



AUTHOR INTERVIEWS

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Author details the spy network that took on America's post-WWII Nazi groups

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HEARD ON FRESH AIR



Terry Gross

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TRANSCRIPT

In *The Secret War Against Hate*, Steven J. Ross details the racist, anti-Semitic groups that sprang up in the latter half of the 20th century — and the spy network that worked to bring them to justice.

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TERRY GROSS, HOST:

This is FRESH AIR. I'm Terry Gross. The Southern Poverty Law Center, the SPLC - a group known for monitoring and exposing white supremacist groups and individuals - was indicted by the Justice Department Tuesday on charges of money laundering, fraud and false statements to banks. One of the SPLC's tactics, which was discontinued, was paying people to join hate groups undercover, monitor the hate groups' activities from the inside and, when appropriate, reporting those activities to local and national law enforcement. The indictment accuses the SPLC of using donor money to amplify hate by sending in paid undercover monitors who had to participate in some of the groups' racist activities, while the SPLC also paid people who were members and leaders of hate groups to become informers. It also says the organization failed to disclose to donors that this was how their money was being used. Many critics of the Trump administration say the indictment was politically motivated.

The day before the indictment was announced, I interviewed Steven J. Ross, the author of a new nonfiction book with parallels to the SPLC's story. It's about the American Nazi groups that formed after World War II to carry on Hitler's legacy in the U.S. and three groups that exposed the white supremacists by recruiting and paying men and women to go undercover, join the groups, spy on them and report their findings to the police and FBI. Those three groups were the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League.

After the SPLC indictment was announced, we called Ross to talk about the parallels between his book and the new indictment. We'll hear that follow-up interview at the end of today's show. Ross' new book is titled "The Secret War Against Hate: American Resistance To Antisemitism And White Supremacy." His previous book, "Hitler In L.A.," is about pro-Nazi groups on the West Coast in the years before and during World War II. Steven Ross is the son of Holocaust survivors.

Steven Ross, welcome to FRESH AIR. The book was, I have to say, very enlightening. You see a direct line between the American-born Nazis who became Nazis after World War II and the organizers of January 6, like the Proud Boys, the Three Percenters, the Oath Keepers. We don't know the names of these American

Nazis post-World War II who you write about. Do you think that the organizers of January 6 knew their names? And if they didn't know their names, do you think that they unknowingly used language or slogans or concepts originated by those post-World War II American Nazis?

STEVEN J ROSS: Yes. The only name they might have known is George Lincoln Rockwell. But while they didn't know the names, they knew the issues and the causes. And we can go back to the moment when this really, I think, hit the public, which was after Charlottesville and the chanting - the Jews will not replace us. And that really goes back to the postwar era, where many men came back from war upset that while they were gone fighting for their country, they were betrayed by Congress that passed all these measures making it easier for Jews and Blacks and minorities to compete with them for jobs and housing. And that never left. From 1945 through the storming of the Capitol, we have grievance politics where many white men and women believe that they have been short-shrifted by their government and that they are the patriots, and the government have betrayed the white Anglo-Saxon Protestants who created America and made America great.

GROSS: Your book begins with quotes of quotes that were on sweatshirts worn by people on January 6 who stormed the Capitol. And those sweatshirts have slogans like, Jews will not replace us, which you just mentioned, Camp Auschwitz, 6M23 (ph), which is short for 6 million Jews weren't enough. And another is, we will finish the job Hitler began, which is a quote from Jesse B. Stoner, you say, one of those post-World War II Nazis.

ROSS: Right. Jesse B. Stoner and a man named Emory Burke. As soon as the war was over, they came out and said, Hitler had not been extreme enough. We will finish the job. We will exterminate all Jews in America, and we will send all Black men, women and children to Africa. And for Jesse Stoner and people like Emory Burke, one of the appeals was when the Jews are gone and we've killed them, we will seize their wealth and distribute all their money to Christian America, and every Christian in America will be wealthy once the Jews are gone.

GROSS: Was there an alignment between the Nazi groups in America and the Klan? Because the Klan were also anti-Black. They were racist, and they were antisemitic.

ROSS: Yeah. Well, the interesting thing is, these undercover operations that were running from the early '40s through the 1970s, in the early '40s, they uncovered a

plot that the Klan and the Nazi party were going to join together - the German American Bund - to create an alliance. And that was ultimately foiled by undercover spies sent in by the Anti-Defamation League and the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League. But that effort would eventually fade away. The Klan would revive after the war, but there was a big difference. When the Columbians, which was the first postwar Nazi group marching in Atlanta - when the Columbians and when people like Jesse Stoner, who founded the - first, the Stoner Anti-Jewish Party, then the Christian Anti-Jewish Party, and later, the National States' Rights Party. When these early groups tried to ally with the Klan, the Klan said, no, we're not going ally with you because you're too extreme in your racial views. And when I read that, I thought, oh, my God. Too extreme for the Ku Klux Klan? That tells you something about who these Nazis were.

GROSS: So there were three leading groups - Jewish groups - who not only opposed the Nazi groups, they infiltrated them with undercover spies. So what were those three groups?

ROSS: It - the three groups who were spying on Nazis and fascists from the 1940s on were the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, both of which still exist today, and a third group that no longer exists called the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League that was founded in 1933.

GROSS: How did they go about recruiting spies?

ROSS: Well, in some cases, the spies were really observers that - the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League had groups throughout the country. They had local committees, and many of those local groups would send in volunteers to go to meetings. Sometimes they would send in volunteers who could take shorthand, and they would take notes on everything that was going on in those meetings. And in the case of the ADL and particularly the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, they actually hired people. In some cases, they were former FBI people or police officers. But in many cases, it was just volunteers, ordinary Americans who wanted to stand up against fascism and Nazism and volunteered to, in many ways, risk their lives by going undercover, joining some of these Nazi and fascist groups, and in the case of the Anti-Nazi League spies, rising to positions of major leadership, where they knew what was going on throughout the Nazi and fascist world and were sending that information to the FBI, to Army intelligence, Navy intelligence and to the CIA.

GROSS: When you say they rose in the ranks, you mean within the Nazi groups?

ROSS: Within the Nazi Party, so that in New York - the Nazis didn't call themselves Nazis, per se. In the case of the New York Nazi group, they call themselves the National Renaissance Party. In the case of Emmanuel Trujillo, probably the most unusual of all the spies, he rose up to become the No. 2 person in the National Renaissance Party. And because he could read and write German, he was assigned to be their overseas director, which meant he was corresponding with more Nazis and fascists - some still in Germany but many had scattered, left Germany to avoid being arrested and were living throughout the world in Latin America, in Sweden, in Australia. And this man - Mana Truhill was his spy name, Emmanuel Trujillo his real name - was corresponding with all of them and getting more information than the CIA had.

GROSS: Well, we need to take a short break here, so let me reintroduce you. If you're just joining us, my guest is Steven Ross, author of the new book "The Secret War Against Hate: American Resistance To Antisemitism And White Supremacy." We'll be right back. This is FRESH AIR.

(SOUNDBITE OF WILLIE NILE SONG, "I'M ON FIRE")

GROSS: This is FRESH AIR. Let's get back to my interview with Steven Ross, author of the new book "The Secret War Against Hate: American Resistance To Antisemitism And White Supremacy." It's about the racist, antisemitic, pro-Nazi groups after World War II in America and the spy network that the Jewish Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Nazi League created to expose them and try to bring them to justice.

Now, although one of the goals of these, like, anti-fascist, anti-hate groups was to get information, inside information, and send that to the authorities, to the FBI, to the police. However, these groups also - and I'm talking here about the anti-fascist groups. They also were very distrustful about the FBI and the police, and often for very good reason. What were those reasons?

ROSS: The reason is, if you go back even to the early '30s, the FBI was not that big at the time. There were only a few hundred agents. And J. Edgar Hoover was obsessed with communist infiltration of America. And to be blunt, he didn't give a damn about Jews and protecting Jews. In fact, when - there was a Jewish leader,

who was one of the founding members of the ADL, Leon Lewis, who had moved to Los Angeles.

And in August 1933, when he realized that no one was doing anything to oppose the rise of Hitler, and a Nazi group had just held its first meeting in Los Angeles, he said, if no one's going to do anything, I will. He was an attorney. And he recruited four men, all Christians, who went undercover, joined these Nazi groups and got information that he knew would be sustainable in court. And he went to the police chief and tried to get him to take over the operation, saying I'm just a lawyer, but I've discovered through these agents there are Nazi plots to drive through Boyle Heights, which was the Jewish neighborhood, with machine guns, killing as many Jews as possible.

There were plots to blow up the docks in Los Angeles where military installations were and various other plots. And he tried to bring this to the police chief. And the police chief stopped him dead and said, you don't get it. The real problem in Los Angeles is not the Nazis. It's all those commies who live in Boyle Heights, basically saying all the Jews were communists, all the communists were Jews.

And when they went to the FBI and brought the evidence. The FBI said, we're sympathetic, but there's nothing we can do until J. Edgar Hoover approves surveillance. And Hoover refused surveillance because he said none of the Nazis had broken laws. And so Jews around the country very quickly begin to realize that no one was going to come to their aid. And so it was up to Jews, it was up to Blacks, it was up to minorities to protect themselves. They could not rely on government officials to do the basic job of any government, which is to protect the lives of its citizens.

GROSS: One of the things that the anti-fascist groups feared was that the fascist Nazi groups would start their own political parties or embed within the two major parties and eventually try to take over the government through the ballot box. How far did they get in those plans?

ROSS: They didn't get very far until 2016, is what I would argue, that part of the problem was what I call the too many fuhrer problem, which is all these hate group leaders from 1945 on were talking about the need for a fascist coalition. And we have to have a united fascist front. That's the only way we can confront the two major parties because the two major parties were corrupt. They also believed that groups like the John Birch Society were way too liberal and that they

needed hardcore fascists in government, and they needed a third party of fascists. And they could never quite get that because they were too divided.

GROSS: So I want to talk about one of the early spy stories in your book. And this is, like, two spies sent in by the Anti-Nazi League to infiltrate the Columbians, which is one of the first of these neo-Nazi groups. And it's based in Atlanta, Georgia, which is also a hotbed of the Ku Klux Klan. And they had just, like, reunited. And they burned this, like, huge cross after World War II to say, we're back. Because they called - they kind of ceased operation during the war. So the spies were named Stetson Kennedy and Renee Fruchtbaum. They took on new identities to go undercover. So tell us about the group that they were reporting on.

ROSS: Well, the group they were reporting on was called the Columbians, and they were led by a southerner. Emory Burke, who liked to affect a British accent, and Homer Loomis Jr, who liked to pretend he was a Southerner, even though he was part of an elite New York family that had lost a lot of its money and believed that much of the money it had lost was due to Jews. And they managed to recruit a great deal of the Klan members who were in Atlanta at the time, as well. But they proved much more violent and much more extreme than the Klan.

They were the first group to call for the mass murder of Jews. And as for Blacks, we ultimately want to deport them to Madagascar. But in the meantime, we don't want any Black man, woman or children moving into the working-class white areas. And they sent patrols out there, and in several cases, people were beaten up. Homes were bombed. When trucks would come, moving vans would come in, they'd be greeted by 100 people or so, and they weren't able to move into their home. And they were saying that within 10 years, we will elect the mayor, we will elect a governor, and within 10 to 20 years, we will elect a president of the United States behind in this incredibly racist, violent organization.

Well, the ADL and the Anti-Nazi League were very much alert to what was going on. And the first spy they hired was Stetson Kennedy, a Southerner, who was also from Florida. His uncle had been a Klan leader, and he was a new dealer - hated by his own family, drummed out by his family. And when his friends were all being drafted and he was too small for the draft, he decided he would go ahead and fight his own battle.

GROSS: So what kind of information does he report back?

ROSS: He reports back that the Columbians are getting bolder and bolder. And right now, he has gone on a run with them to collect dynamite and guns, and they want to dynamite a Black Baptist Convention in Savannah. And he's very nervous that these guys are not just bluffing, that these guys really can carry this through. And so he alerts his spy master, particularly James Sheldon, from the Anti-Nazi League. And Sheldon immediately recruits one of his top agents, Mario Buzzi, who had helped foil the Nazi Klan proposed alliance in the early '40s.

He recruits Buzzi, and he recruits a woman, Renee Fruchtbaum, and they go down to Atlanta claiming to be fascists, part of the Italian Fascist League. And they want to make an alliance with the Columbians, in particular, 'cause the Klan is too moderate, so they want an alliance with the Columbians. And they love - the Columbians love this idea. Particularly Burke sees, oh, now we can expand to the Northeast. This will be great. Well, Renee Fruchtbaum also offers to help them.

And when she goes into their ramshackle offices, she sees everything's in disarray, and she says to Burke and to his partner, Loomis, Homer Loomis, you know, I've done secretarial work, and I don't need your money, but I love your cause. And so, how about I'll stay here for the next several nights and just get all your files together? And they love the idea of having this woman both get their files together - but also, there are a lot of young men who are joining the Columbians, and the idea of seeing an attractive young woman would be another plus for them.

What they didn't understand is that she did put them in order, but she also had - just like in "James Bond," she had a cigarette lighter that was actually a camera. And so for three nights, she was photographing every piece of information. And at the end of three nights, she had over 200 pages of photographs. The photographs are processed. They're sent back down to the Assistant Attorney General who they're all working with in cooperation, and the Columbians get busted.

GROSS: So that's a success.

ROSS: That is a major success. They bring them down, and they are dead.

GROSS: Well, we need to take another break here. So let me reintroduce you. If you're just joining us, my guest is Steven Ross. His new book is called "The Secret War Against Hate: American Resistance To Antisemitism And White Supremacy." We'll be right back after a short break. I'm Terry Gross, and this is FRESH AIR.

(SOUNDBITE OF JEFF PARKER'S "TOY BOAT")

GROSS: This is FRESH AIR. I'm Terry Gross. Let's get back to my interview with Steven Ross, author of the new book, "The Secret War Against Hate: American Resistance To Antisemitism And White Supremacy." It's about the racist, antisemitic, pro-Nazi groups in the U.S. after World War II, and the spy network that the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League created to expose the white supremacist groups and try to bring them to justice.

When we left off, we were talking about Stetson Kennedy, an undercover informant for the Anti-Defamation League and the Anti-Nazi League, who helped bring an end to the Atlanta-based Nazi group, the Columbians.

After the Columbians are put out of business, Kennedy - the undercover person who exposes them - ends up going back to, you know, journalism. He writes a book...

ROSS: Yes, he does.

GROSS: ...About his undercover work. And the part I really love about this, he sells some of his stories to the "Superman" radio series. Were they used? Were they produced?

ROSS: Yes, they were. And it was great because "Superman" radio series was one of the most popular series going. And having been admitted into the sort of secret society within the Klan, he knew all their secrets. He knew their passwords. He knew everything, and he would send that off. And in this case, he sent it off to the radio station, to the two men producing the "Superman," and they incorporated a bunch of that into the shows. And the Klan members - 'cause I have this in the spy reports - Klan members were furious because their kids were listening to "Superman."

GROSS: (Laughter).

ROSS: And their kids were very happy to see Superman defeat the organization their fathers belonged to. And they put - they changed their bounty on whoever was providing this, we were going to give \$1,000 if anyone could get their carcass - dead or alive - to now it was going to be like \$1,000 per pound or something ridiculous like this. And they never caught Stetson Kennedy.

GROSS: So let's get to George Lincoln Rockwell, who is the American Nazi name that a lot of people will recognize. Where does he fit into your story in terms of, you know, being an organizer? You write about how media savvy and charismatic he was.

ROSS: Right. In many ways, he is the closest pre-Trump person we have, in that he understood - unlike the other three leaders I write about - he understood the modern media age was going to transform far-right politics. And he understood that you needed to get publicity, and that any publicity was good publicity. And so he organized stunts and would call the media beforehand and say, here's what I'm going to do. So, for example, when college students were going down to the South in 1964 to register Black voters, he sent a van full of people dressed in Nazi uniforms, and it was a VW van called the Hate Bus - and we are George Lincoln Rockwell's American Nazis, and we hate.

And that Hate Bus trailed the organizer's bus, the civil rights bus, down to New Orleans - all the way down there. And he would do these kinds of stunts. He had - at one point, one of his disciples was dressed in a gorilla uniform and managed to jump onto the floor of Congress. And again, it was incredibly insulting, and yet it made the front page of every newspaper. He would go around to college campuses giving talks, again, calling for death to Jews, to get rid of the Blacks - and all this would make the front page of newspapers. And I would say the other leaders were all jealous of him because they didn't see it as a coherent movement. They just saw it as a series of stunts that was trying to build a movement.

GROSS: When George Rockwell - who, as you say, was so charismatic - was at work, he used the stunts to help recruit and just to also get publicity. But did he try or did any of these, you know, fascist, racist, antisemitic groups try to recruit disaffected young men in the same way that hate groups now and far-right groups are trying to do the same?

ROSS: Yeah, they were playing on the equivalent of bro culture back then. And the National Renaissance Party, James Madole's group, would put out these fliers, are you rugged enough? And challenging young men. And the same with Rockwell. His men would do military drilling. They were asked to bring their own guns. But they would drill. They were getting taught hand-to-hand combat, and they were ready for the day that the Nazi Party would rise up - and that's who the Columbians brought in. That's who the national states writers brought in. That's who the

National Renaissance brought in, and that's who the Nazi Party brought in, was young, disaffected, white men.

GROSS: Getting back to the recruiting campaign, it's kind of like, are you man enough to hate with all your heart? Like, show your manhood by hating, by wanting to deport people and kill people and learn how to use weapons against other Americans.

ROSS: And beat them up.

GROSS: And beat them up.

ROSS: And this is - you know, if you take a look at the Proud Boys in particular, more than any - the Three Percenters or the Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys openly embrace that we are going to go to these demonstrations, and we're going to get drunk on beer, and we're going to beat the hell out of all these demonstrators, you know, the liberal and lefties out there. We're going to beat the hell out of them because they don't even know how to fight.

GROSS: I want to get to what you describe as a turning point in this whole fascist movement post-World War II, and that is *Brown v. Board of Education*. Why was that such a big turning point? I guess, for obvious reasons, that was a turning point. These guys did not want to desegregate schools or anything, for that matter. But what did it lead to? How did it change these neo-fascist groups?

ROSS: It gave them a much larger audience. And in the post-war era, particularly after 1954, Southerners saw it as an assault by the federal government on their very way of life that there was never a reckoning in America after the Civil War. We never really talked about what happened. And by the time reconstruction ended in the 1870s, things went back, racial order went back to the way it was. You have, you know, in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1898, that's when the Supreme Court declared separate but equal is equal, which meant the South could maintain its very way of life - a segregated way of life, low voter registration. They would control everything. But after *Brown v. Board of Ed*, it was like everything is up for grabs now. They saw this as an open attack on their very way of life. And that brought these hate groups and right-wing elements within the Democratic and Republican parties to the fore.

GROSS: So the language that you hear today from extremist hate groups is sometimes coded. And so it's like a dog whistle that people who are believers in that cause understand, and that sometimes people repeat without fully comprehending what it is they're saying. But it seems to me that one of the things that really differentiates the antisemitic, racist groups post-World War II is that they didn't use code. You know, they didn't euphemize.

ROSS: No, they were out there because they still believed that they could change the very - literally the complexion of America. And that - remember, many of these groups, it doesn't start in 1945. Many of these fascist groups were really operating from the late '20s and particularly the early '30s on. That's when these, quote, "nationalists" were forming. And the America First movement was full of these people. And America First was the group formed in the '30s that wanted to keep us out of war.

And I would argue the America First had - it was divided into two groups. There were people like John Kennedy who joined, Gerald Ford who joined, who at that point believed we should not be involved in foreign conflicts, that it was not in America's interest to be involved in foreign wars that had no real impact on our lives. But there were many people, and probably a - certainly a majority of the leadership that were pro-Nazi, pro-Germany. And they wanted to keep America neutral until Hitler was able to arm himself and to capture a good part of Europe. And then it would be too late for America.

These people kept saying, if we get into World War II, it will only be because the Jews forced us into war. And if we do get into that war, we are going to get our revenge on the Jews after the war. And a number of those leaders were prominent in the post-war movement. And they were just fulfilling their pre-war promise that they were now going to go after the Jews who, in fact, control most of the world's finances and controlled world governments. And we were going to put an end to that, and again, restore - start by restoring America to its white Christian past again.

GROSS: Don't you wonder how aware, if at all, Donald Trump was when he started using America first as one of his slogans?

ROSS: My guess is he was told about it. I don't...

GROSS: Told about the phrase or told about the meaning of the phrase?

ROSS: The phrase and the meaning. But I don't believe he was reading about it. I can't believe he's reading history books. All he was told is, you know, people like Charles Lindbergh, a great hero, were America Firsters. And so, you know, and it's also a really good slogan, America first. You know, why not? Who's going to run on a platform America second?

GROSS: If you're just joining us, my guest is Steven Ross, author of the new book "The Secret War Against Hate: American Resistance To Antisemitism And White Supremacy." We'll be right back. This is FRESH AIR.

(SOUNDBITE OF THE AMERICAN ANALOG SET'S "IMMACULATE HEART II")

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You end your book with something that Thomas Jefferson said. And he said, like, democracy can only exist with educated voters who know what they're doing, who know why they're voting for somebody. And that's why Jefferson supported the creation of public schools, so that we would have an educated public. I don't think I really knew that connection before, so I thought that was a very interesting ending.

ROSS: Well, also, I thought, you know, because ending a book - writing the first sentence and writing the last paragraph are the hardest things to do for a writer. And in this case, I'm drawing on my previous book, "Hitler In Los Angeles," where the first question I was asked every single time is, what can we do? What can we do to stop hate? What can we do to stop these right-wing groups?

And so I thought, well, I'm a historian. I look at the long view, at what we call the *longue duree*, the long period. And I don't have an immediate solution other than vote people out of office. But the long-term solution is - we've seen in national politics, people aren't talking about I'm the education president anymore. That's being pushed to the side. If anything, I'm the president who's trying to destroy higher education.

And so I thought, OK, most of these right-wing groups all consider themselves patriots. And they all, every single one of them, go back to the Founding Fathers. And the Founding Father that they like the most is Thomas Jefferson. So I thought, can I hoist them on their own petard? Can I find Jefferson's writing that might have any valence? And so I went to the "Notes On The State Of Virginia." And, you know, he believed that, you know, if we had a country where decisions were based on fact, not prejudice or paranoid fantasies, there would be hope.

GROSS: So your parents were Holocaust survivors. They both survived death camps. When you were growing up, you knew that there were Holocaust survivors, but you thought that they were exaggerating the amount of antisemitism that still existed.

ROSS: Yes.

GROSS: And you grew up after the war.

ROSS: Yes. I...

GROSS: You were born in, like, '51?

ROSS: I was born in '49. I was born on V-E Day...

GROSS: Oh, wow.

ROSS: ...Four years after the end of the war in Europe to parents who couldn't believe their good luck that they had escaped. They lived. They escaped. They were in New York, and they now had a child.

GROSS: OK. So what changed your mind? After thinking that they were overreacting to antisemitism, what changed your mind? 'Cause as an - as a historian, that's what you've been writing about.

ROSS: Right. Well, Charlottesville and Donald Trump. That I could not imagine where the president of the United States would say, there are good people on both sides, because I grew up in the great era of prosperity and a great era where Jews were welcome as part of the American dream. And I never thought that would end. I never thought we'd see this level of hatred towards other Americans and immigrants who want to be Americans that - you know, we were the beacon of the

free world. And now I see they're right that antisemites are never going to go away, and what we have to do is limit their power.

GROSS: Your father learned to bake in Dachau, one of the death camps - one of the Nazi death camps...

ROSS: Yep.

GROSS: ...And then later ended up baking for Balducci's and Zabar's. These are two, like, high-end, boutiquey grocery stores in Manhattan that many prosperous Jewish families shop in. And I feel, in a way, that he got his revenge by using what he learned in the death camp to help feed people, including a lot of Jewish people.

ROSS: Yes. It is one of the great ironies that he had wanted to be an engineer, but he had gone from the Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka to a death march from the eastern front back to Dachau. And when he got there, they put him in the bakery, and he learned how to be a baker there. And after the war, after the liberation of the camp, he had been working for the Germans. And the Army came in and said, well, you're going to run the bakery, and they're going to work for you now.

And when he came to America, he didn't speak much English yet. And so he used the one skill he had, baker, and became a baker, partnered up with someone who had been in Dachau with him, and they ran a local bakery in Queens for years. And they only had two wholesale clients - Zabar's and Balducci's, the two best places in the city to get your baked goods and your delicatessen goods, etc., etc. And it was - again, I think you're right. It's the great irony, the great revenge. He gets to feed America, while those who were trying to kill him are all dead. Can I tell you one very quick story?

GROSS: Sure.

ROSS: I had lunch with one of my colleagues who asked me - 'cause I had given an early talk about the book. He said, I don't get it. You just spent all these years living with Nazis and fascists and writing about them, and now you're turning around and writing another book. How can you do that? And I looked at him, and I smiled. And I said, this is my revenge. I get to write their story. They don't die unknown. They get exposed by me. And it gives me great pleasure.

GROSS: My guest is Steven Ross, author of the new book "The Secret War Against Hate." We recorded the interview Monday. On Tuesday, the Justice Department

announced it was indicting the Southern Poverty Law Center, which used undercover tactics similar to the ones we just discussed to expose white supremacist groups. We'll hear the follow-up interview I recorded with Ross yesterday about those parallels. But first, a short break. This is FRESH AIR.

(SOUNDBITE OF CHARLIE HADEN'S "EL CIEGO (THE BLIND)")

GROSS: This is FRESH AIR. My guest is Steven J. Ross, author of the new book "The Secret War Against Hate: American Resistance To Antisemitism And White Supremacy." We recorded the interview that we just heard Monday.

On Tuesday, the Justice Department announced its indictment of the Southern Poverty Law Center, the SPLC, which is famous for exposing white supremacist groups. One of the SPLC's tactics, which they've discontinued, echoes the tactics Ross just described that was used by organizations opposing American Nazi groups after World War II - sending people undercover to join those groups and get inside information so they could alert law enforcement and the public. Among the indictment's accusations is that the SPLC funded extremism and amplified hate because the paid undercover informants had to participate in some of the groups' activities and because the SPLC also paid some leaders of the hate groups to become informants. The indictment accuses the SPLC of never informing donors that this was how their money was being used. I asked Steven Ross for his reaction to the indictment of the SPLC.

ROSS: I think we're seeing a deja vu all over again that, once again, these groups in the 1930s, '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s - the Anti-Defamation League, the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League and the American Jewish Committee - were also sending in undercover agents and spies, but that was only because the government had refused to protect their lives. The FBI, local sheriffs and local police were doing nothing. And so these groups were simply trying to, as I say, protect the lives of people of color, of different religions, different ethnicities, because the government refused to do so. And in turn, they were accused of being Jewish gestapo groups and, as one politician called them, the Yiddish Ku Klux Klan.

GROSS: And how do you compare that to what the indictment says?

ROSS: I'm not sure if the indictment is true or not, but the idea that there are paid informants is not illegal. These people are simply monitoring what was going on.

And when they're accused of being - stealing records, those records were sent, I'm sure, to government forces like the FBI, the Justice Department, because they weren't doing their job.

GROSS: So the indictment basically accuses the SPLC people who go undercover as inciting more violence, creating more hate because they participate in certain activities, including the rally in Charlottesville. But, I mean, could you also accuse undercover police officers, you know, undercover police detectives, undercover FBI agents, of doing the same when they infiltrate an organization?

ROSS: Well, again, I don't know the rules that the Southern Poverty Law Center set down for their informants, but it was very clear that the three groups I write about set down very strict guidelines that you can participate in demonstrations in your undercover role (ph), but you can't break any laws. That we are very clear about that that you can't break any laws. And I'm assure the SPLC is doing the same thing because they know their informants would get in trouble, otherwise. That they could be prosecuted by the government.

GROSS: So, last fall, in the fall of 2025, the FBI cut ties with the Anti-Defamation League, which is one of the three groups you write about who sent people undercover to infiltrate the neo-Nazi American groups. What's your reaction to the FBI cutting ties with the Anti-Defamation league?

ROSS: Well, that's a historical deja vu again. Very early on, when the ADL was spying in the '40s and even the early '50s, the FBI simply ignored them. They tried - they had undercover agents in the Ku Klux Klan. Extremist groups like the Colombians, who were so extreme, the Klan refused to ally with them because they were too racist. The FBI refused to even listen to the ADL, and the correspondents that went to J. Edgar Hoover referred to the ADL as the Anti-Deformation League. And it - they cut ties. They didn't even cut ties, they refused to listen to them until much later on when they realized they were getting information from the ADL that their own agents couldn't get.

GROSS: When you wrote your book, did you think it would have an echo just as the book was being published?

ROSS: Yes, I did, because hate never stops, it just goes underground at different times. And what we're seeing today is one of the themes of my book that this kind of hate started at the end of World War II when people returned from war feeling

they'd been betrayed by their government. And many of their ancestors feel the same way, that the government has done too much for minority groups and too little for the White Anglo-Saxon Christians who built America. At least that's what they argue. And so this will keep going on. This is not a new story, an old story, it's a continuing story.

GROSS: Steve, thanks for this update.

ROSS: Thank you, Terry.

GROSS: Steven J. Ross is the author of the new book "The Secret War Against Hate: American Resistance To Antisemitism And White Supremacy." If you'd like to catch up on FRESH AIR interviews you missed, like Oscar Isaac on starring in the second season of the Netflix series "Beef" or my conversation with Nobel Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, check out our podcast. You'll find lots of FRESH AIR interviews. And to find out what's happening behind the scenes of our show and get our producers' recommendations for what to watch, read and listen to, subscribe to our free newsletter at why.org/freshair.

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(SOUNDBITE OF JULIAN LAGE'S "HARLEM BLUES")

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