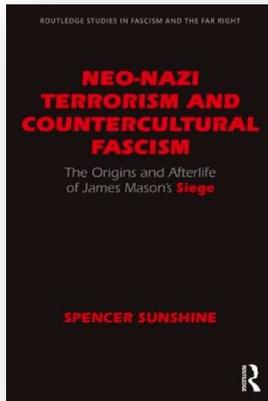


<https://www.ncis.org/the-independent-scholar/tis>



Neo-Nazi terrorism and Counter-Cultural Fascism: The Origins and Afterlife of James Mason's "Siege"

Spencer Sunshine

London and New York: Routledge, 2024.

484 Pages

ISBN 978-0-367-19060-6.

<https://spencersunshine.com/nntccf/>

Review by Goddard Graves, followed by the author's response.

First published online 21 March 2025 and will appear in Volume 11 of *The Independent Scholar*.

Truth in packaging is as essential in scholarship as it is—or should be—in the rest of life. Skip the main title, whose subjects have already commanded—and should continue to demand—entire libraries. Cut to the subtitle. This book is a truly exhaustive study of a particular publication which author Spencer Sunshine claims is a veritable Bible for what many have chosen to call “the alt right”. In eighteen chapters of narrative, plus another hundred pages of commentary and apparatus, we are treated to the life and work of the ideologue, pornographer, and recurrent jail-bird whose seventy-some years were involved with such juicy characters as George Lincoln Rockwell (founder of the American Nazi Party, assassinated in 1967) and the Manson Family. His outlook on life was encapsulated in the slogan “Total attack or total drop-out.” To describe him as racist or fascist would be a little like calling the Grand Canyon a low spot in the road.

It is mildly unnerving for this reviewer to recall that several decades have passed, and two generations come to something like maturity, since the peaks of

activity and notoriety of both Rockwell and Manson. The connection to Sunshine's work is crucial, and remains a burning issue of our time. To paraphrase Groucho Marx, the not-so-secret word is “racism.” Have people forgotten that Charles Manson (1934-2017) seriously believed that the multiple murders committed by him and his Family were intended to start a race war? In *Helter Skelter* (1974), Vincent Bugliosi (1934-2015), who pursued and prosecuted Manson and his Family, for the Tate-La Bianca killings, laid out the scenario for a race war which Manson insisted these murders would spark. As Sunshine thoroughly demonstrates, such “thought” was mother's milk to James Mason. Sunshine goes on to argue that such thoughts were, so to speak, the mothers of such deeds as the violence in Charlottesville in 2017, and the outrages of the self-named Atomwaffen Division, whose German-language perfectly boxes the compass back to the Nazi heritage.

Manson's thought and experience, plus what some might contend are chronic unresolved mental issues,

were ultimately distilled into the slogan "Total attack or total drop out." This slogan could resonate with rebels on the Right or the Left, and in fact did, as Sunshine demonstrates, again in copious detail and seriousness of purpose.

Along his rocky road of sectarian agitation, Mason produced quantities of manifestos, all under the same title, "*Siege*". In 1993, these writings were collected and published in book form. Sunshine contends that this opus is a significant motivator and resource for much subsequent radical Right activity, including open criminal violence. It is at this point, however, that Sunshine's analysis starts to lose traction.

This reviewer would never down-play the danger of any of that "thought," or the need to understand its dynamic, but must say that Sunshine, for all his hard work and high principles, fails badly to identify credible causalities, and instead, pulls back on the evocation of moods and attitudes. There is a place for this, of course, but it isn't history, sociology, or forensics. Some might call it, "abnormal psychology," but since Sunshine is writing about a cluster of movements, rather than diagnosing an individual, the psychological label loses relevance.

It is credible, indeed astonishing, that much of Sunshine's work was based on interviews, including with James Mason himself. It is a pity that with these resources and his seemingly inexhaustible energy, Sunshine couldn't give a clearer picture of such salient facts as press runs, and the mechanics of distribution for this supposedly crucial publication. How did it fit in with other "classics" of the alt-right, such as the William Luther Pierce's more well-known *The Turner Diaries* (1978)?

In preparation for this review, extensive efforts were made to find any trace of *Siege*, or even any living person who'd heard of it. Results: near zero. Same for my search for any of the numerous acolytes whom Sunshine associates with Mason as a cult-figure, except for John (Gary) Jewell, who explodes into the story comparatively late, and then disappears with equal suddenness. Having known Jewell back when as "Gary," he was a Wobbly, this reviewer was naturally curious. Jewell began his public life as an Anarchist member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), leaving it to become a full-blown racist. Jewell had hoped for a face-to-face meeting with Charles Manson while the latter was still in jail. It may indeed be comforting to conclude

that historically speaking, Mason was at most, a big fish in a small pond. This reviewer was reminded of the story about the French revolutionary syndicalist Alphonse Merrheim (1871-1923) when he was asked what he thought about Georges Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* (1908). Merrheim said he couldn't really say, because he preferred the adventure novels of Alexandre Dumas . . .

A woodsman's proverb tells us that if you aim all over a moose, you don't have much chance of hitting him any place in particular. Perhaps then, this volume might be taken as a down payment on a bigger transaction, particularly as the alt-Right moves and shakes almost faster than conventional printed scholarship can ever chronicle. I would like to suggest that Sunshine remain in this subject area to address other individuals as case studies, and to probe other related matters. How did these people live? How were their projects financed? What might have been the role—beyond a couple of specific cases cited of spies and provocateurs? What about the generational demographics over the many decades of this study? Some readers will regret the absence of serious analysis of the strange dance—if you will—between radical Leftists and radical Rightists.

One can never fault a book for not being what it was never intended to be. Spencer Sunshine's book is valuable, and well-worth the thirty-five dollar price tag. I would, however, stop short of pre-publication appraisals like "spellbinding", "tour de force", or "essential reading". The research is humbling in its extent and breadth, though sometimes unintentionally goofy, as when we are told (p. 237) that Sammy Davis Jr. was a member of the Church of Satan, or that mass-murderer Timothy McVeigh might have had a micro-chip in his butt (p. 219). Sunshine's prose is clear and effective, even occasionally drole, as when he describes one particular right wing nutter as "smarter than the average bear". On balance, this is a welcome work, but in the immortal words of Samuel Johnson, "one never wished it longer."

Goddard Graves is the author of a visionary prose work *Harmony Junction* (2010) and sundry other smaller efforts of folklore, criticism, and music history. A student of Archie Green, Philipp Fehl, and George Mosse, he was active in the Industrial Workers of the World and the United Steelworkers of America.

Author's response to Graves's Review

It has been many years since I replied to a review; I do my best to take both accolades and lumps with grace. Neo-Nazi Terrorism and Countercultural Fascism is a long and complicated book, primarily written for readers already familiar with the subject. I appreciate that Goddard Graves took the time to engage with my work and want to acknowledge he offered some very positive remarks, and a good many of the negative ones were quite fair in their criticisms. That said, there are several points where his review misrepresents what the book says, says I missed things that were included, and downplays the significance of the material based on his personal knowledge of the subject.

Graves starts by saying, "In preparation for this review, extensive efforts were made to find any trace of Siege, or even any living person who'd heard of it. Results: near zero." I spent about fifteen minutes online and found about 30 mentions of James Mason on the website of the Southern Poverty Law Center, the most prominent group that watches the US Far Right. Additionally, Siege and Mason are also discussed in The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Guardian, Der Spiegel, VICE, and the BBC. There are Wikipedia entries for both Mason and Siege, and if you search for the two terms together on Google Scholar you get over 600 results.

Graves says the book "fails badly to identify credible causalities." The first chapter explains how five murders were committed by members and associates of the Atomwaffen Division, a neo-Nazi group whose members were all required to read Siege. (In fact, it was a former Atomwaffen member who said Siege was the group's "bible," an appellation Graves credits me with. To be fair, after re-reading my passage closely it is reasonable that one could conclude that this was my comment, although if you look up the footnote's reference you can see the original quote. So I will give him that one.)

The first chapter also outlines arrests for illegal weapons possession, bomb components, child pornography, and swatting operations by members of Atomwaffen and a number of other groups inspired by Siege, including The Base and Feuerkrieg Division—most of which are now banned terrorist organizations. These are not marginal players. By late 2024—too late to include in the book—I had tracked over twenty

murders committed by individuals linked to Siege's ideology. For example, the manifesto for a triple murder in Jacksonville, Florida specifically named Siege as suggested reading for interested parties. Even if Graves wasn't convinced by the evidence in the book, a quick Google search would provide much more where that came from.

Graves claims I argue that Mason's ideas were "the mothers of such deeds as the violence in Charlottesville in 2017." This is not only inaccurate—it's the opposite of what I wrote. On page 10, I state explicitly that Charlottesville "neatly illustrated Siege's argument about why neo-Nazis should not hold public, legal rallies." Mason rejects Charlottesville's approach of public rallies, and instead advocates terrorism—a point I reiterated throughout the book (for example, see pages 39, 79, 81, 115, 164, 331, 343).

Graves also claims that I did not clearly describe "such salient facts as press runs, and the mechanics of distribution for this supposedly crucial publication." This is a headscratcher. I note that the SIEGE newsletter's print run never exceeded 100 copies an issue (p.8), and specified that there were 66 subscriber names that he passed on to others when it folded up (p.124). I also describe the different editions and translations of the books (p.13) and the Black Sun edition's press run (p.310). I detail quite specifically how Siege was sold (\$22 by mail order; p.293), and that Tom Metzger was responsible for half the sales (p.295). The book also documents nearly every known article, review, and media appearance by Mason in the 1990s.

Graves also said "near zero" was also the amount of information he could find on "any of the numerous acolytes whom Sunshine associates with Mason as a cult-figure, except for John (Gary) Jewell"—who was a high-profile figure in the IWW and on the GEB when Graves was active in the union. Even then, Graves strangely fails to note another IWW member, Perry "Red" Warthan, who was on the GEB at the same time, and who shared Jewell's chapter in the book. Graves even ignores Mason associates like David Duke—the most famous U.S. White Supremacist of the 1980s after his election to the Louisiana state House—and Church of Satan founder Anton LaVey.

It's more understandable that Graves hadn't heard of the countercultural figures in the second half of the book who each have a chapter—but it seems he might have noted their importance anyway. I will give him a

pass on Boyd Rice and Nikolas Schreck, cult figures by any estimate. But Adam Parfrey was the founder of press Feral House, which has sold hundreds of thousands of books, some of which were made into films, and—as I mention—was famous enough when he died that the New York Times ran an obituary (p.205). Michael Moynihan is the co-author of a very famous book on black metal, Lords of Chaos, which has sold tens of thousands of copies and was also made into a movie. In fact, another ex-IWW GEB member of Graves's generation told me he didn't know who Mason was, and was only familiar with Parfrey, Moynihan, Rice, and Schreck.

Graves also asked, "Have people forgotten that Charles Manson...seriously believed that the multiple murders committed by him and his Family were intended to start a race war?" Judging by what an attendee shouted out in the middle of a recent book presentation of mine, the answer to that is a resounding Yes.

Last, and perhaps my pettiest peeve, is Graves's claim that the book is "sometimes unintentionally goofy, as when we are told...that Sammy Davis Jr. was a member of the Church of Satan, or that mass-murderer Timothy

McVeigh might have had a micro-chip in his butt"—even as he acknowledged, in the very next sentence, my style is "occasionally droll."

Davis's Church of Satan membership has been a well-known public fact for decades. In fact, Rolling Stone ran a story about it in August 2024—right around when Graves was writing his review. Another former IWW member I talked to said Davis's membership in the Church of Satan was literally the only thing he knew about the group.

As far as the butt microchip, Graves missed my tone, despite his next sentence. Droll, in fact, is the correct answer.

I appreciate that Graves took the time to read the book and to engage with it critically. He offered some generous remarks alongside his critiques, and I respect the effort involved in reviewing a dense and challenging work. And although I am assuredly going on for too long again, I did still feel the need to reply to some of the things he wrote in the review.

Spencer Sunshine