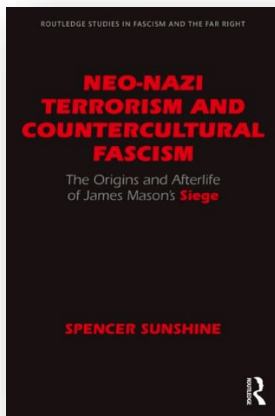


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Neo-Nazi terrorism and Counter-Cultural Fascism: The Origins and Afterlife of James Mason's "Siege"

Spencer Sunshine

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Review by Goddard Graves.

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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 fascistic 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 droll, 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.*

