

Stuart A. Wright. *Patriots, Politics and the Oklahoma City Bombing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 237. \$22.99. ISBN 978-0-521-69419-3

At a time when much of our policy concerns are centered on the threats posed by porous borders, *Patriots, Politics and the Oklahoma City Bombing* offers a sobering analysis of the terrorist threats posed by native militants. Wright contends that too little attention has been paid to right-wing movements among social movement scholars who over the past forty-years have focused almost exclusively on progressive and left wing movements. How can we explain the motives and actions of far right groups? What helps explain the rise in right wing militancy throughout the Cold War era? Why has rural America become a reservoir for such movements? How is this study relevant for the post-9/11 era? Wright suggests that answers lie in uncovering factors that propelled the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995.

The book begins by offering a profile of the contemporary Patriot movement in the United States through the context of the social movement literature. As a sociologist, Wright's work is informed by process theory and the expanding analytic contributions of contentious politics literature. Next, it proceeds to explain the insurgency of the Patriot movement by chronicling the farm crisis of the 1970s-80s viewed by Wright as the early seeds for solidifying the Patriot movement's foothold in rural America. Wright contends that the Patriot movement originated in the Cold War through meta narratives about the communist

threat and it was further fueled by the civil rights era that extended racial equality. Next, the author offers a detailed analysis of the guns right network, and how this network that contributed to a mutual culture of war that caused both investigative government agencies and far right groups to project mirror images of hostile intent upon one another

At the center of his theoretical argument is the idea that a *culture of warfare* contributed to a mutual threat perceived by both the state and far wing militants. Both parties constructed warfare scripts that defined the other as “enemy”. The rhetoric of warfare served to affirm and fuel each other’s perception of threat giving way to an upward spiral of violence. Through extensive research including face-to-face interviews with Timothy McVeigh, Wright suggests that despite government efforts to spin the lone wolf thesis, significant evidence posits that McVeigh was firmly entrenched in the Patriot movement, a loose coalition of militant right groups, and was part of a network of “warrior cells” that planned and implemented the bombing. The terrorist act resulted from the home-grown rage boiling in the Patriot movement in response to the government’s handling of Waco a few years earlier. “McVeigh believed” argues Wright, “that the siege at Waco was a *military* operation carried out illegally against American citizens” (p.5).

The author then develops a framework for conceptualizing why Patriot groups shared a perception that government was waging a war against its own citizens. He attributes this to the state’s increased efforts to define and frame social control in terms of “warfare” predicated on claims of an increasing threat posed by crime and drugs. His historical reference begins with the downsizing of the federal government under the Reagan years, but where federal crime and drug control programs mushroomed and became increasingly integrated with the military. One important development in the political environment that helped far-right movement actors and organizations mobilize arose with the 1980s “farm crisis” involving the largest displacement of farm families since the Great Depression. The contempt for the federal government that ensued in rural America was seized upon by far-right groups framing the problem as a conspiracy of state elites. Framing disputes with government as “warfare” assumed new levels of resonance throughout the 1990s through the exaggerated fears embodied in the disarmament campaign by the state. By 1995, significant numbers of Patriots believed they were engaged in a war with government.

Wright pays a great deal of attention to the Ruby Ridge and Waco debacles as illustrative case studies of the evolving contentious dynamics that ensued. The final chapter assesses the demobilizing impact the Oklahoma City Bombing had on the Patriot movement. While McVeigh was trying to draw attention to the Patriot movement, the OKC bombing had the adverse effect leading to enormous public outcry and a precipitous decline in far-right organization and activity. The Southern Poverty Law Center reported the number of active Patriot groups between 1996 and 2000 dropped from 858 to 194. It was not until after 9/11 that a resurgence in far-right militancy regained momentum. Looking to reinvent themselves in a shifting political climate, far-right groups have sought the opportunity to manufacture new enemies, fuel public apprehensions and fears and broker new ties to like-minded groups. Under a climate of national security and the accompanying militarization of U.S. foreign policy in Iraq, new conditions have been created for resurgence in far-right militancy.

Perhaps most frightening of this book's revelations is the mention of the increase in large numbers of white supremacists and far-right militants enlisting in the armed forces as a result of the surge in militarism following 9/11. The war in Iraq has given far right militants access to sophisticated weaponry, combat tactics, training and contact with other military personnel. Timothy McVeigh, a decorated veteran of the Gulf War, ostensibly became drawn to a network of Patriot insurgents during his tenure in the armed forces. The mega narrative on patrolling the U.S.-Mexico border through vigilantism may in part be a redirected focus of the far-right movement. *Patriots, Politics and the Oklahoma City Bombing* makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of internal dissent and to socio-historical circumstances which feed it.

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