

ORIGINS, ORIENTATIONS AND ETIOLOGIES OF THE U.S. CITIZEN MILITIA MOVEMENT, 1982-1997

Stan C. Weeber, University of North Texas

ABSTRACT

This paper is a review of what we know about the origins, orientations and etiologies of U.S. citizen militias that formed between 1982 and 1997. Two phases in the evolution of this movement emerge: Phase One (1982-1991) marks the rise and fall of Christian Patriot militias; Phase Two (1992-1997) is characterized by the appearance of Constitutionalist entities. Precursors to Phase One drew heavily upon the classic republican tradition of an unorganized, armed populace. Philosophically these precursors branched out toward both Christian Identity and Constitutionalism. Phase One groups were influenced by the Identity tract *The Turner Diaries* and by the survivalist Nehemiah Township Charter and Common Law Contract. Phase Two built upon the Constitutionalism of the precursors and was propelled by Pat Robertson's book, a speech by George Bush, and BATF raids at Ruby Ridge and Waco. At its extreme, militia ideology expresses a paranoid view of how the New World Order is preparing for collectivist control. Sociological explanations of militias emphasize the recruitment to activism, how enemies are socially constructed, the paramilitary culture of the postwar U.S., and the role of structural strain. The paper concludes with an exploration of the concepts of hate crime and domestic terrorism as each relates to the U.S. militia phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

On April 21, 1995, Timothy McVeigh was linked by the *New York Times* to a citizen militia in northern Michigan. Though McVeigh and accomplice Terry Nichols never formally belonged to that militia or to any other one that we know of, the public immediately made a strong linkage between the Oklahoma City bombing suspects and the militias. The militia movement subsequently was scrutinized in great detail by the press, politicians, law enforcement agencies, legal scholars, political and social scientists, and others. Legitimate concerns were raised that the militia movement's anti-government rhetoric contributed to an environment of hatred that encouraged the bombers to act (Berlet, Lyons 1995; Stern 1996). Researchers found links between militiamen and various hate groups (Swomley 1997), and militia members contributed to several terrorist incidents after the bombing (DeArmond 1996). Despite the profound impact of militias upon American society, they have not been the subject of sociological study during the 1990s.

This paper is a review of what we know about the origins, orientations and etiologies of the citizen militias in the United States that formed between 1982 and 1997. Two phases in the evolution of this movement emerged from the review. Phase One, from 1982 to 1991, marks the rise and fall of Christian Patriot militias such as the Covenant, Sword, and Arm of the Lord (CSA), whose paramilitary training was a preparation for an apocalyptic Battle of Armageddon. Phase Two, from 1992 to 1997, is characterized by the emergence of Constitutionalist entities such as the Militia of

Montana, whose public appearance marks a general dissatisfaction with the encroachment of the federal government into the lives of American citizens, and the perceived decline of Constitutional Republicanism.

A citizen militia is defined in this paper as a private army that meets regularly to practice combat scenarios and to discuss weapons. It may identify targets against which weapons could be used. Because this definition is very broad, it is best to view citizen militias as existing along a continuum in terms of their violence, tactics, and ideologies. At one end are well-organized and criminally effective terrorist groups such as The Order and the CSA. These groups specialize in covert action and are philosophically compatible with Christian Identity, neo-Nazism and kindred ideologies. At the other extreme are public entities such as the Michigan Militia, whose orientations are primarily Constitutionalist.

For both phases, I examine accounts of the militias' activities written by the press and civil rights organizations; the verbal statements and written documents produced by militia leaders and participants (including Internet traffic in Phase Two); and the findings of social scientists who have studied the militias and the people who join them. The purpose here is to critique the current knowledge base from a sociological point of view. I will indicate gaps in this knowledge base, and suggest how sociological theory might help guide future studies of the U.S. citizen militias.

ORIGINS

The roots of the modern day militia movement lie in the revolutionary role of the militia

in Colonial history and the precedents for militias that appear in the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution, and subsequent federal legislation. Militias gained visibility and stature by fighting at Lexington and later helping to repel the British advance on Concord. The value of militias to the developing Republic was shown in the Articles of Confederation, where the early Congress was given the authority to call up the militia to quell invasions and the power to organize, arm and discipline militias as needed to fulfill this purpose. After formulation of the Republic, this authority and power was forwarded to the Congress in Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution. The Second Amendment further justified militias, stating that they were necessary to ensure a "free State". The Amendment has been interpreted by some to mean that an important republican function of the militia is to safeguard against the tyranny of standing armies and government incumbents (Halbrook 1984; Kates 1983; Williams 1991).

The Militia Act of 1903 specified that the militia consists of all able bodied male citizens between the ages of 17 and 45. This Act was clarified by the National Defense Act of 1916, which made an important distinction in the ranks of the militia: the *organized* militia consists of the National Guard and the Naval Militia; the *unorganized* militia consists of members of the militia who are *not* members of either the National Guard or the Naval Militia. This distinction has survived into the contemporary era; it appears in Section 10 of the U.S. Code today (Hardy 1985; U.S. Senate 1982).

Precursors to the Phase One militias drew upon the classic republican tradition of an unorganized, armed populace. Militiamen of the era saw themselves as Patriots protecting America from a collectivist takeover (Salsich 1961). However, beyond these basic similarities, early militias branched out philosophically along two different lines of thought. Some were Constitutionalist in outlook while others were influenced by the Christian Identity religion. These are best viewed as ideal typical philosophies and not rigid categories.

Constitutionalists believed in the sanctity of the United States Constitution and contended that an abstract group is behind a conspiracy to destroy America. They were reluctant to blame a definite ethnic, racial or religious group, favoring instead categories like "Bilderbergers," "Trilateralists," or "Force X" (Aho 1990). Important in the early growth of

Constitutionalism was the encouragement and support it drew from illegal tax protestors, the posse movement, the John Birch Society, and the Mormon Church.

Seminars begun by Marvin Cooley in the early 1970s are often cited as the start of the tax protest movement. Cooley's seminars attracted future militiaman Robert Mathews, who would lead The Order on a terroristic rampage a decade later. The posse movement, formed by William Gale and Mike Beach in the late 1960s and later known as Posse Comitatus, recognized the county sheriff as the highest legitimately elected official in the country and hoped to form local armed units that would be a means to compel government agents to obey the law of the Constitution. Gordon Kahl joined the Posse in the early Seventies and his untimely death in 1983 was a precipitant of much militia induced terrorism during the Eighties. The John Birch Society and the Mormon Church influenced the early lives of prominent Constitutionlists Robert DePugh, Robert Mathews, and Gordon Kahl. DePugh, for instance, belonged to the Birch Society in the early years of the Minutemen. Mathews was motivated to attend Cooley's seminars after joining the Mormon Church and the JBS while living with his parents in Phoenix (Aho 1990; Corcoran 1991; Flynn, Gerhardt 1995; George, Wilcox 1996; Jones 1968).

The second line of thought, Christian Identity, is built around three beliefs (Barkun 1997): that white Aryans are descendants of the biblical tribes of Israel and thus are on earth to do God's work; that Jews are completely unconnected to the Israelites and are actually children of the Devil, the literal biological offspring of a sexual relationship between Satan and Eve in the Garden of Eden; and that the world is on the verge of a final apocalyptic struggle between good and evil, in which Aryans must do battle with the Jewish conspiracy—an international conspiracy designed to destroy the United States—so that the world can be redeemed.

The American version of Identity developed through C.A.L. Totten, Howard Rand, William Cameron, and, following a period of consolidation from 1936-1946, grew rapidly with the West Coast preaching of Gerald L.K. Smith. Southern California was the vanguard of the religion as several of Smith's proteges, including William Gale, preached and expanded upon the Identity doctrines (Barkun 1997).

Gale founded one of the early Identity

militias of the 1960s, the California Rangers. The Attorney General of California referred to the Rangers as an underground network for the conduct of guerilla warfare (State of California 1965). It was Gale who introduced Richard Butler to Identity leader Wesley Swift in the early Sixties. Butler was mesmerized by Swift's lectures and soon became an Identity believer. He rose through the ranks quickly, leading a militia called the Christian Defense League. When Swift died in 1970, Butler took over Swift's congregation in Lancaster, California. Later, Butler would leave for northern Idaho, where he would help to establish a racially pure area around Hayden Lake and serve as a mentor to Robert Mathews of The Order (Barkun 1997).

There are gaps in our knowledge of the origins of the precursor and Phase One militias. The precise role of Mormonism and the John Birch Society in establishing these precursors is not known. This is an important question because there is a similarity in the orientations of the precursor militias and those in Phase Two; and Phases One and Two appear to be more than anything else an extension of ideas from the precursor militias. We also are lacking in basic historical research on a number of Constitutionalist precursors such as the Sons of Liberty, the Brothers of the Iron Cross; Paul Revere Associated Yeomen; Soldiers of the Cross; and the American Militia Organization (Sargent 1995; Thayer 1968). Finally, how strong is the influence of JBS and Mormonism on Phase One? For instance, the influence of Mormonism on William Gale is not well understood. Gale's views were similar to Mormonism at points, and Gale resided in Southern California, which had a significant Mormon population (Barkun 1997).

Journalists, extremist watchers, and political scientists have lead the way in researching the origins of the Phase Two militias (Bennett 1995; Dees 1996; Schneider 1994). Sociological research in this area is almost nil (exceptions are Hamm [1997] and George, Wilcox [1996]), something that bodes ill for the discipline of sociology (Hartung 1993). Mills (1959) expected sociologists of his time to provide leadership in helping common citizens avoid the traps of daily life. Today militias are such a trap, but sociologists have done little to help transform this private trouble into a public issue. A first step would be to look at the origins of the most recent movement.

Drawing upon the mostly nonsociological literature that is available, it is possible to draw out some themes with respect to the origins of the Phase Two militias. Underlying the movement is a general dissatisfaction with the encroachment of the federal government into the lives of American citizens, and the perceived erosion of Constitutional Republicanism. For instance, John Trochmann of the Militia of Montana said that his mission was to make people aware of the "military takeover" of the U.S. and how constitutional freedoms were being eroded, especially the right to keep and bear arms (Barkun 1997).

A 1990 speech by George Bush has been cited as the beginning of this dissatisfaction (Halpern, Levin 1996; Walker 1994). Bush's speech declared a new order in which all countries of the world would compete economically but cooperate in peacekeeping missions under the authority of the U.N. Other observers point to Pat Robertson's *The New World Order* (1991) as a key turning point (Church and State 1995). In it, he argues that a tightly knit international cabal that began with the Illuminati and Freemasons and continued with Communism and High Finance, is trying to establish a new order of the human race under the domination of Lucifer and his followers. Although there has been a circulation of this elite, it is still guided by the same evil influences that has guided it for centuries (Aho 1990).

Though the underlying dissatisfaction may be general, specific events led to militia growth. Militia membership expanded significantly following the ATF raids at Ruby Ridge, Idaho and Waco, Texas; and the passage of the Brady Bill and assault weapons legislation (George, Wilcox 1996; Halpern, Levin 1996; Hamm 1997; LaPierre 1995; Reavis 1995; Tabor, Gallagher 1995). To the militias, the Ruby Ridge and Waco episodes were evidence of impending federal tyranny and of a federal government that would stop at nothing to impose its will upon the people. Personal involvement in the two cases led some to form or expand militias. John Trochmann's involvement in the Weaver case led to his creation of the Militia of Montana (Hamm 1997; Walter 1995); others personally involved in that case lent support to a 1992 conference at Estes Park, Colorado, of persons interested in forming militias (Dees 1996). In Indiana, a then-unknown militia leader, Linda Thompson, was so enraged by the Waco standoff that she

produced two films, *The Big Lie* (1993) and *Waco II: The Big Lie Continues* (1994), that purport to show that ATF agents and Branch Davidians were intentionally killed by government agents and that the media helped to cover it up. The Brady Bill and assault weapons legislation were seen not only as a major assault on the constitutional rights to keep and bear arms, but as a more sinister preparation for depriving citizens of other constitutional rights after they have been disarmed (Roland 1994).

ORIENTATIONS

The basic distinction between Constitutionalist and Identity philosophies noted in the precursor militias is also evident in the orientations of Phase One. In California, the Phase One movement was led by William Gale and was more Constitutionalist than Identity in content (Barkun 1997; Seymour 1991); but in Idaho and elsewhere, the predominant strain of thought—and the predominant emphasis of Phase One overall—was Christian Identity. This was due largely to an influential book by William Pierce.

Pierce's *The Turner Diaries* (1978) is a fictional account of a racist, anti-Semitic underground militia that, through a series of violent acts during the 1990s, gains power in America and eventually the world. The book describes the bombing of FBI headquarters in Washington, a mortar attack on the Capital building, the destruction of public utilities and communication systems, and the "liberation" of the nation after atomic bombs have been dropped on the East Coast. In the end, the U.S. population is reduced to 50 million Aryans (Southern Poverty Law Center 1995).

Pierce's book had been read by many who attended a 1982 meeting of right-wing organizations in northern Idaho, the purpose of which was to sign a document called the Nehemiah Township Charter and Common Law Contract. Believing that the "Zionist Occupational Government" had perverted the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence and that those two documents were no longer covenants between God and Man, the Nehemiah Charter was considered the new covenant. It would be the Constitution under the new government that would rule after Armageddon. According to the Charter, Jesus Christ would lead the new government, whose purpose is to safeguard and protect the Christian faith. There would be no legislative body, no

taxation, no governmental laws and only freemen (i.e. whites) would have personal freedoms according to a Common Law that is enforced by *Posse Comitatus* (Aho 1990; Barkun 1997; Mullins 1993).

Fearing that an apocalyptic battle with the forces of evil is imminent, armed townships such as that near Hayden Lake could be considered "survivalist" as well. Survivalism can have many meanings, but to those in the armed camp it represents the anticipation of imminent catastrophe and the belief that, as the self identified remnant of Israel, they must withdraw from an increasingly dangerous world until such time as their enemies have been defeated. The most militarized of all Christian Identity communal settlements was the Covenant, Sword and Arm of the Lord located in northern Arkansas. The CSA was a place to which other rightists went for training in guerrilla warfare and related skills. Its founder, James Ellison, was convicted of the manufacture of automatic weapons and acts of bombing and arson (Barkun 1997; Coates 1995; Hamm 1997).

Robert Mathews and his militia, The Order, left a lasting impact upon Phase One and also Phase Two. Proceeds from a \$3.8 million bank robbery in Ukiah, California in 1983 were generously shared with militia leaders throughout the country, contributing to the longevity of Phase One, and many of those same leaders reappeared at the origins of Phase Two. Though the government's Operation Clean Sweep appeared to kill the Phase One movement by 1987, leaders continued to write and speak - thanks to Mathews' largesse - and kept the movement alive, at least in an intellectual sense (Dees 1996).

Mathews was a financier and leader of the Phase One movement, although his own militia was an anomaly in many ways. It was one of the few to act out upon the blueprint documented in *The Turner Diaries*, and its extremely violent campaign set it apart from most other militias. Second, it was difficult to pin down Mathews' ideology; he was arguably both a Constitutionalist and an Identity believer, but it is more complicated than that. Mathews' ideology was a private pastiche of elements drawn from numerous sources, including an unusual variant of Odinism (Barkun 1997; Flynn, Gerhardt 1995; Hamm 1997; Kaplan 1995). This makes his belief system very difficult to classify.

Militia ideology in the Nineties is

multifaceted and complex, and the militia movement is not monolithic. As of 1996, there were about 440 militias nationwide with each state having at least one militia (Southern Poverty Law Center 1996). The movement emphasizes decentralization and self-sufficiency. There has been no formal effort to organize the various local or regional militias into a national organization. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify some consistencies in militia thinking.

Christian Identity and Constitutionalism are both present to a degree in Phase Two, the latter appearing more often than the former. Phase Two militiamen generally profess a belief in God but are less likely than those in Phase One to view themselves as Christian Patriots, and are more likely to look upon themselves as modern day Minutemen who are prepared to defend the American way of life against an internationalist/collectivist onslaught (Benoit 1995). A preoccupation with safeguarding the Constitutional Republic is a basic idea and guiding principle. Extremist watchers report that this most recent variant of Constitutionalism bears some resemblance to the Birchist beliefs of the Constitutionalist movement of the early 1960s, a precursor to Phase One (Schmuck, Chesler 1963; Stern 1996).

To militia leaders of Phase Two, a new world government—the New World Order—is being formed by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and multinational corporations, and will be administered through the United Nations. The various recent international trade agreements are cited as proof of the global conspiracy. Once the new government is in place, its agents, including the President of the U.S., will impose martial law, suspend the U.S. Constitution, institute totalitarian rule, and seize all weapons from individuals (Kovaleski 1995). Under collectivist control, governmental control over the lives of citizens will be complete and the government will crush all who resist. Fear of collectivism is the militias' "call to arms," and devotees think that they must bear arms and train to resist an impending takeover (Cockburn 1995; Halpern, Levin 1996; McFadden 1995; Schneider 1994).

As noted by Robertson (1991), the New World Order is elite driven. Subgroups within the militia movement may disagree on the particulars of who belongs to this elite (or its origin), but there is little disagreement about what the new order is doing to America: it is

destroying the "Constitutional Republic," a republic that existed only very early in U.S. history, if at all. Militias cite the Constitution and the Bill of Rights as being the "true" (organic) Constitution, and provide highly narrow readings of both documents to show how the current federal government is illegitimate because its authority is derived from amendments that subvert the will of the Founding Fathers, that is, amendments enacted after the Tenth Amendment (Sherwood 1994). The 13th, 14th, 16th, and 19th Amendments are particularly suspect (Halpern, Levin 1996).

The Tenth Amendment is important to the militias because it sets limits upon governmental power. According to militia leader Samuel Sherwood, the Amendment proves that the power of sovereignty lies with the people. Sovereign power can be delegated to the federal government so that it can be used to serve the people, but ultimately that sovereign power is reserved, as the Amendment reads, "to the states, respectively, or to the people" (Sherwood 1994).

Militia ideology in Phase Two draws strength from, and also is supportive of, a number of other right wing causes. Militias oppose the Federal Reserve and the tax system, are protective of property rights, believe in "judicial purity" (e.g., juries should not allow judges to instruct them, since jury members have power to determine points of law and evidence), and object to the bullying of the politically unorthodox by police agencies (*Dallas Morning News* 1994; Helvarg 1995; Wills 1995). Further, militias object to government interference in education, abortion policy and the environment, and believe that it is time to roll back the clock on these issues. Obviously, militias are supported on some of these issues by mainstream conservatives (Halpern, Levin 1996; Schneider 1994).

At its extreme, however, militia ideology expresses a paranoid view of how the New World Order is preparing for collectivist control. Excerpts from militia leaders' speeches and from militia literature tell of black helicopters conducting surveillance on Americans across the country (Keith 1994), and of people having microchips implanted under their skin so that the New World Order can monitor and control their activities (Koernke 1993). Concentration camps are also being set up to intern dissenters, including militia activists. These supposed concentration camps are being established by FEMA, the federal

emergency management agency (Halpern, Levin 1996).

Militias sometimes respond to such perceived (though unrealistic) threats with terrorism or with preparations for terrorism. One example is the Blue Ridge Hunt Club, a Virginia militia. Members of this group were found stockpiling weapons, and one of them had a computer disk that contained a draft of the group's newsletter stating that the group planned to carry out terrorist actions against infrastructure facilities and to eliminate its enemies. There have also been examples of confrontations between militiamen and individual law enforcement officers that have been more spontaneous and that have resulted in violence (Halpern, Levin 1996).

The militia movement has also helped precipitate the movement to set up local judiciaries based upon Common Law. Borrowing from the Nehemiah Charter and similar compacts, common law advocates state that they do not recognize the jurisdiction or constitutionality of the federal court system. They often make the claim that the Constitution of the U.S. was suspended by the government years ago and was never restored, and that the legitimacy of their own bogus, ad hoc courts derives from the Bible, the Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights (Halpern, Levin 1996). Some members of this movement have established self-styled courts and have tried to file official looking but bogus documents with court clerks and other governmental officials (Skiba 1995). In extreme cases some of these courts reportedly have charged government officials with treason or other crimes, and have even threatened the death penalty (Estrada 1997).

Some of the terrorism may be engaged in as part of "leaderless resistance," a strategy in which militiamen organize into small cells of from three to five individuals, and strike at targets of their own choosing at times of their own choosing (Beam 1992; Halpern, Levin 1996; Ridgeway, Zeskind 1995). This is very similar to the tactics of Robert DePugh's Minutemen of the early 1960s (George, Wilcox 1996). The presumed benefits are that these small cells will be much less prone to detection or infiltration by law enforcement and others, and that it will be very difficult to show that movement leaders are legally responsible for crimes committed by their followers. Some fear that due to social control following the Oklahoma City bombing, leaderless

resistance is becoming the tactic of choice of the Phase Two militias (Southern Poverty Law Center 1996).

More work needs to be done on the links between the Constitutionalism of the early 1960s and that of Phase Two. To what extent does the modern movement draw upon that ideology? Is the New World Order simply the reincarnation of the Communist threat? Now that Communism is defeated, have the militias looked inward to find a new enemy (Aho 1994)?

ETIOLOGIES

Attempts to explain the rise of the militia movement have been oriented toward the Phase One militias. The four explanatory models discussed below could be considered ones that require further (retrospective) testing in Phase One, and initial testing for Phase Two.

At the conclusion of his field study of the Idaho Christian Patriots, Aho (1990) outlined the process of recruitment to right wing extremist groups. Based on his interviews with 530 patriots and an accumulation of secondary materials, that process is as follows. The potential recruit is first raised in a conservative or fundamentalist church and is socialized to a conservative or fundamentalist outlook. During this training the individual becomes aware of the conflict between religious standards and the world, and decides to become an active seeker of change in the world.

The key moment in the recruitment process occurs when the individual for the first time has access to the radical opportunity structure through associations with a family member, friend, co-worker, cellmate, lover or other person in the radical movement. After accepting the invitation to affiliate with the right wing group, the recruit increasingly isolates himself or herself from the conventional community. This might involve taking children out of public schools, accepting a socially or physically isolated job, moving to a rural area, renouncing conventional politics, or joining an exclusive sect. In the process he or she may be disowned by friends and family. The combined effect of all the isolating actions is that the believer is propelled into a deeper commitment to the movement.

While this is a grounded explanation of how people come to join extremist movements, it does not explain how one proceeds from the point of "joining" to the point of becoming a

paramilitarist, or to the point of engaging in terrorism. Not all of the militia become terrorists. As Aho (1990) observed, there is a division of heroic labor among the faithful: some pray; some petition; some are civilly disobedient; some write. Others—about 15 percent—take up arms and perform more unpleasant tasks of Christian Patriotism.

In a later work, Aho (1994) embraces an alternate model, social constructionism, to explain how enemies are socially constructed; this better explains the mobilization toward violence. According to this view, the first need of any warrior is to have an enemy. Without an enemy there is nothing against which to fight, nothing from which to save the world, and nothing to give meaning to life. If an enemy is not ontologically present in the nature of things, then one must be manufactured.

Drawing upon Berger and Luckmann (1967), Aho proffers that insofar as things in themselves can never be directly known, we should redirect our attention to phenomenology—to our experience of things. Phenomenology helps to describe in detail the contents of the world as presented to differently situated people, and then helps to analyze how that world has come to be or how it has become constructed. Our experience of the world is built up stepwise through reification or objectification. This process, as it relates to the construction of enemies, takes place in five actions. *Naming* involves a mistaken characterization of an enemy as an instance of an abstract category. *Legitimation* is the validation of this mistaken identification. *Mythmaking* is the retrospective mythologizing of the mistaken identity. *Sedimentation* is the embedding of the legendary tale in the memory of the next generation. *Ritual* is the dramatization of the myth's principal themes. The taking of "appropriate" action toward an enemy produces the enemy's "evil" and equally appropriate response—paranoia, distrust, savagery. In this way "the prophecy concerning (the enemy's) diabolism is uncannily fulfilled, the truth of the myth sustained" (Aho 1994). In other words, when the warrior strikes out at the enemy, the enemy's response reinforces the evil image of the enemy that the warrior has constructed.

This model adequately explains the construction of enemies, but does little to shed light on the particular kinds of enemy construction that is done in the contemporary citizen militias. Aho's model would apply to the militias but also, equally, to left-wing terrorism of

the 1970s in the form of the Black Liberation Army, the Symbionese Liberation Army, and the Republic of New Africa.

The third model, discussed by Aho (1994), might be called the "paramilitary culture" explanation. This historically-specific theory relates to American experience in Vietnam and how the war was "brought home" afterward (Gibson 1994). America's defeat in Vietnam in 1975 created a profound cultural crisis in the U.S. Not only did it break a long tradition of military victories, but defeat was at the hands of a third world Asian country that, by the technical and economic standards of the American war managers, should have been conquered easily.

To make the defeat sensible to their audiences, American cultural elites mythically re-invented the war. According to this revision of history, our men were fully capable of winning, but they were betrayed by corrupt and cowardly politicians, restrained from using their full might, and thus were not permitted to succeed. Hence, in the post-Vietnam era only *paramilitary* heroes, acting alone or in tightly knit groups can achieve success over the enemy. To be effective against the enemy, whether it be Asian, Arab, or homegrown, heroes must be SWAT trained and work covertly outside regular bureaucratic channels. Thus the spate of movies such as *Rambo*, *Delta Force*, and *Iron Eagle*; TV shows such as *A-Team* and *Magnum P.I.*; and in print genre, *Soldier of Fortune* and Tom Clancy's *Patriot Games*. Aho believes the romance of military argot, dress, demeanor and policy—in short, paramilitarism—is a partial explanation of why citizen militias came into being in the United States after 1975. He knows from his field work that several of these units were founded and staffed by Vietnam veterans bitter over their alleged betrayal by the government in Southeast Asia.

The final model, rejected by Aho (1990), is the "structural strain" argument. Following Bell (1963), this position states that postwar American prosperity was the root condition for conservative expression (see discussion in Wolfe 1981). Prosperity, especially if accompanied by inflation, gives rise to right wing discontent. It brings in its wake new social groups, new social strains and new social anxieties. Modernism, a by-product of prosperity, results in the economy becoming more efficient due to concentration. Foreign policy becomes premised on globalism; political

expression becomes more urbane. Hence the social sources of the radical right could be found among those groups left behind in the triumph of modernity: small and medium sized businessmen losing out to monopolies; farmers and managers displaced by new technologies; isolationists and traditional military officers upset with economies and strategies beyond their intellectual grasp. Bell (1963) called the radical right "the dispossessed" who were frustrated, "unable to understand let alone command the mass society that is the polity today."

Lipset and Raub's (1978) elaboration on this general theme was that right-wing movements are primarily preservative and backlash in nature (see discussion in Aho [1990]). Right wingers want to retrieve the past, a past sometimes imagined to be better than it really was. The right wing attracts those whose status in the world is threatened with displacement. Those whose class position and power in society are threatened dramatize their superiority through their lifestyle because they have little else with which to draw attention to themselves. Inflicting their morality on others is a way for right wingers to shore up their sagging esteem.

To Lipset and Raub, extremists are ordinary people caught up in certain kinds of stress, particularly the stress of losing their position in the world. The disconcerting elements of right wing ideology--among other things, its "paranoid" preoccupation with conspiracy and with internal and external enemies (Hofstadter 1979)--are less neurotic symptoms than they are the "cultural baggage" that any American group must adopt if its commodity is to be marketed successfully. That baggage can have a dynamic of its own, but to rightists it is secondary to the underlying social strains and the stresses that accompany those strains.

Much of Aho's field data contradict the structural strain argument. The Patriots were demographically similar to average Idahoans. Objective evidence of marginality or dispossession was lacking. Weinberg (1993) put forth two explanations for this anomaly. First, *relative dispossession* may be at work, i.e., the feeling of dispossession by whites *compared* to the socioeconomic gains made by minorities during the 1980s. Second, because of structural change in the economy, *actual dispossession* occurred. The earnings gap between the top and bottom earners was

growing, and there was an erosion of earning power in the farming-manufacturing sector and the service sector. Thus middle and working class whites indeed felt a real decline in their earning power. The combination of perceived and actual dispossession could have aided the recruitment of right wing extremists during the 1980s. The above discussion suggests that the structural strain argument continues to be viable despite its apparent inability to explain the data we currently have on the Phase One militias.

An alternative way of conceptualizing militias is to frame them within the context of the concepts of hate crime and domestic terrorism. Developing a theory of hate crime or domestic terrorism is well beyond the scope of this paper. However, the relationship between the militias and the two concepts is logical, given that at least a portion of militia activities qualify as one or the other and, sometimes, as both. This effort is hindered by the fact that both concepts suffer from a lack of theoretical specification.

According to the Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990, hate crimes were defined as crimes that manifest evidence of prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, and crimes where the offenders' actions were motivated, in whole or in part, by bias (Hamm 1996). States' interpretations of what constitutes hate crime varied widely; for example, thirty-one states recognize cross burning as a hate crime and twenty states do not. Twelve states considered paramilitary training and fomenting racial violence as part of their statutes. In these states, an active militia that engages in paramilitary training violates the hate crime statute by its mere existence (Hamm 1996).

Another concern is the degree to which the militias encourage others, usually the most radical fringes outside the militias, to engage in hate crime. Just as Tom Metzger's White Aryan Resistance urged skinheads to engage in preemptive strikes against perceived enemies and then claim "self defense" (Hamm 1993; Levin, McDevitt 1993), militia rhetoric may become the motivator for militia "outsiders" to "strike out." According to this line of thought, a "Patriot" may see it his or her duty to strike out at the New World Order, then proclaim that it was being done to "defend" America against the collectivist onslaught. Underlying the act, of course, is an intense hatred of the federal government--inflamed by militia

rhetoric—that is believed to be part of the NWO con-spiracy. This dynamic played a role in the Okla-homa City bombing case. Apparently forced out of the Michigan Militia because of their radi-calism—but still incited by the group's rhetoric —McVeigh and Nichols decided that the time for talk was over and that action or “propaganda of the deed” was essential.

Framing the militias within the context of domestic terrorism is even more difficult. There is a lack of consensus in the research community over the definition of domestic terrorism, and, as Hamm (1996) notes, there are actually no laws against it - no federal or state statutes outlawing terrorism on American soil. Hence, when terrorists are arrested they must be charged with other crimes. McVeigh, for instance, was charged under 18 USC 844 with “malicious danger and destroying by means of an explosive a federal building” (Hamm 1996).

Despite the theoretic ambiguity, a sociologically significant process was at work as McVeigh and Nichols became educated as terrorists. The pair, together with Michael Fortier, provided a support group that encouraged, in Sutherland's terms, definitions favorable to rule violation. The trio's training in the U.S. military supplied the group with the knowledge it needed to carry out the bombing. McVeigh and Nichols' seeking out of the Michigan Militia appeared to be a furtherance of the process of gaining group support and technical know how.

Beyond these admittedly preliminary observations, there are more questions to be answered. For example, at what point in the group dynamic do individuals in similar circumstances (similar to McVeigh/Nichols) decide to carry out “the propaganda of the deed?” Are the documented instances of domestic terrorism that have been “linked” to militias to date situations that are similar to, or different from, those involving the Oklahoma City bombers and the Michigan Militia? It is clear that much more investigative work needs to be done, much of it basic, before we can adequately begin to conceptualize the militias within the framework of domestic terrorism.

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