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# White supremacy

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**White supremacy**, beliefs and ideas purporting natural superiority of the lighter-skinned, or “white,” human races over other racial groups. In contemporary usage, the term *white supremacist* has been used to describe some groups espousing ultranationalist, *racist*, or *fascist* doctrines. White supremacist groups often have relied on violence to achieve their goals.

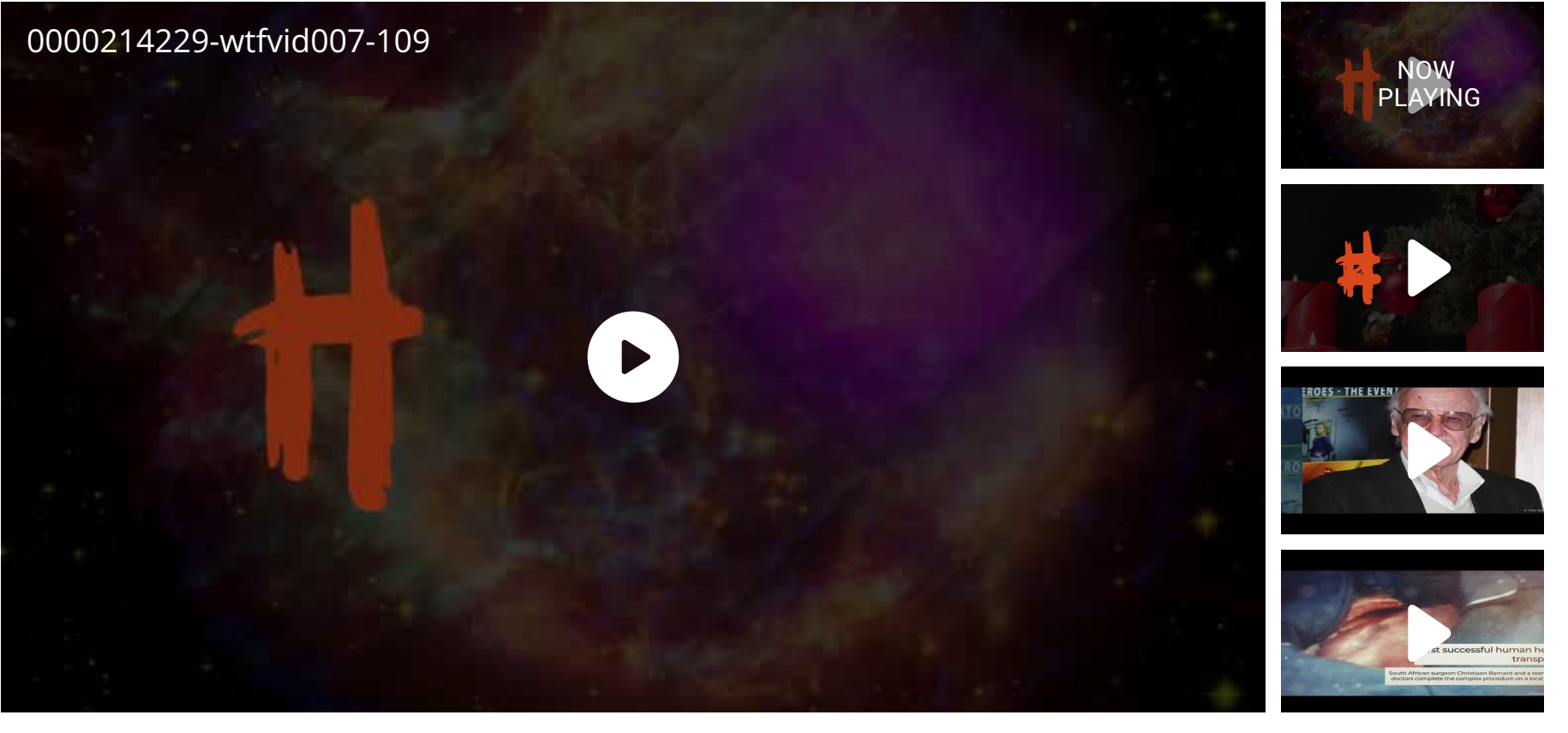
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From the 19th to the mid-20th century the doctrine of white supremacy was largely taken for granted by political leaders and social scientists in Europe and the United States. For example, in the four-volume *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–55; *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*), the French writer and diplomatist Arthur de Gobineau wrote about the superiority of the white race, maintaining that *Aryans* (Germanic peoples) represented the highest level of human development. According to 19th-century British writers such as Rudyard Kipling, Charles Kingsley, Thomas Carlyle, and others, it was the duty of Europeans—the “white man’s burden”—to bring civilization to nonwhite peoples through beneficent imperialism. Several attempts were made to give white supremacy a scientific footing, as various institutes and renowned scientists published findings asserting the biological superiority of whites. Those ideas were bolstered in the early 20th century by the new science of *intelligence testing*, which purported to show major differences in *intelligence* between the races. In such tests northern Europeans always scored higher than Africans.

In the United States—especially in the South—in the era of *slavery* and during the subsequent *Jim Crow* period of legal *racial segregation*, white supremacy enjoyed broad political support, as it did in contemporary European colonial regimes. The doctrine was especially associated with violent groups such as the *Ku Klux Klan* (KKK), which enjoyed some success in the United States (particularly in the 1920s), though many nonviolent individuals and groups also believed fervently in white supremacist ideas. By the mid-1950s, however, overtly racist doctrines fell into deep disfavour across much of the Western world, a development that was hastened by both desegregation (see *racial segregation*) and *decolonization*.

### FEATURED VIDEOS



As a result of hostility among some American whites toward the American *civil rights movement*, civil rights legislation, especially the *Civil Rights Act* (1964) and the *Voting Rights Act* (1965), and *Supreme Court* decisions that invalidated many racially discriminatory laws, especially *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), white supremacy underwent a revival in the United States in the late 1950s and the '60s. It eventually manifested itself in the “White Power” movement, which arose in reaction to the “Black Power” doctrines of the 1960s and '70s. White supremacists, as well as many social conservatives, were troubled by the U.S. government’s adoption of acquiescence in measures such as *affirmative action*, school *busing*, and rules against racial *discrimination* in the housing market. Their resentment contributed to the growth of various groups and movements that actively preached white supremacy, including the traditional KKK, various neo-Nazi organizations, and the religious *Christian Identity* groups. Indeed, by the second half of the 20th century, the Christian Identity movement—which claimed that northwestern Europeans were directly descended from the biblical tribes of Israel and that the impending *Armageddon* will produce a final battle of whites against nonwhites—was the dominant religious viewpoint of white supremacists in the United States.

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Nevertheless, white supremacists in the United States and throughout the world ultimately were unable to defend the laws that ensured white domination. The last regimes to institutionalize doctrines of white supremacy through *comprehensive* legislation were *Rhodesia*, which changed its name to *Zimbabwe* after its white minority finally ceded power in 1980, and *South Africa*, whose *apartheid* system was dismantled in the 1990s.

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Despite the *demise* of segregationist and discriminatory laws throughout the Western world and in Africa, white supremacy has survived as a *populist* doctrine. During the 1970s and '80s the gradually uniform *rhetoric* and iconography of white supremacists in the United States became influential in Europe, where *immigration*, especially from former colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, contributed to a significant and growing nonwhite population. In some countries white supremacist ideas found expression in the programs of anti-immigrant political parties such as the *National Front* (Front National) in France, The *Republicans* (Die Republikaner) in Germany, and the *Freedom Party of Austria* (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) and (since 2005) the *Alliance for the Future of Austria* (Bündnis Zukunft Österreich). In 2009, following the election the previous year of the first African American *president of the United States*, Barack Obama, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) warned that white supremacist groups and *right-wing militias* in the country were winning new recruits by stoking fears of *gun control* and expanded *welfare* rolls and by exploiting resentment created by the economic *recession* that began in late 2007. Some observers of the movements, however, were skeptical of those claims.

In early 2016 the presidential campaign of the real-estate developer Donald J. Trump, the eventual *Republican* nominee, attracted significant support from white supremacists and so-called white nationalists, who largely disavowed *racism* but celebrated “white” identity and lamented the *alleged* erosion of white political and economic power and the decline of white *culture* in the face of nonwhite immigration and *multiculturalism*. Other Trump admirers included members of the “alt-right” (alternative right) movement, a loose association of relatively young white supremacists, white nationalists, extreme libertarians, and neo-Nazis. Trump had earlier questioned the validity of Obama’s American birth certificate and, during the campaign, attacked immigrants and ethnic minorities, vowing to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, to deport some 11 million persons living in the country illegally, and to ban immigration by Muslims. In the immediate aftermath of Trump’s unexpected election as president in November 2016, reported *hate crimes* directed at minorities—including Muslims, Hispanics, and Jews—increased significantly.

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