

## ARTS

# Play portrays terror of racism

By Karen Engels  
Emerald Contributor

"Not long ago, a little 5-year-old white girl who calls me Uncle David asked me, 'Uncle David, why are you in jail?' and I answered, 'Because I love you and because some bad people don't want little white children to live on earth anymore.'" — Lane in *God's Country*.

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When he first saw *God's Country* last year in Ashland, Jack Watson, associate professor of theater arts, knew it was a play more people had to see.

So he decided to direct the play himself and the result is the University's version, which opens Friday night at the Robinson Theatre in Villard Hall.

Steven Dietz's provocative drama centers around the actual events surrounding the murder of a Jewish disc jockey in Denver by members of The Order, a white supremacist group that in an offshoot of the Aryan Nation Church.

The group's avowed purpose is to take action to ensure the supremacy of the white race, Watson said. This can include robbery and assassination. "It's like a documentary film in many ways — it's very cinematic," he said.

Part of the play's impact is that 80 percent of the text was taken from actual trial transcripts and journals. Glimpses into the 1984 trial are juxtaposed with monologues, narratives and portrayals of the group's actions.

Watson said he was scared by the play and hopes it will be frightening for the audience as well.

"The play doesn't let you belittle these people," he said. "They are normal people on the street — the nice guy who borrowed the lawn mower. That's the real terror."

Although there is one skinhead role, the others are 'good, devout, Christians,'" Watson said.

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*Skinheads of America, like the Skinheads of Europe, are working class Aryan youth. "We believe in hard work. We believe that motherhood is the most noble position to which any white woman can aspire."* — Skinhead.

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The play's power is augmented by the inno-



Courtesy Photo

Jeff Burlew, Paul Willis and Roger Johnson, rehearse for *God's Country*. The play, which addresses the impact of white supremacist groups, opens Friday at the Robinson Theatre.

cent appearance of Order members. "It's easy to dismiss these (white supremacist) people as losers, as not intelligent," Watson said. "They aren't yokels or hicks. They are just people led by a powerful leader."

"This play points out the danger and futility of hate," he said. "It alerts the community to the power of hate and the presence of prejudice in our community. It makes clear that the solution to problems of racism and hatred must come from concerned individuals."

Cast members echo many of Watson's perspectives. "What's scary is the real evil in the play," said Kendra Fanconi. "It's difficult to understand the characters."

"The word 'belief' is so strong," said Paul Willis, who plays The Order's leader. "(The play) changed the way I use that word. I have a respect and fear of these people."

"It opened my eyes to a bunch of things," said Wade Johnson, cast member and theater

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