web users, as well as those unfamiliar with recent U.S. racial political history, the name “David Duke” may have no resonance. Going back to the first page, there is one more clue if a casual Web user wanted to know the origin of this “True Historical Examination.” Scrolling down to the very bottom of the first page, there is a link that reads “Hosted by Stormfront,” and clicking on that link takes the user to Don Black’s “White Pride World Wide” at Stormfront.org. Although these clues may seem fairly obvious to some Web users (such as readers of this volume), others can easily miss them. Thus, unsuspecting visitors to the site who have little Web experience but are aware of how white supremacy works in the United States, may very well be familiar with “David Duke” or be suspicious of language referring to “Jews and Civil Rights,” and therefore understand that the site is not actually intended as a tribute to Dr. King but rather aims to undermine the civil rights cause.

The presence of cloaked sites raises important questions about youth and digital media; one of these questions has to do with whether someone could “stumble upon” virulent anti-Semitism or racism online. It is not only possible, but also likely that casual or novice Web users could inadvertently come across white supremacist rhetoric while looking for legitimate civil rights information. The cloaked site [www.martinlutherking.org](http://www.martinlutherking.org) is a case in point. Using the Web monitoring service Alexa, I charted the traffic of this cloaked site (see Figure 5) and to the legitimate civil rights Web site for The King Center, run by the King family in Atlanta (see Figure 6). I also charted them comparatively (see Figure 7). The estimated traffic for both sites is in the tens of millions in terms of number of hits; and, the traffic patterns for the two sites are strikingly similar. Not surprisingly, traffic to both sites peaks annually around the time of Martin Luther King Day (toward the end of January), and during Black History Month (February). There is also one noticeable difference in traffic between the two sites and this is evident when looking at the graphs side-by-side. Here, there is evidence of a spike in traffic to the King Center site (the legitimate site) on January 31, 2005, the day Mrs. King died. Other than this one, rather dramatic, difference the traffic patterns for the two sites are remarkably comparable. The patterns are so similar, in fact, that it suggests that Web users who are looking for legitimate civil rights information may very well be ending up at the cloaked white supremacist site.

Once at these cloaked sites, it is possible that unsuspecting Web users will find this disorienting. In a series of experiments and interviews, when asked to search for information on Martin Luther King, I discovered that even high-achieving and Internet-savvy adolescents had difficulty deciphering whether this cloaked Web site was a trustworthy source of information about Dr. King.<sup>54</sup> For example, one seventeen-year-old respondent woman had this to say when asked to evaluate the cloaked site:

It looks good to me. I mean this is just about how people tried to undermine him (referring to a quote on the first page). And, this (referring to the links to the right of the page) just look like his writings, but I can’t tell if these are *his* writings or writings *about* him. Oh, and this looks good (clicking on the link, “King’s Dissertation”). I like this because it’s got primary sources. (Interview, January, 2006)

As this young woman browsed the cloaked Web site, she displayed a number of advanced skills associated with long hours spent surfing, including quick use of the mouse button



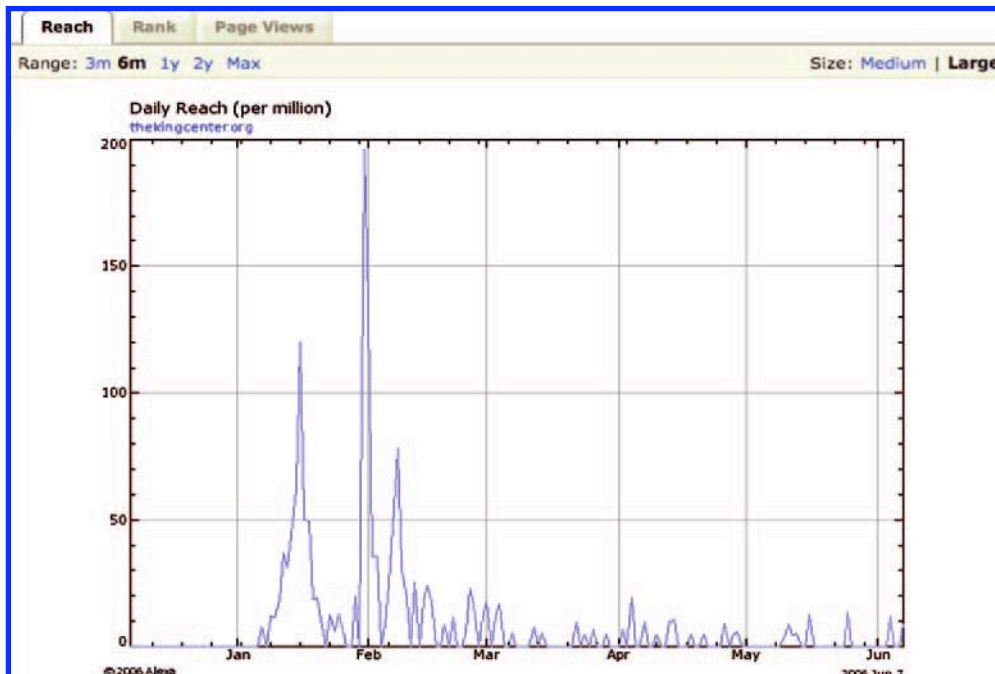
**Figure 5**

Estimated reach in millions for [www.martinlutherking.org](http://www.martinlutherking.org). Source: Alexa, Web Trafficking Service ([www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com)).

and a deft ability with the right click button. And, as a high school junior, she did know that primary sources are important. However, she did not recognize this site as something published by a white supremacist, but instead read it as a legitimate source of information about Dr. King. The link to “King’s Dissertation” is not, in fact, a link to a primary source for King’s writing, but is, instead, a rehashing of the charge that he plagiarized parts of his dissertation. When asked to refer to the page containing information on David Duke’s book *My Awakening*, she replied that Duke did not look familiar, but his (vanity) press “Free Speech Press, does sound familiar” (Interview, January, 2006). This young woman, like other adolescents in this same study, was largely unable to evaluate critically or to distinguish between cloaked sites when they were paired with legitimate civil rights Web sites. What this makes clear is that it takes either a familiarity with white supremacy or a fairly experienced, critically engaged Web user (or both) to recognize cloaked Web sites quickly and distinguish them from legitimate ones.

### **New White Supremacy Online**

Given the presence of white supremacy online, many parents and other adults involved with youth express trepidation about the dangers of the new white supremacy online for youth engaged with digital media.<sup>55</sup> Primarily, there are two questions that are most commonly



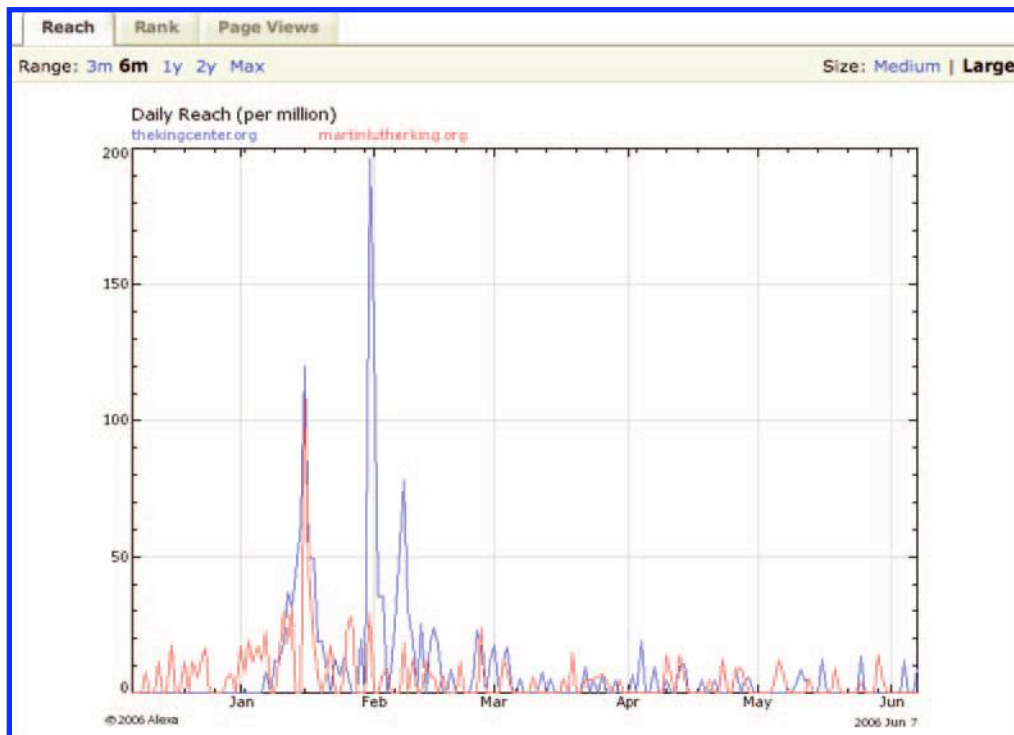
**Figure 6**

Estimated reach in millions for [www.thekingcenter.org](http://www.thekingcenter.org). Source: Alexa, Web Trafficking Service ([www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com)).

raised with regard to white supremacy online. The first has to do with political mobilization: Can neofascist organizations like white supremacists use the Internet to mobilize a large, viable political threat to our democracy? The second, related to the first, is this: Can people, particularly young people, be persuaded to join white supremacist movements via the Internet?

New digital media—like blogs, wikis, and such mobile computing technology as SMS—have made formerly obscure activist subcultures more accessible and created new avenues of political participation for those who are looking for such avenues.<sup>56</sup> When it comes to political mobilization, the Internet has demonstrated just how powerfully it works as an amplifier of many messages, values, and ideas. People who are interested in particular ideas can connect using the Internet and, in this way, the Internet “amplifies” those connections and strengthens networks of like-minded people.<sup>57</sup> For extremist white supremacists, like others in obscure subcultures, the Internet provides a relatively inexpensive venue for widespread communication without gatekeepers.<sup>58</sup> Whether or not this wider availability of white supremacy online will facilitate greater political mobilization for strengthening the movement remains a question under investigation. Among those who have taken up this question, the assessment of Jeffery Kaplan and his colleagues comes closest to posing an answer:

Internet or no Internet, barring some cataclysmic development, WAR, [and similar organizations] ... currently seeking to take advantage of the new technology are unlikely to become serious



**Figure 7**

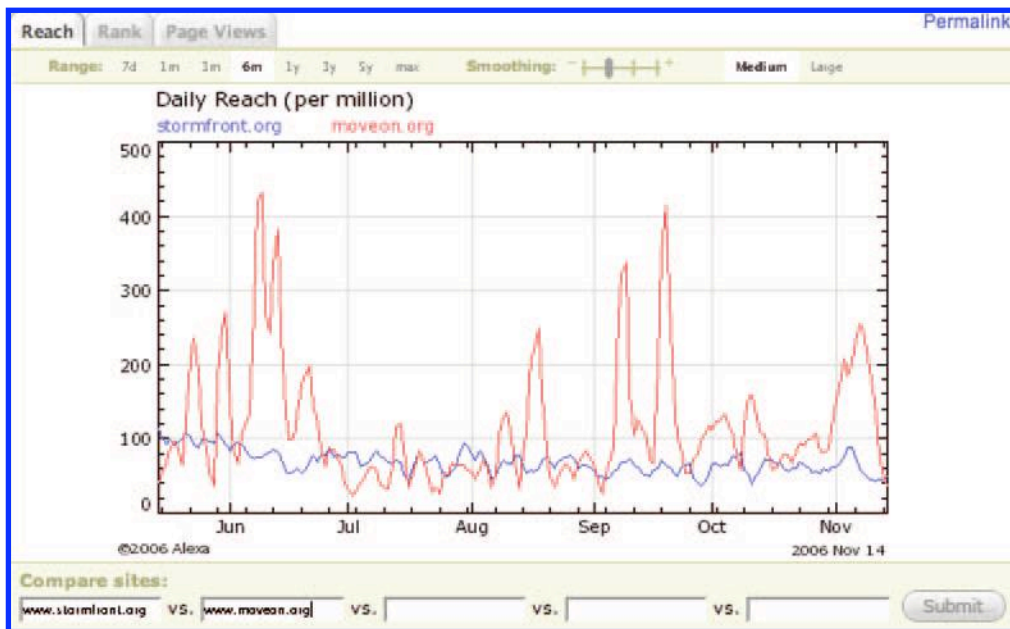
Comparative reach in millions for the cloaked and the legitimate sites. Source: Alexa Web Service ([www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com)).

political contestants. Nevertheless, the Internet does furnish them with a link, a way of circumventing the gatekeepers of the other channels of mass communication.<sup>59</sup>

A serious consequence of participatory media is its accessibility and availability to specialist and nonspecialist users alike. And as a result of this open system, some with nefarious goals and agendas will join in and create their own suspect content. In analyzing what this means for digital media learning and youth, it is important to parse the actual harm from the potential threat. The likelihood that Don Black's or Tom Metzger's organization could become a serious political contender is, in my view, remote. However, the issue of communicating without gatekeepers is significant for the epistemology of white supremacy online and a topic to which I will return. For the moment, let me continue addressing the issue of why the possibility of a larger political mobilization by white supremacists remains distant, but a concern nevertheless.

To effect change, social movement organizations must mobilize resources, such as attracting financial backing, garnering media coverage, establishing organizational structure, and forming political alliances with those in power.<sup>60</sup> The Internet is an important new tool for mobilizing these resources, because it increases the speed at which resources can be mobilized and then dispersed for accomplishing movement goals.<sup>61</sup> Adopting a resource mobilization framework, Hara and Estrada compared the use of the Web by Stormfront.org





**Figure 8**

Comparative reach in millions for Stormfront and MoveOn. Source: Alexa Web Service (www.alexa.com).

and MoveOn.org, a Web site for liberal-to-progressive political activity.<sup>62</sup> Their findings suggest that while there are some similarities between these two Web sites in terms of attempts at political mobilization, they are not equally effective. They find that MoveOn.org is more popular and more effective than Stormfront.org for a variety of reasons. For example, they point to the use of other media, such as print journalism and network news, to drive traffic to the Web sites and garner support for the respective movements. Both Stormfront.org and MoveOn.org have been featured in mainstream media reports, yet MoveOn.org has been much more aggressive in seeking out this media attention and, Hara and Estrada argue, it is this strategy, rather than content alone, which has enabled MoveOn to sustain a broad-based political mobilization that Stormfront has been unable to achieve.<sup>63</sup> The broader appeal of MoveOn.org is borne out using other data (see Figure 8).

Comparing the Web traffic to the two sites,<sup>64</sup> the figures confirm Hara's and Estrada's analysis of MoveOn.org as having a broader appeal than Stormfront.org. As alarming as the 52,000+ registered users at Stormfront are, the fact that MoveOn remains consistently more popular than Stormfront should be heartening for those who are committed to democratic ideals. However, the fact that there are that many people interested enough in white supremacy to register at Stormfront should give those interested in social justice great pause to consider which civil rights goals have been achieved and which goals remain unfilled. But what of those 52,000+ registered users? Are these people being recruited into the white supremacist movement?

To better understand the issue of recruitment into white supremacist groups via the Internet, it is important to distinguish between "supporters" and "members" in social movement

organizations. Unlike traditional groups that have formal organizational structures including “leaders” and “members,” sociologists have conceptualized new social movements as consisting not of members, but of more informal, loosely organized social networks of “supporters.” This is an important distinction for talking about the sort of peripheral involvement of many people in social movements online. For example, in a well-grounded quantitative study of both online and offline environmental activists in the Netherlands, researchers found that online actions were more popular among those who did not take part in any traditional street actions, and thus they suggest that online activism may be an “easy entry point” for more peripheral participants.<sup>65</sup> Whether or not peripheral online participants inevitably, or eventually, become supporters or more involved activists and what the mechanisms of that evolution might be remain unclear. Online communities rather famously suffer from “participation inequality,” in which an estimated 90 percent of those in any given community do not actively participate, but instead “lurk” (or read without posting).<sup>66</sup> In terms of the 52,000+ registered users at Stormfront.org, it is useful to think of a certain percentage of these users variously as “devoted members,” “supporters,” “peripheral participants,” and “lurkers.”<sup>67</sup> While I do not want to diminish the importance of those 52,000 registered users, I think that regarding them as movement members who have been “recruited” is to reverse the online dynamic. The underlying issue, and the much more troublesome one, is not that Don Black is necessarily “recruiting,” but that people are *seeking out* Stormfront and the message of “White Pride World Wide.” This speaks to the existence of an embedded and internal white supremacy that is built into the culture, rather than an extremist one external to the core culture. The fact that some fifty years after the civil rights movement there are 52,000+ registered users at Stormfront suggests that the message of white supremacy, far from being an anachronism, still resonates.

While a number of writers have asserted that the Internet is a *potential* site for recruiting young people to join white supremacist groups, these claims are largely unsupported by empirical evidence, and instead play on parents’ fears about their children’s online activities. For example, in an article for the *Psychiatric News*, Lynne Lamberg writes: “Hate Web sites aggressively pursue impressionable children and teenagers.”<sup>68</sup> And, tying this fear to another, she adds: “Surveys show parents worry most about children’s access to Internet sex sites and that many parents know little about hate Web sites.”<sup>69</sup> The handful of research studies that do take up the empirical question of whether, and precisely how, white supremacists might recruit young people online find little data to support the claim of the Internet as a recruiting tool.<sup>70</sup> For example, in their important study of the effects of “persuasive storytelling” of hate sites on adolescents, Lee and Leets found only minimal effects on adolescents who were infrequently exposed to explicit hate messages.<sup>71</sup> By design, their research did not explore the effects on adolescents who might have repeated exposure to such messages, nor how adolescents might become exposed to these messages on the Internet in the first place.

In his seven-year ethnography of white supremacist groups in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States, Blazak found that in face-to-face interactions the groups used “red flags of strain to guide recruiting activity.”<sup>72</sup> Among these “red flags” are four main areas of strain: racial/ethnic (shifts to multicultural curricula), gender (feminist activist groups), heterosexuality (gay pride events), and economic (factory layoffs).<sup>73</sup> Youths, most often young white males, experiencing cultural alienation or anomie<sup>74</sup> because shifts in any of these areas of strain are susceptible to recruitment and targeted by white supremacist groups. As Blazak describes it, this is a years-long process that happens almost entirely offline, in face-to-face social gatherings. The transformation from “white boys” to “terrorist men” also

makes clear the ways gender and sexuality, and specifically heteronormative masculinity, are central to white supremacist discourse and recruitment.<sup>75</sup> This kind of young, white male alienation predates the advent of digital media; and to locate the harm in this, we need look no further than to the 168 people killed at the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

For those concerned about youth and digital media, there is a very real possibility that alienated young white men may direct their frustration at those perceived to be “others,” whether based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or the combination of one or more of these identities. The potential harm in the presence of white supremacy *online* is that it is easier for already-alienated young white males to seek out validation for their discontent. For youth of color, for women and girls, for gays and lesbians, the potential harm is in real life, just as it was (and is) for Bonnie Jouhari and her child. The key factors that trigger this kind of alienation, including the introduction of multicultural curricula, feminist or gay/lesbian groups organizing, as well as economic changes such as layoffs, develop separately from digital media, but may be amplified by it, and suggest that the root cause lies in the epistemology of white supremacy. This inverted epistemology of ignorance produces the ironic outcome that whites, in general, are “unable to understand the world that they themselves have made.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, the small number of straight white men who create hate speech online, and the many thousands more who actively seek it out, constitute a privileged population sector in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and class (certainly within a global context); yet, these privileged white men end up identifying as an oppressed minority group. This is the very essence of the epistemology of white supremacy.

### Epistemology of White Supremacy and Hate Speech Online

Epistemologies of race, how we know what we say we know about race and racism, are rooted in profoundly different experiences for whites and for people of color, wherein some experience everyday racism while others enjoy the privilege of ignoring it on a daily basis. Added to this bifurcated experiential epistemology, digital media is creating a shift in how knowledge beyond one’s own experience of the world is sought, acquired, evaluated, and retained. The shift from libraries to search engines as the primary source of information for young people raises important questions about how we understand race, hate speech, and civil rights in a knowledge environment without traditional gatekeepers of editors, publishers, and peer reviewers. The same search engine and browser window that serves up the United Nations Web site, the *New York Times*, DailyKos, MoveOn, and the King Center also delivers Resist.com and MartinLutherKing.org. The increasing need for critical literacy to distinguish effectively between these sites is a task left to the user. In my view, a much more likely, and more pernicious risk to young people from hate speech online than either mobilizing or recruiting them into extremist white supremacist groups, is an epistemological vulnerability. The epistemological peril of white supremacy online lies in its ability to change how we know what we say we know about issues that have been politically hard won, issues such as civil rights.

Both forms of online hate speech discussed here, overt and cloaked, are grounded in an epistemology of white supremacy. The presence of overt hate speech online reinforces this epistemology of white supremacy by allowing white racists to retreat from civic engagement and into a whites-only fantasy of superiority or victimhood. For those who create overt hate speech, the Internet provides a forum for amplifying racist propaganda. For those who seek it out, overt hate speech online validates an essentialist notion of white racial purity, privilege,

and entitlement by rearticulating white supremacy using the rhetoric of civil rights. Such a rearticulation rests on a disavowal of everyday racism and blindness to the myriad ways in which whites are privileged by race. Within a context filled with like-minded individuals and absent gatekeepers, these rearticulations set up an infinite loop within the technology, reinforcing white supremacy by design. Even for nonracist whites, the Internet and white supremacy work as reinforcing mechanisms. For well-meaning white liberals, extremists often represent an "Other" who signifies racism and undermines any examination of the ways white supremacy is embedded in the culture and institutions of the United States.<sup>77</sup> For some white liberals, hate speech online is a reliable target for focusing attention on issues of racism, because it is easy to point to vast differences that distinguish liberals from extremists; yet, this focus often obfuscates the more difficult investigation into the ways that white supremacy is built into the mechanisms of the dominant culture, institutions, even the technology itself, administered by those with no ties to extremist groups.

As for cloaked Web sites, they shift the terrain of racial politics to domain name registration and GUI. The decision to register the URL "martinlutherking.org" in 1999, relatively early in the evolution of the Web, was a prescient and opportune move for advocates of white supremacy; failure to do likewise was a lost opportunity for advocates of civil rights. Recognizing that domain name registration is now a political battleground, a number of civil rights organizations have begun to reserve domain names to prevent them from being used by opponents of racial justice. For example, the NAACP registered six domain names that include the word "nigger"<sup>78</sup> and the ADL registered a similar number of domain names with the word "kike."<sup>79</sup> However, registering offensive epithets is only a small part of the struggle. The move by opponents to register the esteemed symbols of civil rights as domain names, such as Martin Luther King, and to use them to undermine racial justice, is one that was clearly unanticipated by civil rights organizations. To be effective, cloaked domain names such as [www.martinlutherking.org](http://www.martinlutherking.org) and [www.AmericanCivilRightsReview.org](http://www.AmericanCivilRightsReview.org) rely on the naïveté of their target audiences, those whites who fail to understand this practice and the world that they, themselves, have made. The vulnerability of these cloaked sites, however, lies in their inexperienced GUI and rudimentary designs, which makes them easier to spot. The problem is that poor graphic design and Web layout are technological bugs that are easy enough to fix, and when that happens, reliance on these visual elements will not be enough to discern cloaked sites. Instead, people will need to parse the rhetorics of white supremacist ideology and progressive racial politics based on the content of the sites, rather than the color of their graphics, so to speak.

Obviously, unsuspecting white people are not the only ones who read these cloaked sites; people of color, particularly youth of color, read these sites also. For youth of color, reading cloaked sites means having their own cultures and histories distorted in the retelling, and this is characteristic of the epistemology of white supremacy. This, however, is not new or unique to digital media. For people of color have had their cultures and histories distorted by whites, both those with and without good intentions, for many centuries. Black feminist epistemology, an alternative epistemology suggested by Patricia Hill Collins<sup>80</sup> and others, may hold some keys for understanding these sites. Collins' epistemological stance places an emphasis on lived experience as a criterion of meaning, and suggests that ideas cannot be divorced from the individuals who create and share them. This is where youth of color may have an advantage in critically evaluating these sites. If they draw on lived experience of everyday racism and do the critical work of evaluating which individuals are creating the ideas contained in cloaked Web sites, then they may have an advantage

over those steeped in the epistemology of white supremacy that reinforces illiteracy about racism.

Digital media is neither a panacea for eliminating racial inequality, nor is it a dangerous lure for young people drawing them inexorably toward hate groups. A more nuanced understanding of both racism and digital media suggests that new white supremacy online looks, in many ways, like the old white supremacy, and our culture and institutions are steeped in it. Analogously, young people who are immersed in digital media do not, somehow, speak with a pure voice when it comes to matters of race and racism, but rather speak with an inflected voice that both mirrors and shapes the culture and institutions in which they grow up. Within the United States, the culture and institutions were originally formed by slave-owning elites (see, e.g., Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*),<sup>81</sup> and this legacy of white supremacy endures. Young people, depending on their lived experience offline, may use digital media to resist or to reinscribe white supremacy, and engaged adults can influence which of these paths they choose. Trying to understand hate speech online exclusively in terms of extremists, without taking into account the context of white supremacy from which it emerges, is to replay the epistemological error that Mills describes. In her work on race and digital media, Tara McPherson calls for an examination of "the ways in which race may be embedded in the very root structures of American technology, functioning as a kind of ever-present ghost in the machine."<sup>82</sup> Similarly, what I mean to suggest with this discussion of epistemology is that white supremacy is constitutive of digital media, particularly in the United States, and not merely added on to digital media. The early, persistent, and durable presence of white supremacy online calls for different kinds of literacies: a literacy of digital media, to be sure, and new literacies not merely of "tolerance," but literacies of social justice that offer a depth of understanding about race, racism, and multiple, intersecting forms of oppression. At stake in this shifting digital terrain is our vision for racial and social justice.

### **Multiple Literacies: Digital Media, Anti-racism, and Social Justice**

One of the ways that digital media has sparked innovation is by opening people's minds to new possibilities and reminding us that we are, in fact, designers of our own social futures.<sup>83</sup> New ways of thinking and learning have emerged, and among those leading the way in thinking about these issues are Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, who have called for a *multiple literacies* approach.<sup>84</sup> A multiple literacies approach combines traditional print literacy with critical media literacy and new forms of literacies about how to access, navigate, create, and participate in digital media.<sup>85</sup> Digital media also poses new challenges and opportunities for parents, educators, activists, and scholars for understanding racism, antiracism, and social justice.

Ten years into the digital media revolution, our initial ways of educating young people about digital media literacy seem ineffectual at best, and misleading at worst. For example, one strategy widely used in Internet literacy curricula is instructing students to "look at the URL," and especially at the three-letter suffix (.com, .edu, .org). In the case of the cloaked Web sites, following this advice only serves to make the cloaked site appear *more* legitimate, rather than less so. Another response popular with some parents and youth-oriented organizations is "hate filters," software programs designed to "filter" hate sites encountered through search engines. These filters are woefully inadequate at addressing anything but the most overt forms of hate speech online, and even when they work as intended, they disable the critical thinking that is central to what is needed in our approach to digital media literacy.

The direction that digital media literacy needs to take is promoting the ability to read text closely and carefully, as well as developing skills necessary to “read” critically the visual imagery and graphic design. Along with visual and textual literacy, the critical thinking skills required to decipher Web authorship, intended audience, and cloaked political agendas in making knowledge claims must be combined with at least some understanding of how domain name registration works. At a minimum, this is what is required to be a fully engaged, thoughtful user of the Web. Important in this effort is for young people to become content creators actively engaged in creating their own digital media, which helps demystify the medium in significant ways. And, introducing young people to the regular use of a range of free, online tools for Web analysis is important as well. Technology such as the “Who Is Registry” ([www.internic.net/whois.html](http://www.internic.net/whois.html)) can sometimes help determine who the author of a Web site is in the absence of clear information. The Alexa ([www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com)) Web trafficking service can help young people see how many visitors a particular site gets, and provide some analysis about how that site relates to other sites. The free software Touch Graph ([www.touchgraph.com](http://www.touchgraph.com)) uses a Java applet to display visually the relationship between links leading to and from a site. Even though youth are immersed in the use of digital media, they are not necessarily adept at thinking critically about digital media, and this is where adults—whether parents, teachers, activists, or scholars—can play a role in connecting them to technology that facilitates this critical thinking. Technological literacy alone, however, is not enough for addressing the challenges of white supremacy online.

Among the advantages of incorporating principles of critical media literacy into a multiple literacies approach required for digital media is that it calls for valuing young people’s voices as well as deconstructing images produced by corporate-owned media. Furthermore, critical media literacy calls for understanding multiple perspectives. Understanding multiple perspectives is an important corrective to the racism, sexism, and homophobia generated by corporate-owned media outlets; and, as Henry Jenkins has rightly pointed out, this is a vital contribution of participatory media.<sup>86</sup> However, I want to add a small but significant corrective to the idea of valuing multiple perspectives, by suggesting that not all perspectives are to be valued equally. If “valuing multiple perspectives” is our only standard, then we have no basis on which to critically distinguish between a cloaked Web site and a legitimate civil rights Web site, no way to evaluate the content generated by The King Center over that produced at [www.martinlutherking.org](http://www.martinlutherking.org). The usual approach within critical media literacy of “understanding multiple perspectives” is simply not enough for understanding the epistemology of white supremacy online. If new media literacy merely advocates valuing multiple perspectives without regard to content, then there is no way to distinguish between different perspectives, no basis for a vision of social justice. So, in addition to understanding digital media, youth need to be well versed in literacies of racism, antiracism, and social justice. And, of course, this is one of the places where adults (provided they have this knowledge themselves) can become involved. Young people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds need to read histories of the United States that include critical race perspectives. Youth of color need critical consciousness to go with lived experiences of everyday racism; and white youth need to begin the lifelong process of unlearning the epistemology of white supremacy. Bringing these multiple literacies together—visual and textual literacy, critical media literacy, and a literacy of antiracism and social justice—will empower young people not to be seduced by white supremacy, whether overt or cloaked, whether in online in digital media or offline, in culture and institutions. The shifting terrain of race, civil rights, and hate speech online compels us to think critically about how we make and evaluate knowledge claims within

digital media. How we develop and teach new literacy skills, and how we articulate a vision for social justice will determine whether we will carry forward hard-won civil rights victories, or relinquish them and the Internet to a new era of white supremacy.

### Notes

1. Anna Everett, Introduction, this volume.
2. The rare exceptions that prove this point include the two most frequently cited volumes on race and the Internet: Beth Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman, eds., *Race and Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
3. Joe R. Feagin and Hernan Vera, *White Racism* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
4. The term *cloak* to refer to a Web site appeared for the first time, as far as I know, in Ray and Marsh's 2001 article to refer to [www.martinlutherking.org](http://www.martinlutherking.org). I am using the term *cloaked Web site* in a similar way, and expanding it to include other types of cloaked sites. These can include political sites, such as [www.whitehouse.com](http://www.whitehouse.com), which is intended as satire, or Web sites connected to sexual politics, such as [www.teenbreaks.com](http://www.teenbreaks.com), which appears to be a reproductive health Web site but is, in fact, a showcase for pro-life propaganda.
5. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).
6. Amanda Lenhart, Mary Madden, and Paul Hitlin, *Teens and Technology: Youth Are Leading the Transition to a Fully Wired and Mobile Nation* (Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2005).
7. Donald F. Roberts, Ulla G. Foehr, and Victoria Rideout, *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-Olds; A Kaiser Family Foundation Study* (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005).
8. Howard Rheingold, Keynote Speech, NMC Online Conference, 2006.
9. For similar uses of the term *white supremacy*, see Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Joe R. Feagin, *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage, 1993).
10. Jessie Daniels, *White Lies: Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality in White Supremacist Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
11. Abby Ferber, *White Man Falling: Race, Gender and White Supremacy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); Abby Ferber, ed., *Home Grown Hate: Gender and Organized Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
12. Feagin, *Systemic Racism*.
13. A read-only record of this discussion is available online at <http://community.macfound.org/openforum>.
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48. Jeffrey Kaplan, Leonard Weinberg, and Ted Oleson, Dreams and Realities in Cyberspace: White Aryan Resistance and the World Church of the Creator, *Patterns of Prejudice* 37 (2003): 139–55.

49. The strategy of “leaderless resistance” has been wildly popular among extremists beyond white supremacists, including extremist environmentalists and Islamic jihadists. The actions of Timothy McVeigh, the white supremacist who bombed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, is perhaps the most well-known example of this in the movement.

50. Karen Mock, Hate on the Internet, in *Human Rights and the Internet*, ed. Steven Hicks, Edward F. Halpin, and Eric Hoskins (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 200.

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52. Weltner also created several cloaked sites in the aftermath of the Katrina disaster, with URLs such as <http://www.InternetDonations.org>, to scam people interested in helping out the victims. A judge in St. Louis, where Weltner is based, issued a permanent restraining order against the scam Web sites;

there is no such injunction against <http://www.JewWatch.com>. In 2004 there was a grassroots effort to convince Google to remove the site from its search engine, but these efforts failed.

53. Here I mean to suggest that the word *Jews* rather than *Jewish people* suggests anti-Semitism. The word *Jew* is not, in of itself, an epithet but when used in certain contexts and by those who are not Jewish, it raises concerns.

54. Jessie Daniels, Finding Civil Rights in Cyberspace: A Study of Adolescents' Internet Use (paper presented at the Eastern Sociological Association Meetings, Boston, MA, 2006).

55. Lynne Lamberg, Hate-Group Sites Target Children, Teens, *Psychiatric News* 36, no. 3 (2001): 26.

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59. Kaplan, Weinberg, and Oleson, Dreams and Realities in Cyberspace, 155.

60. J. McCarthy and M. Zald, Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory, *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977): 1212–41.

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63. Ibid.

64. Using Alexa, a Web trafficking service (<http://www.alexa.com>).

65. Suzanne Brunsting and Tom Postmes, Social Movement Participation in the Digital Age: Predicting Offline and Online Collective Action, *Small Group Research* 33 (2002): 525–54.

66. See Jakob Nielsen's research on this, such as Jakob Nielsen, Participation Inequality: Encouraging More Users to Contribute, 2006, [http://www.useit.com/alertbox/participation\\_inequality.html](http://www.useit.com/alertbox/participation_inequality.html) (accessed June 18, 2007). Other research confirms this, such as Blair Nonnecke and Jenny Preece, Lurker Demographics: Counting the Silent (paper presented at the Proceedings of CHI, The Hague, 2000).

67. An additional category might be “observers” or “researchers” to include those who log in from monitoring organizations such as SPLC or ADL, or those who log on the site conducting research.

68. Lamberg, Hate-Group Sites Target Children, Teens, 26.

69. Ibid.

70. Beverly Ray and George E. Marsh, Recruitment by Extremist Groups on the Internet, Review of Reviewed Item, *First Monday* 6, no. 2 (2001), <http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue6.2/ray/index.html> (accessed June 18, 2007).

71. Elissa Lee and Laura Leets, Persuasive Storytelling by Hate Groups Online: Examining Its Effects on Adolescents, *American Behavioral Scientist* 45 (2002): 927–57.
72. Randy Blazak, White Boys to Terrorist Men: Target Recruitment of Nazi Skinheads, *American Behavioral Scientist* 44 (2001): 982–1000.
73. Ibid.
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75. Blazak, White Boys to Terrorist Men, 982–1000.
76. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 18.
77. Wise, Everyday Racism; see also Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001).
78. I understand that this language is offensive and that is the reason I include the racial epithets in this section in quotation marks, to signal the reader that I neither agree with nor condone such language. However, I do not see how it is possible to engage in a sustained and specific criticism of the particular use of these terms in domain name registration without using the very language I find objectionable.
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