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Commentary, analysis and investigations  
on issues affecting African Americans  
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**Cover Story**  
**Murder on 14th Street**  
**Right-wing extremism is nothing new to the USA**  
**The African World**  
**By Bill Fletcher, Jr.**  
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When he opened the door to the Holocaust Museum on June 10th, Stephen Johns probably thought that he was being polite in assisting an elderly gentleman. More than likely it would never have occurred to him that he was a few minutes from death at the hands of an alleged fascist.

The shootout at the Holocaust Museum, allegedly initiated by James Von Brunn, has met with two responses, only one of which is particularly noteworthy. The first, which was predictable, was the lone-gunman analysis. This take, which usually accompanies most assassinations, always suggests that an insane or otherwise angry individual, carried out an attack without assistance. This view is comforting, in a perverse manner, because it assures us that it really is not rough out there.

The second response has been increasing attention on the re-rise of right-wing populism, and specifically, a subset which can best be described as neo-fascist or white nationalist. This response is an important one because it speaks to an 'underground' that most of the mainstream media would rather ignore. In fact, conservative Republicans have been very upset when there are any criticisms of right-wing extremism because they see this as disparaging of right-wing views and an exaggeration of the threat from the extreme political Right.

Right-wing extremism is nothing new to the USA, whether one is considering the Ku Klux Klan; anti-Asian pogroms; the Texas Rangers or the Arizona Rangers and their intimidation of Mexicanos and Chicanos; the Black Legion; the Minutemen (the original ones); or countless other groups. It comes in waves and, normally each time is excused away by the mainstream until and unless there is an outrageous action that hits at large numbers of white people, e.g., the Oklahoma City bombing by Timothy McVeigh. When right-wing extremism is targeted at people of color; union organizers;

or pro-choice doctors and supporters, it is largely ignored or treated as something that is a bit over the top and must be contained.

It does not really matter whether Von Dunn was a lone gunmen. In many respects, whether he was part of a hit-team or acting solo, he was not alone. His views have not only been fueled by right-wing media commentators, such as Glenn Beck and Bill O'Reilly, who are not only provocative but incendiary, but they are fueled by a racist, anti-Semitic, misogynist subterranean political culture that has its own irrational logic, but also multiple forms of organization. This right-wing populism, extremely well analyzed in the book [\*\*Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort\*\*](#) (by Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons), tends to gain traction in periods of economic downturn when large numbers of whites are under stress. Thus, in the 1980s in the Midwest, as farm foreclosures swept town after town, ultra-right-wing, if not neo-fascist, organizations built support blaming the crisis on Jews rather than analyzing and understanding the way that capitalism operates (and that it is not just people of color who are hurt by it). In the current period, of course, we are living through the worst nightmare of the right-wing populists: an economic crisis combined with the existence of an African American President of the United States of America.

By all reports, Von Brunn was unraveling in the weeks leading up to the murder on 14th Street. His anger with Jews and Blacks knew no bounds. Yet what is particularly striking is that his friends and family, while generally noticing that Von Brunn's views were a bit 'off color', took no significant steps to flag that there was a serious eruption about to occur. It would be easy to summarize this as some sort of apathy on the part of Von Brunn's associates, but i am more inclined to believe that the tolerance level for extreme right-wing views in large portions of White America is far worse than the mainstream media tends to let on. While those of us of color, in hearing such insane extremism, would have sought to have this individual committed, Von Brunn's friends and family simply accepted his views, even if they happened to disagree.

The murder on 14th Street should not be quickly forgotten or written off. It is a symptom of a dangerous cancer in the US political system, and one that will not go away on its own. Until and unless large numbers of whites are organized around a progressive, left populist message that challenges the corporations, and indeed the system, it is far more likely that they will be influenced by the irrational demagoguery of right-wing populism with its easy answers and identifiable scapegoats. The challenge of developing such an alternative approach and practice to addressing millions of whites is too important to leave to white progressives alone. People of color must ourselves be central to constructing such a view and practice. After all, we have a lot to gain...or lose, depending on the success in defeating right-wing populism, which like so many other demons, has many manifestations.

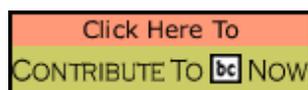
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