

# IDHH Episode Six: House Defense



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CHD publicity photo (date unknown). Abby Layton in foreground, Jonathan Mozzochi back center, Eric Ward lower left.

**Episode Summary:** Members of the Coalition for Human Dignity (CHD) describe defense strategies. Working together with individuals and families under threat from racist skinhead violence they co-developed the support strategy they called House Defense; they also trained themselves in security and offered basic support to local groups. The mutual aid the CHD established created a community-wide bond many of them still feel today.

Interviews for this episode were with CHD activists Abby Layton, M Treloar, Jonathan Mozzochi, Krista, and Eric Ward. Also interviewed was Portland Anti Racist Action activist and organizer Jason.

**Mary Steiger** lived in the Richmond neighborhood of southeast Portland. She offered sanctuary to Abby's daughter and her two friends, welcoming them into her home around 10:30 pm on July 30, 1991 when they begged to come in while being chased by eight racist skinheads and two pitbulls. Around 2:30 in the morning of July 31, the racists returned to terrify Mary; they pounded on the door, rang the bell, broke the picture window, hurled granite rocks from her garden against the house and broke the back window of a car in the driveway, resulting in damages of around \$1,700 (about \$3,200 in today's money.) Mary suffered from the stress, was hospitalized with congestive heart failure and racked up many hospital bills she could not afford; the Metropolitan Human Rights Commission started a fund to help her pay for doctor visits. A week or so after the attack, the Richmond Neighborhood Association gave her a Certificate of Appreciation; during the ceremony where she accepted the award at the Richmond Grade School park, she could see an old car full of her tormentors circling the park during the speeches. (Margie Boule 'Think Maybe the Bad Guys Are Winning?!' *The Oregonian*, 18 August, 1991, p. B01)

At the September 18, 1991 City Council meeting, Commissioner Mike Lindberg presented Mary Steiger with an official commendation for her kindness to Abby's daughter as someone "who aided citizens being chased by Neo-Nazi Skinheads."

In the interviews M. Treloar notes that Steiger was in her 70s, Abby Layton describes her to be in her 80s. We could not determine her actual age at the time of the attack.

**The March and Rally for Dignity And Diversity** is the demonstration to which both M. Treloar and Krista refer. Organized by the October 7th Committee (one of whom was IDHH interviewee Scot Nakagawa), the event drew over a thousand citizens (1,500 people according to the *Oregonian*; CHD member interviews mention 5,000 attendees) who gathered in Laurelhurst Park the morning of Sunday, October 7, 1990—the day before Engedaw Berhanu and the Southern



The March and Rally for Dignity and Diversity, 1990 (photographer unknown).



Local news coverage of the March and Rally for Dignity and Diversity, 1990

Poverty Law Center sued white racist nationalist Tom Metzger for Metzger's role in the death of Berhanu's nephew Mulugeta Seraw. From Laurelhurst Park, everyone marched to SE 30th Place and Pine where a moment of silence was observed at the site of the killing; the crowd then marched to Burnside Avenue and then downtown, gathering finally at the South Park blocks near Portland State University. Warm Springs Elder Sylvia Wallulatum opened the rally with a prayer. Groups and prominent individuals present at the included Nick Khoury, director of the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee; U.S. Attorney Michael Brown; Deputy District Attorney Norm Frink (who prosecuted Seraw's murderers); Mayor Bud Clark; Rep. Margaret Carter, D-Portland; the Portland Rainbow Coalition; Operation PUSH; the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission; AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACTUP); the New Jewish Agenda; about 50 SHARPs; American Indian Treaty Rights; Earth First!; and "several American Indian [sic] and women's and environmental groups."

Reports that 300 neo-Nazi racist skinheads planned to disrupt the march resulted in the largest police turnout in the history of the city, with 150 officers and riot police on the scene throughout the peaceful march and rally. While most protestors directed their messaging toward anti-racist statements of unity, there were also signs encouraging people to boycott Nike and protesting U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf.

According to multiple reports in the Oregonian, quite a bit of violence was expected. While Tom Metzger claimed "there is no organized plan," the outgoing message on his answering machine encouraged Portland racist skinheads to house visiting neo-Nazis and ended with "I'll see you in Portland on the 8th. White Aryan victory." In preparation, the city of Portland designated the entire week beginning Sunday October 7, 1990 to be 'Dignity and Diversity Week.' The day before the rally, police questioned and released a carload of SHARPs who gathered under the umbrella organization the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee, some of whom traveled from as far away as Oklahoma to attend an Anti-Racist Action convention held on Saturday October 6.

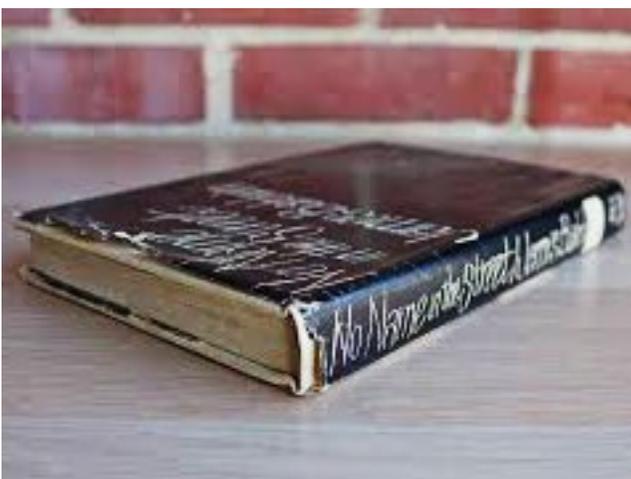
**Volksfront** was an anti-Semitic, anti-Black, anti-choice, homophobic neo-Nazi skinhead group started by four inmates in an Oregon prison, including Randal Krager, featured in the episode for crippling an African-American father of four. Eventually developing national and international chapters, the group was extremist, violent and dangerous, to both people it targeted in hate crime attacks and to each other. Frequent feuds and reports of violence between members was common over its 18-ish year history. They waged what the Southern Poverty Law Center described as 'a war' against rival skinhead group Hammerskins for much of their existence. [Volksfront](#) recruited heavily among young people, using its extensive international hate music scene to draw people in; the professed end goal was a utopian



Bomber jackets at a Volksfront meeting (photographer unknown)



Eric Ward



white separatist homeland similar to the fantasy depicted by members of the Order and other hate groups, where they would live off the land and control their environment and all the humans around them. Krager dissolved the organization at the national level after the September 2012 shooting at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. Six people were killed, and it was revealed the shooter had ties to Volksfront.

**James Baldwin**, 1924-1987, a gay Black poet, essayist, novelist and critic, was one of this country's great writers and thinkers on intersections of race, gender, society and freedom. Jonathan Mozzochi quotes in this episode from *No Name in the Street*, Baldwin's 1972 history of the volatile events of the 1960s:

"The prison is overcrowded, the calendars full, the judges busy, the lawyers ambitious, and the cops zealous. What does it matter if someone gets trapped here for a year or two, gets ruined here, goes mad here, commits murder or suicide here? It's too bad, but that's the way the cookie crumbles sometimes. I do not claim that everyone in prison here is innocent, but I do claim that the law, as it operates, is guilty, and that the prisoners, therefore, are all unjustly imprisoned. Is it conceivable, after all, that any middle-class white boy -- or, indeed, almost any white boy -- would have been arrested on so grave a charge as murder, with such flimsy substantiation, and forced to spend, as of this writing, three years in prison? What force, precisely, is operating when a prisoner is advised, requested, ordered, intimidated, or forced, to confess to a crime he has not committed, and promised a lighter sentence for so perjuring and debasing himself? Does the law exist for the purpose of furthering the ambitions of those who have sworn to uphold the law, or is it seriously to be considered as a moral, unifying force, the health and strength of a nation?"

*No Name in the Street*  
The Dial Press, NY, 1972

In the 2016 acclaimed documentary film 'I Am Not Your Negro,' director Raoul Peck offers a personal version of Mr. Baldwin, based on the unfinished manuscript 'Remember This House,' reflecting on his relationships with assassinated leaders Medger Evers and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as personal observations on the societal unrest rising through the liberations sought in the civil rights, anti-poverty, and anti war movements of those times.