

## WHITE SUPREMACIST ACTIVITY IN EUGENE

*Death threats and Oregon's racist history*

**O**n Monday, May 8, the Eugene Police Department issued a news release asking for the public's help in identifying a man who walked into the Eugene Islamic Center and "threaten[ed] to kill attendees." The following day, EPD arrested Chad Everett Russell after a dispute was reported in Monroe Park.

Russell was arrested for "disorderly and bias related crimes against two separate victims," according to an EPD statement. He was also the suspect police were searching for in the Eugene Islamic Center incident, police said.

Hate and bias crimes in Eugene are on the rise this year, according to data provided by Human Rights and Neighborhood Involvement. Jennifer Lleras Van Der Haeghen with the HRNI says the office has received 36 hate and bias crime reports from Jan. 1 through May 31 compared to 14 reports during the same period in 2016.

Local incidents mirror concerns that have arisen in Oregon about the state's racist history, concerns that have spiked in the wake of the May 26 Portland stabbings, which killed two men and injured one. The alleged killer was intimidating a young woman in a hijab and an African-American teenager on a light rail commuter train.

"The targeting of and threat of violence at the Eugene

sentence of up to one year in prison. Russell will face a six-person jury on June 22.

Although hate and bias crimes reporting has increased, racism is not new to Oregon — radical racist laws are embedded in the state's history. In 1844, Oregon declared slavery illegal, but passed the "Lash Law," which "required that blacks in Oregon — be they free or slave — be whipped twice a year 'until he or she shall quit the territory,'" according to an Oregon Department of Education document.

The law was repealed in the same year, and yet people of color faced multiple unconstitutional laws from 1844 to 1959 that ranged from forbidding men of mixed races from becoming citizens to making interracial marriage illegal and preventing people of color from voting. In 1959, Oregon ratified the Fifteenth Amendment — that prohibited denying men the right to vote based on race, which was ratified to the U.S. Constitution in 1870.

Even today, "Negro Brown Canyon" is listed on Google maps just northwest of Madras, despite the canyon's being named after John A. Brown, one of the state's first black homesteaders, according to Oregon nonprofit Oregon Humanities.

on edge both in Eugene and Portland, and statewide to be frank."

The suspect in the Portland public transit stabbing attacks participated in the right-wing "March for Free Speech" in April, according to *EW* freelancer Mike Bivins, who videoed the march.

In a statement released after the Portland stabbings, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI in Oregon Loren Cannon said, "It's too early to say whether last night's violence was an act of domestic terrorism or a federal hate crime."

"To those community members affected by this violence — in particular, the families of the good Samaritan heroes and our neighbors in the Muslim and African-American communities — we stand with you. We won't allow these acts to go unanswered," Cannon said.

President Trump continues to reiterate that foreign-born terrorists are a constant threat. A Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security report discredits the president's claims, stating that right-wing extremists commit more terror attacks than foreign-born terrorists. The authors found that "Islam-inspired terror attacks accounted for 50 deaths since 9/11, but that 'right-wing extremists averaged 337 attacks per year in the decade after 9/11,

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Islamic Center was unacceptable. Hate and bias have no place in our community, and we will act in solidarity with our Muslim neighbors and any community targeted by hate and bias," Van Der Haeghen says.

EPD Sergeant Scott Vinje says Eugene has seen an increase in white supremacist activity.

Beth Ann Steel with the FBI's Portland office said in an email to *EW*: "The FBI takes allegations of hate crimes very seriously, and we are continually working with local partners and concerned community members to ensure that everyone feels that they can worship safely and without fear. In this particular instance, we are working with the Eugene Police Department, the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division to determine whether federal charges are an option moving forward."

Video footage sent to *EW* shows a man alleged to be Chad Russell being aggressive towards people in the park. "They're not going to come, dude," Russell says in the video after being told police were being called. "They don't give a fuck about you," he says.

"You're going to get your ass kicked out of my country," Russell continues and then slaps a witness's hand.

Court documents filed in Lane County list three counts of intimidation in the second degree and menacing. A Class A misdemeanor carries a maximum fine of \$6,250 and a

EPD Sergeant Scott Vinje says Eugene has "some white supremacy groups." American Front, a white supremacy group, is active in Eugene, according to Vinje. Classified as a racist skinhead group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, the group dates back to the 1980s, making it "one of the oldest continuously existing racist skinhead groups in the United States," according to the Anti-Defamation League's website.

Vinje says there have been racist posters around campus and graffiti in the Whiteaker area, "including some swastikas."

He adds, "Some of the swastikas, some of the things that have happened we have investigated them as hate crimes. Some of them we have not. If we don't know who graffiti[ed] the swastika we don't necessarily know what their intent was with it."

Zakir Khan, with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), first spoke to *Eugene Weekly* after threats were made at the Eugene Islamic Center. He says the narrative that arises after white men threaten communities of color is deeply frustrating and often focuses on the mental health of the perpetrator. He adds, the label terrorist is quickly used if a person of color is suspected of committing a violent act.

After the Portland stabbings, Khan says, "the community is really suffering right now. Communities are really

causing a total of 254 fatalities."

In fact, Americans are more likely to die from heart disease (1 in 7), murder (1 in 249), assault by gun (1 in 358) or by police (1 in 8,359) than from foreign-born terrorist (1 in 45,808), according to data from the National Council on Safety.

Vinje says people should call EPD and be willing to walk away from a verbal incident that could escalate. He says he encourages anyone who feels like they have been the victim of a bias crime to report it to EPD. He says he would "encourage everybody if they feel like they have been victimized bias-wise don't be afraid to make a report."

Vinje adds, "There has been an increase in white supremacy type activity [with] the swastikas and that kind of thing. I don't know everything that's causing it." He says, "I have asked for all of our patrol officers to, anytime you see this stuff, please take a report, do a good investigation, get it to me, we are tracking it."

Khan says, "Any time a hate crime happens, it should have a response. It shouldn't take people losing their lives," after being asked about the stabbing in Portland.

"I understand Eugene is smaller community but it doesn't mean they don't matter. I hear from community members that they are afraid to go to the mosque. That should concern everyone in the state." ■