

# **Nazis in Skokie**

***Freedom, Community, and the First Amendment***

**Donald Alexander Downs**

In 1977, a Chicago-based Nazi group announced its plans to demonstrate in Skokie, Illinois, the home of hundreds of Holocaust survivors. The shocked survivor community rose in protest, and the issue went to court, with the ACLU defending the Nazis' right to free speech. The court ruled in the Nazis' favor. According to the "content neutrality doctrine" governing First Amendment jurisprudence, the Nazis' insults and vilification were "neutral"—not the issue, as far as the law was concerned.

But to Downs, they are at issue. In *Nazis in Skokie* he challenges the doctrine of "content neutrality" and presents an argument for the minimal abridgement of free speech when that speech is intentionally harmful. Drawing on his interviews with participants in the conflict, Downs combines detailed social history with informed legal interpretation in a provocative examination of an abiding tension between individual freedom and community integrity, and between procedural and substantive justice.

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**George Parkin Grant**

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