

MARKETING HATE

by Sarah Henry
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The Church of the Creator Has Sold Violent Racism as Religion for 20 Years. Now, It's the Skinheads Who Are Buying, and Some Serious Head-Bashing Has Begun.

RICK MCCARTY CARRIES A TAN BRIEFCASE and wears a navy blazer, starched white shirt, pressed trousers and a vibrant red tie with a fishhook pattern—a fashionable motif, no doubt, in the small Gulf Coast town of Niceville, Fla. McCarty is dining in a neighborhood eatery not far from his suburban tract home. In keeping with the seaside theme, the restaurant's walls are adorned with fake fish.

McCarty alternately stabs at a salad smothered in ranch dressing and responds to questions about his latest business venture. A large man with a prominent stomach—sweaty-palmed, jittery, and prone to nervous tics—he twists his neck from side to side before he talks. He peppers his speech with terms like "operating capital," product "positioning" and the "bottom line to what we do."

McCarty, a former Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh devotee and a self-described psychotherapist, claims to have a doctorate in philosophy from an East Coast university he refuses to name. However, this October day he appears most comfortable speaking in the jargon of a marketing mogul.

What he's selling, McCarty says excitedly, is "like Coca-Cola. As far as positioning, (it's) No. 1." But the product is nowhere near as innocuous as a soft drink.

McCarty is the proud peddler of prejudice. He is the current leader of the white supremacist Church of the Creator, "the only racist religion known to mankind right now," as the businessman is wont to boast. McCarty's official title is Pontifex Maximus (Latin for "high priest"), although in keeping with his preference for corporate culture, he favors the lower-keyed title of executive director, because, he says, it makes "the whole thing a bit more acceptable and recognizable."

The COTC espouses a race-based religion known as Creativity, which worships nature—not a higher God—and is "dedicated to the survival, expansion and advancement of the White Race." It is virulently anti-Semitic, racist and, unlike most white supremacist groups, anti-Christian as well.

The group has a striking emblem: a red crown, a white halo and a large black W. When asked what it signifies, McCarty fumbles through a highlighted notebook for the answer, mumbling: "I've got it all written down, I'm tired and my mind's not working." (The crown, it turns out, stands for the COTC's "kingly position." The halo indicates that the white race is "sacred above all others." And the large W? It represents the white race, of course.)

Church of the Creator dogma, as outlined in such books as "The White Man's Bible," written in 1981 by COTC founder Ben Klassen, dictates that a racial holy war, or RAHOWA in COTC parlance, must ensue to rid the world of "parasitical Jews" and the so-called "mud races" (people of color). A "Jewish conspiracy," according to the COTC, controls the federal government, international banking and the media.

McCarty took over the COTC last January and readily concedes that his mission is to make it profitable. Asked if anything is unique about running a business that preaches hatred of Jews and other minorities, he responds: "It's all the same thing. It doesn't really matter. It's just a different commodity. We've had people say that a religion is not a business, but I don't know any that aren't."

Long a bit player in the already marginal world of white supremacists, the Church of the Creator has recruited heavily since the late '80s and with some success. McCarty brags of a following in the thousands, including members in all 50 states and 37 countries, with strong chapters in Germany, South Africa and Sweden. And he says the COTC prints between 20,000 and 40,000 copies a month of Racial Loyalty, its tabloid.

White-supremacist watchdogs say McCarty's numbers are inflated; they estimate the church's following in the hundreds instead of thousands. But the COTC has been especially successful in reaching the most active, impressionable and violent disciples of the hate movement today: young, racist skinheads. In recent years, more than 30 COTC skinhead chapters have popped up in states such as New York, California and Wisconsin.

Numbers, however, don't tell the whole story. Indeed, the group's real strength may lie not in signing up supporters but in the particular power of its message. "They're dangerous in that they influence young kids," explains Danny Welch, director of Klanwatch, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. "The No. 1 reason why we go after the COTC," he adds, "is because they instill violence in people through their rhetoric." The COTC membership is so violent that the group has leaptfrogged to the top of the list of organizations that Klanwatch tracks-superseding the Ku Klux Klan in the South, the California-based White Aryan Resistance and the Aryan Nations, headquartered in Idaho.

The most obvious sign of the group's higher profile is the growing list of criminal acts committed by its followers. The group has a national prison-based "brotherhood" of about 180, many of whom are doing time for racially motivated crimes, according to Klanwatch. COTC members have been linked to terrorist conspiracies and violence-including murder-against minorities both in the United States and abroad.

Last July, a Florida jury convicted George Loeb, a COTC minister, of murdering Harold Mansfield, an African American who had served in the Persian Gulf War. Loeb, who does not hide his hatred for blacks, shot Mansfield after a parking-lot altercation. And at least five of the COTC's Canadian members have been arrested on charges ranging from kidnaping to assault for crimes against immigrants, anti-racists and rival white supremacists.

In July of this year, one of three skinheads suspected of firebombing the NAACP office in Tacoma, Wash., confessed that he was a COTC minister, or area organizer. The heavily armed trio planned to carry out a string of attacks on Jewish buildings and black rap stars. Also in July, two Orange County residents associated with the COTC-Geremy von Rineman, 22, and his then-girl-friend Jill Marie Scarborough-were arrested on weapons charges in conjunction with a federal undercover sting. As part of the operation, Joe Allen, working on behalf of the FBI, had infiltrated the Church of the Creator.

Ironically, the COTC's emergence as a big-league player in global racist circles coincides with potentially self-destructive growing pains. The group has been embroiled in leadership struggles and faces financial uncertainty as well as the mounting scrutiny of federal law-enforcement officials and hate-group watchdogs.

Just who are the followers that worship at the Church of the Creator and why are they preparing for a racial holy war? And does the COTC have the staying power of veteran racist groups like the Klan and White Aryan Resistance? Or will the world's only white-power religion become a victim of its own success?

JEREMIAH (JEREMY) KNESAL OF AUBURN, Wash., has a long juvenile record with a racist bent. Knesal, 19 and awaiting sentencing in a Northern California prison, is a recent COTC convert who took its prophecy of a racial holy war very much to heart. In fact, he tried to start one. But after his side trip to a J. C. Penney store in a failed attempt to steal jeans, T-shirts and underwear, the race war that was just beginning was all over.

It was a summer day in Salinas, a small farm community south of San Francisco, and Knesal got busted for shoplifting. A routine police search of Knesal's car turned that dime-a-dozen arrest into a large-scale investigation involving the FBI, the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Inside his 1987 green Volvo were three metal pipe bombs, four loaded rifles, ammunition, racist literature, military-style clothing and wigs. The car also contained a certificate from the Church of the Creator: Knesal was "a member in good standing."

It didn't take long for Knesal to spill the beans. He told an FBI agent, who says Knesal was "very proud" to be a COTC reverend and state director, that he had bombed the NAACP building in Tacoma a week earlier. He also admitted targeting a Seattle gay bar, according to FBI Agent John Zent, where an explosion had occurred a few days later. (No one was hurt in either blast.) Court documents reveal that Knesal, along with two other white supremacists not connected to the COTC, intended to start a race war in a battleground ranging from Oregon to the U.S.-Canadian border. The trio planned to murder black rap artists Ice-T and Ice Cube and to bomb synagogues and military installations.

Knesal snitched on Wayne Wooten, 18, also of Auburn, who along with Jeremy was arrested on explosives and firearms charges in Salinas (they have not yet been charged in the Washington crimes), and he implicated a third man—the alleged ringleader, ex-convict Mark Kowaalski, 24, who was later picked up in Seattle. In October, Kowaalski pleaded guilty to the Tacoma NAACP bombing. On Dec. 1, Wooten pleaded guilty to one felony count and Knesal to four counts. Knesal faces a maximum sentence of 35 years in prison and more than \$1 million in fines.

When he was arrested, Knesal perfectly fit the profile of a recent COTC recruit. He favored the skinhead look: shaved head, Doc Martens boots and racist tattoos, which, according to Zent, "cover his body from the neck on down to his ankles and out to his wrists." He was affiliated with more than one racist group, and he was kicked out of two high schools for distributing hate literature.

A worthy warrior in the race war, Knesal is also a confused and troubled teen. He has a prior conviction for malicious harassment of a Latino. But his father, Gordon Knesal, describes him as a "great kid" who always treated Gordon's fiancée, Adriana Pittaluga, a Latina, with kindness and respect. "He listened to her more than he would listen to me," says the elder Knesal, a Seattle resident. "I adore the kid," chimes in Pittaluga, who has two children of her own. "When I talk with him (from prison) he tells me he misses me and the kids so much and he doesn't stop crying." Knesal had other good-and-close-relationships with minorities: his mother remarried an African American man with whom Jeremy went fishing and hunting. One of his best friends was another African American who taught him how to be a cowboy.

Gordon Knesal, who got custody of his son Jeremy at age 2, has searched for a reason for his child's behavior. He says the only motivation the teen-ager might have for hating people of color was that he was beaten up by several black men while skateboarding a few years ago. But Jeremy's racist inclinations were not tolerated at home, says his father, who reprimanded him on several occasions. "I tried everything," says Gordon, his voice sounding both weary and sad, "I couldn't get through."

The COTC is especially attractive to young people like Knesal, experts say, because the group's dogma offers a reason for their failures. "We see a lot of kids in schools hurting; people can't get jobs, they're worried about crime, unlimited numbers of immigrants, this gives cause to a lot of people," says Klanwatch's Welch. "And someone is listening. I think white Americans do feel left out."

Today's racist organizations are often less structured and more decentralized than traditional hate groups. Now, the elder statesmen of hate provide a basic framework of beliefs for a younger generation of racists, who are being encouraged to start a worldwide white revolution on their own. Jeremy Knesal may have felt like a mover and shaker within the COTC, but he had only been a member for about two months and he was unknown to McCarty before he acted on the church's gospel.

Welcoming the young has proved to be a savvy strategy of the COTC. "It's hard to get a lot of old-line Klansmen to hand out newspapers, but you can get together four or five skinheads, and they'll put out 2,000 pieces of literature in a neighborhood," says Klanwatch chief investigator Joe Roy. Teen-agers are also effective at fulfilling racism's ultimate goals. As COTC founder Ben Klassen wrote in 1988, the movement wants to get "rid of" Jews and nonwhite races through "murder, treachery, lying, deceit, mass killing, whatever it takes to win." Unlike seasoned hatemongers, skinheads are impatient for change. "Kids get frustrated, they don't want to wait; they are hands-on people," Roy says.

The COTC's largest "hands on" youth followings have been in Milwaukee and Toronto. At its peak last year, the Milwaukee chapter had about 80 active members and an aggressive leader, Mark Wilson (also known as Rev. Brandon O'Rourke—many COTC devotees use pseudonyms in an attempt to foil police). Several of Wilson's followers are White Berets, members of the COTC's security forces. According to McCarty, the White Berets are an "elite unit" who "protect (COTC) members and their property from harm." Asked whether the White Berets are armed, he laughs and responds: "in ways." The COTC contingent in Milwaukee has run a "white survivor hot line" and hosted overseas supporters at paramilitary training courses that feature pictures of blacks and Jews as targets, according to a British informant. Hate-group monitors also suspect that the chapter runs guns from Wisconsin across the Canadian border.

The Canadian group, about 100 strong, is led by George Burdi, who calls himself the Rev. Eric Hawthorne, a 23-year-old body-builder and college dropout with a penchant for quoting Nietzsche. In a telephone interview, Burdi says concern over immigration, multiculturalism, unemployment and the environment are all strong drawing cards. "There's a tremendous amount of support" for the COTC message, says Burdi, adding that he's looking for "a higher quality of person that's talented, educated, middle- and upper-class who (is) as concerned about what's going on as we are."

The spirit of COTC youth is apparent in the music of Canada's RAHOWA (rhymes with aloha) rock band. Burdi, its lead singer, believes that his music is powerful propaganda for the '90s. The popular group's recordings are released on his Resistance Record label, which sells "pure racist rock." (To dodge Canada's strict anti-hate laws, the mail-order company is based in Detroit.) In an interview for a recent MTV special on hate rock, Burdi said that music is "the best way to reach youth . . . (with) . . . our political ideas." On the program, Burdi is seen introducing bands at a Toronto club packed with over-amped skinheads bouncing off one another. When RAHOWA's turn comes, he begins to belt out a song over the din of the raucous crowd. It has a familiar tune. To a reworked version of the 1960s Nancy Sinatra hit, "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'," Burdi shouts:

These boots are made for stompin',
And that's just what they'll do.
One of these days these boots are gonna
Stomp all over Jews.

TO LEARN ABOUT THE ROOTS OF THE CHURCH OF THE CREATOR, ONE HAS to travel to western North Carolina, to the tiny rural town of Otto, just shy of the Georgia border. It's a pretty place, dotted with wildflowers and surrounded by rolling hills. The community, too small to be incorporated as a city, consists of a couple of gas stations, a few craft shops, a home-style restaurant, post office, flea market and country music hall.

For more than a decade, it was also the home of Ben Klassen, founder and driving force behind the Church of the Creator. Klassen, who first registered the COTC in 1973 in Lighthouse Point, Fla., moved to Otto permanently in 1982. There, on his 22-acre property, he built a house of worship, an oddly shaped three-story church, complete with the COTC's white-power insignia. He also built a small warehouse, for stockpiling the group's extensive array of publications, and a little-used school for gifted (white) boys.

According to townfolk, Klassen was intelligent, philosophical and quiet, a polite man who kept to himself. He lived with his wife and daughter in a large but simple A-frame home overlooking his church, in a secluded sub-development whose entrance bears the sign: PRIVATE ROAD, PROPERTY OWNERS ONLY, NO TRESPASSING.

But if Klassen wasn't active in Otto, his ideas were well known around town. "I got along with Ben just fine. Now, I sure didn't get along with his beliefs, but I figured he had a right to them," says J. J. Ayers, a Klassen neighbor just back from Sunday service at the local Baptist church. "He'd get all stirred up about the n- - -rs and the Jews-he hated them. And he made that pretty clear," adds the 79-year-old farmer. The community left him to his own devices. As one longtime resident of this dry Bible Belt county explained: "Our pastor told us just to sit still and not do anything and let God take care of it."

Ben Klassen was born in Ukraine to German-speaking Mennonite parents. His family, described in his books as "early victims of Jewish Communism," lived briefly in Mexico and then moved to Canada, where he earned a degree in electrical engineering and a bachelor of arts. In 1945, Klassen settled in the United States and became a citizen three years later. He had a varied career: He was a farmer, a schoolteacher, a nickel miner, an engineer, a realtor and a Republican state assemblyman in Florida for a short time. Klassen was also the inventor of one of the first electric can openers and, in later life, an accomplished oil painter. (Speculation over where Klassen's money was made-he admitted pouring a small fortune into the COTC-is divided between the can opener and real estate.) But Klassen's greatest achievement, he believed, was creating a religion for the white race, a group he dubbed "Nature's Finest."

Disillusioned by the ultraconservative John Birch Society, to which he belonged during the 1960s, and fed up with party politics after working on the 1968 presidential campaign of George Wallace's American Independent Party, Klassen developed his own ideology. In 1938, when he was 20, he had borrowed "Mein Kampf" from the library. "The book . . . was to influence my life more than any other," he wrote later. It took another 30 years, but it was at this young age that "the vague outlines" for his "full-fledged racial religion for the White Volk" began to take shape. That religion would become Creativity: a creed that maintains that one's race is one's religion.

"It is hard to tell at this point in history whether the n- - -rs, or the Mexicans, or the Cubans, or the Haitians are the biggest threat to the White Race in America," wrote Klassen in a July, 1990, issue of Racial Loyalty. "The point is they all are, as are the . . . other mud races who are starving in their own countries and want to get on the backs of the White Man's generous subsidy."

Klassen was not, by most accounts, a charismatic leader. In public appearances, he favored a bolo tie with the COTC's emblem and a painted-on Hitler-style mustache. But he was a prolific writer: During his 20 years as head of the COTC, he pumped out racist propaganda at a prodigious rate-more than 15 books, including the organization's three sacred texts: "The White Man's

Bible," "Nature's Eternal Religion" and "Salubrious Living," a guide to healthy habits for white warriors that he co-authored. Klassen also wrote many of the diatribes in *Racial Loyalty*, signing off with "For a Whiter and Brighter World, Creatively Yours."

Though Klassen didn't know it at the time, his writings would later position the COTC as a front-runner in the new world order of racism. Some of his books are considered classics in today's white-power movement, and *Racial Loyalty* is regarded as "good" hate literature both in the United States and abroad, where such publications are hard to come by; in Germany and Canada, for example, it is illegal. The paper has features like "Cupid's Corner," a matchmaking service for finding the right-white-mate: "White Men and Women, be fruitful and multiply! This planet is all ours!"

Although Klassen claimed that his creation was a religion, he had mixed success convincing government officials of that notion. In 1982, when he built his church in Otto, the organization was granted tax exemption "as a bona fide nonprofit religious organization" from the North Carolina Department of Revenue—a "fact" Klassen cited repeatedly. What Klassen failed to make public, however, was that the state's approval was contingent on a federal government ruling, and the IRS has no record of an exemption.

But for about seven years, Klassen's Otto property did enjoy tax-exempt status, until Richard Lightner became the Macon County assessor. In 1987, Lightner started an investigation, which concluded in 1989 that the Church of the Creator was not, in fact, a church at all. "This is not a religion; this is a social, political organization," says Lightner, who noted that the church grounds were not kept up, that there was no public notice of meetings and that the COTC was a membership organization.

In a battle that dragged on for four years, the county finally succeeded in revoking Klassen's tax-exempt property status in November, 1991. Klassen had invoked freedom of speech and religion in his opposition to the inquiry. "We contend that the persecution of our religion, Creativity, and our church, the Church of the Creator, is nothing more, nor is it anything less, than a malevolent, malicious witch hunt, an Inquisition reminiscent of the Dark Ages," Klassen wrote in 1990. In an anticlimatic ending, he failed to appear in court.

Lightner says it was not moral outrage that motivated him to pursue the matter. It was his compulsion to follow the tax codes to the letter. The county spent about \$15,000 on the case; for the years that Klassen never paid taxes, it lost \$20,000 to \$30,000 in revenue. From Lightner's perspective, the battle was worth it. "It's not right for legitimate churches, who help the community, to be rated the same as this type of organization," he says matter-of-factly.

At the same time the COTC was losing in court, it was winning on the streets. Klassen was beginning to strike a chord with racist skinheads. Many skinheads allied themselves with longtime racist Tom Metzger and his Fallbrook-based White Aryan Resistance, but they were growing disillusioned. In the late '80s, Metzger was embroiled in a lawsuit that revealed he had spent their contributions on such personal items as a hairpiece. They were attracted to Klassen's philosophy and his emphasis on physical training for the race war. In "On the Brink of a Bloody Racial War," published this year, Klassen implores "the younger generation" to "pursue our goal with a militancy, energy and dedication that will drive our congenital enemies into oblivion."

Klassen was also looking for a worthy successor. Tom Metzger says Klassen repeatedly courted him to take the reins, but he declined because "there were some problems. It's a church to start with, and I wouldn't want to be allied with a church." Klassen then made several missteps in choosing the next Pontifex Maximus. First, there was the announcement that Rudy (Butch) Stanko, a Colorado-based felon, had been chosen. Stanko, who had been convicted of selling tainted meat to schools, wanted to relocate the COTC to the Rocky Mountains, but Klassen opposed the move. So Stanko declined the offer. Then there was discussion in May last year that COTC Rev. Charles Altvater, a Baltimore pizza-delivery man, would take over. But Klassen again changed his mind. That decision proved perhaps a wise one: Six months later, Altvater landed in jail for attempting to bomb a police officer's home.

In June last year, the COTC did move—briefly—to Milwaukee and was led by Mark Wilson. Wilson, who served as Pontifex Maximus for about six months, was likely rewarded for his efforts in recruiting dozens of newcomers to the COTC. But Klassen, who was supposed to have retired upon Wilson's appointment, was still calling the shots. For reasons that remain unclear, Klassen apparently became disillusioned with Wilson, and the 25-year-old did not last long as the COTC high priest.

Then, out of the blue this January, Klassen selected an unknown: Rick McCarty. McCarty says he learned about the COTC from watching "Geraldo" and was intrigued. "I'd never heard of the Church of the Creator," recalls McCarty, who says he "wasn't really into" racism at that time. "But I've always been interested in religions, and with my background in psychology, I thought, hey, isn't that perfect?"

On his way back from a business trip to Charlotte last October, McCarty called on Klassen. The by-then beleaguered leader lamented his inability to find a replacement, and McCarty says he cheered up Klassen with his ideas for ensuring the group's economic security. Not long after that, McCarty got the nod.

Along with the COTC's problems, Klassen faced personal difficulties in 1992. His wife of many decades died after a long battle with cancer. In July, he sold most of his compound, including the church and school, to a former leader of the American Nazi Party. Although the Otto headquarters had never been a hive of activity, he firmly believed he had "succeeded in spreading . . . our creed and program to most of the racially conscious groups all over the world and our creed is now well rooted," as he wrote upon his retirement.

During this past summer, the 75-year-old Klassen began work on his final project. He had registered a part of his remaining land for a burial plot and was seen clearing it. He went into town to arrange for his gravestone, and on his property he burned shredded documents and took other files to a landfill. On Aug. 7, Klassen quietly committed suicide. His daughter, who had been visiting her father, discovered that he had taken an overdose of sleeping pills. A suicide note-not made public-referred to a chapter in "The White Man's Bible." In the book, Klassen wrote: "Suicide (is) not dishonorable. Like the ancient Romans we believe that under certain circumstances suicide is an honorable way to die, rather than live on in shame, humiliation or captivity."

Speculation surrounding his suicide has swelled in recent months. Some say Klassen feared a lawsuit because of the wave of violent crimes by COTC members. Others say he was despondent over his wife's death. Still others contend that it was a simple matter of his life's work being done.

Klassen would no doubt be pleased that his meticulous planning has resulted in an impressive memorial. On a fall day in Otto, his former property-a little shabby from neglect-is ringed by the reds, burnt oranges and golden hues that mark the changing of the seasons. Tucked between the church and Klassen's home is a thin strip of grass-freshly mowed-that leads to his grave. A large, gray tombstone bears the Church of the Creator's insignia, and beneath two carved roses bracketing Klassen's name, and the years 1918-1993, is the inscription: HE GAVE THE WHITE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD A POWERFUL RACIAL RELIGION OF THEIR OWN.

IN A MARCH APPEARANCE on a "Sally Jessy Raphael" show about white-collar racists, Dr. Rick McCarty, as he prefers to be known, had a hard time getting a word in between a teacher and an attorney. Still, he made a valiant effort to espouse the COTC's point of view. "It's time that the white race thinks about themselves, mobilizes, promotes their own interests," he said. "We don't care about the colored races. We just want to get rid of them." McCarty says he seizes every opportunity to appear on tabloid talk shows, but only if he is paid for his time. "There's got to be something in it for us," he says bluntly.

McCarty runs the COTC out of a small office in Niceville, Fla., an unlikely name for a town that's world headquarters of a white-power organization. Born in Germany while his father was stationed in the Army there, he says he went to high school in Niceville, near the military town of Pensacola. McCarty also says he is divorced and childless, but he is actually separated from his third wife and has three children, according to sources who requested anonymity. Before his recent return to Niceville, McCarty lived in Birmingham, Ala., where a lawsuit, later dismissed, accused him of fraud. He says he earns a living now by operating his own management-consultant businesses and by conducting group-therapy sessions. But one source says his statements should be taken with a grain of salt. He's "sneaky; he wouldn't really tell you where he worked or what he did."

Most locals didn't know that McCarty had moved the COTC to Niceville until July, when he was arrested on a drunk-driving charge following a COTC bash and after the organization made national news following the federal bust of Los Angeles skin-heads. The COTC has no place of worship in Niceville, but there are two large warehouses that hold thousands of dollars' worth of merchandise-books, T-shirts, stickers and other paraphernalia that the COTC sells. A small core of White Berets handles security and helps with COTC mailings, McCarty says.

It's clear that during his short tenure McCarty has tried to bring some structure to a loose-knit organization. He is checking COTC records, making sure members have paid their \$30 "donation" and a \$25 annual subscription to Racial Loyalty. "Twenty years ago as a small religious movement just starting out we had more money coming in than (sic) going out. Today we have become so huge that our outgoing postage alone, would fed (sic) a small country," reads a letter from McCarty to COTC members, asking them to pay their fair share. Without Klassen's money, he says, the group is losing about \$4,000 a month. McCarty claims to draw no salary and adds that the COTC "brings in" only about \$24,000 a year.

In the course of a more than two-hour interview, it becomes apparent that this Pontifex Maximus is far from being a fire-breathing racist. At one point, McCarty confesses he doesn't have "a good, solid answer" for why he even leads the organization. "Since

I'm the head of the group, I take the party line, so I would consider myself a racist," says McCarty unconvincingly. His low-key attitude, he says, stems from the fact that he is "kind of insulated" from the white-supremacist world of many of the COTC's members. "Most of the people I deal with on a day-to-day level," he says, "we think more in terms of where we're going to golf, what restaurant we get to eat at, whose boat is working, things like that."

McCarty concedes that there is "probably a lot of violence" within the group, that many of its members own guns and other weapons and that some could be dangerous. "They're not a majority," he says. And, "They have their times when they're nice to have around, of course." Pressed on whether the COTC's rhetoric encourages violence among the young, McCarty replies with a laugh: "Saying yes to a question like that would probably get you sued later on. So I'd have to answer no to that."

McCarty's main motivation seems to be to turn the COTC into a thriving venture. He understands the importance of continuing Klassen's propaganda push. Of *Racial Loyalty*, he says: "The publication is really key. That's really what keeps us alive." But he also wants to expand it. He sees a way to swell the COTC's membership by targeting an upper-income audience with a toned-down version of the paper.

McCarty has trademarked the COTC's name, emblem and rallying cry, RAHOWA. He calls the COTC's symbols powerful marketing tools that must be protected. Recently, he cottoned onto a lucrative new moneymaker. "I did some tape cassettes. Basically, all I did was take a chapter out of Klassen's books and read it on the tape and sold it for 10 bucks," he says triumphantly. "Kids love that stuff."

And McCarty believes in the marketing credo that there is no such thing as bad PR. As was the case in July when former COTC member Von Rineman, the 22-year-old from Fullerton, was arrested with his girlfriend for illegally selling a shotgun. The investigation that nabbed them also uncovered a separate skinhead plot to kill Rodney King and to bomb the First African Methodist Episcopal Church. To McCarty, the attention was a real coup. He even claims to be unconcerned that he backed Joe Allen, considered a star recruiter but actually an FBI infiltrator in the operation.

"What happened in Los Angeles is the best thing that could have happened to us," McCarty says. "We got a million dollars' worth of advertising for free. I thought it was excellent."

This relative newcomer to the racist movement has already found a role model. He admires the financial achievements of White Aryan Resistance's Metzger and hopes to emulate it. "I personally think Metzger runs probably the most successful racial organization in the world," McCarty says. "He probably tops it off somewhere around 150 thou a year, which is really about what you need to run one of these things." Metzger reserves kind, if cautious, words for his new colleague. McCarty "is well meaning and may pull it off," Metzger says. "Time will tell if he's the man for the job."

JOE ROY AND DANNY Welch, Klanwatch investigators, are two former Montgomery, Ala., cops who dress in the same casual manner-jeans and sneakers-and answer questions in an almost identical way. Roy, who wears small round glasses, ties his salt-and-pepper hair back into a tiny ponytail, a most un-Alabama-like fashion statement. Welch is wiry and raspy-voiced-the result, he says, of talking too much. The two work out of the Southern Poverty Law Center's modern offices in downtown Montgomery. On any given day, busloads of schoolchildren congregate around the law center's granite memorial, dedicated to civil-rights activists killed between 1955 and 1968; the last entry is for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Inside the building, banker's boxes filled with files on the COTC are piling up. Roy and Welch are keeping a close eye on the Church of the Creator. The law center, known for its novel civil court challenges against white supremacists, announced in August that it is investigating the COTC to determine whether there is a case to be made for a federal lawsuit against the group.

Klanwatch and the law center keep tabs on hate groups like the COTC with the hope of one day putting them out of business. In recent years, the center has had some success with an inventive legal strategy. They go after the hate theorists for the violent acts of the followers. Using that tactic, in 1987 the group sued, and eventually succeeded in breaking up, one of the largest Ku Klux Klan chapters in the South. In 1990, the center won a \$12.5-million judgment against Metzger and his group White Aryan Resistance in a case involving skinheads in Portland, Ore., who beat to death an Ethiopian student.

For now, the law center is mum about its exact plans for a lawsuit against the COTC. Their investigation, Roy and Welch will tell you in typically tight-lipped copspeak, is continuing and may take as long as three years to complete. But spending the time to gather every shred of evidence is important, Roy says, because "these suits are very difficult to win."

Klanwatch's approach, however, has its detractors. Other hate-group monitors, such as Loretta Ross of the Atlanta-based Center for Democratic Renewal, wonder aloud whether civil suits are really the best way to rid a community of haters. Metzger, for example, is still running hate hot lines, publishing a monthly paper and producing his own cable TV program, "Race and Reason," which airs in 62 markets. But with his last appeal having been denied in November, Roy says, Klanwatch intends to "press him full court," collect on the judgment and put a significant dent in his business.

Still, the investigators are well aware of the limits of lawsuits. "We file suits because it is a deterrent," Welch says. It's true, he concedes, "the fanatics we don't get." But suits are nonetheless worthwhile, because "for every one of these guys, we get five or six that quit."

Pressure on the COTC is also coming from law-enforcement agencies. The long list of COTC-related arrests has hit some of the group's VIPs. Canada's George Burdi, for example, has two court dates scheduled for next May. One concerns an attack against an anti-racist following a RAHOWA concert; the other is related to a fight he had with three Middle Eastern immigrants. In Milwaukee, a handful of the vaunted White Berets have been arrested on weapons charges. Pending court dates are having a chilling impact on individual chapters, which are often held together only by a thin leadership thread.

Klassen's suicide, too, may have hurt the COTC's chances for survival, and not just because the founder's free flow of money has dried up. McCarty's emphasis on business over zeal appears to be creating internal conflicts. Klanwatch reports, for example, that early this year disgruntled Milwaukee members were plotting against the new leader when he paid a visit north. (The plan was thwarted by the weapons arrests.) All of this is good news to Welch and Roy. "If there's one thing that we've learned," Welch says, it is that "if there's no leadership-and in this field McCarty is untested-it will kill the movement. Leadership is everything."

Still, few are content to wait and see whether the Church of the Creator will self-destruct. The case for vigilance against hate-mongers like the COTC was made clear by the law-center founder, Morris Dees, in an op-ed piece he wrote for the New York Times. "Until recently, skinhead violence was random and impulsive, mostly street crime targeting the nearest minority person. But their international counterparts have waged terrorist campaigns against immigrants and other minorities for two years," wrote Dees, in a reference to widespread neo-Nazi violence in reunified Germany. "It may only be a matter of time before another race war scheme is hatched by American white supremacists."

NO MATTER WHAT'S DONE in an effort to stop racist organizations-whether it's community pressure, jail time or civil suits-the ideas promulgated by groups such as the Church of the Creator never go away. McCarty is banking on that fact.

The businessman says he isn't worried about rumors that unhappy church members would like to see him ousted. He has seen to it that his friends have been elected to the COTC's board of directors and says he can't be overthrown because he heads the corporation. He also says he is security conscious but has found that "the best defense is no defense at all."

From McCarty's perspective, time is on his side. More white Americans are becoming interested in his group, he says, because of the country's flagging economy, increasing crime and concern over immigration. When times are tough, minorities are often blamed for society's ills. The COTC welcomes disenfranchised whites with open arms.

As a true believer in the wonders of the marketplace, if nothing else, McCarty says he sees a future in capitalizing on Klassen's death. "You know, most religions don't get off the ground until their founder dies," he says. "That's been when they really take off. I see the COTC as a religion that's not quite there yet. It needs a soul. But a lot of times a founder of a religion leaves an open window when they die. You can make mythical heroes out of them when they're gone."

Credit: Sarah Henry is a staff writer for the Center for Investigative Reporting in San Francisco.