

# The Cultural Conspiracy Theory That Fed Anders Breivik's Transformation From Disaffected Graffiti Artist to Cold-Blooded Murderer

by [Ben Davis](#)

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The world is still struggling to understand the warped psyche of Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian citizen who masterminded the worst terrorist attack in the country's history two weeks ago, detonating a lethal bomb in the heart of Oslo before methodically gunning down teenagers at an island youth camp while dressed as a police officer. Still, even a cursory scan of the 1,500 page manifesto he left behind, titled "2083: A European Declaration of Independence," shows one thing clearly: he was motivated by a keen sense of cultural grievance. The Oslo tragedy shows how the overheated metaphor of the culture warrior can become tragically real.

A fanatic who romanticized the heroic myth of the Middle Ages and the Christian Crusades, Breivik called himself a "Justiciar Knight." But rather than being motivated by religion per se, he seems to have been driven by one overriding animus: hatred of Islamic culture — or at least the fantasies of Islamic culture that he had picked up from venomous conservative Web sites he frequented like Little Green Footballs, Jihad Watch, and Front Page Mag — matched only by his cold fury at liberals who he saw as capitulating to them. In interminable passages, he rails against the evils of "multiculturalism," which he describes as "an anti-

Western hate ideology aimed at undermining the indigenous peoples of Europe and destroying European civilisation and culture."

On the one hand, Breivik can be frighteningly calculating in his manifesto, speaking of the need for defenders of European culture to avoid appearing to espouse extremist ideologies: "A hateful ideology (white supremacist), death metal, Odinism, conspiracy theories does NOT have mass appeal." But at the same time, there are passages that show him to have lost all sense of what is extreme and what is not: "The principle of proportionality should be adhered to by those carrying out the armed struggle against the multiculturalist elites of Europe. This means that we should under normal (optimal) circumstances not exceed (per 2010) approx. 45 000 dead and 1 million wounded cultural Marxists/multiculturalists in Western Europe."

Among the text's more outlandish detours, Breivik claims that he was once one of the most influential graffiti artists in Norway, going under the tag MORG. "Our standard 'graffiti raid' consisted of going out at night, in groups of 2-3, with our backpacks full of spray cans. We took our bikes and 'bombed' city blocks with our tags, 'pieces' and crew name all over Oslo." The contemporary Breivik, of course, is no fan of street art — he actually cites E.H. Gombrich's "The Story of Art" at length in a passage explaining that the tradition of "realistic, faithful depictions of beings and matter in our paintings and sculptures" is one of the things threatened by the Islamic invasion — but he grounds his present-day views on the authority of his early experience in the graffiti and hip-hop scenes. Breivik describes this youthful period as being wracked with violence. He claims to have hung out with Pakistani peers who denigrated Western values and to have faced constant intimidation from violent Muslim gangs (he says he ultimately joined an "ethnic Norwegian" graffiti gang to defend himself).

In all likelihood, much of this is fantasy. Time magazine [tracked down](#) one of the Pakistani associates he mentions in the manifesto. "It was always peaceful here," says Faizal Rafique, whose father, incidentally, was honored by the Norwegian royal family for service to the nation's car industry. "There was no conflict." As for Breivik's graffiti exploits, the Telegraph [has this quote](#) from an old school friend: "It's true he got into a lot of trouble, but what he doesn't admit is he informed on his friends to the police. When it comes to depicting himself, not all of that adds up — like his claim to be the best-known graffiti artist in Oslo."

Breivik obsesses over American hip-hop as a degenerate ideology. "Rap's musical accompaniment mirrors the brutality of rap lyrics in its harshness and repetition," he writes, gleefully detailing the criminal exploits of various rappers — 50 Cent, Diddy, etc. — as examples of corrupting cultural nihilism. To show the complicity of the "multiculturalist" intelligentsia, he even takes a swipe at Georgetown professor Michael Eric Dyson for his sympathetic book about Tupac Shakur. In essence, he holds hip-hop culture responsible for the scourges faced by the black community over the last decades: "The rise of nihilistic rap has mirrored the breakdown of community norms among innercity youth over the last couple of decades."

(As Alexander Billet [notes on Dissident Voice](#), it is truly weird for Breivik to single out hip-hop as the preeminent example of cultural decay, given that his country's homegrown "black metal" subculture was accused of inspiring murders and something like 50 church burnings during the exact period Breivik describes himself as coming to his youthful conclusions about the corrupting influences of foreign culture.)

Rap is not Breivik's only cultural obsession. He also trains his ire on mass media images of women, believing that they are part of a plot to weaken the traditional family, thereby facilitating a takeover by more fertile Muslims. Thus: "Artists such as Madonna, Lady Gaga, and Christina Aguilera and series such as Sex and the City must be considered political activists/political movements and the lifestyles they propagate considered political propaganda. Alternatively, artists/series movies propagating/glorifying promiscuousness must be restricted to liberal zones."

And at last, cultural historians may be amused — and disturbed — to find just what Breivik identifies as the sinister force behind Europe's corruption and decline: The Frankfurt School. In an extensive section, Breivik reviews Martin Jay's influential history of critical theory, "The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute for Social Research, 1932-1950." Among other things, the book offers "an answer to the question of why most 'serious' modern art and music is so awful," Breivik explains. "It is intended to be."

After a thorough chapter-by-chapter summary, he concludes, "by this point, the reader will already have the picture. He will have seen how Marxism was translated from economic into cultural terms; discerned the themes of sexual liberation, feminism, 'victims,' and so on that make up today's Political Correctness; and found in Critical Theory the origins of the

endless wailing about 'racism, sexism and homophobia' that 'PC' pours forth." (He then speculates, however, that Jay is neglecting to mention a secret alliance forged between Frankfurt School intellectuals Adorno and Horkheimer and the entertainment industry while they were in Los Angeles.)

So, there it is: Breivik was driven by a worldview that held perceived corruptions of modern art, licentiousness of female pop stars, and mainstream hip-hop as of a piece with the slide of Western civilization into the hands of bogeyman Muslim fundamentalists. All of this is deranged, but it's worth noting that the manifesto is also relatively comprehensible. You can follow his logic. That is because the manifesto draws on a narrative that is repeated incessantly on Web sites and tabloids by people who are not psychopaths, but merely eager purveyors of ignorance and hate. In fact, judging by the citations, "2083" shows Breivik to be a keen student of America's more wild-eyed culture-wars rhetoric. Such theories of a secret cultural conspiracy would actually be laughable, except, of course, that the events in Oslo show just what terrible and real effects they can have.

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