

THE ORIGINS OF THE MILITIA MOVEMENT: VIOLENCE AND MEMORY ON THE SUBURBAN-RURAL FRONTIER

Sometimes change is sudden, and so dramatic that we can hardly believe our eyes. On November 9, 1989, I came home from teaching high school and turned on the television. I had followed the events in Eastern Europe closely that fall, but it still took me twenty minutes to fathom the live images of young people dancing atop a concrete wall. I simply could not grasp what I was seeing. The newscasters reporting the fall of the Berlin Wall were themselves speechless.

Sometimes change is imperceptible, until one day we are forced to confront a new state of affairs and realize that it has been twenty years in the making. I grew up in a variety of communities, urban, suburban, and rural. In one of those rural communities I once attended a Fourth of July celebration in a parking lot in the middle of town. It was a tailgate party attended by most of the town's high school students, who stood in a small crowd drinking beer, in wholesale violation of the town's open container laws and the state's minimum age regulations. At the entrance to the parking lot, about fifty yards from the crowd, the town's chief of police sat in his cruiser. As every underage celebrant left the party, they stopped by the cruiser and chatted for a while with the chief, before heading up the road. The chief seemed to know each of them by name: he'd grown up in the community, and he'd probably stopped in to watch

his share of Little League games and soccer matches while on his appointed rounds. I'm quite sure he was the happiest law enforcement officer in the county that night. The law lay prostrate, but he had all his ducks in one pond.

Several years later I took my first teaching job at a suburban public high school in the same state. After school I usually did some paperwork and then headed across the street to watch my students play soccer on the adjacent field. Often their mothers came to watch them play, and usually their fathers would take half an hour off from work to come watch as well, parking their cars along the edge of the field. One day that first fall one of the town police officers arrived at the game in his cruiser. Though he knew a few of the school's "bad apples," he didn't actually live in the community, and he didn't appear to know any of the parents. He did, however, know his job, and so he was perfectly professional and correct as he began to ticket the illegally parked cars belonging to the parents who had come to watch their children play. And one by one the fathers ran to their cars and drove back to work.

Most Americans live in suburban and urban communities. They may see what happened in that first community as an abdication of responsibility and what happened in that second community as one of life's typical frustrations. But as someone who had never before lived in a suburb, I was shocked and disoriented by the spectacle of a community that had surrendered control of its policing. My sense of having entered a new world was as strong that day as it would be when I watched the Berlin Wall fall just a few weeks later. But I had entered that new world voluntarily: I had moved to take a job in this community and accepted the change in social norms that came with it. Many Americans in the 1980s and 1990s found themselves in that new world through no action of their own. It simply grew up around them. Born in the first town, they woke up one day in the second, and were left to wonder how it had happened, how they had lost control of their world. Between the end of Communism, the transformation of rural communities undergoing suburbanization, and the increasing pace of economic globalization, millions of Americans experienced this disquieting loss of control in the early 1990s.¹

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For some, the sense of shock and loss, and even of rage, was aggravated in the early 1990s by a wave of state-sponsored political violence stemming from the arrival of paramilitary policing in the heartland. The paramilitarization of law enforcement was nothing new in America. SWAT teams originated in Los Angeles in the late 1960s, but in the late 1980s, paramilitary tactics and weapons were adopted by the enforcement arms of a variety of federal agencies and also by a number of suburban police and sheriff's departments. Paramilitary policing thus came into the lives of rural and suburban communities that had never experienced it before. The federal law enforcement assaults at Ruby Ridge, Idaho and Waco, Texas were the most visible product of this broader trend toward paramilitary policing. But many concerned citizens, especially gun owners, saw Ruby Ridge and Waco as the tip of a much bigger iceberg, and observed that federal and local agencies were employing the same weapons and tactics in communities closer to home.

The sense of threat and alienation that many felt after witnessing Ruby Ridge and Waco reverberated within a new alternative public sphere that emerged as a result of the communications revolution of the 1990s. Using talk radio, fax networks, Internet discussion lists and chat rooms, and the World Wide Web, gun owners, tax protesters, white supremacists, and common-law activists all came together to discuss what they perceived as a growing threat from their own government. Concerned individuals also banded together in local civic organizations, such as patriot discussion groups and gun clubs.

Finally, and crucially, these years also witnessed the revival of the libertarian memory of the American Revolution within the gun rights movement. As gun rights activists entered into this new public sphere, they brought with them an insurrectionary understanding of the Second Amendment, a familiarity with eighteenth-century Whig ideology and the Whig diagnosis of government abuse, and a more civic understanding of the institution of the militia. These ideas offered an alternative to the millenarian, white supremacist, and anarcho-libertarian ideas that had been circulating on the far right for half a century.

The first groups of what would become the militia movement began to operate in the winter and spring of 1994. From the outset two com-

peting models, linked to differing perceptions of the threat, governed militia organization. Constitutionalist began to organize militias on the basis of public meetings and open membership. They saw the growing threat of state-sponsored violence as a symptom of a corrupt and abusive government, and argued that the militia, if public, could act as a deterrent against further government abuse. Millenarians began to organize on the basis of a closed cell structure hidden from public view. Their vision was millennial and apocalyptic: they saw militia organization as the only way to survive an imminent invasion by the forces of the New World Order. Over time, these divergent worldviews would produce the distinct constitutionalist and millennial wings of the militia movement.

Sometimes change is sudden and startling. Sometimes it is gradual and imperceptible. The militia movement represented the anxious response of a group of white suburban Americans to change. In the 1990s, militia men and women perceived a fundamental alteration in their relationship to their government, and in that government's capacity for violence. The movement was born out of its members' perception that government, both local and federal, posed an increasing threat to their liberty and their lives, a threat that was political, violent, and intolerable.

The Road to Ruby Ridge and Waco: The Growth of Paramilitary Policing and the Declaration of a War on Guns

During the 1980s, law enforcement agencies across America embraced the use of paramilitary weapons and tactics. The number of police paramilitary units in urban and suburban communities grew rapidly in the post-Vietnam era. In a 1995 survey of police departments serving communities with populations of over twenty-five thousand, criminologist Peter Kraska found that over 75 percent of departments had organized a paramilitary unit, the vast majority within the previous ten years. More importantly, such units took on a significantly expanded role after 1985. According to Kraska, the number of annual callouts for police paramilitary units (PPU's) increased an average of 538 percent between 1980 and 1995 in the 193 departments serving cities of over fifty thousand that deployed units for the full period. Furthermore, these units shifted their fo-

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cus from reactive responses to hostage situations and “barricaded persons”—their original purpose—to such proactive tasks as investigatory drug raids and “warrant work.” The expansion in PPU activity occurred in departments serving smaller communities as well: the median number of callouts tripled in departments serving a population of twenty-five thousand to fifty thousand. Much of this proactive work involved no-knock entry into private residences, with very high risks to all concerned. Kraska refers to the expansion of paramilitary policing into progressively smaller communities as the “militarization of Mayberry.”²

The 1980s and early 1990s also witnessed a significant increase in cooperation and joint operations among local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. Kraska has noted that the federal government began to take an active role in training and equipping local police paramilitary units in this period. At the end of the Cold War, the federal government began to donate helicopters, armored vehicles, and other equipment to local law enforcement agencies as part of its effort to dispose of surplus military equipment. The war on drugs also produced new interagency programs called Multi-Jurisdictional Task Forces (MJTF), in which local, state, and federal officials combined their policing resources to combat drug trafficking. Some of these operations involved the cordoning off and systematic searches of multiple city blocks. One such operation took place in Shreveport, Louisiana, in September 1994.³

Finally, the early 1990s brought a renewed interest in urban warfare. After battles in Panama City and Mogadishu showed up deficiencies in the U.S. military’s capacity to conduct operations in urban settings, the army and marines began to hold military exercises in cities and suburban areas around the country. For example, 125 soldiers from various military units along with several helicopters conducted an exercise in the Chicago suburb of Lamont in June 1995, complete with simulated gunfire and the use of explosive charges. Similar exercises took place around the country in the mid-1990s. At least some of these exercises carried the suggestion that the MJTF model might be expanded to involve actual military forces in domestic law enforcement. An exercise planned for Detroit in July 1994 featured cooperation between U.S. Army Special Forces and the Detroit police SWAT team. In 1996, Pittsburgh

SWAT teams participated in an urban warfare exercise alongside troops from Fort Bragg, North Carolina.⁴

Though the trend of paramilitarization had its roots in America's prohibition on illegal drugs, paramilitary tactics were eminently applicable to the prohibition on guns that was an ascendant priority in the 1990s. In 1989 the Bush administration banned the importation of some types of semiautomatic weapons. After 1992, the Clinton administration made the tighter regulation of guns a legislative priority. The 1993 Brady bill required that purchasers of handguns undergo criminal background checks before completing the purchase. The 1994 assault weapons ban prohibited the sale of certain types of semiautomatic weapons. On February 28, 1994, the day that the Brady bill went into effect, much broader follow-on legislation was introduced into the Senate that would have required the registration of all handguns, the safe storage of all weapons, and special licenses for owners of more than twenty guns. The bill, widely dubbed Brady II, included an expanded version of what would become the assault weapons ban, and a 50 percent sales tax on ammunition.⁵

More than anything else, it was the application of paramilitary tactics to an emerging war on guns that produced Ruby Ridge and Waco. Randy and Vicki Weaver moved from Iowa to Bonners Ferry, Idaho, in 1983. Millenarians obsessed with the impending end of time, they built a cabin on Ruby Ridge and adopted a survivalist lifestyle. Randy attended several events at Richard Butler's Aryan Nations compound in nearby Hayden Lake. The Weavers' religious views gravitated increasingly toward Christian Identity belief. Though they were clearly comfortable socializing with white supremacists, the Weavers were at most only peripherally involved in the white supremacist paramilitary activity taking place in the region in the mid-1980s.⁶

The Weavers were, however, acquainted with the family of John Trochman, who would later found the Militia of Montana. In 1989, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms suspected that David Trochman, John Trochman's brother, was trafficking in illegal firearms. BATF informant Kenneth Fadely was instructed to see if Weaver might introduce him to the Trochmans. Fadely asked Weaver to supply him

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with sawed-off shotguns. Once Weaver supplied two such weapons, illegal without a government permit and a registration fee of two hundred dollars, he had committed a crime. In June 1990, BATF agents gave Weaver a choice: he could either go to jail or inform on the Trochmans. Weaver told the agents to “go to hell.” For years the Weavers had believed that during the tribulations of the end times, agents of the Zionist Occupation Government would come to destroy them. In 1990, the federal government chased Randy Weaver up his mountain and made his fears real. For the next two years, a standoff ensued, with Randy Weaver refusing to surrender to the authorities.⁷

On August 21, 1992, federal marshals conducted a dawn surveillance sweep of the Weavers’ property. As the marshals were preparing to leave, the family’s dog, Striker, detected them. Randy Weaver, his fourteen-year-old son Sam, and family friend Kevin Harris followed Striker into the woods in hopes that he had found some game to add to the family’s meager food supply. All were armed. The agents retreated, but Striker pursued them. Randy tried to circle around the prey that Striker was stalking, and caught sight of the agents. He ran back to the cabin and called out for Kevin and Sam to return as well, but they did not hear him, and continued to follow Striker. Finally, one agent shot Striker, only to be confronted by Sam Weaver, who cursed him and opened fire. In the ensuing exchange of gunfire, Agent William Degan was killed, probably by Kevin Harris, and Sam Weaver was shot in the back while running home. Randy Weaver took no part in this exchange.⁸

The Federal Bureau of Investigation took over the case that night, and FBI snipers moved into position around the Weavers’ cabin. In the midst of considerable confusion over what exactly had happened that morning, the FBI fixed its attention on several details: the bureau determined that Randy was an Aryan Nations member and that the Weavers’ home was a “fortified white supremacist compound.” With this information in mind, the Justice Department issued special rules of engagement for use in the Weaver case. The new rules provided that “deadly force can and should be used to neutralize” any armed adult male on the property. Given that prior surveillance had revealed that all members of the

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Weaver family habitually carried arms outside the cabin, these rules were a virtual death sentence against Randy Weaver and Kevin Harris. FBI sniper Lon Horiuchi agreed with his team leaders that if Randy Weaver and Kevin Harris left the cabin armed, the snipers would kill them. Weaver and Harris left the cabin later that morning to visit Sam's body in an outbuilding. As they approached the shed where Sam's body was stored, Horiuchi opened fire, wounding Weaver. As Weaver and Harris ran for the safety of the cabin, Horiuchi drew a bead on Harris, and fired a second shot as he passed through the cabin door. Vicki Weaver was behind the door (which opened outward) holding it open. On its way to its intended target, Horiuchi's second shot blew Vicki Weaver's head off.⁹

Randy Weaver and Kevin Harris surrendered eleven days later. The white supremacist community of the Northwest was enraged by the deaths of Vicki and Sam and considered them martyrs for the cause. But outrage at the events at Ruby Ridge extended well beyond the racist Right. As the truth of what had happened emerged in the ensuing trial of Randy Weaver and Kevin Harris, many Americans began to question whether the failure to purchase a two-hundred-dollar permit justified the massive show of force on Ruby Ridge and the order to shoot Randy Weaver on sight.

During the trial of Weaver and Harris, on April 19, 1993, the government's assault on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, resulted in more deaths and more questions. The Branch Davidians, a small isolated religious sect led by charismatic preacher David Koresh, were suspected of illegal weapons trading. The initial BATF assault on the Waco compound on February 28 was ostensibly intended to serve a search warrant, but extensive preparations to film the raid suggested that it was also planned in part as an exhibition of the agency's martial prowess with an eye on the upcoming federal budget cycle. The assault plan featured paramilitary "dynamic entry tactics" and involved the use of helicopters and flash-bang grenades. The raiders' first task was the "neutralization" of the compound's dogs.¹⁰

The plan depended on the element of surprise, but agents realized the morning of the raid that the Davidians had been tipped off. Thus

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when agents rushed the compound, they found the Davidians armed and determined to defend their community. Once again, the best evidence indicates that BATF agents fired the first shots at the compound's dogs. The ensuing gun battle left four agents dead and fifteen wounded. At least three Branch Davidians died that day, and David Koresh was wounded, but the total number of Davidian casualties on the twenty-eighth is unknown.¹¹

After the failure of the initial assault, the FBI's elite paramilitary squad, the Hostage Rescue Team, took over from the BATF. For the next fifty days agents laid siege to the compound. In round after round of fitful negotiations, they persuaded Koresh to send out a few of the residents' children, and a few adults left voluntarily. By the end of two weeks, however, the HRT was losing patience with Koresh and began to employ more aggressive psychological tactics, including cutting off electricity to the compound and using music and sound recordings to create sleep deprivation and irritability among the Davidians. Finally, on April 19, the FBI used armored vehicles to inject CS gas into the compound. Several hours later fire swept through the structure. Nine Davidians escaped the flames. Seventy-five others died in the fire. Thirty-three, including all of the remaining children, took refuge in a concrete room at the center of the compound. The children huddled together with their mothers under wet blankets and slowly asphyxiated as the fire raged over their heads. After the fires died out federal agents raised the BATF flag over the ashes.¹²

There were striking similarities between Waco and Ruby Ridge. In both cases armed confrontation degenerated into a *mêlée* when the authorities fired the first shot at a dog. In both cases, critics later questioned whether the use of force was proportional to the original offense. In both cases, the offense in question revolved around the purchase and possession of firearms. American gun owners, in particular, looked at Ruby Ridge and Waco and wondered who was next.¹³

Gun rights organizations took pains to publicize other incidents which they believed illustrated a broader pattern of abusive law enforcement tactics directed at gun owners. For example, the Second Amendment Foundation circulated a report on eleven botched paramilitary

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raids conducted by the BATF and other federal agencies around the country between 1991 and 1995, several of which resulted in serious injuries to civilians. National Rifle Association president Tom Washington published a letter to former president George H. W. Bush in which he described several cases in which entirely innocent civilians had been shot in botched raids.¹⁴

One final tragedy, this time initiated by local law enforcement, illustrated the perils of the paramilitarization of suburban policing. John Lekan lived in Brunswick, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, with his wife Beverly and nine-year-old son John Jr. Lekan suffered from mental illness, and neighbors had reported instances of odd behavior. Home health aides frequently visited the Lekan home to care for Beverly, who was bedridden with multiple sclerosis. In March 1995 the aides complained to supervisors that Lekan had displayed firearms while they were in the home. A request from the nursing agency that Lekan sign an agreement to refrain from such behavior in the future seemed to agitate him. Meanwhile, word of Lekan's behavior reached the Brunswick Police Department. On the afternoon of Friday, March 31, 1995, two officers were dispatched in plain clothes to check on the situation. Lekan refused to let the officers into his home, and they later reported that he lapsed into incoherence when talking to them through an open window about his constitutional rights. The officers decided that Lekan represented a danger to his family, and kicked in the door to the house, though they had no warrant to enter the home. Lekan responded by shooting officer Sam Puzella in the chest. Five hours later Lekan shot two more officers when a five-man SWAT team attempted to rush the house.¹⁵

Thereafter some 250 police officers, including four SWAT teams, laid siege to the house. Police snipers had orders to shoot Lekan on sight. They fired tear gas into the house at 6:00 a.m. Saturday morning, and attempted to further intimidate Lekan at 11:00 a.m. by using a thirteen-ton armored assault vehicle named "Mother" to ram holes in the house. We will never know exactly how Lekan perceived Mother as it smashed through the walls of his home, but the coroner's report indicates that he responded by shooting his son in the head and then killing himself. Beverly Lekan believed that her husband may have been trying in his own

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way to protect their son from the hostile forces arrayed against him. She buried John Jr. in his father's arms.¹⁶

Some Americans looked upon the events at Ruby Ridge and Waco and placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of Randy Weaver and David Koresh. Some looked upon these events as tragedies without clear villains or victims. But for some, the experience of bearing witness to these events transformed their perception of their place in the world and their relationship to their government. Jim McKinzey, cofounder of the Missouri 51st Militia, described this paradigm shift in terms of his understanding of patriotism:

Ruby Ridge was a wake-up call for a lot of people in the country, including myself. Until Ruby Ridge came down the pike, I could care less about politics. . . . "This is the greatest country in the world, love it or leave it" type attitudes. . . . And then, they're starting to shoot children, and shooting unarmed women in the head. "Wait a minute now, I need to pay attention to what's going on here." Then, what, less than a year later, these same people are now down in Texas, taking on women and children, and that is really what did it.¹⁷

The perception among those who would join the militia movement that paramilitary policing had brought a wave of state violence into suburban communities may have been exaggerated. Few police departments kept statistics on the proportion of raids that yielded injuries and significant property damage or that were conducted on innocent parties. As a result, the size of the problem cannot be fully calculated. Anecdotal research by Radley Balko of the Cato Institute indicates that botched raids were not isolated incidents. Balko has documented sixty-nine cases between 1985 and 1994 in which police actions led to deaths or in which the police raided the premises of an innocent party. His sample is composed only of cases that generated news coverage and does not include nonlethal raids that generated injuries or significant property damage. His research does, however, demonstrate that for those caught up in it, the consequences of the state's resort to paramilitary violence were often devastating.¹⁸

Tragedy Finds a New Forum: The Rise of the Christian Patriot Public Sphere

The events at Waco played out before a national television audience. Ruby Ridge, by contrast, received only brief coverage in national news media, and most of the other events discussed here did not make it into the national news at all. But these events reverberated within a new public sphere that had emerged in the early years of the 1990s. This public sphere offered adherents of a variety of far right ideologies a forum for the discussion of political grievances, looming threats of state violence, and new modes of political organization. The individuals that communicated in this forum, though sometimes lumped together as “Christian Patriots,” did not represent a unified political movement. It was access to a new, alternative public sphere, which I will refer to as the Christian Patriot public sphere, that bound them together. Advances in communications technology offered diverse voices on the far right new ways to spread ideas long considered unpublishable within the mainstream public sphere and fostered communal discussion and deliberation across space and time in a manner that had never been possible before.

Some of the technology in use within this new public sphere was actually quite old. Politicians across the political spectrum had used radio broadcasts to reach a broad audience since the 1930s. In the late 1980s, however, conservatives were the first to see the potential of the new format of talk radio for fostering discussion and debate of key ideas and for community building. The 1987 repeal of the fairness doctrine requiring broadcasters to present controversial public issues in a balanced manner facilitated the emergence of a new style of partisan and inflammatory political discussion on broadcast radio, particularly on the right. Leading conservative radio hosts included Rush Limbaugh and G. Gordon Liddy. On the shortwave bands, World Wide Christian Radio offered a forum to more radical voices from the far right, including conspiracy theorists Chuck Harder and Bill Cooper, Christian Identity minister Pete Peters, and militia proponent Mark Koernke. All of these programs offered listeners the opportunity to call in and join the on-air discussion.¹⁹

Two new technologies supplemented the web of connections offered

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by talk radio. The advent of cheap plain paper fax machines at the end of the 1980s offered activists a means of rapidly transmitting documents to large numbers of recipients. The American Patriot Fax Network (APFN) was founded during the trial of Randy Weaver to distribute daily reports to those concerned by Ruby Ridge. It then began to send reports on the Waco siege that began one week later. When Linda Thompson, an Indianapolis attorney, called for a militia to muster in Waco and pressure authorities to lift the siege, APFN distributed the call to arms.²⁰

Personal computers and modems brought an additional set of communications technologies into the hands of conservative and far right political activists. Electronic bulletin board systems allowed individuals with computers to dial into a server and upload and download messages. Fidonet, founded in 1984, grew into a worldwide BBS (Bulletin Board System) network connecting hundreds of thousands of users. In April 1994 Linda Thompson posted her infamous call for a militia march on Washington, DC, to her own node of this network, AEN News Service, and sent it out over Fidonet.²¹

A more sophisticated level of communication was facilitated by Internet news and discussion groups that allowed users to post comments and respond to other users in an ongoing discussion. The Usenet system hosted hundreds of such groups, all open to any computer user connected to the Internet. Discussions of militia organization appeared on `alt.politics.guns` and `alt.politics.usa.constitution` as early as 1992, and in April 1994 Jon Roland and Norm Olson used Usenet discussion groups to announce the formation of the Texas Constitutional Militia (TCM) and the Michigan Militia Corps (MMC). Because of the high level of militia-related traffic on these lists, Usenet started a new list dedicated to issues related to militias, `misc.activism.militia`, on April 14, 1995. Local Internet service providers and private individuals hosted additional discussion groups. Other important militia-related discussion groups included `patriots@kaiwan.com` and the Patriots Information Mailing List, `piml@mars.galstar`.²²

Email alert systems also allowed institutions and individuals to send emails with news and commentary to thousands of subscribers. The National Rifle Association and Gun Owners of America organized email

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systems to keep their memberships informed about legislative developments and law enforcement abuses of gun owners' rights. The Militia of Montana (MOM) organized a similar list to publicize "intelligence" concerning the impending New World Order invasion.²³

Finally, the World Wide Web allowed political activists of a wide variety of stripes to create Web pages and online newsletters and to link them together in a dense web of connections. White supremacists were among the first to capitalize on the Web and to use the new medium to publicize their views and attract recruits. In the mid-1990s more generic Christian Patriot sites offered links to hundreds of Web pages hosted by tax protest groups, gun rights organizations, survivalist catalogs, Christian Identity churches, and militia groups. By early 1995 over two dozen militia groups had created Web sites of varying sophistication. These sites featured news, essays on preparedness, and political commentary. The Michigan Militia Web site published Norm Olson's *Michigan Militia Corps Manual*, and several militias published newsletters online.²⁴

Perhaps the most important of the early militia-related sites was Jon Roland's Constitution Society Web page. Roland's site included links to militia Web sites around the country, a link to the subscription page for the Patriots Information Mailing List, and a directory of county contacts for the Texas Constitutional Militia. Roland also used the site to publish essays, known collectively as the *Texas Militia Papers*, that discussed eighteenth-century political philosophy and its application to his project of reviving the universal militia. Finally, Roland created an electronic library containing classic texts of Anglo-American political philosophy in html format. This collection has grown over time, and his site is now one of the leading online repositories of Anglo-American political theory from the early modern period.²⁵

Alongside these marvels of the technological revolution of the 1990s, the Christian Patriot public sphere also depended on more traditional modes of political organization and discussion. Participants often brought the news, opinions, and information generated in online discussion networks into local political discussion groups that met periodically to ponder political developments and national events. Some of these groups coalesced around an interest in gun rights, but others cov-

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ered a broader array of concerns, including taxation, home schooling, and religion. Face to face conversations in these discussion groups often served as the catalyst for the formation of local militias. For example, in Columbus, Ohio, the Central Ohio Unorganized Militia sprang from the patriot discussion group *E Pluribus Unum*. A discussion group called the Indiana Patriots gave birth to the Indiana Citizens Volunteer Militia. In Kansas City, the Western Missouri Shooters Alliance played a similar role in the founding of the Missouri 51st Militia.²⁶

Preparedness expos, which began to tour the country in the early 1990s, served as additional nodes in the Christian Patriot public sphere. Essentially a combination of traveling bazaar and political road show, expos offered far right activists the opportunity to sell literature, videotapes, and survival gear and offered national spokesmen for various causes the opportunity to spread their messages across the country. The appearance of militia figures such as John Trochman, Mark Koernke, Jack McLamb, and J. J. Johnson tended to reinforce local efforts to organize militias.²⁷

The Christian Patriot public sphere thus facilitated a combination of nationwide communication and local face-to-face discussion that fostered the rapid growth of the militia movement. The tragedies of Waco and Ruby Ridge were constant topics of discussion on early patriot Internet discussion groups. The National Rifle Association and Gun Owners of America used email to keep their memberships well informed of continuing BATF abuses. Talk radio kept up a steady beat of criticism of the “jackbooted thugs” responsible for Waco, and G. Gordon Liddy famously advised listeners that if the BATF should come to disarm them, they should “kill the sons of bitches.” Calls for militia organization by Linda Thomson, Norm Olson, and Jon Roland went out over popular Usenet lists and reached hundreds of local political discussion groups all over the country. Within those groups, small numbers of individuals came together to discuss the idea of forming a militia, held initial meetings, contacted existing militias like the MOM or the MMC for assistance, and then began to recruit members.

The militia movement, like most insurgent movements in American history, was sparked by the perception of an urgent threat, a perception

that grew and matured through a process of public discussion and deliberation. What set that discussion apart was that it took place within a new alternative public sphere made possible by the communications revolution of the early 1990s. As a consequence, these deliberations, though public and national in scope, took place outside the notice of most Americans. They touched on topics, like revolutionary violence, long banned from the mainstream public sphere. Finally, the entire process of discussion and political organization occurred at an accelerated pace. As a result, to many Americans, the militia movement seemed to come out of nowhere.

The Racial Ideology of the Militia Movement: Color-Blind Patriotism as an Expression of Mainstream Racial Discourse

Throughout the 1990s civil rights activists argued that the militia movement was an outgrowth of the racist Right. In 1996 Morris Dees and Kenneth Stern argued that the movement was conceived at a 1992 meeting of leading white supremacists at Estes Park, Colorado. Other activists charged that the movement had adopted major tenets of white supremacist ideology, including the theology of Christian Identity, the doctrine of Fourteenth Amendment citizenship, and the concept of "leaderless resistance." Activists were careful to emphasize that not all militia members were racist, but the Southern Poverty Law Center asserted that 45 of the 224 militias that it had identified in 1995 had "ties" to white supremacist groups. According to this "narrative of 1995," racism was a central animating cause of the militia movement.²⁸

Many militia members were indignant at this portrait. Denying that racial animus played any role in their motivation, they argued that their racial views had been misrepresented. They pointed out that principled statements of antidiscrimination and antiracism had been a part of militia discourse from the first days of the movement. Nevertheless, most scholarship on the movement has either accepted the civil right charge or taken an equivocal stance.²⁹

Recent work in sociology offers a more fruitful approach to evaluating the racial ideology of the militia movement and the role of racism in

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its emergence. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva observed in 2001 that the racial order of the United States had been transformed during the civil rights era, but that structured racial inequality had nevertheless persisted. According to Bonilla-Silva, structured racial inequality gave members of the dominant race a stake in its perpetuation: “actors in superordinate positions (dominant race) develop a set of social practices . . . and an ideology to maintain the advantages they receive based on their racial classification.” He argued that in the post–civil rights era the racial ideology of white Americans can best be characterized as “color-blind racism.”³⁰

In Bonilla-Silva’s view, color-blind racism rested on ideological beliefs, or “sincere fictions,” with which white Americans justified the persistence of racial inequality. The first of these ideological frames was “abstract liberalism,” which combined a faith in the market economy’s capacity to produce racially equitable outcomes and a laissez-faire rejection of state regulation as a tool of social reform. A second frame described racial outcomes such as de facto segregation as the natural product of free choice. In a third frame, whites substituted ethnocentric cultural disdain for older racial stereotypes. They asserted that cultural deprivation, rather than racial inferiority, prevented minority groups from taking advantage of the equal opportunities open to them. A final frame denied the importance of racial discrimination as a lasting influence on inequality. Bonilla-Silva noted that this dismissal of the continuing impact of discrimination rested on taking the incorporation of minorities to signify the nonracial character of social institutions and also on the marginalization of “old style” biological racists.³¹

Bonilla-Silva’s observations offer an interpretive model for evaluating the racial discourse of the militia movement. As libertarians and critics of overreaching government, militia members placed a decided emphasis on abstract liberalism as a frame in racial discourse. This often took the form of criticizing the intrusion of the state into what they considered to be essentially private decisions: whom to hire, whom to do business with, and where to send their children to school. Many emphasized that they did not discriminate when making such choices, yet they resented what they considered to be state coercion. For example, Charlie

Morrison, a member of the Central Ohio Unorganized Militia (COUM), complained:

The government tells me that I have to hire, I can't discriminate when I hire, and personally I think I should be able to discriminate when I hire. I discriminate in every other field. I say you don't know enough about electronics, so I'm not hiring you—I'm discriminating against him. But when it comes to sexuality, race, creed, color, whatever, I'm not allowed to be prejudiced. Now I'm going to back up what I said there by stating that I do have a lesbian who works for me, she's worked here for ten years, best employee this company has ever had, ever will. I have a black man working for me. I have—well that's about all of the minorities I can claim, except obviously the lesbian is a woman. So I wouldn't want to discriminate, but I think that it is my right to handle my company the best way that it is for me.³²

Samuel Sherwood, founder of the United States Militia Association, also argued that freedom demanded a broad latitude for private discrimination, even while criticizing those who would use it: "Why shouldn't you be free to sell your home to whom you want to? Why shouldn't you be free to hire whom you want to? Now, if you want to be a jerk and discriminate against somebody on the basis of their color because you don't want to work with them because they're Latino, well, okay, then don't hire them, okay?"³³

Bonilla-Silva found in his own research that whites were relatively reluctant to apply the second frame by describing racial outcomes like segregation as natural.³⁴ Such sentiments were equally rare among militiamen, but they did occur. For example, the manual of the Militia of Montana contained the following warning: "Beware of someone whose intellect, education, and background appear different from those with whom he attempts to associate. Most people inter-relate with others of similar interests and background."³⁵

More common among militia members were examples of Bonilla-Silva's third frame, expressions of cultural disdain that served to explain racial inequality. These varied from racially charged humor to fears of urban unrest to outright expressions of the cultural inferiority of minority communities. The newsletter of the Gadsden Minutemen, for ex-

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ample, reprinted a parody of a “Los Angeles City School Test” that offered crude stereotypes of inner-city minority youth as promiscuous, drug-addled criminals. Jim McKinzey, cofounder of a racially integrated militia in Kansas City, expressed cultural disdain when describing his fear of urban unrest: “The welfare class is a major threat to this country. . . . Y2K comes around and all these government checks, they stop. They’ve never had to rely on themselves for nothing. . . . Well, these people, their checks aren’t coming in and their food stamps aren’t coming in, do you think they’re going to go out and get a job or you think they’re going to come over and try to steal what I have?” McKinzey denied that the culture he was describing was racially distinct: “I just see angry scared people that are more willing to hurt me than to go out and try do what’s right and take care of their own families.” For his part, Joe Pilchak, commander of one faction of the Michigan militia, asserted that most technological innovations have “basically come from the white race.” But he insisted that this was the product of cultural environment, not inherent racial superiority: “The environment that people lived in has made some people superior in their ability to do things.”³⁶

Bonilla-Silva’s fourth frame, the denial of structural discrimination, offers an explanation of militia antiracism that renders it consistent with these other aspects of militia racial discourse. This interpretive model suggests that militia antiracism served the ideological function of allowing members to believe that discrimination was marginal in their movement and in society as a whole. This interpretation of militia antiracism is acceptable only if offered in conjunction with a full accounting of its power and persistence. This antiracism consisted of efforts to welcome minorities into the movement, albeit often at a token level, as well as efforts to resist the attempt of white supremacists to infiltrate the movement. Militia men and women also publicly repudiated some of the racist doctrines circulating within the Christian Patriot public sphere, including Christian Identity and Fourteenth Amendment citizenship, and in some cases actively harassed white supremacist groups. Finally, the movement embraced the principles of equal protection and due process of law for all Americans.

Almost all militias, including those in the millennial wing, dis-

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claimed any intent to discriminate in terms of membership. Within the constitutional wing, many militias took pains to advise potential recruits that minorities were welcome to join, but racists might not feel comfortable. For example, the Regiment of Dragoons, a constitutional militia in New Hampshire, declared that “the Regiment is anti-racist, anti-sexist, and multi-ethnic. . . . We are all the children of immigrants, regardless of when we arrived.” The Wayne County Brigade of the Michigan Militia explained, “The very concept of racism is hateful to the true freedom loving patriot.” They further advised potential recruits that racists “are not welcome. We aim to make anyone who would oppress, by word or deed, as uncomfortable as possible. Officially, we will ‘suffer the fool.’ Say what you will, but don’t be surprised to be ridiculed, shouted down, or confronted by our members.”³⁷

Several members of constitutional militias described this stance as important to their own comfort with joining the group. Chuck Wittig described his desire in joining the Missouri 51st Militia to ensure that he was “not becoming involved with a group of white supremacists or ZOG conspiracy proponents.” John Hakes, a brigade commander in the Indiana Citizens Volunteer Militia, described watching the crowd at one ICVM organizational meeting to discern their reaction to minority members of the audience: “I spent a lot of time watching people. And I did key in on that because I wanted to see what the makeup of this bunch was. And it heartened me to see that nobody, very few people in that room, took any exception to these two men.”³⁸

The result was that in the constitutional wing of the movement, many militias had at least a token minority membership. In some militias, there were substantial numbers of minority members. One member of the Cuyahoga County chapter of the OUM reported that approximately one-third of the group’s members were African American. There was a significant Hispanic presence in some of the militias in the Southwest. At the same time, members of the ICVM, the MMC, and the COUM reported turning away members who were Christian Identity adherents or casual bigots. Tom Plummer and Charlie Morrison described discouraging two Aryan Nations members simply by advising them, “Our unit leader is black. Would that bother you?”³⁹

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Constitutionalists within the militia movement also publicly denounced the ideological doctrines of the racist Right. In 1996, Mike Vanderboegh, an Alabama militiaman and prominent spokesman for the constitutional wing of the movement, placed the blame for the Oklahoma City bombing on “neo-Nazis and self-described ‘Christian Identity’ racists and anti-Semites from Elohim City, Oklahoma, who hope to ignite a civil war that will destroy the American Republic thus giving way to a Nazi American Reich.” In a 1997 email exchange, Oral Deckard, an Indiana militiaman, ridiculed the doctrine of Fourteenth Amendment citizenship for its suggestions that blacks had no rights that the government need respect: “The contention that states have the authority to deny people the right to vote based on their race is not only racist, but unpatriotic, in that it violates the very foundation upon which this country was based, that is, government by the consent of the governed. Denying them the right to vote was government without the consent of the governed, the very definition of tyranny. Any patriots for that?”⁴⁰

Some militia members grounded their antiracism in libertarian principle. During this email discussion of Fourteenth Amendment citizenship, Deckard observed, “Well I, for one am for States Rights. I am also for individual rights. And individual rights come from God, and are not subservient to states rights. In a republic, individuals have rights that no government, federal or state, has any authority to violate.” The antiracism of other militia members was grounded in Christianity. Joe Adams, an Ohio militiaman, attributed his own antiracism to “being a student (albeit a very imperfect one) of the One who came to earth as an olive-skinned Jewish carpenter.” Norm Olson similarly declared, “I have absolutely no use for Christian Identity. I think it mocks this true nature of mankind. It mocks the spiritual nature of mankind. It mocks the very purpose and the reason why Jesus Christ came to redeem all men.”⁴¹

Militia antiracism manifested itself in deeds as well as in words. Members of the Missouri 51st Militia picketed a Klan gathering in Lone Jack, Missouri, in 1996 and also protested against racial profiling in Kansas City’s Swope Park. Members of the Tri-States Militia publicly harassed several white supremacists linked by Mike Vanderboegh to the Oklahoma City bombing. According to Vanderboegh, Tri-States mem-

bers also conducted a quieter campaign dubbed “Operation White Rose” that involved breaking into the homes of white supremacists suspected of collaborating with Timothy McVeigh and leaving mechanical rats that when disturbed would thrash about as though in their death throes. Vanderboegh explained that the campaign was intended to warn these individuals that any further terrorist attacks would bring retribution from the militia movement.⁴²

As they imagined themselves as a community of patriots, militia members argued that race was irrelevant to membership and indeed suggested that membership transcended racial identity. At the Tri-States meeting, Vanderboegh asked the assembled constitutional militia members, “Do you suppose that any of our ancestors who were at the Boston Massacre cared that the first guy who died was Crispus Attucks? Do you think that they cared that his skin was black? Did it matter? Did it matter that the sniper who killed Pitcairn at Bunker Hill was named Peter Salem? Did it matter that he was black? Did it matter that he was a slave? No, it didn’t matter. He killed Pitcairn, didn’t he? He’s an American, by God, in my eyes.” J. J. Johnson, the most influential African American in the militia movement, also argued that the movement transcended race. In his 1998 novel *Cracking the Liberty Bell*, J. J. Johnson ruminated on the nature of patriotic identity. He portrayed a confrontation between an African American FBI agent captured during an assault on a separatist religious community and an elderly African American member of this community of patriots who had been his Sunday school teacher. The agent is astonished to find her among the congregation, and says, “I didn’t know you were in here. I didn’t know any black people were in here.” She replies by pointing to the bodies of congregants killed in the assault: “Look at these folks covered up here. Both black and white. These folks is our folks. They ain’t got color no more.”⁴³

Militia expressions of this “color-blind patriotism” distinguished them from the “old-style” racists of the white supremacist Right. Nevertheless, the militia movement inhabited the racialized social system of late twentieth-century America, and its white members were complicit in the social practices and “sincere fictions” with which white Americans defended their privileged position in that system. Bonilla-Silva’s struc-

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tural explanation of the contours of racial ideology in the post-civil rights era thus captures the central themes of militia racial discourse, though it does not predict the passion and activism of militia antiracism. This interpretation places militia racial discourse squarely within the mainstream racial ideology of white America at the end of the twentieth century. With regard to race, militiamen and militiawomen were not ideologically distinct from those colleagues and neighbors who never contemplated joining the movement. A full evaluation of “color-blind patriotism” thus undermines the assertion that racism was an animating cause of the militia movement.

From Warriors to Citizens: The Emergence of Civic Masculinity in Post-Cold War America

A number of sociologists studying far right paramilitary activity have argued that the phenomenon was rooted in a crisis in masculine identity. In particular, James Gibson, Michael Kimmel, and Abby Ferber have interpreted far right paramilitary organization as a hypermasculine response to the decline in status and authority faced by rural and working-class men in the post-Vietnam era. These scholars have identified downward mobility, resentment of female self-assertion, and anger at economic and political competition from minorities as the central features of an embattled paramilitary masculinity. According to Gibson, the warrior dream behind paramilitary organization was to reforge patriarchal domination and to retaliate against those who had undermined it. Gibson described a “new war fantasy” at the root of paramilitary culture in which men enjoyed freedom from ethical constraints, civic obligations, and domestic ties. Gibson, Kimmel, and Ferber have argued that this new war fantasy lay at the center of militia masculinity.⁴⁴

Developments in masculine identity at the turn of the twenty-first century were indeed important to the emergence of the militia movement and to the identity of its members. But most militia members viewed the practices associated with Gibson’s warrior dream as the antithesis of true manhood. Militiamen fashioned a masculine identity in which the paramilitary warriors of both the white supremacist Right and

the BATF served as negative referents. Though martial in character, militia manhood was not so much an extension of the warrior dream as a reaction to it.

In 1995 sociologist R. W. Connell referred to those gender practices tending to reproduce a patriarchal domination based on violence, aggression, and competition as hegemonic masculinity. Connell argued, however, that within the gender order of contemporary Western society, hegemonic masculinity existed in tension with other, distinct, masculine identities: complicit, subordinate, and marginalized. In particular, he described complicit masculinity as that practiced by men who “wield the patriarchal dividend” but also respect the women in their lives, provide for their families, and refrain from domestic violence. He argued that such men were embedded in “marriage, fatherhood, and community life” and that these relationships were based on negotiation rather than “naked domination or an uncontested display of authority.” Connell suggested that challenges to hegemonic masculinity might emerge out of this complicit identity, and offered Robert Bly’s Men’s Movement as one example.⁴⁵

On close observation, the identity of many militiamen offered a similar challenge to the hegemonic masculinity of the warrior dream. Most militiamen grounded their identity in a sense of personal accomplishment and civic contribution and described their participation in the movement as the fulfillment of a civic obligation to serve as active citizens. Their understanding of civic duty encompassed active political participation, disaster preparedness, and the martial defense of liberty. Women participated in most militia groups, and militiamen saw their female colleagues as full partners in the civic duties of political action and emergency preparedness. Though many militiamen saw the martial aspects of citizenship as essentially male, even this most masculine facet of militia identity remained rooted in domestic attachment.

Militiamen often expressed an identity that was firmly grounded in personal and professional accomplishment. Chuck Wittig of the Missouri 51st Militia described his colleagues as follows: “We are the doers and the thinkers of the world. We are the people who make things work. We bring power to the light meters and dial tones to the phone system.

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We are the mechanics who keep the automobiles running. We are the network managers and programmers that maintain the computer nets.” Mike Vanderboegh similarly described the members of the groups he had associated with as successful in their professional and domestic lives: “Most of these guys . . . are successful within their own chosen field. I mean, for a time my executive officer was, not then, but is now, the vice president of a bank here in town. Most of these guys make good money. They’ve got wives and kids, as well adjusted as—certainly better than me, I suppose.” These observations were borne out by two small surveys, both of which found that militia members were significantly more likely than the general population to hold a bachelor’s degree.⁴⁶

The identity of most militia members revolved around their sense of obligation as citizens to strengthen the larger community, rather than a sense of alienation. In 1999 Mike Vanderboegh gave a speech to the Birmingham Libertarian Club in which he described citizenship as the fulfillment of this masculine duty: “along with the rights and privileges as citizens, comes the duty to fight against the tyrannies of our day. . . . We’re stuck with the duty. It comes right along with the title ‘citizen.’” Tom Plummer agreed that the defense of liberty and the Constitution was an obligation for men (though optional for women): “That’s why I’m doing this. I feel I have an obligation as a citizen.” Vanderboegh dubbed those willing to undertake that duty as “sheepdogs,” a designation that described them as neither sheep nor wolves, neither victims nor victimizers. And he explained that the fulfillment of this duty reinforced the identity of those involved: “You come to understand that being a sheepdog is a pain in the butt, but it also is self-affirming. It is like I said, the big things don’t love you back, but you can take joy in your small successes and you can make a difference.”⁴⁷

This ideal of citizenship encompassed political and civic, as well as martial activity. In elaborating on his understanding of masculine duty, Vanderboegh discussed the political responsibilities of citizenship:

First, to inform myself on the issues of the day, so that I may make cogent arguments of my beliefs to other citizens and so that I will cast my ballot based upon facts not propaganda and party line. . . .

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Second, a citizen must stand ready to serve in the jury box. . . .

Third, to vote at every election. It is our duty to exercise our franchise at the ballot box at every opportunity. . . .

Fourth, and this really is no laughing matter, it is our duty to fight the corruption of the political process wherever it occurs and in every way we can. We must hold the leaders we elect accountable to the law and even, as shocking as it may seem, to their campaign promises.⁴⁸

J. J. Johnson offered a similar vision of active citizenship that emphasized political rather than martial activity: "If we grab onto the first amendment and use it every day, then we won't need to use the second. Those of you who own twenty guns, go out and sell a couple and buy a computer. Set up a home page on the internet and teach people about the first amendment. Start a shortwave radio program. Get the message out."⁴⁹

Militia members also placed considerable emphasis on a citizen's civic duty to contribute to the larger community in a crisis. In 1994, Norm Olson urged militia members to prepare to offer safe haven to refugees in the event of the collapse of the federal government. Jim McKinzey expressed his sense of civic obligation in a program of survivalist preparation. He stored arms, food, clothing, medical supplies, and other essentials far in excess of the needs of his family in order to be able to provide refuge for others: "You come over to my house right now and I can arm fifteen people, totally arm them, and put them in the field and, in my basement, I have well over a year's supply of reserve groceries." Mike Vanderboegh argued that citizens had an obligation to serve others in moments of crisis: he defined citizens as "the people who had the smarts and the determination, and more importantly the ethos, the social philosophy that they needed to take care of the wider community as well."⁵⁰

Women participated in almost all militia groups from the earliest days of the movement, and most militiamen acknowledged the desirability of female participation in the political and civic responsibilities of citizenship. John Hakes noted that at the second meeting of his local unit of what would become the ICVM, the wives of those assembled came into the garage where their husbands were meeting, and said, "Hey, we've been in here talking, and we think we should be part of this too." Hakes

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described the roles filled by these women as “medical, food, a lot of things like communications.” In discussing the role of women in the movement, Charlie Morrison described women as full partners in *E Pluribus Unum*, a political discussion group associated with the Ohio Unorganized Militia: “You’ll find at least half of them are women and they’ve got the same goals, as far as the Constitution. They write their congressman, senators, make their phone calls, we pass out flyers, have a newsletter going on, that kind of thing.”⁵¹

Nonetheless, many militiamen expressed ambivalence toward female participation in the martial aspects of citizenship. Tom Plummer and Mike Vanderboegh both celebrated individual female members of their militias who had mastered the military arts. But both expressed an anxiety that female participation in combat transgressed natural gender roles. Vanderboegh noted that when women were wounded in combat, their male colleagues abandoned the fight to tend to them, and this disrupted unit cohesion at a critical moment. Plummer suggested that men might not be able to withstand the psychic trauma of watching women killed in combat: “If we ever would happen to get into hard-core combat, it might not be as easy for a woman, and when you’re into seeing people’s guts all over the place, it’s unpleasant. It would be less, really unpleasant if it were a woman.”⁵²

Other militiamen simply insisted that women had no place in combat. Oral Deckard, for example, argued that female self-sacrifice in combat was unnatural: “Instinctively, I think, most men will go into mortal combat, sacrificing their own life, to defend their wife and children. I’m not going to advocate that women take on the same attitude. If they do that heroic, well, then, I’ll commend them, but it’s not in their best interests of their children that they sacrifice themselves. That’s the job of the man.”⁵³

Although most militiamen saw the martial aspects of citizenship as essentially male, they also conceived of that role as rooted in their attachment to family and community. A description of weekend field exercises conducted by the Missouri 51st Militia demonstrated a close connection between martial citizenship and domestic life: “rifle and pistol practice included first time shooters and youngsters. . . . It was apparent

that the militiamen were proficient in the use of their arms. . . . Though the training was enthusiastic and done in earnest, this was a family affair. Husbands, wives, and kids were very much a part of the group.” Norm Olson described his motivation for participating in the militia movement as driven primarily by his relationship with his children and his descendants, a relationship characterized by obligation and affection: “The only thing we can leave to our children is a legacy of who we were and what we could do. And one day when they come out to your grave site, they’re going to either stand over your grave with hallowed respect and whispering soft words and cherished words of admiration and thanksgiving because you did everything you could do, or else your grave will be covered with brambles and they’ll come out and they’ll curse the day that you lived because you did nothing when you had the chance.”⁵⁴

The militia movement was indeed influenced by the tensions in masculine identity at the turn of the century. But the civic ideal of citizen-as-guardian espoused by militiamen bore little resemblance to the Gibson’s warrior dream. To the contrary, it represented a new conception of civic masculinity that directly challenged the hegemonic masculinity of the warrior dream.

The Last Necessary Ingredient: The Recovery of the Libertarian Memory of the American Revolution

The idea of reviving the militia as a revolutionary institution gained currency on the far right as early as the 1980s and it took several different forms. In 1984 William Potter Gale envisioned the “unorganized militia” as a county-based military force that would enforce the mandates of the Committee of the States. In 1992, white supremacist Louis Beam wrote an essay entitled “Leaderless Resistance” in which he argued that “those who love our race” should form leaderless cells for the purpose of resisting a government whose corruption he measured by its enforcement of civil rights and equal protection for minorities. He suggested that such cells would strike proactively at the government in a manner impossible to predict: “Those idealists truly committed to the cause of freedom will act when they feel the time is ripe, or will take their cue from others who

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precede them.” When white supremacists gathered in Estes Park in 1992 to formulate their response to Ruby Ridge, Beam offered his essay as the organizational model for a new militia movement.⁵⁵

These far right conceptions of a revived militia would not, however, serve as the intellectual inspiration for the bulk of the movement. The final necessary factor in the emergence of the militia movement was the recovery of the libertarian memory of the American Revolution by the gun rights movement. In the mid-1970s, the National Rifle Association adopted a much more militant stance in its political lobbying, arguing that all forms of gun control violated basic constitutional principles. To make its case more persuasive, the NRA promoted legal scholarship to support the thesis that private gun ownership was constitutionally protected under the Second Amendment. This individual rights interpretation of the Second Amendment, though common in the nineteenth century, had fallen out of favor with judges and most legal scholars in the twentieth century.⁵⁶

One of the most important early reevaluations of the Second Amendment was a 1976 article in the *Fordham Urban Law Journal* by David I. Caplan, a lawyer and gun rights activist. In “Restoring the Balance: The Second Amendment Revisited,” Caplan offered the first modern articulation of what has become known as the insurrectionary interpretation of the Second Amendment. Caplan argued that the Second Amendment recognized a right of private gun ownership because the Framers believed that private arms had a role to play in the constitutional balance between the people and their governors:

The founding fathers were, after all, revolutionaries who had seen that the success of the American Revolution was in no small part attributable to militia action, some of it in the nature of guerilla-type warfare. In striving to protect the “security of a free state” from tyranny, the second amendment draftsmen apparently believed that the private keeping of arms played a significant role in deterring any Presidential attempts at usurpation.⁵⁷

Several other lawyers connected with the gun rights movement, including David T. Hardy and Stephen P. Halbrook, elaborated on this in-

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surrectionary interpretation of the Second Amendment. In a series of law review essays, and also shorter articles in gun rights publications such as *The Rifleman*, they explored eighteenth-century understandings of the militia, and discussed statements by prominent founders, including Noah Webster, the Federal Farmer, Tench Coxe, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison, supportive of the right of revolution and the right to keep and bear arms. Halbrook summed up his work in a monograph, *That Every Man Be Armed*, in 1986, and Hardy published a short sourcebook on the Second Amendment the same year.

Beginning in 1989, scholars unconnected with the gun rights movement began to take this interpretation seriously. Sanford Levinson, professor of law at the University of Texas, argued in 1989 that the insurrectionary interpretation was worthy of serious academic scrutiny. Other scholars at leading law schools, including Akhil Reed Amar, David Williams, Robert Cottrol, Glenn Reynolds, and Randy Barnett, followed Levinson's lead.⁵⁸

The result of this scholarship was the recovery of the libertarian understanding of the American Revolution within the collective memory celebrated by the gun rights movement. As the highlights of this new scholarship began to filter down to rank-and-file gun rights activists, some began to read the *Federalist Papers*, prominent Anti-Federalist tracts, and various other texts from the era of ratification for themselves. Others turned amateur historian and began to comb through more obscure eighteenth-century texts and compile quotes supportive of the insurrectionary interpretation. The most comprehensive of these collections, *The Origin of the Second Amendment*, published by David E. Young in 1991, contained hundreds of excerpts from early American texts mentioning the militia and the right to keep and bear arms.⁵⁹

What gun rights activists found within these texts was a set of eighteenth-century ideas about the nature of government, the right of revolution, and the role of the militia as an armed deterrent against government abuse. In the Anti-Federalist discourse of the ratification period they encountered the Whig fear that all governments, regardless of their structure, inevitably tend toward centralization, the exercise of unde-

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gated power, and the military enforcement of the laws. In the Federalist responses to these texts they found repeated assurances that an armed militia would deter such abuse, and would in the last extremity intervene to protect the people from their governors. In these texts, the modern gun rights movement encountered the most radical legacy of the American Revolution, the idea that the people have a right and duty to take up arms, even against an elected government, should that government exercise unconstitutional power.

Together these ideas became a fundamental part of the collective memory of the gun rights movement, and gun rights activists carried this memory into the Christian Patriot public sphere and into the militia movement. The work of David Hardy, Stephen Halbrook, and Robert Cottrol and Sanford Levison was posted to Usenet groups between 1989 and 1992. Clayton Cramer, a gun rights activist and a prolific researcher and author on the topic of the right to keep and bear arms, posted an early draft of his monograph *For the Defense of Themselves and the State* to the Usenet discussion group ca.politics in 1991.⁶⁰

With these texts available online, and with the distribution of Halbrook's monograph and Hardy's and Young's sourcebooks by gun rights organizations, references to and brief quotes from ratification-era texts entered into the public discussion of the Second Amendment. An impression of this process can be gleaned through an examination of the Google Usenet archive, a searchable database of every Usenet post from 1981 to the present. According to this database, the first reference to Tench Coxe, the Federalist author of several commentaries on the right to keep and bear arms, appeared in a 1991 post to ca.politics by Clayton Cramer. In 1994, Coxe was mentioned in ninety messages posted to newsgroups. While the number of postings was not large in absolute terms, the audience for these discussions was growing exponentially. The Second Amendment was mentioned in 194 messages posted to Usenet prior to 1991. Over the next four years, almost twenty thousand posts to Usenet mentioned the amendment.⁶¹

A 1994 essay by Mike Vanderboegh offered another glimpse of this process. Vanderboegh observed that during the American Revolution

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the subject of political liberty was no longer monopolized by a “civil and priestly hierarchy,” but became the “object of universal attention and study.” A similar phenomenon, Vanderboegh suggested, had overtaken America in the 1990s:

A good friend listened not long ago to a two-hour discussion of the Federalist and Anti-Federalist papers on a radio call in show in Columbus, Ohio. The callers argued about the substance of the founding father's writings and also shared information on where the Federalist Papers books could be purchased and engaged in a fascinating discussion of why the books were not available at most local bookstores. Two truck drivers were recently overheard discussing the same subject on CB radio, when in the middle of making a point, one said, “Wait a minute, I got to pull over and find out what George Mason said about that.” The conversation resumed after he found the citation. When we no longer rely upon the “civil and priestly hierarchy” of the news media and political parties to tell us what to think, we have come full circle to the pre-revolutionary times of our forefathers.⁶²

The impact of the libertarian memory of the American Revolution on the militia movement is clear. Jon Roland's 1994 essay “Reviving the Ready Militia” was one of the most widely read and reproduced texts within the militia movement. Roland did not cite fellow Texan Louis Beam, but he did cite Halbrook's *That Every Man Be Armed*. Samuel Sherwood, one of the movement's first organizers, was influenced by a broader range of intellectual currents percolating in the Northwest, especially by Mormon constitutionalism. Nevertheless, Sherwood's 1992 volumes, *The Little Republics* and *Guarantee of the Second Amendment*, owe much to eighteenth-century republicanism and draw heavily on eighteenth-century texts. John Trochman, founder of the Militia of Montana, would base his *Information and Networking Manual* on Sherwood's work. Mike Vanderboegh and Michael Johnson, an early militia spokesman in Florida, grounded some of their early writing on the eighteenth-century texts cited by the 1980s gun rights literature.⁶³ Without this collective memory of the eighteenth century, there might still have been a right-wing paramilitary response to the rise in state-sponsored violence in the 1990s, but it would have been a very different movement.

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A Force upon the Subdivision: The Militia Movement Takes the Field

The first component militias of the movement began organizing in early 1994. Though there was no one point of origin for the movement as a whole, there were several currents of intellectual influence by which we can trace its spread. The first of these begins with Idaho organizer Samuel Sherwood. Sherwood began to publish his ideas for a militia movement in 1992, as part of a larger vision of constitutional restoration. Sherwood's vision, outlined in *The Little Republics*, called for a return to original constitutional principles through the creation of new democratic republican governments at the county level. He argued that the growth of the welfare state had brought corruption, socialism, and control of the individual in its wake. In describing his solution he invoked the romantic language of a return to the glorious freedom of the Anglo-Saxon shire prior to the arrival of the Norman yoke. Medieval romanticism aside, his blueprint called for the creation of new county governments based on eighteenth-century principles of limited government, popular participation and representation, the separation of powers, and the preservation of inalienable rights. In some sense, Sherwood offered an alternative to William Potter Gale's vision of local sovereignty as a path to national regeneration. Whereas Gale had envisioned empowering the posse comitatus as a fully sovereign body, Sherwood sought to retain the national government established by the "original constitution" of 1787; he simply sought to strip the national and state governments of the powers they had accumulated over the centuries and return them to the people to exercise at the local level. Whereas Gale sought to empower a revolutionary elite in the Committee of the States, Sherwood insisted on open public government and strict democratic accountability for all officeholders. His call for civic regeneration was also free of the white supremacist taint of the Posse Comitatus movement.⁶⁴

Like Gale, Sherwood called for the reinstatement of the militia as part of his framework for county government. In a companion volume, *The Guarantee of the Second Amendment*, Sherwood laid out his vision for the militia. Sherwood is a Latter-day Saint, and his vision was signifi-

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cantly influenced by biblical texts, but he also quoted extensively from the eighteenth-century texts resurrected by the gun rights movement, including *Federalist Nos. 29* and *46* and the essays of Tench Coxe. He used these passages to assert that the people had an inherent right to reconstitute the universal militia and to reclaim “the right to keep and bear arms, have a militia, and maintain a civilian counter balance to the terror of the force of government.” He called for concerned citizens to organize militias in their communities and outlined the policies of the United States Militia Association as an umbrella group. In training materials, published in 1994, Sherwood made it clear that the militia would be a public institution. He instructed organizers to publicly announce meetings and invite local magistrates and law enforcement. He urged them to seek charters from state or local officials. He also made it clear that while the USMA was a private organization, membership was open to all who would uphold the Constitution and abide by the laws of the state and nation. He explicitly suggested members of the white supremacist groups operating in the Northwest, who generally rejected the authority of the federal government, would not be permitted to join.⁶⁵

Sherwood had previously operated a home-schooling resource center called Nauvoo Academy. Access to this national network of home schoolers led to the rapid dissemination of Sherwood's call for militia organization. His vision began to bear fruit in the summer of 1994, as units of the United States Militia Association began springing up around the country. The organization first took root in a belt of counties running from Pocatello to Teton, Idaho. It also spread into the suburbs of Boise; Portland, Oregon; Philadelphia; and Las Vegas. Additional units emerged in more rural areas of New Mexico and northern Utah.⁶⁶

Sherwood's work had some degree of influence on John Trochman, who joined with his brother David and his nephew Randy to found the Militia of Montana. Trochman had been angered by the federal assault on the home of Randy Weaver, with whom he was friends. He also appeared to move comfortably within the social and intellectual circles of the white supremacist Right in the Pacific Northwest. Trochman participated in programs held at Richard Butler's Aryan Nations compound on at least two occasions, and he is rumored to have been a Christian Identity adher-

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ent. When Trochman first began discussing the creation of a militia in Montana, he consulted Sherwood. As a result, the first half of the Militia of Montana *Information and Networking Manual* consisted of a significantly condensed paraphrasing of Sherwood's *Guarantee of the Second Amendment*. But Trochman used Sherwood's words to take the militia movement in a very different direction. Whereas Sherwood envisioned the militia as operating in cooperation with state and federal government, Trochman's vision was much more local. Two deletions from Sherwood's text may also reflect white supremacist influences on Trochman's thought. Sherwood's articles of association stated that "the militia shall at all times be interested in fairness, equality, and justice." Trochman deleted "equality" from this sentence. Sherwood also insisted that the militia "shall always be under the authority of, and be subject to, the penalties of the civil law of the land." Trochman altered this to read "the penalties of the Constitutional laws of the land," a formulation that suggested that militiamen might pick and choose which laws to abide by. Trochman's manual also stated that any citizen might call out the militia to oppose "any armed force" not authorized under state law, a provision that suggested that the militia might turn out to oppose any armed federal officer.⁶⁷

In addition to modifying Sherwood's model for the militia, Trochman's manual offered two additional models of paramilitary organization. MOM's manual included a second section on organizing "militia support groups," public organizations that would fulfill the same role as the militia in states with antiparamilitary activity statutes. These support groups were pyramidal organizations designed to organize a statewide structure of "neighborhood guards." When Trochman later testified that MOM was nothing more than a big neighborhood watch, it is probably this model to which he was referring.⁶⁸

The final model offered in the manual would become the best known and most controversial. Inspired by Louis Beam's essay, "Leaderless Resistance," Trochman included advice on how to form seven-man underground cells. This last section of the manual also suggested that white supremacists might be welcomed into the militia: Trochman warned his potential recruits, "Do not react to the buzzwords: White Supremacists; Tax Protesters; Cultists; Bigots; Nazis; and other words which the masses

Fig. 4. John Trochman at a Preparedness Expo in Spokane, Washington, February 1997. Associated Press.

Trochman, cofounder of the Militia of Montana, is seen here selling militia material and videotapes. Trochman was one of the leading voices in the mil-lenarian wing of the movement.

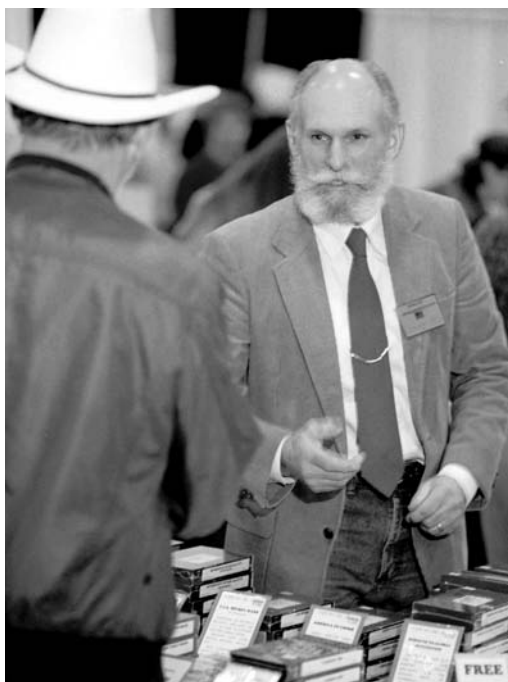


Fig. 5. Norm Olson in his gun shop, Alanson, MI, 1995. Paul Paiewonsky.

Olson, cofounder of the Michigan Militia, was a licensed gun dealer in one of the northernmost counties of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. He was one of the leading spokesmen for the constitutional wing of the movement until May 1995.



Fig. 6. J. J. Johnson addressing a meeting of the Virginia Citizens Militia, Richmond, VA, July 1996. Associated Press.

Johnson was the cofounder of E Pluribus Unum, a patriot discussion group in Columbus, OH. He was also an early leader of the Ohio Unorganized Militia.



Fig. 7. The Gadsden Minutemen on the firing line. Copyright, *The Birmingham News*, 2008. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Target practice and military training were a fundamental part of militia activity in the 1990s. Here the Gadsden Minutemen practice marksmanship with a variety of semiautomatic weapons.

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are conditioned to hate. After the media has demonized the target, as in Weaver and Waco, the government is free to murder as it chooses.”⁶⁹

The Militia of Montana began holding public recruiting meetings in February 1994. As an actual paramilitary organization, the MOM was largely restricted to the state's northwest corner. Nevertheless, Trochman had a broader intellectual influence. He opened a mail-order “information clearing house” of militia and preparedness information and videotapes and toured the country, speaking at gun shows, preparedness expos, and even at Yale University.⁷⁰

Trochman's intellectual influence outside of the Northwest is most evident in Ohio. In early 1994, the Ohio Unorganized Militia (OUM) was organized by an uneasy alliance of libertarians and white supremacist sovereign citizens. The manual of the OUM was a revision of Trochman's MOM manual. Here again, Trochman's product was put to new uses, and the OUM made significant alterations to his manual. The OUM styled itself as an association of “Nationals of the Ohio Republic.” The OUM manual further defined “nationals” as follows: “Term used in reference to people, recognizing their sovereignty, as opposed to the word citizen, which indicates ‘the property of.’”⁷¹ The term was a reference to the theory of sovereign citizenship that grew out of the Posse Comitatus movement of the 1980s. The theory of sovereign citizenship argues that after the Civil War, Americans had been duped into accepting the complete control of the state and federal governments and had thereby given up the rights and privileges of free men. To regain these freedoms and return to the original status of individual sovereignty, individuals must rescind all contracts acknowledging the sovereignty of government. Such contracts include birth certificates, drivers' licenses, and social security numbers. An explicitly racist variant of this theory, dubbed the theory of Fourteenth Amendment citizenship, argues that African Americans may only aspire to a lesser category of citizenship devoid of inalienable rights, and that sovereign citizenship is only available to Caucasians.⁷²

The incorporation of this theory into the original OUM manual had serious implications. Whereas Sherwood and Trochman had stipulated that the militia might never use violence against unarmed citizens, the

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OUM manual stated that this protection applied only to unarmed nationals, suggesting that the militia need respect only the rights of sovereign citizens. The manual also stipulated that the militia could be called out against the police or state government by its commander. Sherwood had insisted that only the “representative authorities within their jurisdiction,” such as the governor, state senate, or assembled county commissioners, could issue such a call.⁷³ In sum, the manual suggested that the OUM might have been conceived as a tool of the white supremacist movement in Ohio.

If there is an identifiable line of influence from Samuel Sherwood to John Trochman to the early OUM, a second line of influence emerged almost simultaneously in Texas and Michigan, one much closer to Sherwood’s original vision. In Texas, Jon Roland and Bill Utterback organized the first muster of the Texas Constitutional Militia on the first anniversary of the final assault on Waco, April 19, 1994. In response to Roland’s public call, several dozen individuals assembled at daybreak on the outskirts of San Antonio. Only two dozen individuals came to the first muster, but subsequent meetings served as the genesis of the first county units of the TCM.⁷⁴ Roland outlined his vision for the militia in his essay, “Reviving the Ready Militia.” He began with George Mason’s question to the Virginia ratifying convention, “Who are the militia? They consist now of the whole people, except for a few public officers.” Roland explained that his intent was to revive the eighteenth-century institution of the universal militia. He argued that the Dick Act of 1902, which scrapped the universal militia system mandated by the Militia Act of 1792 and institutionalized the National Guard in its place, had violated the Constitution’s intent to ensure that the states would continue to organize and train the whole militia. “If the state fails to do so,” Roland declared, “people have not only the right but the duty to organize and train themselves locally, using their own arms.” Roland recognized that the militias he was organizing would be composed of “volunteers, who may not constitute a cross section of the general population. In this situation,” he observed, “the militia members must make a special effort to avoid having the militia unit take on the attributes of a private association, such as by always calling up the militia using public notices, and al-

lowing any responsible citizen to participate. It must also avoid any suggestion of partisan or sectarian bias, and limit itself to constitutional actions." Roland urged militia members to reach out to local and state officials, and to involve themselves in community affairs. By the spring of 1995, the TCM had organized militias in thirty-eight counties, concentrated in the San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas metropolitan areas.⁷⁵

On April 29, 1994, ten days after the TCM's initial muster, Norm Olson and Ray Southwell organized the First Brigade of the Michigan Militia in Emmett County. Like Roland and Utterback, Olson and Southwell argued that the militia must operate publicly and be open to all: "Call the assembly meeting. Make them public. Stay focused. Stay constitutional and cling to the rule of law, due process, and the Bill of Rights. Open your militia to all races, creeds, religions. This is what America is really all about." Olson also appealed to the memory of the American Revolution. He quoted at length Patrick Henry's call upon the Virginia Provincial Convention to embody the militia as a precedent, and he argued that "it was clear to the early patriots that the militia was independent of the organized government, and made up of the people who stood ready to repel a tyrannical government from denying the rights of liberty under the Constitution." Over the next year, Olson and Southwell organized brigades of the Michigan Militia Corps in almost all of Michigan's eighty-three counties.⁷⁶

Together, Samuel Sherwood, Jon Roland, and Norm Olson offered a more constitutionalist, civic, and racially inclusive vision of the militia than that propagated by John Trochman. Their vision had a broad appeal. In Ohio, libertarians and gun rights activists were by the end of 1994 becoming increasingly disenchanted with the white supremacist overtones of the early OUM. In February 1995, J. J. Johnson, the African American cofounder of E Pluribus Unum, issued a new manual offering a much more constitutionalist vision for the OUM. In that manual, Johnson reprinted Roland's "Reviving the Ready Militia" and Olson's essay "Is the Citizen Militia Lawful?" Thereafter, in the fall of 1996, Ohio militias of a constitutionalist orientation organized the Ohio Unorganized Militia Advisory and Assistance Command as a new umbrella group. In 1998 it claimed to have organized units in as many as fifty counties.⁷⁷

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As was true of Sherwood, Roland's and Olson's outreach stimulated militia organization in many states. By 1996, Olson's manual for the Michigan Militia served as the basis for the manuals of militias in Texas, Florida, Pennsylvania, Missouri, and California, and Roland's essay had been republished in militia newsletters in Alabama and Ohio.⁷⁸

One further source of inspiration proved especially important in the Midwest. In early 1994 Mark Koernke began broadcasting a radio program called the *Intelligence Report* over the stations of World Wide Christian Radio. Koernke's program, and a videotaped presentation entitled *America in Peril*, warned of an imminent invasion by the forces of the New World Order. Koernke urged patriots to form underground cells along the lines suggested by John Trochman. He claimed to have formed his own Michigan Militia at Large, and had some significant influence over some of the brigades of the Michigan Militia forming in southeast Michigan. Koernke also joined the preparedness expo circuit and helped stimulate militia organization in Ohio and Pennsylvania.⁷⁹

From these multiple influences, hundreds of militia groups began to organize in the fall and winter of 1994–95. The movement had relatively little presence in the Northeast, but emerged in various degrees of organization in most other regions of the country. The Indiana Citizens Volunteer Militia, the South Carolina Citizens Militia, the Oregon Militia, and the New Mexico Citizens Regulated Militia adopted the model of statewide organization pioneered in Texas, Michigan, and Ohio.⁸⁰ In other states, multicounty organizations emerged. For example, the Northern Illinois Minutemen organized in the suburban counties surrounding Chicago, and the Florida State Militia spread through the counties of Florida's Treasure Coast.⁸¹ In other states, organization was ad hoc, with independent groups springing up at random. In Alabama, militias emerged independently in the suburbs of Gadsden, Birmingham, and Montgomery. In California a dozen independent groups organized in different parts of the state, from the suburbs of San Diego and Sacramento to the foothills of the Sierras.⁸²

Several journalists and scholars observing the movement have described it as rural in character, and many participants would agree with this characterization.⁸³ An examination of a sample of over two hundred

militia counties lends itself to a very different conclusion. In the twenty-two states in which I have been able to assemble significant information on the militia movement, stable militias organized in 246 counties. Of these counties 139 (57 percent) fell within metropolitan areas as the federal government defined them in 1993, the vast majority of them in metropolitan areas with a population of greater than 250,000. In other words, the bulk of the movement emerged in counties that had experienced significant urban and suburban development. Another 52 (21 percent) counties sat adjacent to the metropolitan boundaries that marked the suburban-rural frontier, and of these 15 would be “captured” in the next decade. Only 55 (22 percent) of the 232 counties lay entirely unconnected to the suburban-rural frontier. Of these, 5 would be captured by 2003 and the metropolitan frontier would move adjacent to another 10.⁸⁴

Looked at overall, the bulk of the militia movement emerged in suburban and suburbanizing communities. In Texas the movement expanded through the suburbs of San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas. In New Mexico, the movement grew out of the emerging suburbs of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. The strength of the United States Militia Association lay in the suburbs of Boise, Portland, and Philadelphia. In Ohio, the movement grew up rapidly in the suburbs of Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati, and around smaller cities like Dayton, Findlay, and Akron. In Indiana and Illinois, the movement gravitated around the suburbs of Indianapolis and the Chicago–South Bend metropolitan area. In Florida, Alabama, and South Carolina, the movement emerged similarly in the suburbs of major cities like Birmingham and Palm Beach and subsidiary cities like Greenville–Spartanburg and Gadsden.

When militias emerged outside of metropolitan boundaries, they often took root in counties where a combination of rapid population growth and the proximity to more urbanized communities raised the prospect of incorporation into metropolitan America. Large units of the Indian Citizens Volunteer Militia emerged in Brown, Owen, and Greene counties, all incorporated during the 1990s. The same phenomenon of exurban growth probably played a role in militia formation in Torrance County, New Mexico, and in Bibb County, Alabama.⁸⁵

Even where the movement took root in fully rural communities, it

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tended to emerge in communities that were growing rapidly. Twenty-one of the fifty-five rural militia counties experienced population growth in excess of 20 percent over the course of the 1990s. Of the most rural militia counties, those scoring a nine on the USDA's nine point rural-urban continuum, all but one were growing faster than the national average.⁸⁶ Two examples illustrate the importance of this growth. The Militia of Montana's greatest recruiting success lay in Flathead County, centered on the Kalispell, a popular vacation destination. Flathead County's population grew 26 percent during the 1990s, a figure that does not capture the boom in second-home construction. When county officials refused to appropriate funds to update the county's master plan to provide new zoning to regulate land use, a private association of recently arrived homeowners hired a planner and crafted a revision of the master plan. When they submitted a revised plan to the county government, local landowners complained bitterly that the planning process and zoning regulations were being imposed by "outsiders." MOM's warning of the threat posed by the shadowy cabal behind the New World Order found a fertile environment in a community riven by the process of rapid growth.⁸⁷ Emmet County, Michigan, birthplace of the Michigan Militia, experienced a similar growth rate and for a similar reason—Michigan's northern and western lakeshore counties were booming in the 1990s as they became desirable vacation and retirement destinations.⁸⁸

In sum, even to the degree that the militia movement took root in rural America, it was more often a creature of rural growth than rural decline. Though several of the individuals who inspired the movement in its early days lived in rural communities isolated from metropolitan America, the movement itself was largely a creature of the suburbs. In these communities the threat of state violence represented by paramilitary policing, the growing reach of the Christian Patriot public sphere, the resurrection of the libertarian memory of the Revolution, and the political and cultural friction generated by suburbanization all came together to produce the militia movement.