BLAKE (VO): Hi. My name is Blake, and I have just a quick note before we get started. Actually, it's more like a recommendation because this podcast is an immersive audio storytelling experience, part fact, part fantasy. It's best that you listen with headphones on, imagination on, and everything else turned off.

Welcome to *abandoned: The All-American Ruins Podcast.*

SFX: fade in, 1940s anti-nazi newsreel w/ marching drums and horns
Fade in, 1935 Hitler speech & crowd

ANNOUNCER: In the last 75 years, this madness has cost the world more than 20 million killed, more than 60 million wounded, more than 200 million made homeless.

MUSIC: fade in, dreadful/dreary drone

This does not include the untold millions that died of disease resulting from war, or the billions upon billions of dollars worth of property destroyed, nor does this include the grief, the anguish, the misery, the terror the world has seen due to the German's insane passion to enforce their rule…

SFX: fade in, LA canyon soundscape
Distant traffic, nature, Blake walking

BLAKE (TAPE): Okay, these houses are fucking massive. God. Damn.

BLAKE (VO): I park on the corner of Capri Drive and Casal Road-- though it feels like I shouldn't. Google Maps informs me that I'm a tenth of a mile from the Murphy Ranch Trailhead, which, much like the now-abandoned Murphy Ranch, is hidden in plain sight.

BLAKE (TAPE): -- I mean, just look at the exorbitant wealth staring down on me from all sides. It's just… crazy. I mean--

BLAKE (VO): I walk down (then up) a winding road, passing mansion after mansion. Once I reach the defunct security gate, I see that this otherwise dusty, brown landscape is a haven for graffiti artists. It's a thick spread of rich and colorful pieces.

SFX: gate keypad

I push a few of the buttons on the keypad of the security gate then proceed, noting the cultural commentary, "Zoot!" spray painted across the gates. While the word "Zoot" always cracks me up, the reality is that it's a word woven into a true, horrific American story.

SFX: fade in, vintage newsreel re: gang violence

ANNOUNCER 2: Burning! Looting! Shooting! Overthrowing the law and order of America.

MUSIC: fade out drone, fade in vinyl crackling "Clair de Lune"

Thousands of rioters joined in the assaults with clubs and bricks and Molotov cocktails.

JOURNALIST: Do you feel that there's any pattern or any conspiracy behind the riots that we've had in our major cities in recent years…?

SFX: fade out

BLAKE: In June of 1943, various minority groups, most notably young Latino men, were violently mobbed and brutalized by white civilians, off-duty police officers, and United States servicemen in Los Angeles. The name, "Zoot Suit Riots," took a page out of the baggy ensembles that were

worn by many non-white populations during the late 1930s and into the 1940s.

SFX: fade in, vintage newsreel of gang violence

More than 500 men were arrested and over 150 beaten, beyond belief. This was among a nationwide epidemic of related riots lodged against young men of color during this era. Wartime industrial cities across the Deep South, up into Michigan, and eastward into New York City, experienced attack after attack against the "Zoot Suits." In Los Angeles, where the largest attack took place, the city didn't formally apologize for what happened until 2023.

MUSIC: crossfade radio into full recording, "Clair de Lune"
SFX: crossfade chaos to Murphy Canyon Ranch Trail, Blake exploring

NBC ANCHOR: …and some 80 years later, LA County is apologizing.

HILDA L. SOLIS: The Zoot Suit Riots have been one of Los Angeles' most shameful moments in our history…

BLAKE (VO): This story is oddly fitting, considering the history behind the canyon I'm currently peering down into. As I begin my hike, I take stock of mementos of past explorers: shoes dangling off telephone wires, abandoned backpacks, water bottles, and spray painted sketches of American pop culture icons like Casper the Friendly Ghost, Homer Simpson, and Pikachu.

MUSIC: fade out, echoed

It's a blue-sky day, virtually no clouds in sight, a temperate, 78 degrees — perfect November weather for Southern California. I begin to notice small artifacts that indicate at one point, this was a heavily guarded place occupied by real people.

MUSIC: erie, dissonant strings

Metal ditches built into several spots all over the canyon, barbed-wire fences, strange, makeshift doors that lead out to tiny platforms that look like guard posts overlooking the deep ravine. This might be modern-day construction that never got finished, but I'm not sure. And the stairways: long and narrow, concrete, tumbling into the expanse, deep and serious entry points to the former site of the Nazi-owned Murphy Ranch.

Yes, you heard that correctly: a ranch, owned and operated and occupied by Nazis in this canyon in Los Angeles. And some of it is still here.

SFX: fade in, vintage newsreel re: 1940s Nazi spy activities

ANNOUNCER 3: In a house outside Los Angeles, this self-appointed dictator set himself up in the business of promoting Nazism…

BLAKE (VO): Perhaps you've already heard this story from the extremely popular limited audio series *Rachel Maddow Presents: Ultra*, the podcast that blew the lid off the little-known story about Nazis attempting to overthrow American Democracy from the inside.

ANNOUNCER 3: … these German-paid agents were spreading their poison…

SFX: crossfade, Nazi rally at Madison Square Garden, 1930s

BLAKE (VO): In the canyons near the wealthy Brentwood neighborhood of Los Angeles rest the remains of a former ranch. A majority of the compound has been completely demolished, though a few lingering structures, now embraced by graffiti, stand tattered and torn as solemn reminders of the property's dark past.

SFX: fade out

MUSIC: fade out

But the legend of Murphy Ranch is only a tiny part of a much larger fascist storyline, a troubling narrative about the imminent threat to American Democracy; a tale of an almost century-old attempt to infiltrate and overthrow the United States government during World War II.

MUSIC: sneaking, punctuated, staccato strings/piano
SFX: fade in, FDR's Declaration of War, 1941

FDR: … yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy. The United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked…

BLAKE (VO): Originally erected in the 1930s, the ranch was the brainchild of Winona and Norman Stevens, a pair of Nazi sympathizers and members of the terrorist group Silver Legion of America, a failed alt-right congregation of white supremacy that was eventually obliterated by the United States' entrance into World War II on Dec. 8, 1941.

The ranch was constructed to be a self-sustaining property and boasted several structures: a power station, gardens, bomb shelters, bunkers, water and fuel storage, and a smattering of outbuildings, including a neoclassical mansion, with some original blueprints of the property having been attributed to famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Murphy Ranch existed as a safe haven for Nazi-related activities until it was raided the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, though it's worth noting the irony of the fact that several key members from the LAPD were secretly aligned with the Silver Legion-- and likely part of the Zoot Suit Riots. All 50+ occupants were arrested and removed from the premises.

SFX: demolition

Despite the city of Los Angeles' decision to level most of the derelict compound in 2006, explorers like you and I can still plunge deep into Rustic Canyon to see the remains.

FDR: … I ask that the Congress declare, that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7, 1941, a state of war…

KGU REPORTER: … distant view a brief full battle off Pearl Harbor and the severe bombing of Pearl Harbor by enemy planes…

MUSIC: out
SFX: Blake descending into canyon

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BLAKE (VO): I finally choose a staircase down, and as I begin my descent into the canyon, I see a large water tower in the distance. Though it might just be my imagination, which is par for the course of any All-American Ruins expedition, I watch a man duck underneath and into the structure.

MUSIC: mysterious, enigmatic

A small chill runs up my spine, the first of two times I'll feel spooked today by Nazi ghosts.

1980 NATIONAL RUNAWAY HOTLINE AD: If you've run away from home and need help, a place to stay, medical services, or someone to wrap with, there's a toll-free national runaway switchboard, on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Your parents will not be notified…

BLAKE (VO): It takes a good ten minutes to reach the bottom of the canyon, and once I do, I spot more leftovers from the extremist history: concrete walls, brittled asphalt road, various household centerpieces including a brick hearth and fireplace standing next to a defunct bathtub covered in band stickers and more graffiti. I meander around a circular path

that I'm fairly confident used to be a driveway and happen upon a fenced off area, "protecting" a collapsed structure, one of the few buildings the city kept up as a reminder of the ranch's dark past, though there are several holes and gaps in the fence. But even this one finally buckles underneath the pressure of the elements.

As I begin to hike away from the torn-up wood and nails, I spot a tree limb with the word "WAKEN" on it, which, admittedly, I didn't even know was a word.

1980 NATIONAL RUNAWAY HOTLINE AD: … all you need is one dime to call the Runaway Switchboard: 800-621-4000. There's no charge for the call, no charge for delivering a message…

BLAKE (VO): I slowly climb out of the canyon, passing outdated metal signs that indicate a far more organized city park used to exist here. I loop my way around the backside perimeter of the property. As I turn a corner into a hillside, I peek down into the ravine again and notice that same water tower I saw earlier, surrounded by trees, propped up on a portion of flattened ground jutted into the canyon walls.

I walk carefully, quietly down the steps so as not to disturb the potential ghosts I might have already seen, but when I duck underneath and stand up inside the hollow storage tank, whatever specter I thought I saw has vanished. There are several cracks in the rusty metal, but it's quiet in here. It's been eerily quiet all day, and I haven't come across a single human being, except for that partial mirage I thought I saw earlier. I smell the dust and dirt and spray paint and wonder if anyone's ever slept in here before.

Probably.

1981 NATIONAL RUNAWAY HOTLINE AD: You ran from home and you're on the street. You've been ripped off, you've been used, and you could be

killed. There is a way out, there is a way off the street. Not tomorrow, but now. Runaway Hotline…

SFX: crossfade to canyon soundscape
MUSIC: fade out

BLAKE (VO): As I maneuver back out into view, I feel a strange longing and disappointment to have missed this place before it was demolished in 2006. But this happens a lot with this kind of hobby. I can do as much research as I want on a particular abandoned space, but sometimes the internet can't keep up. I may rev myself up to go exploring somewhere, only to discover that it's been completely demolished.

I climb back up to the main path and begin to make my way back to the car that I'm borrowing from my friend Alix. I'm cat-and-house-sitting for her while she's away at her wedding in France.

MUSIC: dreamy drone

I circle around a bend with a magnificent view of the Pacific Ocean in the distance and pause to breathe it in. The vastness feels so endless and makes me think of the tens of thousands of abandoned buildings and sites of ruin all over the world. I succumb to the reality that I won't ever get to see them all, which feels humbling somehow.

I press on, content enough with my trip to the Nazi ranch when I happen to glance down into the canyon one last time and spot a truly wondrous sight: pummeled into the side of the canyon wall, buried deep, is a truck.

MUSIC: drone slowly transitions to thrilling, simple chase synth

An old pickup truck. For a moment, I think my imagination is acting up again, but as I look closer, I realize, no, it's really there. I wonder if getting down to it will be possible — or safe. Finally, I shrug and slowly start to inch

my way down the hill on my ass until I reach the spot where about a third of the vehicle is still showing, the rest lost underneath piles of pebbles and stone.

These are the moments I hope for, the curious happenstances where I ask myself, “How the hell did this get here?” I inch closer to the cabin of the truck and when I look inside, I jump back in fear. My imagination, mostly empty today, just busted out of my skull because there sit two Nazis inside the truck, trapped, begging for help. I listen to their cries, unaffected by their torment, and slowly pull my camera out.

SFX: trapped, screaming Nazis

As I begin to photograph their demise, I suddenly remember that, as fascinating as all this abandoned Nazi shit is, what it actually represents is horrific. Genocide. And as it turns out, humanity still hasn’t quite evolved past the word, as we continue to watch the attempted (and often successful) eradication of entire populations unfold in places all over the world, in real time, to this very day.

As the Nazi screams get louder, I close my eyes for a few seconds and then open them again, and they’re gone.

I sit there in the stillness and look up at the sky while my thoughts of World War II and the distant sound of the Pacific echo through the canyons of Los Angeles.

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If you’re just tuning in, welcome to the third season of *abandoned: The All-American Ruins Podcast.* Join me every other week as I take you on an immersive sonic journey, recounting my expeditions of abandoned spaces across the United States which I transform into fantastical audio

experiences that allow you, dear listener, to dive into my imagination with me-- or maybe inspire you to go out and use your own.

If you don't want to miss it, please subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts. Also, if you like to read or enjoy amateur photography, just know that each episode this season is adapted from the original All-American Ruins blog where you can catch up on more of my adventures. Just visit: allamericanruins.com, or follow me on Instagram at All American Ruins.

abandoned: The All-American Ruins Podcast is hosted, written, edited, and produced by me, Blake Pfeil, with studio space courtesy of Radio Kingston, WKNY, AM 1490, FM 1079 in Kingston, NY. Also, a huge shoutout to my big brother Ryan who provided very valuable feedback on every script for every episode this season. Thank you, my friend, for taking time to explore these abandoned spaces with me.

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