

The Public Eye

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Hard Times on the Hard Right Why Progressives Must Remain Vigilant

By Chip Berlet

Introduction

What happened to the armed citizens Militias? Once a flourishing movement, Militia units are dwindling rapidly. Now that the influential Aryan Nations compound in Idaho has been demolished after being seized through a civil lawsuit, what is the future of the Extreme Right? Does it still make sense to monitor these types of groups when the Bush administration is the major force propelling politics in the United States to the right? When a leading Christian Right activist is Attorney General of the United States, does the term “extremist” have any meaning? When it’s hard times on the Hard Right, why do groups in this sector warrant continued attention?

While mainstream electoral politics and legislation is an appropriate arena for progressive organizing, the task of opposing Hard Right groups is no less important. To buttress this argument requires the reader to:

- Reject some old and widespread beliefs about the nature of the Militias;
- Review some new theories about how right-wing social and political

movements work, and where the boundaries on the political Right lie;

- Rethink some useful ideas borrowed from major human relations groups (with which PRA sometimes disagrees); and,
- Remain alert, active, and optimistic—and not get too blue.

Some Important Distinctions to Bear in Mind

The Extreme Right does not cause racism in this country—it exploits it. What clearly is seen as objectionable bigotry surfacing in Extreme Right movements is actually the magnified form of oppressions that swim silently in the familiar yet obscured eddies of “mainstream” society. Racism, sexism, heterosexism, and antisemitism are the major forms of supremacy that create oppression, but there are others based on ability, language, ethnicity, immigrant status, size, and more. These exist independent of the Extreme Right in U.S. society.

Between the hate-mongering groups of the Extreme Right and the election-oriented groups in Mainstream Conservatism lie a series of right-wing populist movements—the Dissident Right. Both conservative

Republican political activists and Extreme Right organizers recruit activists in this sector. By recognizing that the political Right is arrayed along a continuum, and by tracing the dynamic relationships among the various sectors, we better understand what is happening in the U.S. political Right and how to construct an effective counter-strategy.¹

Two recent books have attempted to chart the boundaries of different U.S. right-wing movements. One is by Martin Durham, the other by this author and Matthew N. Lyons.² Below is a chart using compromise terminology that establishes some of the boundaries recognized in both books.

In this article I will use the term Hard Right to describe all right-wing movements to the right of Mainstream Conservatism, which is primarily focused on political movements and institutions committed to electoral reform through the Republican Party. To avoid confusion, I will eschew the term Far Right, because it is sometimes used to describe what is here called the Hard Right, but also used to describe what is here called the Extreme Right.³

When using the term Extreme Right I

Mainstream Conservatism	←----- Hard Right -----→	
Electoral Reform (Political Movements) Republican Party Heritage Foundation American Enterprise Institute	Dissident Right (Populist Social Movements) Christian Right Patriots Militias Anti-Immigrant White Ethnic Nationalists Property Rights Anti-Affirmative Action	Extreme Right (Insurgent Right / Racist Right) Neofascists Neonazis National Alliance Racist Skinheads Church of the Creator Ku Klux Klan

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Guest Commentary

By Kathleen M. Blee

What [still] needs to be done in terms of studying the Racist Right? In recent years, many excellent studies of racist groups have appeared. Further research, however, is sorely needed in six areas.

First, we must *connect* grassroots activism and academic work. It is clear that accurate knowledge of the Racist Right depends on sustained engagement between community activists and academic scholars. Yet, academic research informed by the questions, agendas, strategies, and concerns of grassroots activists is still rare.

Second, we need to understand the *causes* of organized racism. We know how racist groups recruit, but not why people join them. We know how racist groups are organized, but not why they form. There is increasing consensus that a single factor—an absent parent, childhood victimization, or financial uncertainty—cannot explain organized racism. But there is little consensus about why people become racist activists.

Third, we need to study racist *violence*. We do not know whether symbolic violence (the displays of swastikas and burning crosses, with their threat of racial terrorism) or the practice of physical violence is most important to racist groups. We also need to know what violence means for organized racism. Is it a tactic, a goal in itself, a means of promoting internal solidarity, a way to ensure media amplification of racist events, or largely the product of those only loosely affiliated with racist groups?

Fourth, we need to *differentiate* racist display from racist recruitment. Klan and neonazi groups incite tremendous public concern by announcing their intention to recruit new members through public rallies. Yet, few new members are recruited in such a fashion. We need to study how racist groups recruit—largely through personal ties to potential members—rather than assume that recruitment occurs through public racist displays.

Fifth, we need to explore why people adopt the *worldviews* of organized racism. Racist groups teach their members that racial, ethnic, and religious enemy groups control the world, fomenting unremitting struggles for dominance in which Whites and Aryans are increasingly dispossessed. There is a pressing need for research on why people embrace or reject such ideas. Why does one person accept ideas that are bizarre, dangerous, and conspiratorial while another, similarly positioned, dismisses them?

Sixth, we need more research on the *connections* among the varying ideas that circulate within racist groups. We know that there are intense conflicts within hate groups over issues like nationalism, pan-Aryanism, organized religion, and gender. We need to catalog such ideological frictions in the Racist Right. In so doing, we can discern—and exploit—its weaknesses.

Kathleen M. Blee is Professor of Sociology and Director of Women's Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. The comments are based on data from Kathleen M. Blee, *Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). A longer version of this commentary appeared in *The Politics of Social Inequality* 9 (2001), pp. 171-178, and is used here by permission of Elsevier Science.

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am referring to militant insurgent groups that reject democracy, promote a conscious ideology of supremacy, and support policies that would negate basic human rights for members of a scapegoated group. Extreme Right groups are viewed as insurgent because they “reject the existing political system, and pluralist institutions generally, in favor of some form of authoritarianism.”⁴ In contrast, Dissident Right groups still hope for the reform of the existing system, even when their reforms are drastic and they are dubious their goals will be reached. The terms Extreme Right and Racist Right are used interchangeably in this issue of *The Public Eye*, although for some groups on the Extreme Right gender is also a major focus, and racism exists in various forms and degrees in all sectors.

The term hate group will be used to describe any organization in any sector that dehumanizes or demonizes members of a scapegoated target group in a systematic way.⁵ Rather than using the term hate crime, however, this article will refer to acts of intimidation and violence based on prejudice and hate as acts of ethnviolence.⁶ The term “extremist” is of dubious value and not used in this article. As sociologist Jerome Himmelman argues, “At best this characterization tells us nothing substantive about the people it labels; at worst it paints a false picture.”⁷

There are many movements and topical groups active in the Dissident Right, including the Christian Right, Patriot Movement, and the armed citizens Militias. How much actual overlap exists between these groups in the Dissident Right and the race hate groups of the Extreme Right is vigorously debated. It is clear that some issues, rhetoric, and conspiracy theories cross-

pollinate all three constituencies. Sometimes activists in all these sectors can join with mainstream conservatives to vote for a political candidate or work in a project to advance a topical goal such as restricting gay rights or immigrant rights.⁸ Yet the differences that exist among these groups are important for both analysts and activists.⁹

Durham, a British academic who has authored two books on right-wing politics,

conservative territory altogether.”¹⁰ Durham criticizes those who lump together “the Christian Right, Buchanan and the militias” with the Extreme Right. He also argues it is not useful to claim that the Hard Right already does (or might potentially) dominate the entire U.S. Right. “Not only have we disputed such a categorisation, but it may be that the mainstream [conservative electoral sector] will prove even more successful than it has already been on drawing more militantly right-wing activists into its orbit.”¹¹

This certainly seems true with the coalition building efforts of the Bush administration.

In order to make sense of what has happened in the Hard Right, it is crucial to recognize that the Christian Right, the Patriot Movement and the Militias, and the Extreme Right are three different movements. Kathleen Blee stresses that all these groups can be dangerous, but that their differences are substantial (see Blee interview sidebar).¹² There is some overlap of beliefs, especially with some of the Militias and White supremacists. But as Betty Dobratz observes, “these movements remain fairly distinct, and although there are attempts to bridge these movements, they are mostly not successful.”¹³

John C. Green, who studies right-wing electoral activity, also sees some overlap at the edges of these movements, but says,

“there is not significant overlap.” According to Green, director of the Ray Bliss Center at the Institute of Applied Politics of the University of Akron in Ohio, “the Christian Right had some militants that leaned toward the Militias, and some Militias were composed mainly of Christian evangelicals. But for the most part, the Christian Right took a dim view of the Militias.”¹⁴

Mark Pitcavage, director of Fact Finding for the Anti-Defamation League

The Extreme Right does not cause racism in this country—it exploits it. What clearly is seen as objectionable bigotry surfacing in Extreme Right movements is actually the magnified form of oppressions that swim silently in the familiar yet obscured eddies of “mainstream” society. Racism, sexism, heterosexism, and antisemitism are the major forms of supremacy that create oppression, but there are others based on ability, language, ethnicity, immigrant status, size, and more. These exist independent of the Extreme Right in U.S. society.

suggests that some analysts toss too many right-wing activists into the bin of the Extreme Right. He does not think that figures such as Pat Robertson or Pat Buchanan should be characterized in such a way. To Durham, “more complex distinctions are worth making, and where such figures have breached the boundaries that distinguish conservatism from forces to its right, it remains important to understand that contrary pressures have kept them from leaving

Interview with Kathleen Blee

12/17/01

The Public Eye: What have been the major changes in how social science looks at members of racist groups?

Kathleen Blee: In the 1950s, 60s, and 70s many scholars who looked at the Right were somewhat sympathetic in their perspective, and there were few critical, progressive scholars studying the Right until the 1980s and 90s.

In the earlier period, most scholars who looked at dissident movements were using the collective behavior model based on the idea of mob action. The presumption was that this type of behavior was transient, of short duration, essentially irrational, and not justifiable by underlying social conditions.

Even when scholars looked at the Right, they tended to study the Right outside of any social context. Many studies were biographies of the leaders, and the groups they led were not seen as part of a social movement on the Right.

Contemporary social movement theory developed as scholars studied groups on the political Left such as the Civil Rights Movement. These groups were not seen as engaged in irrational outbursts of collective behavior, but as part of strategic movements based on real and legitimate grievances that stemmed from inequalities in society.

At first, the theory of Resource Mobilization (the idea that disadvantaged groups have constant grievances and can be mobilized to change their situation under certain conditions) was developed and primarily applied to progressive social movements. Scholars saw disadvantaged groups as having legitimate grievances. That it was rational to mobilize to change.

The Racist Right was still sidelined as irrational, it was not seen as composed of people acting in their own interests in the same clear way as progressive movements. Civil rights activists were acting on behalf of their race and class interests, but anti-civil rights activists were not always doing so.

It took awhile for scholars to look at Racist Right movements to see how they would fit into the pattern developed by social movement theory. Racist Right movements are a more perplexing combination of people acting in their interest and acting against their interests at the same time.

Take as an example the White, Citizens Councils in the South in the 1950s and 60s. On the one hand, here Whites were acting in their interest against Black demands; on the other hand, they were acting against their interests and on behalf of the interests of wealthy people in their communities such as landowners and factory owners. They were acting with their race interests and against their class interests.

The Public Eye: What differences exist between the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s and the KKK today? How is it related to a revolt of the Middle Class?

Kathleen Blee: In the 1920s, the Klan was a revolt of the Middle Class in most of the places it organized. In places where it was strong it was also a mainstream movement, especially in Indiana, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Ohio. Where the Klan had its strongest chapters, they often involved to some degree many of the White native-born Protestants in those communities. So the Klan *was* the mainstream in those communities.

Today the Klan is a very tiny marginalized movement, and it is difficult to say it represents a revolt from the middle. Although the Klan uses many themes and concerns of the Middle Class, they are so very tiny that it is unlikely they represent a response to social conditions in middle America.

I am leery of explanations based on Middle Class malaise or economic conditions to explain groups that are very tiny and very marginal; we need to look at other factors. One danger is that people borrow theories worked out to explain the middle class base of the Nazi movement in prewar Germany and import them to the United States. In Germany, the Nazis exploited economic fears to generate scapegoating, but that is not a good explanation for what has happened here. Racist Right movements in the United States have often coincided with periods of economic prosperity.

The Public Eye: How does the Racist Right interact with other movements and the electoral system?

Kathleen Blee: There is a substantial gulf between the Racist Right, the Christian Right, and the Electoral Right. They have some issues in common, and there are bridging issues such as guns, or anti-immigrant sentiments, and for some, abortion. But we don't want to blur the differences between the legislative anti-immigrant movements in California, for example, and the Christian Coalition, and the Racist Right. This is not to say they are not all dangerous in their own way. In some ways, the Mainstream Right is more dangerous due to their relative power.

The Christian Coalition is able to peddle soft-core antisemitic ideas, not because they are borrowing these ideas from the Racist Right, but because both movements are drinking from the same well of prejudiced attitudes in the United States.

Anti-immigrant organizing is another good example. Prejudice against immigrants is so diffused into the public mind in this country that as president, George Bush could exploit it without having to turn to the Racist Right. He could just tap into what was already there below the surface in the general public. Some ideas promoted by the Racist Right—such as xenophobia and anti-Islamic beliefs—were already present in mainstream society.

(ADL), and founder of the Militia Watchdog website, makes similar distinctions, observing, “For the Militias and the Patriot Movement the primary focus is antigovernment. For the right-wing hate groups the primary focus is intolerance. These are not mutually exclusive ideas and people can shift, but still they are basically different perspectives.”¹⁵

In addition to recognizing these ideological boundaries, progressives need to carefully delineate the different methodologies used by various sectors of the Right. This is an especially important task since the horrific terrorist attacks on 9/11, given the dramatic erosion of civil liberties and overbroad use of the term “terrorism” justifying surveillance and detention of dissidents across the political spectrum. Few members of Hard Right groups are actually breaking laws. Progressives need to oppose the Hard Right, but not foist the task of confronting social oppression onto law enforcement for solution through government repression.

Since *The Public Eye* has extensively covered the Christian Right in recent issues, this article will primarily examine the Extreme Right, the Patriot Movement, and the armed citizens Militias. The dynamic relationships among these sectors are explored. There is a tour of styles and dynamics such as populist anti-elitism, producerism, alienation, and apocalypticism. Tools for establishing boundaries are sharpened. How the Hard Right influences the mainstream electoral system is discussed. The article concludes with a review of why the Hard Right still requires our attention.

The Extreme Right

The Extreme Right in the United States largely comprises groups promoting White supremacy and antisemitism. The White supremacy of the Extreme Right is rooted in pseudo-scientific theories of the biological superiority of the White “race.”¹⁶ Key texts that these theories draw on include Count Arthur de Gobineau’s 1853, *The Inequality of Human Races*, Francis Galton’s 1870, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences*, and Madison

Mark Pitcavage, director of Fact Finding for the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and founder of the Militia Watchdog website, makes similar distinctions, observing, “For the militias and the Patriot Movement the primary focus is antigovernment. For the right-wing hate groups the primary focus is intolerance. These are not mutually exclusive ideas and people can shift, but still they are basically different perspectives.”

Grant’s 1923, *The Passing of the Great Race*.

Grant summarizes the concepts:

“Democratic theories of government in their modern form are based on dogmas of equality formulated some hundred and fifty years ago [the late 1700s] and rest upon the assumption that environment and not heredity is the controlling factor in human development. . . .”¹⁷

“ . . . Aboriginal populations from time immemorial have been again and again swamped under floods of newcomers and have disappeared for a time from historic view. In the course of centuries, however, these primitive

elements have slowly reasserted their physical type and have gradually bred out their conquerors. . . .”¹⁸

“ . . . [and] the more primitive strata of the population always contain physical traits derived from still more ancient predecessors. . . .”¹⁹

“ . . . Women, however, of fair skin have always been the objects of keen envy by those of the [female] sex whose skins are black, yellow or red.”²⁰

Such pseudo-scientific theorizing continues today, and it facilitates aggression, violence, and murder by adherents to Extreme Right philosophies such as Christian Identity.²¹ In its most militant form, Christian Identity accentuates “racist and anti-Semitic motifs,” envisioning a “militarized apocalypse” pitting godly, White, Christian men against traitorous government officials, manipulative evil Jews, and subhuman people of color.²² Christian Identity most likely helped motivate Buford O’Neal Furrow, Jr., who in 1999 wounded several people in an attack on a Jewish institution in California, and then killed a Filipino-American postal worker. The racist book *War Cycles, Peace Cycles* by Richard Kelly Hoskins was found among Furrow’s belongings. In 1958, Hoskins wrote a pamphlet popular among White supremacists, *Our Nordic Race*, where he claimed that, “The history of our [Nordic] race is an epic story which should thrill the hearts of our youth.”²³

According to Hoskins:

“Today the entire world is seething with unrest. The line of conflict is found wherever the protective ring of outposts of our western civilization comes in contact with the now belligerent and aggressive nations of the colored world.”²⁴

Hoskins identifies the villains:

“[A] group of ‘agitation Jews,’ in close co-operation with a group of Nordic Race Traitors, are almost wholly responsible for the destructive ‘one race, one creed, one color’ Marxist campaign that has brought strife and disunity to our country and to the

rest of Western Civilization.”²⁵

He also proposes some solutions, a tactical reform agenda, and a strategic plan that implies a more aggressive methodology:

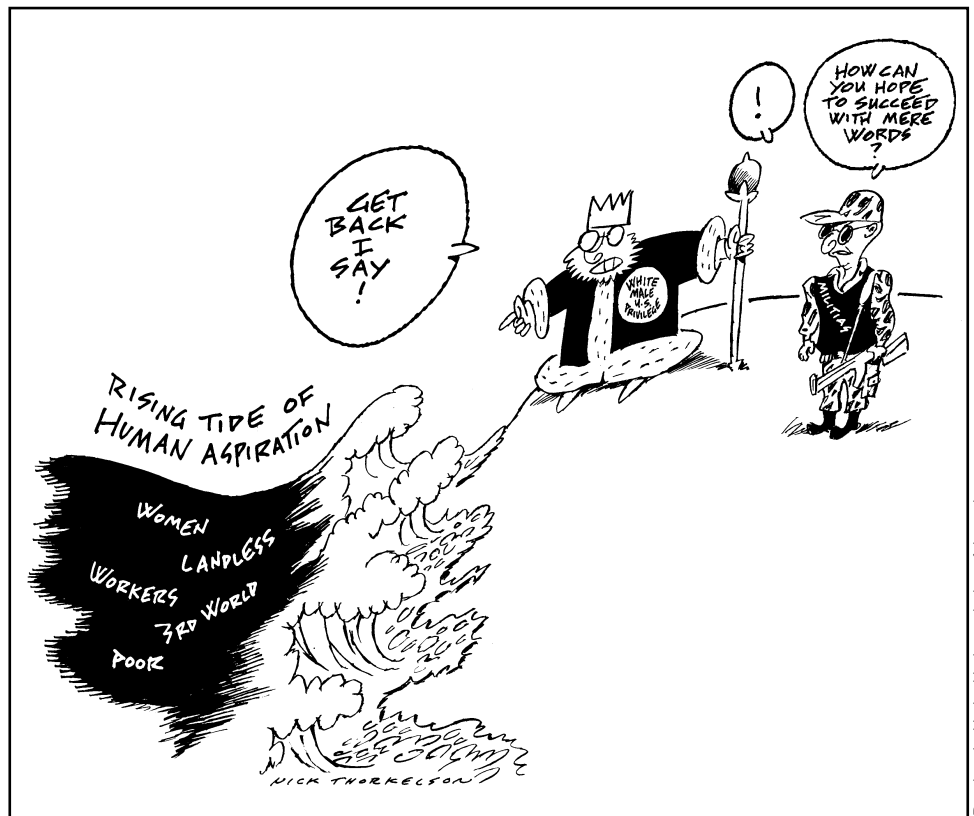
“... we must add to the large number of states who already have laws prohibiting racial interbreeding and insure that these laws are made iron-clad. It would be an irony indeed to protect ourselves against a second Pearl Harbor only to be destroyed by Marxist mongrelism from within.”²⁶

“Crucial it is that we have solidarity on the subject of Nordic preservation in spite of our enemies within who are doing their utmost to destroy us. If we do not unite our thinking and our actions we shall rest with the ashes of the ages in less than a century. But if we rise to the crisis—if we ally ourselves with our neighbors next door, with our kinsmen more distant, to crush beneath the heel the traitors within, and stalwartly meet the tidal wave of colored fanaticism that is rapidly approaching our shores—we shall win through to a great new era that will follow us to the stars.”²⁷

For Hoskins, the primary focus is on White supremacy, but secondarily the issues of race traitors, Marxists, and “agitation Jews.” He also is critical of the role of government in aiding “mongrelism from within.” Since contemporary White supremacy is based on pseudo-scientific racialism, Jews are considered to be part of the semitic race, even though not all Jews are semitic, and many people who consider themselves semites are Arab. To add further confusion, some Extreme Right hucksters claim they are not really “antisemitic” because they hold no grudge against Arabs, who they classify as semites.

Some of the better-known contemporary Extreme Right groups and tendencies are listed below.

Ku Klux Klan	Neonazi Groups	Racist Skinheads
Christian Identity	Aryan Nations	Church of the Creator
White Aryan Resistance	National Alliance	Third Position fascists



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Even within the Extreme Right, it is important to note that strategies and tactics vary within sectors of the movements, and can change over time. Kathleen Blee shows how the Klan and other Racist Right groups adapt to find new roles for women, and how women in the Klan have reached accommodations and exercised power within the structures and strictures of almost-exclusively male Klan leadership.²⁸ Betty Dobratz and Stephanie Shanks-Meile make this point in their book examining the increasing popularity of White separatism as a frame among White supremacists.²⁹

Changing social and economic conditions can also affect the targets of White supremacist organizing. One study of the contemporary Ku Klux Klan in the South found that “fluctuations in density of black populations, or shifts in its relative size, were unrelated to [contemporary] Klan activities.” However the study found that shifts

in the population of Hispanics and Asians were linked to recent Klan activity. Hispanics and Asians “are relative newcomers to

the southern landscape and anti-Hispanic and anti-Asian discourse would have most appeal in places where they had been gaining visibility.”³⁰

For many years, members of Racist Right groups were described as part of a pathological lunatic fringe of “extremists” gnawing away at the vital electoral center of U.S. politics. This “centrist/extremist” analytical model actually impedes antiracist efforts and other struggles against oppression because it individualizes what are essentially institutional and systemic problems.³¹ The use of the centrist/extremist paradigm to analyze the Extreme Right and hate groups by major human relations organizations has not “abolished the movement, nor diminished racism in general, and may, in fact, unwittingly support racist beliefs,” suggests Abby Ferber. “While the focus is on the fringe, mainstream, everyday racism remains unexamined.” She argues that a discussion is needed on the “points of similarity between white supremacist discourse and mainstream discourse,” especially since “White supremacist discourse gains power precisely because

it rearticulates mainstream racial narratives.”³² Raphael Ezekiel agrees, noting that organized White racism exploits feelings of “lonely resentment.” It does this by weaving together ideologies already present in mainstream culture: “white specialness, the biological significance of ‘race,’ the primacy of power in human relations” along with “the feeling of being cheated.”³³

James Aho points out how easy it is “to dismiss racism and religious bigotry as products of craziness or stupidity,” but argues that such a view is not accurate. “Evidence from field research on Pacific Northwest racists and bigots shows that in the main they are indistinguishable from their more conventional peers, intellectually and educationally.” Aho also observes that with the exception of those who engaged in politically motivated murders, the racists and bigots he studied “appear well within the bounds of normal, psychologically.”³⁴

The Dissident Right: The Patriot Movement and the Armed Militias

The Patriot movement began growing in the early 1990s “because of a sense of frustration—that no one was listening—that the government was not effective.”³⁵ Rural areas suffered greatly in the 1980s and 1990s. Farm and ranch economies essentially collapsed, with transnational agribusiness swooping in to buy out thousands of family-owned operations. Suicide rates in the farm belt rose along with reports of abuse and mental illness. Hard Right groups spread conspiracy theories in this region while corporate media and policy makers for the most part ignored the plight of the residents who saw their way of life devastated.³⁶ As one song sung to raise funds for Farm Aid put it, these families were being “weeded out.”³⁷ Extreme Right groups such as the Posse Comitatus laid part of the groundwork for the Militias during this period,

but so did existing Patriot groups.

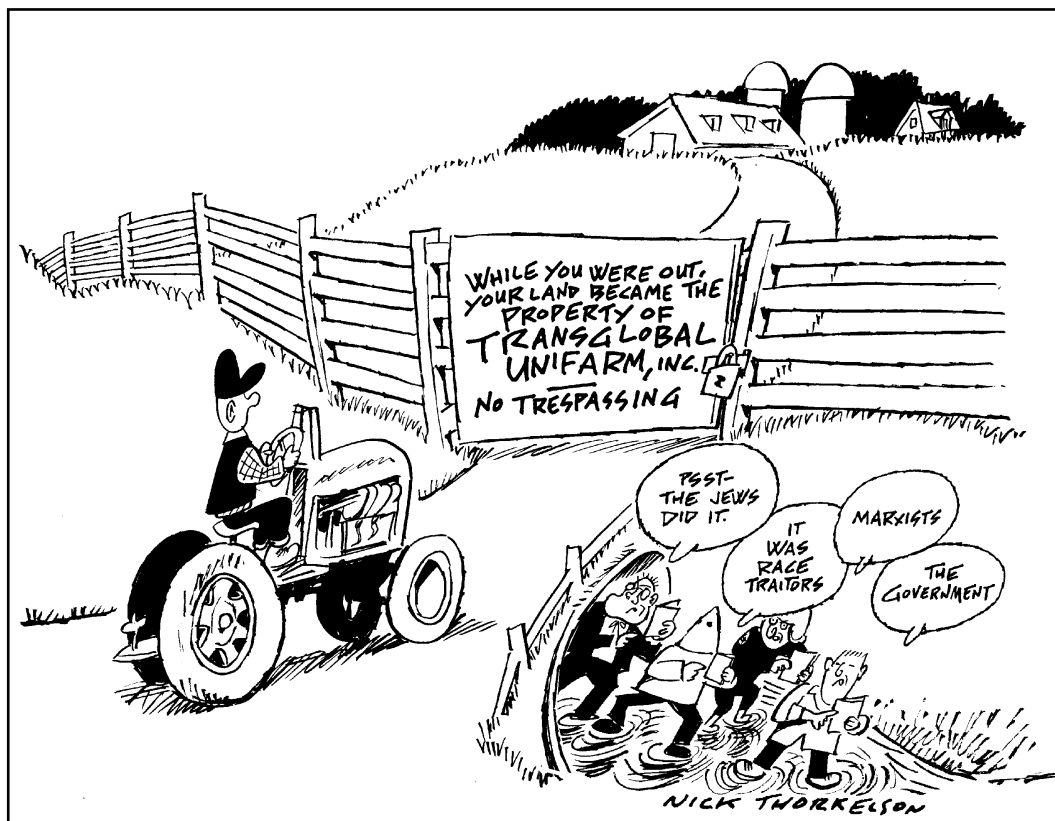
Patriot social movements involve as many as 5 million Americans who believe that the government is manipulated by subversive secret elites and is planning to use law enforcement or military force to repress political rights. Durham observes that “the movement is divided in strategy and exhibits both authoritarian and libertarian impulses” and that “aspects of each have the potential to bring its adherents into conflict, sometimes bloodily, with a federal government that they see as a threat to their rights and a servant of their enemies.”³⁸ Government analytical errors and abuses of power during just such confrontations resulted in needless deaths at the Weaver family cabin in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas.

Randy Weaver and his wife were Christian Identity adherents who adopted a survivalist mindset and moved to a remote location in the mountains. The discovery by the Weavers of a secret government surveillance team quickly escalated into a deadly 1992 shoot-out in which federal

Marshal William Degan, and Weaver’s wife Vicki and son Samuel died. Randy Weaver and his friend Kevin Harris were wounded.

The Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas was a Christian fundamentalist church and survivalist retreat. In 1993 David Koresh, leader of the Branch Davidians, was decoding Revelation as an End Times script and preparing for the Tribulations. The government failed to comprehend that the Davidian worldview was part of rising millennialist expectations generated by the approach of the calendar year 2000. A series of miscalculations by government analysts cost the lives of 80 Branch Davidians (including 21 children), and 4 federal agents.

Spurred by anger over these events, the Patriot Movement spun off the Militia Movement as an armed wing.³⁹ Armed citizens Militias quickly emerged in all 50 states and according to a tally kept by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), there were 224 Militia units in 1995.⁴⁰ At its peak during this period there were between 20,000 and 60,000 active participants.



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Ken Stern, an analyst with the American Jewish Committee, argues that the main factors behind the growth of the Militias were government missteps during the Weaver and Waco confrontations, and fears generated by proposed federal gun control legislation.⁴¹ The government is central to all of these factors. Sarah Elizabeth Mahan, who conducted a content analysis of four Militia of Montana videotapes, found that the central narrative was to use “insinuation and intimation” in an “attempt to ‘prove’ the presence of a grand conspiracy to which the viewers, as American citizens, must be alerted.” The videos cited “instances of injustice” to “weave a web of suggestive rhetoric designed to make the viewers afraid of their own government.”⁴²

John Keith Akins likened Militia conspiracy theory to an ideological octopus. “In this analogy, the body of the octopus represents the New World Order theory; each tentacle represents a specific concern, such as firearm ownership, abortion, or prayer in schools. Each tentacle of this octopus reaches into a pre-existing social move-

ment, yet each connects with the others at the body, the New World Order.”⁴³

Recent social movement theory argues that it is face-to-face recruitment through pre-existing relationships—family, friends, and co-workers—that draws people into an activist group. People join groups because they have some grievance or fear, but they are seldom attracted by the specific ideology of the group they join, and in fact tend to learn and adopt the ideology only after joining the group.⁴⁴ The armed citizens Militias drew recruits from a broad range of preexisting movements and networks (see sidebar).⁴⁵

Militias & the Extreme Right

What is the relationship between the Militias and the Extreme Right? Some analysts trace the birth of the Militia Movement to a 1992 Estes Park, Colorado meeting of antigovernment activists. Stern argues that while the meeting was significant, it “may be an overstatement to say that this Colorado gathering was the birthplace of the American militia movement.” The Estes Park meeting:

“. . . may have laid some of the groundwork for the militias’ formation, not only in suggesting structure, but also in solidifying connections between longtime white supremacists and Identity followers, on the one hand, and others such as Larry Pratt of Gun Owners of America. Yet its importance should not be overrated. Meetings happen every day. In order to have an impact they must plug into a social fabric that is ready to receive the meeting’s message.”⁴⁶

The “1992 meeting at Estes Park was not the birth of the Militia Movement,” asserts Pitcavage, even more firmly. “What Larry Pratt was talking about was Militias in the sense of the Guatemalan death squads, not in the ideological sense of the Militia as a movement” as it materialized in the United States. And “none of the major early Militia leaders appear to have had strong ties to white supremacist groups or the Estes Park meeting.”⁴⁷ Although one attendee, John Trochman, who had espoused the racist theology of Christian Identity, later went on to found the influential Militia of Montana.

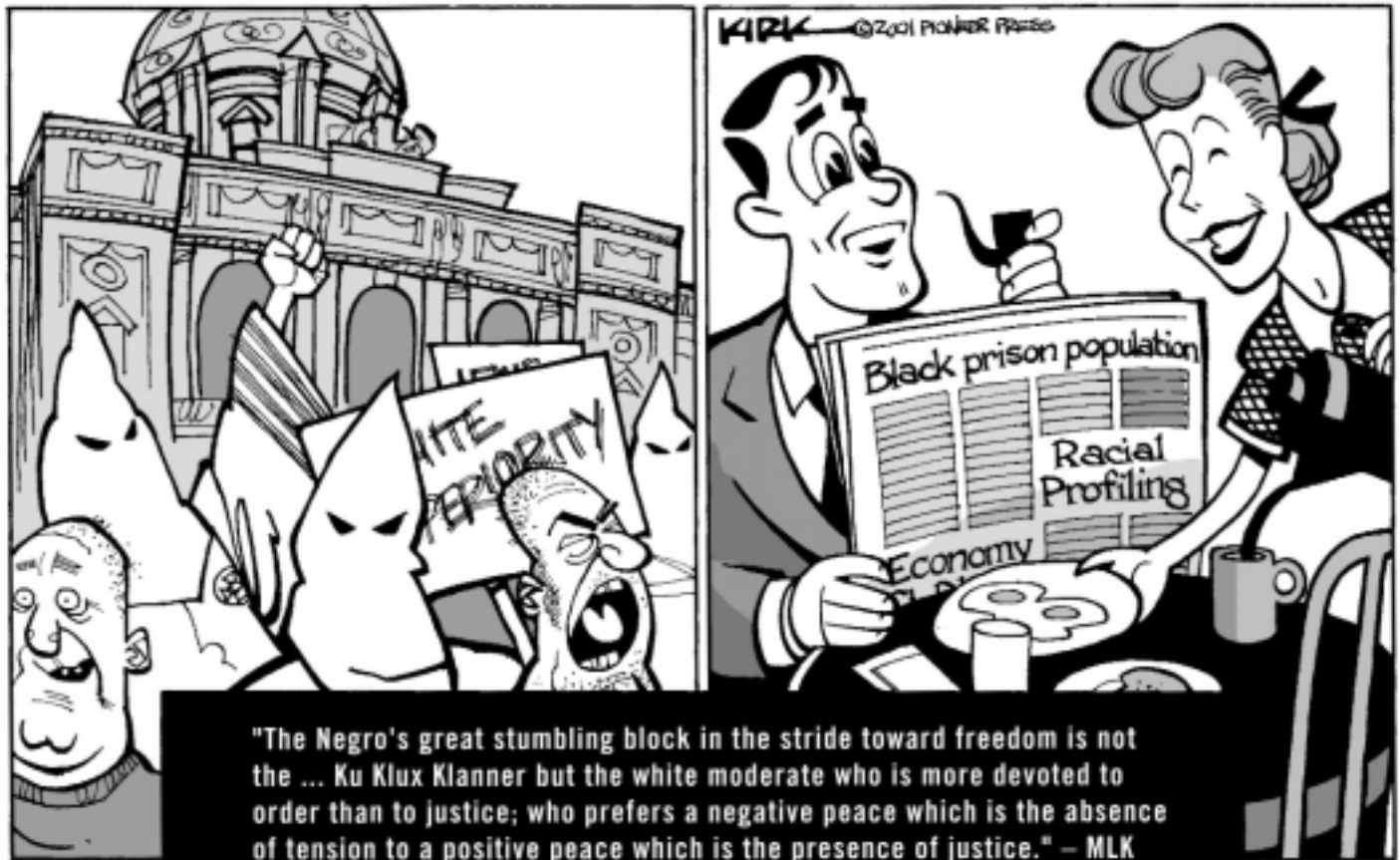
Pitcavage does see Christian Identity as playing an important role for some key Militia leaders such as Trochman, where it serves as “a medium that allows for bridging antigovernment viewpoints with intolerance.” He, however, argues that while John Trochman is involved with Christian Identity, as a Militia Movement leader, Trochman “does not actively promote it [and] it is the government that is his primary focus. With Pete Peters, a Christian Identity adherent based in Colorado, it is the reverse. Intolerance is his main focus, and he promotes that, along with antigovernment ideas,” which are his secondary focus. Pitcavage says that for the average member of the Patriot Movement, “the basic problem is with the legitimacy of the system—in part or in whole. They are antigovernment, and this then manifests itself as tax protest, sovereign citizenship, and the Militia.”

In the 1980s, the Patriot Movement was much closer to the Extreme Right.

Where the Militias recruited

- Militant right-wing gun rights advocates, antitax protesters, survivalists, and right-wing libertarians.
- Christian Patriots, and other persons promoting a variety of pseudo-legal “constitutionalist” theories.
- Extreme Right organizers in White racist, antisemitic, or neonazi movements, such as Christian Identity, the Posse Comitatus, and Aryan Nations.
- The confrontational wing of the antiabortion movement.
- Apocalyptic millennialists, including those Christians who believed the period of the “End Times” had arrived and they were facing the Mark of the Beast, which could be hidden in supermarket bar codes, proposed paper currency designs, implantable computer microchips, Internet websites, or e-mail.
- The dominion theology sector of the Christian Evangelical Right, especially its most militant and doctrinaire branch, Christian Reconstructionism.
- Advocates of “sovereign” citizenship, “freeman” status, and other arguments rooted in a distorted analysis of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth Amendments, including those persons who argue that a different or second-class form of citizenship is granted to African Americans through these amendments.
- The most militant wings of the anti-environmentalist “Wise Use” movement, county supremacy movement, state sovereignty movement, states’ rights movement, and Tenth Amendment movement.

Source: Berlet & Lyons, Right Wing Populism, p. 289.



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Examples would be groups such as the Christian Patriots Defense League and the Posse Comitatus, with leaders like James Wickstrom, William Potter Gale, and Gordon Kahl. According to Pitcavage, "the philosophy of the 1980s Patriot Movement was closer to half-and-half antigovernment and intolerance." In the 1990s, "the Patriot movement was much closer to libertarianism, and the major leaders mostly were not overtly racists," but were more concerned with "the New World Order."⁴⁸

Where a Militia unit was located appears to be a factor as well, observes Pitcavage. It appears that urban and suburban Militia units leaned more toward libertarianism, while the rural units leaned more toward Christian Identity and other racist philosophies. Ohio provides an example of this tendency. "In Columbus, the Militia leader was J. J. Johnston," an African-American "with libertarian antigovernment" sentiments. In rural areas of Ohio, the militia leaders were closer to racist ideologies.⁴⁹

The SPLC agrees that people in the Patriot and armed Militia Movements "were drawn from all walks of life." They argue, however, that "though only some were explicitly racist many of the key militants and ideologues of the movement had long histories of involvement in white supremacist groups"⁵⁰ This is true, and it certainly set up a struggle within the Militia Movement between those comfortable with overt racism and antisemitism and those not.

Just how much of the Militia Movement was dominated by the Extreme Right is hotly debated. Some analysts argue that the Militia Movement was largely indistinguishable from the Extreme Right. A significant number of academics and other analysts, however, disagree. In their current publications, both the SPLC and ADL describe the Patriot and Militia Movements in terms different than those they use to describe Extreme Right groups such as the KKK and neonazis. This is not to say that there are not elements of racism and

antisemitism in the Militia Movement—there are. But the Patriots and Militias were different, autonomous, and distinct movements, and despite some overlap, neither is a subset of the Extreme Right.

How can we explain the genesis of this analytical disagreement? Pitcavage notes that, "People who were monitoring hate groups were among the first analysts to have discovered the Militias."⁵¹ So it was predictable that some watchdog groups would see the Militias merely as extensions of existing hate groups in the United States. After the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, many experienced analysts who studied the U.S. political Right pointed at the Militia Movement as the source of the attack; and argued that the Militia Movement was essentially a front for Extreme Right groups. Yet neither assertion stands up to close scrutiny.

From the beginning there was a lack of appreciation that "the Militia Movement was a different movement from the White supremacist Movement," Pitcavage explains.

There was a tendency to “claim that the conspiracy theories in the Militia Movement were just a ruse” for recruitment by the Extreme Right and that “eventually people in the Militia Movement would be introduced to intolerance,”⁵² especially through antisemitic conspiracism. In some cases this is just what happened, but it was not a universally successful endeavor.

Pitcavage contends that a key early leader in the Militia Movement, Linda Thompson, “had no apparent racist motivations. Thompson was part of the Patriot Movement, and introduced the idea of the Militias” to a wide audience in the summer of 1993 over shortwave radio and her computer bulletin board system (BBS).⁵³ Stern notes that Thompson identified herself as a libertarian and social justice activist. She repeatedly sought to distance herself from racism and antisemitism. Al Thompson, who with his spouse Linda ran Associated Electronic News (AEN), an online text service distributed to hundreds of BBSs, filed an affidavit in a 1995 legal action against the antisemitic newspaper, the *Spotlight*, in which he said the following:

“Our network is a serious news network and has no association with persons who purport to be racists or anti-Jewish, nor do we in any manner condone or endorse such agendas; this false association by the *Spotlight* with our network discredited AEN News in journalistic circles and subjected the network to a massive media campaign directed against us. It also attracted at least one very antisemitic person to our network who left an anti-Jewish post and which has caused us to have to use great caution in allowing access to the network.”⁵⁵

The Thompsons, and many other Militia and Patriot Movement leaders, openly fought against recruitment efforts by the Extreme Right, including organized White

supremacist and hate groups.

Durham also thinks that the Militia Movement should not be primarily defined by antisemitism or White supremacy. He argues that “Patriot conspiracy theory is [not] always undisguised or even disguised anti-Semitism.”⁵⁶ This is a crucial point that is easily misunderstood. There *are* elements of White supremacy and anti-

As is true with the issue of White supremacy, many of the conspiracist narratives in the Patriot and armed militia movements are influenced by and drawn from historic antisemitic claims of an international Jewish banking conspiracy. Most Christian Identity adherents circulate these theories. Yet many in the Patriot Movement do not see the anti-Jewish roots of conspiracist theories that do not specifically mention Jews. They do not recognize that given historic prejudice, even generic conspiracism creates an atmosphere where antisemitic scapegoating can flourish.

semitism in the Patriot Movement, but not in the same form or force as in the Extreme Right, and in some cases barely distinct from prejudice found in sectors of “mainstream” society.

The charge of White supremacy often flows from the way some members of the Patriot Movement utilize what are called constitutionalist legal arguments. Some

persons in the Patriot Movement claim “sovereign” citizenship. They contend that while the Fourteenth Amendment granted statutory rights of citizenship, there was an earlier “organic” or “*de jure*” form of state citizenship. Thus “sovereign” citizenship is seen as superior to “federal” citizenship, especially since it is believed to place the individual outside the jurisdiction of the federal courts and agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service. Since Patriots believe that a conspiracy of secret elites controls the federal government, some further claim part of this conspiracy is to trick the American people into voluntarily giving up their “sovereign” citizenship.

Since the Fourteenth Amendment recognized the constitutional rights of Black people, some critics of the Patriot Movement argue that Constitutionalism is evidence of conscious racism. Yet within the Patriot and armed Militia Movements there were serious debates over White supremacist interpretations of “sovereign” citizenship, and some Militia leaders publicly urged the expulsion of open racists.

While debates over federalism are as old as the writing of the U.S. Constitution, today’s constitutionalist arguments for the most part have been adapted from pre-Civil War appeals for states’ rights as a way to defend legal or de facto White supremacy.⁵⁷ So even though Patriot Movement proponents argue they have no racist intent, the use of constitutionalist arguments perpetuates historic racist ideology.

This is different, however, from the naked and overt White supremacy of neo-Nazi and other Extreme Right groups. Objectifiable, but different.

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Christian Identity adherents circulate these theories. Yet many in the Patriot Movement do not see the anti-Jewish roots of conspiracist theories that do not specifically mention Jews. They do not recognize that given historic prejudice, even generic conspiracism creates an atmosphere where antisemitic scapegoating can flourish.⁵⁸ Again, this is different from the naked and overt antisemitism of neonazi and other Extreme Right groups. Again, objectionable, but different.

As Green explains, “A lot of negative ideas are picked up from common experience, and sometimes people pick them up without knowing their pedigree.” And in some cases the pedigree does not directly track back to antisemitism. Many Patriot Movement members draw their anti-elite narrative from a set of conspiracist theories about plots by Freemasons or the Illuminati. This is the basic conspiracist narrative promoted by the John Birch Society. These Freemason conspiracy theories arose in the 1790s, while in the United States the antisemitic hoax document, “The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion,” did not popularize the antisemitic conspiracy theory of Jewish global control until after WWI. After that, the two strands of conspiracy theory intertwined, and the result was a continuum of conspiracism ranging from generic to vividly antisemitic.⁵⁹

End Game

What explains the demise of the armed citizens Militias? Green argues that as a social movement the Militias managed to survive several buffeting events. In November 1994, “the Republican Congress provided a sort of safety valve, even though it was a legislative failure and did not extend to the state and local level. But this was not enough to divert the growth in the Patriot and Militia Movements.”⁶⁰ Then came the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995. The Militias gained national attention after the Oklahoma City bombing, but while the two persons convicted of the bombing interacted with the Militias, neither Timothy McVeigh nor Terry Nichols

were actually members of a Militia unit. They interacted with Militia members at sales tables they set up at gun shows and other events. McVeigh had nurtured his White supremacist views until they bloomed into neonazi ideology. Nichols flirted with Constitutionalism, but while both he and his brother James were clearly enmeshed in the Patriot Movement, Terry Nichols’ connection to the Militia Movement was peripheral, while his brother had closer ties with it.

Contrary to popular belief, the Militias continued to grow after the Oklahoma City bombing. The number of units reached a peak at 858 in 1996, according to the SPLC. Thereafter, yearly totals dropped, and by 2000 there were only 194 units.⁶¹ “The Oklahoma City bombing simultaneously created both a sense of horror and a sense of attraction,” explains Green.⁶² Pitcavage suspects that “gun rights activists were the Militia members who tended to drop out first after the Oklahoma City bombing.”⁶³ While these and other moderate members of the Militias were running out the back door of the Militia Movement, a number of new recruits were running in the front door. These tended to be more militant and ideologically closer to the Extreme Right.

Although the Militias initially grew after the Oklahoma City bombing, they soon started to collapse. The list of factors behind the collapse of the Militia Movement is long (see sidebar). Increased government attention clearly reduced political opportunities for Militia organizers to exploit. “The risks went up,” Green says. “It’s a lot less fun if the sheriff is watching you and the guy next to you might be an informer.” Still, he observes “a movement can take a lot of hits if it has successfully built institutions to sustain it.”⁶⁴ The Militias, however, failed to build lasting institutions. Pitcavage points to a specific internal problem. He says the Militias “did not succeed in proposing solutions to take the movement to the next level without engaging in illegal acts, such as stockpiling weapons.”⁶⁵ He explains:

“If they took it to the next step, by stockpiling weapons for instance, they exposed themselves to getting

arrested, and the milder activists dropped out. But when they did not take the next step, the inaction led the more radical to resign or get kicked out for calling for illegal action. An example of this was the failure of the Militias to support the Montana Freeman or the Republic of Texas. It was an insolvable dilemma.”⁶⁶

Safety Valves

Much of the anger in the Patriot and Militia Movement was diverted into the anti-Clinton campaign. It became the major focus for Patriot institutions such as the Free Republic website. “Clinton provided a high profile target,” Green observes. “The attempt to remove him from office failed, but it almost succeeded. The Clintons as an issue were something that could draw all these different people together.”

“There were broader dynamics as well,” says Green “On economic issues, the coun-

Why the Militias Collapsed

- The economy improved for many who had joined militias due to economic concerns.
- Law enforcement activity made many in the militias more cautious.
- The militias did not institutionalize their movement.
- Splits and feuds continuously weakened the militia movement.
- Anticipated government repression and tyranny never materialized in a dramatic confrontational form, and it was impossible for militia leaders to sustain an unending defensive posture.
- The cooling of apocalyptic and millennialist fervor, especially after the year 2000.
- The lack of disruption caused by the largely-resolved Y2K computer programming glitch.
- Anger was channeled into the anti-Clinton campaign.
- Politics in the United States shifted to the right, opening political opportunities through electoral reform.
- Militia members were recruited into libertarian, antiregulatory, gun rights, and antiglobalization projects.

try did, in fact, shift to the right in the 1990s. This was true across the board. Perot, the Reform Party, Gingrich, even Clinton moved to the right.”⁶⁷ There were two themes that were widely shared: An unwillingness to see the government grow, and renewed support for free market solutions and privatization.

Green sees in the Extreme Right, the Patriot and Militia Movements, and in sections of the Christian Right, “a shared hostility to the government and regulations. But this was also present in the broader body politic, and became the position of the political Center.” Specifically, this translated into such things as “support for vouchers and suspicion of the FBI.” And as the broader Electoral Right achieved a series of legislative and ideological successes, “it no longer seemed that nothing could change.” For the Militia Movement, “it was like letting the air out of a balloon slowly, rather than popping it.”⁶⁸

Because the Militias were part of the Dissident Right rather than the insurgent Extreme Right, it was easier for organizers to lure Militia activists back toward the Electoral Right. For some Militia members this meant simply folding back into pre-existing Patriot Movement groups, while voting Republican. Others became active in Mainstream Conservative groups tied to the Republican Party. A few went the other direction, and joined Extreme Right groups.

Pressure Cookers

As groups on the Hard Right shifted and sifted their membership, the forces on the Extreme Right became even more marginal. Some formed underground cells while others acted as “Lone Wolves.” Klan leader Louis Beam promoted such tactics in a 1983 essay titled, “Leaderless Resistance.”⁶⁹ In the most extreme cases there were horrific acts of violence such as the Oklahoma City bombing, the attacks by Furrow, the dragging murder of James Byrd, Jr., and a shooting spree in Illinois and Indiana by Church of the Creator devotee Benjamin Nathaniel Smith. There were also profound organizational changes

within the Extreme Right. Betty Dobratz explains:

“The old segregationist model prevalent into the 1960s still placed White supremacists within the mainstream culture. They were in the mainstream trying to keep minorities separate from the mainstream. So White supremacists saw themselves as

Much of the anger in the Patriot and Militia movement was diverted into the anti-Clinton campaign. It became the major focus for Patriot institutions such as the Free Republic website. “Clinton provided a high profile target,” Green observes. “The attempt to remove him from office failed, but it almost succeeded. The Clintons as an issue were something that could draw all these different people together.”

still part of the system, and sometimes were used by the system. Now White supremacists are seeing themselves as distinct from the mainstream, and even distinct from the White mainstream. They are advocating some-

thing different. They are separating themselves off from the mainstream and not wanting to participate in the mainstream culture. Some even call for the establishment of a separate nation.”⁷⁰

According to Dobratz, “the move into separatism by White supremacists results in part from pressure from various anti-racist groups that have forced this change by exposing the full agendas of various individuals and groups.”⁷¹ At the same time, the level of xenophobia and White supremacy in more mainstream institutions has increased. Even as the Extreme Right became more marginalized, mainstream politicians using populist appeals were echoing some of the Extreme Right’s historic themes.

Uncommon Grounds, Common Threads

Demographics: Who, and Where, are these People?

Sometimes different sectors of the Hard Right have different demographics. For example the Christian Right is populated largely by people with above average income, education, and social status.⁷² Many are managers and small business owners.⁷³ On the other hand, Nella Van Dyke and Sarah A. Soule found a significant correlation between the location of Militia units and areas suffering hard economic times.⁷⁴ A study by Deborah Kaplan found members of a Patriot group in California had good reasons to fear downward mobility:

“Many of the adherents . . . did suffer reversals, and as a direct result of corporate restructuring strategies. As many as 49.3 percent, compared to 28.0 percent in a national news survey, said they had been ‘personally affected’ by business downsizing.”⁷⁵

Urban areas saw similar themes. One suburban New York Militia included a downsized IBM executive and others who envisioned themselves as threatened economically.⁷⁶

While there is little reliable data for the United States, Hans-Georg Betz, in his

study *Radical Right-wing Populism in Western Europe*, noted that one common theme among the contemporary right-wing populist movements in Europe was xenophobia and racist scapegoating of immigrants and asylum-seekers.⁷⁷ Betz argues that generally, the right-wing populists in Europe distanced themselves from open affiliation with the violent Extreme Right groups such as neonazis, avoided obvious and overt racism, and presented themselves as willing to make “a fundamental transformation of the existing socioeconomic and sociopolitical system,” while still remaining within reformism and claiming to represent “democratic alternatives to the prevailing system.” Betz, however, did not examine the other side of the equation, where Extreme Right movements (including fascists) interact with Dissident Right populist groups, engage in recruitment, and make right-wing populist demands seem more reasonable in comparison.

Betz’s review of voting demographics in Europe reveals that Dissident Right populist parties attract disproportionate numbers of men, persons employed in the private sector, and younger voters. In terms of social base, two versions of Dissident Right populism emerge: one centered around “get the government off my back” economic libertarianism coupled with a rejection of mainstream political parties (more attractive to the upper middle class and small entrepreneurs); the other based on xenophobia and ethnocentric nationalism (more attractive to the lower middle class and wage workers); although there is an attraction across many sectors.⁷⁸ This is similar to the main themes of right-wing populism in the United States.

These different constituencies can unite behind candidates that attack the current regime since both constituencies identify an intrusive and incompetent government as the cause of their grievances. Anecdotal evidence suggests a similar constituency for xenophobic right-wing populists in the United States. One 1995 Harris poll found that while 42 percent of citizens had a great deal of confidence in small businesses, the

figure was only 19 percent for big businesses, and 8 percent for the federal government. The same poll found 60 percent favored restricting government-provided social services to “illegal immigrants.”⁷⁹

Sometimes these electoral constituencies span different sectors of the Right. There are far more voters angry with big government, bloated corporate leaders, and blustering politicians than participants in the Patriot Movement.⁸⁰ In fact, much of the middle class has been primed to be what Barbara Ehrenreich has called a “Bludgeon for the Right.”⁸¹

Populist Anti-Elitism

The central motif of right-wing Dissident Movements in the United States is populist anti-elitism. Populist rhetoric flourishes in the Christian Right, Patriot Movement, and the Extreme Right, but plays different chords in each sector. The armed citizens Militias are just one of a series of populist movements that have arisen periodically throughout U.S. history to mobilize people

against what are portrayed as government elites who have become corrupt or indifferent. Catherine McNicol Stock argues that the two key themes in these historic populist movements are “the politics of rural producer radicalism and the culture of vigilante violence.”⁸² Stock notes that, “the roots of violence, racism, and hatred can be and have been nourished in the same soil and from the same experiences that generate rural movements for democracy and equality.”⁸³ While the Militia Movement was strong in rural areas, there were also urban and suburban Militias.

Populism is a rhetorical style that seeks to mobilize “the people” as a social or political force. Populism can move to the left or right. It can be tolerant or intolerant. It can promote civil discourse and political participation or promote scapegoating, demagoguery, and conspiracism. Populism can oppose the status quo and challenge elites to promote change, or support the status quo to defend “the people” against a perceived threat by elites or subversive outsiders.

The Underlying Currents of Populism

Populism draws themes from several historic currents with potentially negative consequences, including:

Anti-elitism—a suspicion of politicians, powerful people, the wealthy, and high culture...sometimes leading to conspiracist allegations about control of the world by secret elites, especially the scapegoating of Jews as sinister and powerful manipulators of the economy or media;

Anti-intellectualism—a distrust of those pointy-headed professors in their Ivory Towers...sometimes undercutting rational debate by discarding logic and factual evidence in favor of following the emotional appeals of demagogues;

Majoritarianism—the notion that the will of the majority of people has absolute primacy in matters of governance... sacrificing rights for minorities, especially people of color;

Moralism—evangelical-style campaigns rooted in Protestant revivalism...sometimes leading to authoritarian and theocratic attempts to impose orthodoxy, especially relating to gender;

Americanism—a form of jingoism that twists patriotism into aggressive nationalism...often promoting ethnocentric, nativist, or xenophobic fears that immigrants bring alien ideas and customs that are toxic to our culture;

Producerism—the idea that the real Americans are hard-working people who create goods and wealth while fighting against parasites at the top and bottom of society who pick our pocket...sometimes promoting scapegoating and the blurring of issues of class and economic justice, and with a history of assuming proper citizenship as defined by White males.

Michael Kazin argues that populism in the United States today is “a persistent yet mutable style of political rhetoric with roots deep in the nineteenth century.”⁸⁴ In the late 1800s an agrarian-based popular mass revolt swept much of the country, and helped launch the electoral Populist Party. The Populist Party fought against giant monopolies and trusts that concentrated wealth in the hands of a few powerful families and corporations in a way that unbalanced the democratic process. They demanded many economic and political reforms that we enjoy today. The Populist Movement of this period started out progressive, and even made some attempts to bridge racial divides between Blacks and Whites. Some populist groups, however, later turned toward conspiracism, adopting antisemitism, and making White racist appeals.

Conservative analyst Kevin Phillips compared the populist resurgence in the 1990s to previous examples in the 1890s and 1930s and found many of the same elements:

“Economic anguish and populist resentment; mild-to-serious class rhetoric aimed at the rich and fashionable; exaltation of the ordinary American against abusive, affluent and educated elites; contempt for Washington; rising ethnic, racial and religious animosities; fear of immigrants and foreigners, and a desire to turn away from internationalism and concentrate on rebuilding America and American lives.”⁸⁵

Right-wing populism diverts attention from inherent White supremacy by using coded language to reframe racism as a concern about specific issues, such as welfare,

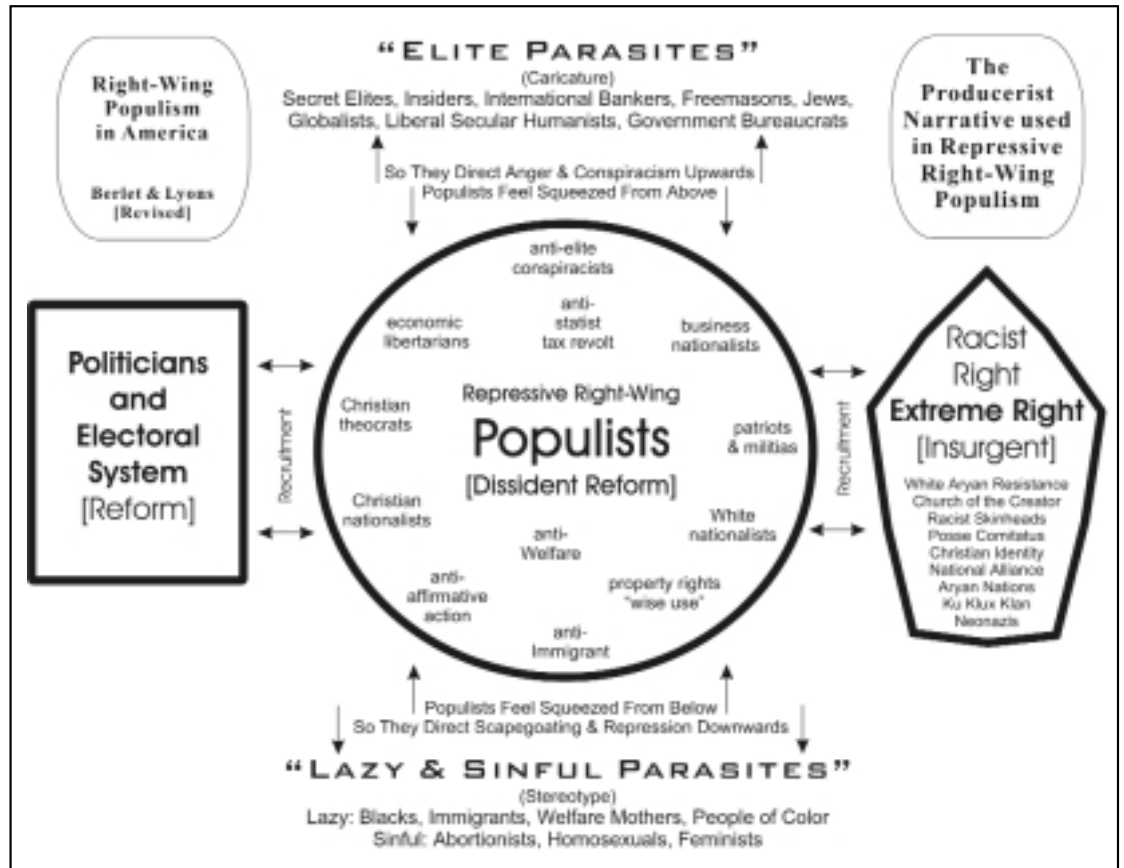
immigration, tax, or education policies. Non-Christian religions, women, gay men and lesbians, youth, students, reproductive rights activists, and environmentalists also are scapegoated. Sometimes populists use the producerist narrative framework to target those persons who organize on behalf of impoverished and marginalized communities, especially progressive social change activists.

As the right-wing populist sectors grow, politicians and activists within electoral reform movements try to recruit the populists toward participation within electoral political frameworks. As they seek votes, some politicians begin to use populist rhetoric and pander to the scapegoating.

Producerism facilitated the shift from the main early mode of right-wing populist conspiracism that defended the status quo against a mob of “outsiders,” historically framed as a conspiracy of Freemasons or Catholics, or Jews, or communists, or immigrants. The John Birch

Society and the Liberty Lobby played a significant role in promoting producerism and helping it transform into populist anti-government conspiracist themes during the 1960s and 1970s. Populism in the Christian Right centers on mobilizing Godly people against secularized elites seen as controlling the government and media, but the grievances are frequently related to gender—abortion, homosexuality, and the feminist movement.

Right-wing populism can act as both a precursor and a building block of fascism, with anti-elitist conspiracism and reactionary scapegoating as shared elements. Peter Fritzsche showed that distressed middle-class populists in Weimar launched bitter attacks against both the government and big business. The Nazis later exploited this populist surge by parasitizing the forms and themes of the populists, and moving middle-class constituencies far to the right through ideological appeals involving demagoguery, scapegoating, and conspiracism.⁸⁶



Conspiratorial allegations about parasitic elites seen as manipulating society, lead to anger being directed upwards. The list of scapegoats among the alleged elite parasites includes international bankers, Freemasons, Jews, globalists, liberal secular humanists, and government bureaucrats. The parasites below are stereotyped as lazy or sinful, draining the economic resources of the productive middle, or poisoning the culture with their sinful sexuality. Among those scapegoated as lazy are Blacks and other people of color, immigrants, and welfare mothers. The sinful are abortionists, homosexuals, and feminists. A repressive force is directed downwards toward people seen through stereotyping and prejudice. In this context, conspiracy theories that often accompany producerism are a narrative form of scapegoating; and they overlap with some demonizing versions of Christian millennialist end times scenarios that watch for betrayal in high places and a population turning from God and drifting into laziness and sin.

The overall outcome of the producerist model of populism is a broad social and political movement some analysts call “Middle American Nationalism” or “The Radical Center” or “Middle American Radicals.” Whatever the label, this form of repressive populism with a producerist narrative is a central feature of right-wing organizing across the Hard Right. This is not a recent phenomena, but part of a long historic tradition.

Alienation & Gender

In the early 1990s there was a tremendous sense of alienation in certain middle class and working class sectors. Politicians have been eager to focus this growing alienation on the usual suspects: welfare mothers, crime, immigration, feminists, and homosexuals. This scapegoating involved issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. A significant factor in shaping the backlash move-

ments of the 1980s and 1990s was a gender-driven male identity crisis.⁸⁷ Durham argues that the situation is far more complex than can be explained by just blaming angry White men.⁸⁸ Yet, when placed in a larger context of economic, social, and political grievances, it is precisely angry straight White men who comprise the main pool of potential recruits for the Patriot Movement.

Dan Junas, in one of the earliest published reports on the Militia Movement before the Oklahoma City bombing, put it this way:

In the early 1990s there was a tremendous sense of alienation in certain middle class and working class sectors. Politicians have been eager to focus this growing alienation on the usual suspects: welfare mothers, crime, immigration, feminists, and homosexuals. This scapegoating involved issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. A significant factor in shaping the backlash movements of the 1980s and 1990s was a gender-driven male identity crisis.

“For over 40 years, the ‘international communist conspiracy’ held plot-minded Americans in thrall. But with the collapse of the Soviet empire, their search for enemies turned toward the federal government, long an object of simmering resentment. The other factors are economic and social. While the Patriot movement provides a pool of potential recruits for

the militias, it in turn draws its members from a large and growing number of U.S. citizens disaffected from and alienated by a government that seems indifferent, if not hostile, to their interests.”

“This predominantly white, male, and middle- and working-class sector has been buffeted by global economic restructuring, with its attendant job losses, declining real wages and social dislocations. While under economic stress, this sector has also seen its traditional privileges and status challenged by 1960s-style social movements, such as feminism, minority rights, and environmentalism. Someone must be to blame. But in the current political context, serious progressive analysis is virtually invisible, while the Patriot movement provides plenty of answers. Unfortunately, they are dangerously wrong-headed ones.”⁸⁹

Ted Arrington studied Patriot groups in North Carolina and concluded that, “The Patriot movement is made up mainly of alienated white men who yearn for their lost dominance.”⁹⁰ He asserts: “The working guy hasn’t seen his lot improved in a long time. He feels betrayed. The American Dream doesn’t include him. It’s a myth so far as he is concerned. Something’s gone wrong.”⁹¹

Michael Kimmel and Abby Ferber argue persuasively that right-wing Militias are seeking “restoration of Rural American Masculinity.” This is true even for suburban and urban participants in the Militia Movement, since one aspect of their identity is bound up in longing for the romanticized terrain of rural frontier America. According to them, Militias are “both fiercely patriotic and simultaneously anti-capitalist and anti-democratic government.”⁹²

They continue that, “To negotiate that apparent contradiction, the militias, like other groups, employ a gendered discourse about masculinity to both explain the baffling set of structural forces arrayed against them, and to provide a set of ‘others’ against which a unifying ideology can be projected.”⁹³

Barbara Ehrenreich, in *Blood Rites*, argues that warrior culture originally developed from the need to defend the tribe from external threats. Now, at a time when some men feel unable to fulfill traditional roles as provider and defender, a reversion to aggressive paramilitary behavior is not surprising.⁹⁴ In *Warrior Dreams: Paramilitary Culture in Post Viet Nam America*, James William Gibson writes about a broader paramilitary culture that emerged in the early and mid-1970s.⁹⁵ In a later article tying his theories to the Militia Movement, he notes how they grew “at the same time that a series of social changes shook the foundations of American society.”⁹⁶ According to Gibson:

“First, we lost the Vietnam War, creating something of an identity crisis for men who had been shaped by our country’s long history of victory in warfare. These men felt further besieged by the changing roles of women, increased opportunities for ethnic and racial minorities and the beginnings of deindustrialization, all of which they perceived as decreasing opportunities for white men.”

“Threatened by these changes, many men began to dream, to fantasize about remaking the world and returning to a time before Vietnam, before women’s roles changed, before the races started to become more equal. A new hero emerged, a warrior who fought outside the chain of military or police command, outside the ‘self-imposed restraints’ liberal politicians were thought to have forced on fighting men, and which conservative critics contended led to defeat in Vietnam and rampant crime at home. Freed from bureaucracy, the para-

military hero fought all of America’s enemies—terrorists, drug dealers, mobsters and, above all, communists who organized these villains into a vast demonic network.”

“Paramilitary culture celebrated man as warrior and combat as the only life worth living.”⁹⁷

Part of this narrative of alienation was a story of betrayal by leaders in high places of the foot soldiers in Vietnam (and later, working stiffs back home). This in part accounts for the fixation of many veterans on locating soldiers missing in action and still supposedly being held captive in Vietnam.⁹⁸ This was the basis of the popularity of the Rambo genre of films where callous government elites use soldiers as pawns, and the antihero has to fight both internal and external enemies.⁹⁹ This is a classic right-wing populist narrative. Given this context, it is not surprising that the first Militia organizing efforts were aimed at blocking federal laws regulating the use of firearms, which Militias believed were needed to defend against government tyranny.

Apocalypse Again

The concern in paramilitary gun-culture with government betrayal overlapped with the central apocalyptic narrative of the Militias: the New World Order conspiracy.¹⁰⁰ Pitcavage says this appealed to a wide audience of conspiracists like those “people who think the X-Files TV program is non-fiction or who listen to Art Bell” on his syndicated national radio program. He notes that this milieu inherits the legacy of “400 years of susceptibility to conspiracy theories, including strains in Puritanism and Republicanism.”¹⁰¹ According to Akins, it is “Fundamentalist thinking [that] provides the dualistic, conspiratorial, and millenarian perspective necessary to accept the Militia Movement’s synthetic conspiracy theory.”¹⁰²

Grounded in apocalyptic narratives from a particular reading of the Bible’s Book of Revelation, apocalyptic conspiracism is widespread throughout the Hard Right.¹⁰³

In this form it is a projective “future mythology” which Pitcavage says transcends its religious roots and “becomes a form of secular prophecy. There is a nuclear version, and one involving race riots. For the Patriot Movement, the myth revolved around fears of a New World Order and chaos caused by the Y2K computer bug. The idea of a secular apocalypse motivates whole sectors of the right,” he explains. “It is the idea of the immanent destruction of all you hold dear. This is what is behind the fear of invading foreign troops or government concentration camps.”¹⁰⁴ This form of apocalyptic demonization is a masculinist narrative that engenders confrontation; and as Linda Kintz has noted, “The linkage between God, the Constitution, and masculinity provides a powerful foundation of emotion.”¹⁰⁵

Michael Barkun says the suspicion of big government fostered by the Patriot brand of “radical localism” readily blends with apocalyptic conspiracy narratives ranging from secular, to Christian fundamentalist, to Christian Identity.¹⁰⁶ He has put forward the concept of “stigmatized knowledge” as an effective organizing device, especially when linked to fears about a New World Order. Barkun sees this as supplying a bridge between several movements:

“New World Order ideas can perform this bridging function in part because they have an open conception of the ‘other.’ They agree on the existence of what many call a ‘secret government,’ but exactly who runs it is the subject of vigorous disagreement. Indeed, as one surveys New World Order literature, the only common element among candidates for the role of master manipulators is an alleged gift for secrecy and dissimulation.”

“As a result, all of the usual suspects are present, and one is struck by the extent to which New World Order writers bring back the villains of nineteenth-century nativism: Jewish international bankers, Jesuits, and Masons, alongside Trilateralists,

Bilderbergers, and the Council on Foreign Relations.”

“The danger of these developments lies in their fusion of three factors: a belief in an imminent apocalypse, a theory that purports to explain all of the world’s evil, and an identification of that evil with concealed or invisible forces. Since the malefactors of the New World Order are initially faceless, conspiratorialists can fill in whatever features they wish, and in a conspiracy so allegedly vast, there is, unfortunately, room for everyone’s favorite villain.”¹⁰⁷

This is one way that right-wing populists and Extreme Right activists seek to recruit people from the political Left. There was a plethora of conspiracy theories in the anti-elite “stigmatized knowledge” mode after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, and while most came from the political Right, the posts sometimes jumped to Internet discussion lists on the political Left.

Setting Boundaries

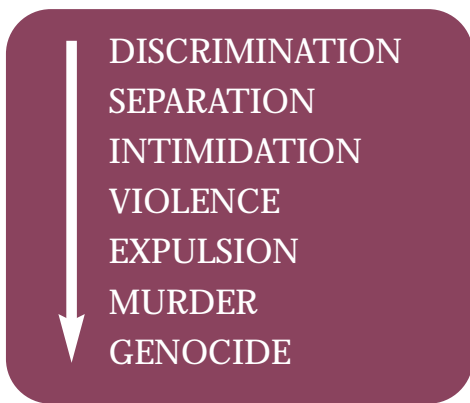
If the Christian Right, Patriot Movement, and Extreme Right all share common elements, what tools can be used to establish the boundaries between them? Pitcavage argues that, “When trying to figure out social and political movements it is important to see multiple axes.”¹⁰⁸ To start with, he lists three main divisions:

left --- right
 authoritarian --- anti-authoritarian
 populism --- elitism

Another set of variables involves the methodologies used or promoted by social movements, which range from passive to active. In the civic sphere, these method-

ologies include electoral reform and traditional lobbying, dissident mobilization and organizing to force reform outside of elections and legislation, civil disobedience, vigilantism (both aggressive and defensive), and insurgency (up to and including attempts to overthrow the government).¹⁰⁹

Methodological distinctions are especially important in an era when under Attorney General John Ashcroft, the Justice Department has written legislation and guidelines that make little or no distinction among nonviolent civil disobedience, vandalism, terrorism, and armed revolution.



In terms of ethnic or race relations, methodologies can range from the dominant group engaging in discrimination to committing genocide. Dominance in this case is not necessarily numerical but stems from wielding power. For instance, Whiteness in the context of institutionalized racism affords members of the “White race” dominance in settings as different as the contemporary United States and apartheid South Africa. (Note that prejudice is an ideology, with its rhetoric, except in narrow circumstances, protected by the First Amendment). See below.

Overarching ideological frames of reference important in U.S. right-wing dissi-

dent movements include apocalypticism, conspiracism, populist anti-elitism, and domination. These four “master” frames often appear like a nested set of Russian dolls. Apocalypticism is a regular component of conspiracism. Conspiracism is a common component of populist anti-elitism. And apocalyptic populist anti-elite conspiracism is often found in insurgent groups.

If a core narrative of the political Right is that straight White Christian men have been dispossessed, to use a concept proposed by Durham, then several questions arise. Who are the agents of dispossession? From whom is America to be taken back? To whom is it to be restored? We can easily round up the usual villainous suspects: Blacks, Jews, immigrants, liberals, welfare mothers, secular humanists, corrupt politicians, government bureaucrats, feminists, gays and lesbians, etc. These targeted scapegoats often overlap, yet there is usually some central villain or some hierarchy to the alleged villainy depending on the social or political movement.

If we chart the three major right-wing movement sectors for their primary targets, secondary targets, major methodologies, and major frames of reference ranked by importance, there is considerable, albeit nuanced, variation. (see chart on next page)

All three sectors cobble together their ideologies from the same basic materials, but using slightly different priorities. In the Extreme Right, for example, populist anti-elitism is a rhetorical style used to mask underlying authoritarian goals. While there is a subtle form of White Eurocentric racialism in the Christian Right, its major form of supremacy is founded upon notions of heteropatriarchal dominance.

How different forms of oppression manifest themselves in different movements is another way to establish boundaries. Is the prejudice or supremacy in the movement being studied conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional, overt or covert?

The following holds true for all varieties of prejudice and oppression. Replace [anti-semitism] with any form of oppression

Reform: Political Movements		Reform: Social Movements		Insurgent Movements	
Major Electoral Parties	Third Parties	Dissident Mobilization	Civil Disobedience	Aggressive Vigilantism	Armed Revolt

Movement Sector	Primary Target	Secondary Targets	Major Methodologies	Major Frames of Reference by Rank
Insurgent: Extreme Right Racist Right	Race	Government Gender	Violence Armed Struggle	Domination Conspiracism Apocalypticism Populist Anti-Elitism
Dissident: Patriot Movement Armed Militias	Government	Gender Race	Reform Defensive Vigilantism	Populist Anti-Elitism Conspiracism Apocalypticism Domination
Dissident: Christian Right	Gender	Government Race	Reform Electoral	Apocalypticism Conspiracism Domination Populist Anti-Elitism

such as [racism] or [sexism] to see the universal validity of the argument. With different forms of oppression, the example groups or individuals would also change.

- ▶ People can be consciously [antisemitic] and overt about it. Example: [White Aryan Resistance].
- ▶ People can be consciously [antisemitic] but covert about it. Example: [Liberty Lobby and the *Spotlight* newspaper].¹¹¹
- ▶ People can be unconsciously [antisemitic], but fail to see it and deny it. Example: [Pat Buchanan].
- ▶ People can be unintentionally [antisemitic] by promoting ideas or policies that have the effect of perpetuating [antisemitism] or citing material that is not recognized as [antisemitic]. Example: [Pat Robertson].

For analytical purposes and for activists trying to prevent future occurrences, gauging the intent or motivation of an act or utterance is important. As Joe R. Feagin points out, however, it does not matter if racism is conscious or unconscious, verbal or violent; “oppression is not less serious because it is more subtle.”¹¹² Even if an organized hate group is small in number, or an act of ethnviolence is carried out by a handful of unaffiliated vandals, the direct victims feel the same pain, and the whole

community in which the attack took place suffers. The negative outcome of a public act or utterance that spreads prejudiced or hateful ideas is the same no matter what the intent. This is why there is a need for visible and forceful public displays of disapproval and attempts at healing by leaders in political, religious, ethnic, business, and labor sectors.

Ripples in the Mainstream

Dissident populist movements interact on the reform side with electoral politics and on the insurgent side with the Extreme Right. Mainstream politicians seldom directly interact with the Extreme Right, but since they frequently pander to large dissident populist movements, the influence of the Extreme Right on the populist movements in the Dissident Right can indirectly influence mainstream politics by pulling the whole political system to the right.

As Dissident Right movements are pulled in both directions—toward reform and insurgency, they sometimes split into factions. The Christian Right is divided into several factions ranging from the pragmatism of Ralph Reed, to the Culture War politics of Paul Weyrich, to the insurgent theocratic authoritarianism of the Christian Reconstructionists.

Green explains that while many in the

Christian Right sympathized with calls to rethink their pragmatic relationship with the Republican Party, “they ended up more open to broader coalitions. After all, they have been at this for 20 years and haven’t succeeded. So most of them decided they had to support Bush as a compromise.”

Further, Green says that from the perspective of most groups on the Hard Right, the “system is deeply flawed. . . . But for the Christian Right the system is not intrinsically antagonistic. Being mean-spirited and just walking away from electoral politics is not just counter-productive, but un-Christian.” Even critics of pragmatism such as Ed Dobson and Cal Thomas (who argued for more emphasis on proselytizing and soul-saving) thought that “evangelicals should be good Christians and vote.”¹¹³

As for Pat Buchanan, who acts as a bridge between the Republican Party and the Hard Right, jumping to the Reform Party was problematic:

“So many of his supporters had become card-carrying Republicans. His support might have been different if he had stayed through the primaries, but because he did not, he was seen as opportunistic. The Buchanan synthesis was appealing, but he found it too difficult to take traditional social values and wed them to economic nationalism. The Christian

Right is largely made up of free marketeers, even though they are critical of materialism at large. This fits with their religious individualism. The battle for control of the Reform Party had negative repercussions and the popular attitude was that the Reform Party was finished.”¹¹⁴

Green observes that Bush benefited from Buchanan’s miscalculations, and the collapse of the Forbes candidacy, which had received strong support from some factions in the Christian Right. “Bush handled the Christian Right very well. In part this is because “Bush grew up in Texas and had a born again experience . . . so even though he is a main-line denominational Protestant, he speaks and understands the language of evangelicalism.”¹¹⁵

In the 2000 campaign, Bush “made real concessions to the Christian Right [but]

Bush and his allies built an effective coalition that included a variety of sectors, not just the Christian Right. This alleviated a lot of frustrations on the political right. Things looked much brighter.”¹¹⁶ This helped redirect the energy in the Patriot Movement, and helped deflate the hot air balloon that had risen so swiftly as the Militia Movement.

Why the Continued Concern About the Hard Right?

Green thinks the Patriot Movement and Extreme Right “are still out there, largely undiminished. Both sectors could see in Bush and a Republican Congress some things they liked, and they could vote for him from a critical perspective. [But they still] feel cheated. Who is supposed to enforce the social contract? The government!” So right-wing populism breeds antigovernment and

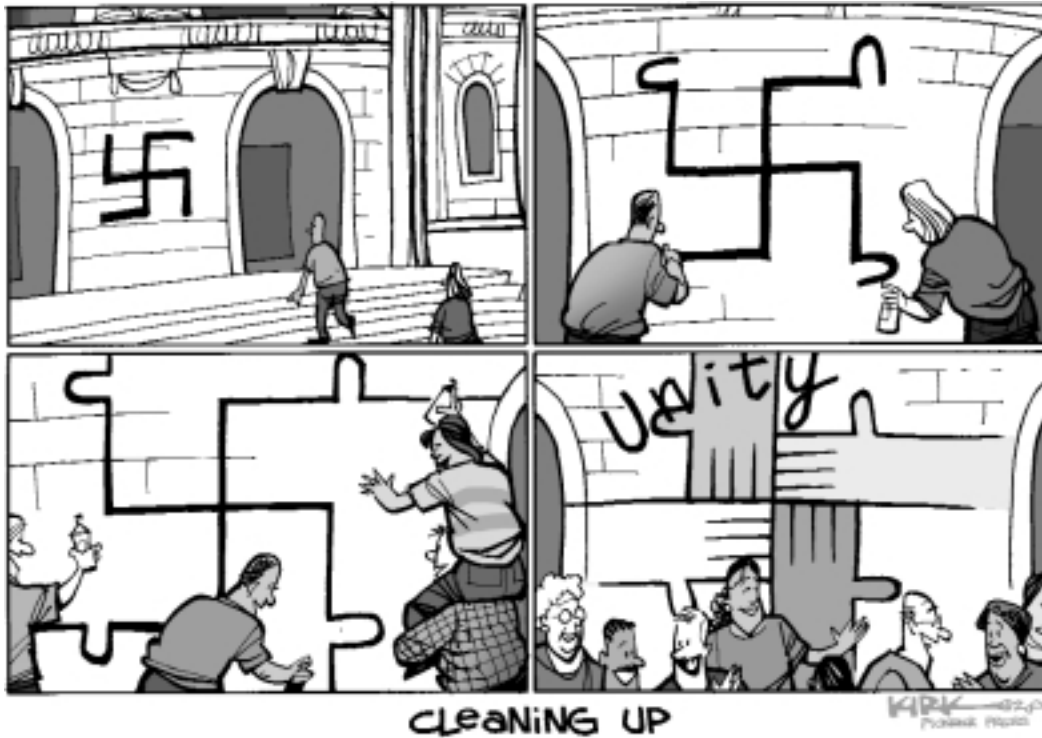
anti-elite conspiracism, which still provides a major frame of reference for people with grievances. This means there is a potential for Hard Right activism to revive at any time. Green admits that, “We may not know the exact mechanism. . . . Getting inside these people’s heads is very hard. They are guarded. They don’t see academics as their allies.”¹¹⁷

Pitcavage agrees, “the Militia Movement has stumbled, but these people are still out there. What was exciting and a novelty in 1994 is not in 2001 . . . but new issues or incidents could re-ignite their passions.”¹¹⁸

The Patriot Movement needs to be opposed because it breeds demonization, scapegoating, and conspiracism that are toxic to democracy. The Extreme Right recruits from the Patriot Movement, and takes pre-existing prejudice and inflames it into an ideology that encourages intimidation and threats against people perceived



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to be members of the scapegoated group. Sometimes these explode into physical attacks ranging from vandalism of property, to savage beatings, to murder.

Activists groups challenging the Extreme Right and the Patriot Movement remain on the front line while news reports about brutal attacks are often buried in the back pages. Progressive activist groups such as the Center for Democratic Renewal, The Center for New Community, the Northwest Coalition for Human Dignity, the Southern Catalyst Network, and on the state level, groups such as the Montana Human Rights Network, the Colorado Anti-Violence Program, the Rural Organizing Project (in Oregon), and Equality Illinois continue to provide assistance to communities under attack by the forces of organized hate and mobilized resentment.¹¹⁹

To make the broad struggle for social and economic justice more effective, we need to name the forms of supremacy and oppression. White supremacy and White nationalism are major factors in the U.S. political Right. But these terms alone are not sufficient to explain to a public audience the

complexity of supremacist and authoritarian ideas that include race, gender, sexuality, and class, and involve individuals, institutions, and the government. At a time when not all critiques of the government and elite power are progressive, it will be more effective to challenge social oppression and government repression as part of one broad agenda. And by asserting that race, gender, sexuality, and class are inextricably intertwined in the United States, we offer a better vision of not just the oppressions we oppose, but the equalities we desire.

At the same time we need to resist defending civil rights at the expense of civil liberties and social justice. Not all right-wing groups are hate groups, and not all members of hate groups commit crimes. Groups such as the American Friends Service Committee and the Audre Lorde Project have raised legitimate criticisms of how certain applications of hate crimes laws replicate the worst aspects of a punitive criminal justice system, especially by stressing vindictive extensions of prison sentences rather than alternative programs stressing community service, education, and reha-

bilitation. Uncritical support of hate crimes rhetoric and prosecution is problematic given the overall attack on civil liberties being launched by the Bush administration under Ashcroft.

We need to reach out to and organize all sorts of people, but without compromising principles for pragmatism. Populism needs to be seen as a historic style of organizing that transcends political boundaries. Fear of all forms of populism by some intellectuals is dismissive of the democratic capability of the majority of citizens. At the same time, the idea that populism is always good, and that "The People" are always right, ignores the history of such claims. Too often this attitude leads to infringement of minority rights by the majority. Populist conspiracism from anywhere on

the political spectrum can lure mainstream politicians to adopt their scapegoating narratives in order to attract voters. Throughout U.S. history, repressive populist movements have used demonizing rhetoric that encouraged acts of discrimination and violence. A lynching is as much a form of populism as is a demonstration against racist police brutality. Like most tools, populism can be used for good or bad purposes.

Kazin suggests that, "When a new breed of inclusive grassroots movements does arise, intellectuals should contribute their time, their money, and their passion for justice. They should work to stress the harmonious, hopeful, and pragmatic aspects of populist language and to disparage the meaner ones."¹²⁰

The formula for democracy involves a process. It is the faith that over time, the majority of citizens, given enough accurate information, and the ability to participate in an open public debate, reach the right decisions to preserve liberty, defend freedom, and extend equality.

End Notes

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- ⁹⁸ H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America* (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1992).
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- ¹⁰⁷ Michael Barkun, "The Apocalyptic Other," (Annual Conference, Center for Millennial Studies, Boston University, November 4, 1997, online). Barkun expanded on this thesis in "Conspiracy Theories as Stigmatized Knowledge: The Basis for a New Age Racism?" in Jeffrey Kaplan and Tore Bjorgo, eds., *Nation and Race: The Developing Euro-American Racist Subculture* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), pp. 58-72.
- ¹⁰⁸ Pitcavage interview.
- ¹⁰⁹ Nicholas N. Kitztrie, *Rebels With a Cause: The Minds and Morality of Political Offenders* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); Nicholas N. Kitztrie, *The War Against Authority: From the Crisis of Legitimacy to a New Social Contract* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Kitztrie observes that not all participants in social movements break laws or engage in violence, and that in democratic societies, such distinctions are important.
- ¹¹⁰ Stephanie L. Shanks-Meile and Betty A. Dobratz, "Linkages of Hatred: Hierarchies of Oppression and Violence among Contemporary White Supremacists," (Unpublished paper, n.d., on file at PRA).
- ¹¹¹ The Liberty Lobby and its newspaper *The Spotlight* were closed through legal action resulting from a civil lawsuit filed by former affiliated organizations. The successor newspaper is the *American Free Press*.
- ¹¹² Joe R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparation* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 139-140.
- ¹¹³ Green interview.
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid..
- ¹¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁸ Pitcavage interview.
- ¹¹⁹ For a more extensive list of such groups see the resources section of the PRA website <http://www.publiceye.org>
- ¹²⁰ Kazin, *Populist Persuasion*, p. 284.

Book Review

Lisa McGirr

Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right

(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), hb, 416 pp, with notes, bibliography, and index.

Rick Perlstein

Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus

(New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), hb, 671 pp, with notes, selected bibliography, and index.

Lane Crothers

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These two books, focused on the rise to power of the conservative wing of the Republican Party starting in the 1960s, share common strengths and common weaknesses. Both usefully chronicle the stunning and rapid repudiation of liberal politics that, at the outset of the 1960s, seemed likely to dominate American politics for years to come. Yet, both are limited by their inattention to the place of contemporary conservatism in the broad history of American political life, as well as by their unarticulated assumption that the events of the 1960s led, inevitably, to the Reagan Revolution and the dominance of conservatism in American politics.

The books go about their tasks in very different ways. *Before the Storm* focuses on the insurgent politics that identified Barry Goldwater as the leader of the conservative movement in the Republican Party and then led to his takeover of the presidential nominating process for the Party in 1964. *Suburban Warriors* examines the political, economic, ideological, and social conditions that shaped Orange County, California's position as the heart of contemporary Republican conservatism from the late 1950s through the present. Before addressing the common themes and perspectives these books introduce, this

essay will first examine each work separately.

Before the Storm begins by noting the consensus among commentators of the early 1960s that liberalism had established itself as the dominant fact of American politics after the 1964 elections, particularly President Lyndon Johnson's smashing defeat of Barry Goldwater in the presidential campaign. This consensus, Perlstein argues, "was one of the most dramatic failures of collective discernment in the history of American journalism."¹ Instead, the subsequent elections of conservative Republicans—including Ronald Reagan—as governors nationwide in 1966, and Reagan's election as president in 1980, is presented as proof that liberalism was anything but dominant post-1964. Perlstein then insists that his is "a book about how that story [the rise of conservative dominance of the Republican Party and American politics] began."²

Given its assumption—that the Goldwater takeover of the Republican Party in 1964 set in motion the chain of events that led to conservative dominance in contemporary political life—*Before the Storm* focuses largely on the choices, leaders, strategies, and issues leading to Goldwater's nomination as the Republican candidate that year. Perlstein does an impressive job identifying key individuals like Clarence "Pat" Manion, Herb Kohler, and others who were dissatisfied with the dominance liberals and moderates enjoyed in Republican Party politics in the 1950s and early 1960s. Individuals like Manion and Kohler believed that moderates allowed Communism to expand both overseas and at home even as they burdened American business with unnecessary taxes. Perlstein exhaustively chronicles the many meetings, strategy sessions, and procedures these proconservative actors used to turn Republican Party rules to their advantage in pushing for Goldwater's nomination in 1964. He also tells the story of Barry Goldwater's rise from a relatively obscure Senator to the leader of a new wing of the party in a thoughtful way. Cumulatively, Perlstein's text stands as a definitive account of the Goldwater insurgency.

Unfortunately, in light of the nearly 40-year-old events the text describes, *Before the Storm* is only a definitive account of the Goldwater insurgency. Written as a piece of political journalism, the work is focused on the kinds of names, dates, conversations, and events that can be established, confirmed, and sourced. What is missing are a number of contextualizing factors that would more fully demonstrate its thesis and make it relevant today. There is, for example, no discussion of conservatism in American political history. After all, Goldwater and his supporters did not make up the terms of their ideologies out of whole cloth; there was a context of previously existing right-wing movements and ideas from which they drew life.³ Similarly, the text ends with Goldwater's defeat—as if Goldwater to Reagan were an unbroken line of political history.

The absence of a broad analysis of Goldwater's ideology in the context of American politics is problematic in a number of areas. As Perlstein makes clear, for example, the Goldwater nomination victory was the result of superior organizing on the part of Goldwater's supporters at a time when the Republican Party elite, not voters at large, chose the party's nominees. Thus, it became possible for a party to choose a nominee who seemed, to a sweeping majority of voters in a national election, totally out of touch with their preferences and hopes. Yet, in Perlstein's book, Goldwater's crushing defeat is presented as the result of superior tactics by Johnson's staff in the face of Goldwater staff incompetence. This explanation is unconvincing, and at the least misses an understanding of why it was possible for the Johnson campaign to paint Goldwater's positions as extreme. An understanding of the nature of conservative ideology over time would help establish the context in which Johnson's campaign was able in convincing a substantial majority of voters that Goldwater's ideas were "frightening."

Further, the lack of an understanding of Goldwater's ideology in context implies that there is a direct, unchanged connection between the terms on which Goldwater ran for office and the issues on which Ronald Reagan won office

16 years later. While there were certainly many shared positions between the two campaigns, Reagan offered a much less extreme version of conservatism—at least in terms of issues like the use of nuclear weapons—than did Goldwater. Likewise, Reagan was able to link 16 years of problems like riots, crime, and Soviet expansionism with liberal politics, an opportunity Goldwater never had. Further, even the circumstances under which Reagan won his party's nomination—in primaries controlled by voters, not party insiders—differed from the Goldwater campaign.⁴ Reagan's victory, like that of the conservative Republicans in Congress in 1994, came after years of events, choices, and outcomes across an array of issues and through a series of campaigns.

Ultimately, because Perlstein concludes his text with the end of the Goldwater campaign, it is impossible for him to demonstrate his claim that the conservative revolution “began” in the Goldwater campaign. Perhaps the most direct link between Goldwater's insurgency and Reagan's victory was the discovery of Ronald Reagan as a powerful political force. Indeed, Perlstein implies as much by the amount of attention he pays to Ronald Reagan at the end of his text, noting that Reagan drew the public's attention as he toured the country giving what came to be known as “The Speech” on Goldwater's behalf, late in the campaign. Other connections are, at best, assumed.

Suburban Warriors is a much more satisfying book, although it, too, is limited by its scope. Focused on the development of conservative politics in Orange County, CA—a Los Angeles suburban area arguably the epicenter of contemporary American conservatism—the work examines the cultural, demographic, economic, social, and political factors that led Orange County to become “the ground forces of a conservative revival—one that transformed conservatism from a marginal force preoccupied with communism in the early 1960s into a viable electoral contender by the decade's end.”⁵

As an academic, McGirr focuses her work very differently than does Perlstein. McGirr concentrates less on personalities and more on contending ideas over time. Thus, an impressive strength of her work is the careful way she traces the development of conservatism from

its dominance by conspiracy-minded John Birch society members to a more nuanced, sophisticated critique of liberal politics embodied in the New Deal and the Great Society. Central to her analysis is the way western U.S. traditions of individualism and antitotalitarianism promoted a libertarian laissez-faire business sense at the same time that new, predominantly Protestant religious leaders like Robert Schuller advocated restrictive moral codes enforced with government power. This combination of probusiness libertarianism and social authoritarianism would eventually serve as the foundation of the Reagan victory in 1980 and the conservative takeover of Congress in 1994. Accordingly, McGirr's analysis of how this ideology formed and developed in Orange County in the 1960s and 1970s serves as a useful tool with which to understand the broader rise of conservatism nationwide.

Additionally, the fact that McGirr is more attuned to ideology and other social forces rather than personalities means that her book is tighter and more focused than is Perlstein's. Her focus on broad social categories like demographics, economics, and political ideas, makes her work more applicable outside the context of its analysis than Perlstein's. Put another way, McGirr's work raises a host of questions that might be applied in other contexts where ideology interacts with religion in conditions of social and political change to either promote or resist conservative expansionism. This is particularly valuable in light of the growth of conservatism among White Southerners in the 1970s and 1980s. And to the degree that conditions in the South paralleled those of Orange County, a broader understanding of why and how the modern conservative movement came to dominate Republican Party politics and those of the nation at large can be attained.

Importantly, the link between the rise of conservatism in Orange County with the conservative movement in the South raises problems with McGirr's analysis that her exclusive focus in Southern California does not easily admit. For example, White Southerners, who had traditionally voted Democrat even as they engaged in racist politics, only began voting Republican in large numbers after the

national Democratic Party began advocating civil rights for African Americans. While McGirr acknowledges that race politics played a part in the spread of conservatism in Orange County, as well as in the Republican Party, the virulence of anti-Black racism that was common in the South rarely expressed itself in Orange County. Indeed, McGirr makes it clear that much of the racism extant in Orange County was antisemitic, not anti-Black.⁶ Such an antisemitic ideology could not dominate in the South, however. Similarly, Southern religious conservatism included an emphasis on the traditional role of women as homemakers and child-raisers. Accordingly, while Orange County may have been ground zero for the rise of modern conservatism, the shape of that movement has certainly been much changed from its foundation.

Another ideological dilemma that McGirr acknowledges but largely glosses over deserves attention that is far more careful if modern conservatism is to be understood. As McGirr notes, Orange County's wealth and opportunity were grounded on the government-funded military building boom of the 1940s and 1950s. A similar process occurred throughout much of the South. Yet in the face of their direct experience, indeed often of their own pocketbooks, conservatives developed an antigovernment ideology that insisted on the moral superiority of the independent businessman working to create jobs and best left largely unfettered by restrictions like taxation and regulation. This moment of ideological cognitive dissonance finds continuing expression in favored conservative programs like increased defense spending and tax subsidies for businesses, which even conservatives regularly justify in terms of the economic opportunities they offer local constituents. Such ideological inconsistencies beg for sophisticated explanations if the rich dynamic of contemporary American conservatism is to be understood.

McGirr is to be commended for at least briefly tracing the Orange County story over time, however. In at least one chapter, she explores the roles that the social protests of the 1960s, the rise of new social issues like abortion, women's rights, and prayer in school, pornography, and evangelical Christianity played in the development of modern conservatism

after the failed Goldwater campaign of 1964 and Ronald Reagan's successful gubernatorial run in 1966. She also tells the story of Orange County's bankruptcy in the 1990s. Unfortunately, both these analyses are brief and underdeveloped: the question of how and why Orange County leaders continued to believe in free market, libertarian principles after experiencing the largest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history in 1994 is barely explored, for example. Similarly, recent Orange County policies aimed at slowing growth and promoting environmental protection are described more than analyzed and explained.

Ultimately, then, both books are excellent examinations of the question of why conservatives like conservatism and dislike liberalism. Perlstein's focus on one specific time period, and McGirr's attention to the politics of one county, allows each to explore multiple issues in a logical, consistent way. McGirr's is a broader analysis, whereas Perlstein's is narrower, but each provides unique insights into the dynamics of the rise of modern conservatism in the United States.

An important thing that both books lack, however, is a sophisticated analysis of contemporary conservative ideology in the context of historic American conservatism. The Goldwater, Reagan, and Congressional conservative movements of the last 40 years (among others) rest on an accumulated context of ideas, conspiracies, religious assumptions, ethnic and racial biases, economic classes, and social and political values that both shape the terms of modern conservatism and influence why some individuals and groups find that conservatism "makes sense" in contemporary life. Thus, when McGirr titles chapter five of her text "The Birth of Populist Conservatism," she misses the historical existence and political influence of many right-wing populist movements that have existed in the United States at least since the 1830s and are insightfully examined in Berlet and Lyons, and Diamond, among others.⁷ Perlstein's text presents Goldwater's conservatism in virtually isolated terms, barely relating it to ideological currents existing at the time, much less broader traditions in American political history.

This analytical hole undermines both texts because ideology is dynamic. Its terms change

meaning as political contexts differ. Without understanding how ideologies change over time, it is not possible to finally prove what both texts assume—that the rise of modern conservatism in the 1960s led to contemporary dominance of conservative values in the United States today. Conservatism in the 1980s, 1990s, and into the 2000s is related to conservatism in the 1960s, but it is not the same. No conservative today could echo Goldwater's easy acceptance of the utility of nuclear weapons and expect to win office, for example. Similarly, contemporary conservatives have to work hard to insulate their ideology from charges of racism and sexism through the adoption of language promoting states' rights and economic opportunity. Tracing these distinctions is a crucial component of any project that seeks to link the rise of modern conservatism to its contemporary practices.

Finally, both these texts assume that the Reagan Revolution and the dominance of conservatism in contemporary U.S. politics were inevitable. While it is true that conservative values have dominated political life in the United States over the last 20 years—clearly evident when President Clinton, a Democrat, promoted and signed a bill eliminating welfare for the poor as an entitlement in 1994—it is a mistake to assume that what happened had to happen. Imagine, for example, a politics in which Lyndon Johnson chose not to escalate the war in Vietnam beyond the point it exhausted the nation's economy and led to massive deficit financing. Imagine a politics in which the Chicago Democratic convention of 1968 did not unfold as an advertisement for the collapse of the Democratic Party. Imagine a politics in which Gerald Ford won election in 1976, leading to a condition in which the economic chaos of the late 1970s was predominantly associated with Republican Party control of the Presidency. Or, as a final example, imagine that the Iran hostage rescue attempt in September 1980—just two months before the election that brought Reagan to office—had worked. None of these possibilities—or any of hundreds more that might be imagined—is far-fetched: the hostage rescue attempt might have succeeded, for example, had one more helicopter flown on the mission, meaning that the attempt would not have to be aborted

at the desert staging area south of Tehran. Had the attempt succeeded, it is possible that President Jimmy Carter might have been reelected, and Ronald Reagan might have been dismissed as another radical Republican rejected by a moderate voting American majority. It does not follow that any one of these changes would have prevented a conservative takeover of American politics, of course. But it does not follow that the conservative victories were inevitable either.

Paying serious attention to political history is an important corrective to any sweeping explanation for political developments. Both McGirr and Perlstein are to be commended for their work exploring the reasons many people came to support conservatism in its contemporary shape. However, coming to a full understanding of how and why conservatives came to dominate the Republican Party first, and then national politics generally, requires substantial development beyond the foundations laid in these works. Moreover, paying close attention to political history is equally important for those who hope that the conservative dominance might be countered—if circumstances had to be constructed to promote conservatism, opportunities can arise for the advance of progressive points of view. As such, both books should provide lessons of value for progressives and conservatives: events are political, choices matter, and change happens.

End Notes

¹ Perlstein, p. xi.

² *Ibid.*, p. xii.

³ By contrast, two recent works do an excellent job of tracing the evolution of conservative ideology over time: Chip Berlet and Matthew N. Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort* (New York: Guilford, 2000); and Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: Guilford, 1995). Readers of Perlstein's work who are familiar with texts like Berlet's and Lyons', and Diamond's, will be able to locate the dimensions of Goldwater's ideology as they interact with conservatism in American history. Unfortunately, Perlstein does not establish such linkages in his own work.

⁴ Perlstein, p. xi.

⁵ McGirr, p. 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 183-84.

⁷ Berlet and Lyons, 2000; Diamond, 1995.

Eyes RIGHT

NOSTRADAMUS REDUX

Alice Smith forecasted world events in a guest commentary on the Christian Broadcasting Network. Smith wrote that, "Sept. 11 was a wake-up call to the church [but] we hit the snooze button and rolled over." She warns that, "the day for compromise is over." Here's a peek at her apocalyptic crystal ball.

"Alice says the Lord has impressed upon her the following:

1. There will not be peace for Israel for 2002. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.
2. China will make a power move on Taiwan this year.
3. 2002 is the beginning of the resurgence of Russia as a superpower.
4. In the days to come, there will be riots in our streets and internal civil uprisings in our land.
5. If President Bush negotiates to take the land from Israel and give it to Palestine, natural disasters in the U.S. will increase and be far worse. God's covenant to Abraham and Israel has never changed.
6. The demons behind the Shiite Muslims have yet to be felt in this nation.
7. It is time for the church to stop complaining about the things we permit. Pray and see change.
8. Never has there been a more important time to get out of debt. Then sow your seed (money) into ministries and churches where souls are being saved. Always remember, never eat your seed. Your seed does not look like the harvest. Don't waste your seed. Don't spend your seed. Plant your seed and harvest will come multiplied many times over!"

Source: *Christian Broadcasting Network*
http://www.cbn.com/700club/features/Alice_Smith.asp

OPRAHVISION

Tim Wildmon, vice president of the American Family Association, apparently does not believe in veering off the beaten path. He insists:

"We need to get serious about our faith. We need to understand the differences between a biblical belief system, or worldview, and the belief systems of humanism, relativism, paganism, new age, Islam and others. Then we will appreciate how and why Christianity is superior to all other religions, worldviews and belief systems and how we can earnestly contend for the faith in the Oprah Winfrey world of 'all roads lead to God.'"

Source: *American Family Association Alert*, 1/4/02

BUCHANAN BOMB[L]AST

Pat Buchanan is at it again. A bruising presidential campaign apparently has not taken the wind out of his sails, evident in a column he wrote recently for Pravda's English version.

"If belief is decisive, Islam is militant, Christianity milquetoast. In population, Islam is exploding, the West dying. Islamic warriors are willing to suffer defeat and death, the West recoils at casualties. They are full of grievance; we, full of guilt. Where Islam prevails, it asserts a right to impose its dogma, while the West preaches equality. Islam is assertive, the West apologetic—about its crusaders, conquerors and empires. . . .

Don't count Islam out. It is the fastest growing faith in Europe and has surpassed Catholicism worldwide. And as Christianity expires in the West and the churches empty out, the mosques are going up. . . .

To defeat a faith, you need a faith. What is ours? Individualism, democracy, pluralism, la dolce vita? Can they overcome a fighting faith, 16 centuries old, and rising again?"

Source: *Bill Berkowitz*, "Buchanan's Apocalypse Now,"
<http://www.workingforchange.com/article.cfm?itemid=12609>

RATTLESHAKE

More than 20 different antichoice groups including Focus on the Family, the Center for Reclaiming America, Concerned Women for America, and the American Family Association have been sending rattles to U.S. senators since last Fall as part of a campaign against women's right to choose. Janet Folger, director of the Center for Reclaiming America asserts, "[w]e will shake this nation back to life, and this historic campaign is only the beginning."

Source: *Focus on the Family with Dr. James Dobson*
January 2002, pp. 20-21.

Eye LASHES

“When contemplating college liberals, you really regret once again that John Walker is not getting the death penalty. We need to execute people like John Walker in order to physically intimidate liberals, by making them realize that they can be killed too. Otherwise they will turn out to be outright traitors.”

Ann Coulter, *at the Conservative Political Action Conference*, 1/27/02.

Source: http://www.andrewsullivan.com/index.php?dish_inc=archives/2002_01_27_dish_archive.html#9314168

IT'S NOT CHRISTIAN

Thomas Fleming, editor, *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, certainly knows what's Christian and what's not:

"We must work toward the recreation of Christendom in North America and Europe. This has been and continues to be the primary goal of both *Chronicles* and The Rockford Institute. A people that thinks dinner consists of eating a deli sandwich from Arby's while watching *Friends* is neither Christian nor civilized. A public that pays top dollar for tickets to see Barbra Streisand or Michael Jackson should probably have its collective eardrums punctured. . . ."

Source: "Cultural Revolutions," *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture* (January 2002), pp. 6-7.

GRASSROOTS WAVE OR BIG MONEY TSUNAMI?

According to Ken Connor, president of the Family Research Council [Fiscal Year 1998 budget \$14,618,789], "FRC and its sister lobby organization American Renewal, [which spent \$439,788 on programs in 1997] worked closely with Focus on the Family [Fiscal Year 1998 budget \$110,890,180 and that spent \$88,156,142 on programs that same year] and Capitol resource Institute, [Fis-

cal Year 1998 budget \$341,463] a family policy council in California, to defeat AB 1338 [which was a civil unions bill]. The combined activity generated a grass roots wave. . . ."

Connor went on to say that "[f]or the sake of marriage as we know it, it's imperative that Californians remain vigilant to see to it that the will of their vote is not overturned by homosexual activists."

Source: *Family Research Council Press Release 1/15/02* <http://www.frc.org/get/p02a02.cfm>

Budget sources for organizations: Derek Arend Wilcox, ed., *The Right Guide: A Guide to Conservative, Free Market, and Right-of-Center Organizations* (Ann Arbor, MI: Economic America Inc., 2000).

DOMINANCE AND SUBMISSION, FOCUS ON THE FAMILY STYLE

Dalene Vickery Parker explores the nuances of submission in "Not Just Vanilla! Finding the true flavor of submission in marriage." She describes an argument over ice cream with her husband during their honeymoon: she wants a sundae, but he insists on vanilla. She writes, "'Thought you were on a diet' Pat admonished. 'On our honeymoon?' I asked. 'Surely we don't have to think about calories on our honeymoon.' 'You better think about them all the time or they'll sneak up on you.'"

Seeking to achieve "biblical submission," she yields to his will. But after years of such compliance, she is depressed and having suicidal thoughts. With counseling and motherhood, Parker achieves a new understanding of submission, teaching her husband his role within the household. She finds ways to get him to fulfill her needs—by helping with the children's homework, carpooling and repairs. She concludes, ". . . Pat and I had learned a wonderful lesson in love: Life is not just vanilla! Love and marriage can be any flavor you choose. . . ."

Source: *Focus on the Family*, vol. 26, no. 2 (February 2002).

JUSTICE UNDER COVER

Attorney-General John Ashcroft recently gave a new spin to undercover operations at the Justice Dept. Apparently, the AG, uncomfortable at being juxtaposed with "Minnie Lou's" bosom in Department photo-ops, has decided to drape the statue of the "Spirit of Justice," a.k.a. Minnie Lou, and her companion, the "Majesty of Justice," in more modest garb. As far as undercover operations go, this one is not immodest. Only \$8,000!

Source: <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/HallsOfJustice/hallsjustice.html>

Compiled by Nikhil Aziz and Mitra Rastegar

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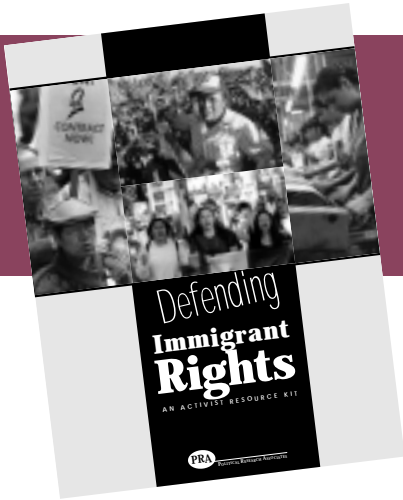
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