

## **Anti-Racist Action (ARA)**

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Anti-Racist Action (ARA) has been a militant form of anti-fascist organizing in North America for two decades. ARA is best described primarily as an organizing model, and only secondarily as a formal organization. The Anti-Racist Action Network functions as a loose coordinating framework. While emphasizing physical confrontation with fascists, ARA groups have also struggled against institutional forms of white supremacy, and against sexism and homophobia. Although it has been strongly influenced by anarchism, Anti-Racist Action has remained largely

non-sectarian and open to activists of many ideological backgrounds.

McGowan (2003) notes that Anti-Racist Action began in the Minneapolis skinhead scene of the 1980s. A multiracial crew of anti-racist skinheads, the Baldies, organized public and sometimes violent opposition to a growing fascist presence. To expand their struggle, the Baldies initiated the first ARA group, with mixed results. Broadening activities beyond opposing fascism initially proved easier than recruiting activists from outside skinhead circles. Physical defense of abortion clinics and opposition to police brutality became key areas of struggle, but the activists remained primarily skinheads and punks.

By the 1990s, however, in response to surging fascist organizing in the Midwestern US, and the often tepid or legalistic response from mainstream organizations, ARA groups formed in many cities. At a conference in Ohio the Anti-Racist Action Network was founded to coordinate activities and discussion. The Network (1996) adopted four “Points of Unity” which have remained largely unchanged: “1) We go where they [fascists] go; 2) We don’t rely on the cops or the courts to do our work for us; 3) Nonsectarian defense of other anti-fascists; 4) We support abortion rights and reproductive freedom.” The final sentence reads: “We intend to win.”

The rapid growth of Anti-Racist Action led to increasing repression, both legal and physical. Dozens of ARA supporters were arrested during or after protests in the late 1990s, although few were convicted of serious charges. At least two ARA activists were killed by fascists, and others were injured, many during mass public confrontations. The question of violence in anti-fascist organizing was not easily resolved, contributing to the decline in ARA groups during the years after 9/11, when violent protest in the US became increasingly associated with terrorism. Disarray in the fascist movement during the same period, and the continued tendency of ARA groups to rely on subcultural affinity rather than political agreement, also had a negative effect.

Anti-Racist Action groups continue to organize in various parts of North America, notably Los Angeles and Toronto. Other contemporary formations tied to ARAs legacy include the Northeastern Federation of Anarchist Communists (NEFAC), and the small “three-way fight” tendency within the North American left.

SEE ALSO: Anarchism; Fascism, Protest and Revolution

#### References and Suggested Readings

- Anti-Racist Action Network (1996) Points of Unity. Available at [www.antiracistaction.us](http://www.antiracistaction.us) (downloaded February 15, 2008).
- BRICK Anarchist Collective (2003) Above and Below: Them, Them, and Us. Available at [three-wayfight.blogspot.com/2005/06/above-and-below-them-them-and-us.html](http://three-wayfight.blogspot.com/2005/06/above-and-below-them-them-and-us.html) (downloaded February 15, 2008).
- Hamerquist, D. & Sakai, J. (2002) *Confronting Fascism: Discussion Documents for a Militant Movement*. Montreal: Kersplebedeb.
- McGowan, R. (2003) Claim No Easy Victories: An Anarchist Analysis of ARA and Its Contributions to the Building of a Radical Anti-Racist Movement. *Northeastern Anarchist* 7 (Spring/Summer).