

**The Rising Tide of the American Militia: An Unlikely Product of 21st Century
Intervention**

By
Erik Kellomaki

Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in the Curriculum of Peace, War, and Defense
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

2016

APPROVED: _____ (Advisor)
Dr. Michael Waltman
Department of Communication

APPROVED: _____ (Reader)
LTC Daniel Knott, USA AV
Professor of Military Science

APPROVED: _____ (Reader)
Dr. Charles Kurzman
Department of Sociology

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Brett Whalen, a professor in medieval history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Whalen developed the love of research in me and he taught me to enjoy the thrill of coming to a profound realization. Without Dr. Whalen's mentorship and guidance, I would not have appreciated research nearly as much and likewise this project would cease to exist. I hope to share my appreciation of scholarship and academia with others in the same way that he shared it with me.

I would also like to thank Dr. Michael Waltman. Dr. Waltman has not only served as an advisor for this thesis, but has been instrumental in providing me with resource suggestions to continue and expand my research. He has challenged me to think deeply about the subject material and even invited me to participate on an academic panel at the National Communication Association's Annual Conference in Las Vegas, NV in November 2015, which was an honor and a privilege.

The Rising Tide of the American Militia: An Unlikely Product of 21st Century

Intervention

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. List of Acronyms - 4
2. Introduction: Staring Down the Barrel of a Comrade's Rifle: An Introduction to the Modern American Militia Movement - 5
3. The Militia and the Citizen-Soldier's Guns Aimed at Washington: An American Tradition? - 11
4. Why Now? The Modern American Militia Movement as a Product of Fallujah and Fear - 38
5. Battle! Not Through Gunfire, But Expression and Image - 71
6. Conclusion: Looking Toward the Future - 94
7. Works Cited - 98

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ATF – Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms

BLM – Bureau of Land Management

CS – 2-chlorobenzalmalononitrile

FARC – Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (trans. Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia)

FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigation

FEAR [militia] – Forever Enduring Always Ready

DHS – Department of Homeland Security

MAMM – Modern American Militia Movement

MOM – Militia of Montana

Introduction

Staring Down the Barrel of a Comrade's Rifle: An Introduction to the Modern American Militia Movement

As flames and riots ravaged the city of Ferguson, Missouri after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed black teen, by Darren Wilson, a white police officer, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon deployed the state's National Guard and called for additional law enforcement.¹ Armed with sniper teams, assault rifles, concussion grenades, and mine resistant ambush protected vehicles, these uniformed individuals did not resemble "your friendly neighborhood cops," but rather the US occupation of Baghdad in 2006 during the height of the Second Gulf War.² The militarized troops and law enforcement most likely anticipated their eminent clash with the legions of protestors who were upset with the actions seen to be symbolic of endemic racial issues. What they probably did not expect was a second front they would have to muster against – that of constitutional militias seeking to stake their claim in the turmoil and conflict.

During late November 2014, a period marked by both frequent and intense reports of arson and looting throughout the city of Ferguson, a group known as the Oath Keepers approached the site of the seeming American warzone. Also flaunting military-grade weapons and equipment, the organization presented itself as a heroic vigilante-like group

¹ Erin McClam, Tracy Jarrett and Hasani Gittens, "Governor Nixon Orders 2,200 National Guard Troops into Ferguson," *NBC News*, published 25 NOV 2014, accessed 10 SEP 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/michael-brown-shooting/governor-nixon-orders-2-200-national-guard-troops-ferguson-n255931>.

² Paul D. Shinkman, "Ferguson and the Militarization of Police," *U.S. News*, published 14 AUG 2014, accessed 10 SEP 2015, <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/08/14/ferguson-and-the-shocking-nature-of-us-police-militarization>.

that sought to protect the citizens of Ferguson from both the violence of the protests as well as the militarized forces under Federal control.³ Upon arrival, the militia quickly organized itself into small “Community Preparedness Teams” and mounted atop and residential and commercial buildings of areas of high rates of violence in order to guard them. Seeking to control the chaos of the city and prevent future violence, the National Guard and Ferguson police dubbed the Oath Keepers “domestic terrorists” and ordered them to stand down. When the Oath Keepers refused to comply, tension built as the militia’s leadership even alleged that federal sniper teams engaged their members by aiming their rifles at them.⁴ Considering that the armed action component of the militia is comprised entirely of current and former military and law enforcement, it seems strange that these men who may have recently served alongside each other now stand with rifles pointed at their compatriots.⁵

Self-described as “a non-partisan association of current and formerly serving military, police, and first responders, who pledge to fulfill the oath all military and police take to defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic,” the Oath Keepers stands as only one of many involved the modern American militia movement.⁶ Here, I define the modern American militia movement as a recent political and social

³ Terrence McCoy, “The Oath Keepers: The Little Known Militia Now Roaming the Streets of Ferguson,” *The Washington Post*, published 1 DEC 2014, accessed 10 SEP 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/12/01/the-oath-keepers-the-militant-militia-now-roaming-the-streets-of-ferguson>.

⁴ Joshua Cook, “Exclusive: Called “Domestic Terrorists” by the Feds, Oath Keepers Help Stop Ferguson from Burning,” *Truth In Media*, published 30 NOV 2014, accessed 10 SEP 2015, <http://truthinmedia.com/exclusive-interview-called-domestic-terrorists-by-the-feds-oath-keepers-help-stop-ferguson-from-burning>.

⁵ “About Oath Keepers,” *Oath Keepers*, published 2015, accessed 10 SEP 2015, <http://oathkeepers.org/oktester/about>.

⁶ Ibid.

trend beginning in 2008 that marks the massive escalation of the number of Americans tracked as being a part of anti-government hate groups.⁷

Although still relatively unknown by the much of the American public, domestic militia participation is at an all-time high and has skyrocketed in recent years.

Furthermore, many militia groups have managed to break their traditional image of trigger-happy uneducated racists. Some groups have even gained mainstream media coverage and have received a somewhat positive response from many Americans unsatisfied with the domestic political situation.⁸ Although this trend is marked by a complex interplay of domestic factors, the United States 21st century intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan has played a major role in the rise of the militia. This essay seeks to argue three major points: (a) the current militia is not a new phenomenon in the United States and that militia of this sort has been an ever-present concept in American history, (b) the Modern American Militia Movement is a product of the legacy of militias in the 1990's as well as US intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan and the current perception of American government, (c) the right-wing populist movement and the federal government fight a constant rhetorical and ideological battle in the American public over the notion of sovereignty.

Although not all militia groups and members take the same radical anti-government right wing, populist stance as the Oath Keepers, this essay purely seeks to address groups that take a grassroots approach, have an ideology focused on

⁷ Mark Potok, "The Antigovernment 'Patriot' Movement Expands for the Fourth Year in a Row as Hate Groups Remain at Near-Historic Highs," Southern Poverty Law Center, published 4 MAR 2013, accessed 10 SEP 2015, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2013/year-hate-and-extremism>.

⁸ Daryl Johnson, *Right Wing Resurgence: How a Domestic Terrorist Threat is Being Ignored* (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), 205.

constitutionality, a fervent belief in the principle of limited government, as especially the Second Amendment. It is important to understand the diversity of beliefs, tenants, and call to action within the current active American militias, and furthermore the sheer diversity of ideas that may exist within each individual militia unit.

Although it is highly interesting to study the makeup and ideological foundations of the American militia in academia, knowledge on this topic remains especially critical as confrontations with these groups and individuals has resulted in some of the most violent acts perpetuated in United States history. The greatest domestic terrorist attack on United States soil, the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh in 1995, remains enshrouded in much of the same ideology that the modern American militia movement exhibits today.⁹ Although no attacks of the same magnitude have occurred since, the popularity and radicalization of the ideology behind this type of violence is growing and likewise, the nation is experiencing a recent spike in anti-government violence, threats, and crime. These acts take many forms whether the accumulation of illegal and highly destructive weapons, the conspiracy to conduct a chemical attack on government buildings, or the growing regularity of armed standoffs between militia and federal forces over land disputes gone awry.¹⁰ Without a doubt, there is a growing need to first understand the modern American militia movement in order to mitigate the possible negative effects of the growing national tension.

⁹ D.J. Mulloy, "Introduction," *Homegrown Revolutionaries: An American Militia Reader*, ed. by D. J. Mulloy, (Norwich, UK: EAS Publishing, 1999), 11.

¹⁰ "Domestic Violent Extremists Pose Increased Threat to Government Officials and Law Enforcement," *Department of Homeland Security*, published 22 JUL 2014, accessed 18 APR 2016, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/DHS-DomesticViolentExtremists.pdf>.

Intrinsically, understanding the causes for the rise in the militia movement rests as an important and necessary initial step.

Up to this point, very little research has been conducted on the militia organizations formed and growing post-2008, and many fail to realize that these new militia movements exhibit a highly different structure, ideology, and set of targets from their 1990's counterparts. Even less research exists on the actual causes of the skyrocketing motion of the movement's popularity. This thesis seeks to fill this informational void and assert that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan played an instrumental role not only in the organizational mobilization of the modern American militia movement, but also in molding its constitutionally-focused, anti-government, patriot ideology and the way it conducts its operations. Although the 21st century American intervention influenced militia resurgence to a high degree, it is essential to note that changing domestic political conditions paralleled it. In order to best understand the subject matter, this thesis seeks to not paint the American militia as heroes nor as barbaric, hateful gunslingers, but as an ideologically determined minority group that is willing to threaten and even resort to violence for its political purposes.

In its first chapter, this essay argues that although it is changing, the notion of militia has always been an establishment throughout United States history. The following chapter seeks to attribute the Modern American Militia Movement to the legacy of fear and anti-government militias of the 1990's as well as the foreign policy intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 21st century. The final chapter moves to examine the domestic actions of constitutional militia groups and other related right-wing rhetoric in response to major national events, such as the Bundy Ranch standoff, the Ferguson

unrest, and the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge takeover, and how these responses stem from lessons learned and overseas experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. In conclusion, this thesis will discuss both the dangers and limitations of this growing domestic security issue and potential ways to mitigate conflict.

Due to the sheer lack of academic research conducted on the Modern American Militia Movement, this thesis will utilize a variety of medium as primary sources. These range from the webpages and forum posts of militia movements themselves to amateur videos recorded even off of personal cellphones of militia action to printed transcripts, radio, and video interviews of militia members of their opponents. These sources prove as the richest source material on the militia movements due to their raw non-tampered nature. In essence, what can be more useful to understand the motivations, experiences, and stories behind the modern American militia movement than the way that the militia movements choose to present themselves? In addition, much source material on the notion of the American militia from its colonial beginnings to its heightened scare in the 1990's will be pulled from the plethora of existing primary and secondary sources. Unlike the current source pool, these sources often exhibit the form of congressional hearings, government documents, as well as narratives and their accompanying secondary and tertiary source literature. Much of what the militia movements do remains highly controversial and even the most basic information are widely disputed between sides. This thesis recognizes that there may be no single "truth" to many of the events and accounts given, but merely seeks to understand the tension and rhetoric behind each voice and tie it to greater questions.

Chapter One

The Militia and the Citizen-Soldier's Guns Aimed at Washington: An American Tradition?

Underneath Daniel Chester French's statue "The Minute Man," a monument to the citizen-soldier in the American Revolutionary War, lies Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous stanza echoing the legacy of the Battle of Lexington and Concord. The text is short, simple and is read by many young schoolchildren across America as a piece of history and pride in the American spirit of independence.¹¹ These four simple lines describe the magnitude of the 'common farmer's' actions and their impact across the world in saying:

"By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world."¹²

Although the exact details of the fighting are often blurred and widely disputed, the Battles at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775 marked the successful attempt of American colonists armed with muskets in repulsing the British Regulars long enough to prevent them from seizing the colonial militia's weapons cache. Drawing on both the use of firearms against a force seen to be tyrannical and the sacrifice of the common farmer

¹¹ D.J. Mulloy, *American Extremism: History, Politics, and the Militia Movement*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 50.

¹² Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Hymn to Concord Monument," in *American Extremism: History, Politics, and the Militia Movement*, ed. D.J. Mulloy, (London: Routledge, 2004), 50.

in the Revolution, modern militias draw important legacy from April 19, 1775.¹³

Naturally, the Oath Keepers, the most prominent group in the Modern American Militia Movement, chose to launch its organization on April 19, 2009 on Lexington Green, Massachusetts. Founder Stewart Rhodes described his decision and drew upon the historical symbolism of the events:

“The Founders Republic was born on April 19, 1775 when the American patriots stood their ground and gave ball for ball. It was born in hot lead, cold steel, and the cries of wounded men, the cries of anger of the patriots, and the cries of fear of the Red Coats as they were chased back to Boston with a swarm of pissed off patriots all around them at every step. That is when this Republic was born. The Declaration of Independence, while clearly momentous and timeless in its statement of principles that form the foundation of our American Creed, was really the birth certificate of our Republic – the official recognition of what had already taken place over a year prior.”¹⁴

Rhodes’ rhetoric on the significance of the Battle of Lexington and Concord and militia’s role in the American Revolution is not unique to the Modern American Militia Movement. Norman Olson, the former leader and founder of the Michigan Militia, called for the establishment of Patriot Day on April 19th, which he considered to be “an important date for liberty and tyranny.”¹⁵ In another instance, the Militia of Montana attempted to prevent the execution of Richard Snell, a murderer ideologically associated with the militia movement, by drawing on the rhetoric of the Revolutionary War. Although seeming rather outlandish, they pointed out the coincidence behind Snell’s April 19th execution, which not only coincided with the Battle of Lexington and Concord,

¹³ Lane Crothers, *Rage on the Right: The American Militia Movement from Ruby Ridge to Homeland Security*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 26.

¹⁴ Elias Alias, “Sixth Anniversary Message from Stewart Rhodes,” *Oath Keepers*, published 20 APR 2015, accessed 14 OCT 2015, <http://oathkeepers.org/oktester/stewart-rhodes-sixth-anniversary-essay/>.

¹⁵ Mulloy, *American Extremism*, 50.

but also the sacking of Warsaw by the Nazis, the federal raid on Randy Weaver's home, and the burning of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas.¹⁶ To these militiamen, Lexington and Concord had become immortalized as a symbol of the fight against tyranny and oppression.

Noting the influence of the American Revolution and the militia's role in the early nation on shaping the militia's perception of itself, it is necessary to understand the history of the militia movement throughout the course of the nation. This section will first elaborate on how the American militia characterized the notion of 'patriotism' and became an institution of resistance to tyranny in the Revolutionary and Early Republic Periods. It will then outline how the militia changed and how political events, especially under the administration of Andrew Jackson, caused many Americans and militia members to view the federal government as the 'true tyrant.' Finally, the chapter will describe the rise of right-wing populist movements in the post-WWII period and how they blended religious, ethnocentric, economic and political elements of discourse to further the militia cause. Rooted in a strange combination of Revolutionary and modern history, the Modern American Militia Movement's ideology, tactics, and actions have been profoundly influenced by its past as well as US intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The American militia has not been confined to a single way of interacting with the United States government since its conception, but instead underwent vast transformations of behavior from the nation's birth to its current status. These transformations can be marked by three distinct periods: the Revolutionary War and the

¹⁶ Mulloy, *American Extremism*, 51.

early republic when militias worked hand in hand with federal interests, the early 19th century when militias began to operate independently of government, and finally the post-WWII period when militias began to fear government. Furthermore, although this trend applies to most historical militia cases within the United States, the militia throughout America should not be reified as a single object.

The Post-Revolutionary Period: The Militia as an Institution of Resistance to Tyranny

The history of the militia movement within the United States has always remained a pivotal point of contention between members of the Modern American Militia Movement and its opposition. As mentioned previously, some like Stewart Rhodes argued for the militia's ever-present safeguard against tyranny both from foreign and domestic threats. Critics, like President Clinton, argue that many militia groups appropriate their colonial background and do not serve as a modern comparison.¹⁷ Whether militia groups are an accurate comparison to their historical counterpart is unimportant, and what should be focused on instead is how history has had a profound impact on militia groups in their formation of their notion of the patriotic identity, their ideology, and their relationship with the government.

Contrary to the roles and ideology of today's anti-government militia groups, the militia played an important role in not only assisting the federal government in times of duress in early independent America, but also in winning the War for Independence from Britain in 1783. This early historical period impacted the Modern American Militia Movement by characterizing its notion of 'patriot' as well as identifying the militia as an

¹⁷ Mulloy, *American Extremism*, 51.

institution of resistance. These sentiments toward government were rooted in 18th century political philosophy of a general distrust of government and its natural inability to perform its obligations to its people. This belief in Republicanism was not inherently a new thought, but was developed out of previous historical examples such as the Roman Empire, which stressed that the power of the central government rested on stronger, local forms of government.¹⁸ The American framework of government also applied the Enlightenment ideals of Locke, Rousseau, and Voltaire by guaranteeing liberty, inalienable rights, and a rejection of inherited power in the United States Constitution as well as the pre-existing Articles of Confederation.¹⁹

Most commonly referring to a love for one's country, the notion of 'patriotism' has been appropriated by the militia movement to include a more specific definition. While also including the more common definition, the militia movement has used its history in the American Revolution to articulately define patriotism as embodying and supporting the early ideals of Republicanism and limited government. Not only did many Revolutionary militia groups believe in these political principles, their structure and missions were directly tied to demonstrating their practical application.

Although the American militia of the Revolutionary Period has often faced modern criticism for its unreliability, poor training, and equipment, its role proved more significant in an ideological rather than a military sense. While the Continental Army under the control of General George Washington did the majority of fighting, local

¹⁸ Barry Balleck, *Allegiance to Liberty: The Changing Face of Patriots, Militias, and Political Violence in America*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2015), 4.

¹⁹ "Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau on Government," *Constitutional Rights Foundation*, published Spring 2004, accessed 20 OCT 2015, <http://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-20-2-c-hobbes-locke-montesquieu-and-rousseau-on-government.html>.

militia units played an invaluable role in supplementing its efforts. Militias were organized at the company level and were placed under the control of the Governor of each state.²⁰ They existed in all thirteen colonies, and while their cause and commitment differed between them, they served three major purposes: holding communities to the patriot cause through indoctrination and intimidation, providing large amounts of armed manpower for short periods of battle, and creating a system authorities could use to continuously draft men into the Continental army to sustain its numbers.²¹ Through these actions militias manifested the early ideals of a limited government as decision-making and autonomy were placed into the hands of local company commanders who recruited using the ideals of ‘civic duty to the patriot cause’. These militias existed outside of the confines of government, reflecting a suspicion toward government and the dangers posed by a standing army. While officers were social elites directly appointed by state governors, most militia members were working class individuals of varying degrees of technical expertise and education, reflecting the involvement of the common man in government.²²

Accordingly so, the militia’s post-war legacy not only endured but also thrived in the early United States of America and revolved around their commitment to the causes of liberty, ‘patriotism,’ and Republicanism. Dubbed by many modern historians as a myth, the military importance and testaments of the militia were hugely exaggerated, but still found popularity with many of the Founding Fathers who wove the militia into the political framework of the nation and used it as a selling point for a stronger central

²⁰ John K. Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1983), 16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

²² *Ibid.*, 16.

government. *The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union*, the earliest agreement between the thirteen states, established a rigid framework for the federal government and severely limited its scope of action. Barring the federal government from raising an army during peacetime, the contract allocated for states to: "...always keep up a well-regulated and disciplined militia, sufficiently armed and accoutered, and shall provide and constantly have ready for use, in public stores, a due number of filed pieces and tents, and a proper quantity of arms, ammunition and camp equipage."²³ The document not only shapes the militia to be a civic defense institution, but also blends it to be an institution of resistance against tyranny in the belief that armed mass participation could topple any power-seeking tyrant as either a foreign or domestic threat.

Despite the early harmony between the militia and the government, conflict would shortly arise as it did during Shay's Rebellion in 1787 and 1788, proving that the interests of the government and unorganized militia would not always align. In order to pay for the damages caused by the War for Independence, the United States government began collecting heavy taxes and seizing land by way of the states. Already driven into poverty by the lack of attention given to their farms during the war, a group of armed Revolutionary War veterans led by Daniel Shay attempted to stop tax and debt collecting efforts in Massachusetts as a perceived injustice and infringement on the American people by forcibly seizing the armory at Springfield. Unable to stop them due to the inability to raise an army, the Massachusetts state government raised a private militia off

²³ *The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union*, Article 6, Clause 4.

of merchant funds to stop Shay's gang.²⁴ Interestingly, both groups could be considered militias by early colonial standards. Both believed they embodied both the principles patriotism toward the notion of limited government and saw themselves as resisting tyranny. The only difference was that Shay's group found the government as tyrannically operating outside of its authorized role, while the merchant-raised militia, although possibly motivated by profit, saw Daniel Shay's militia as a tyranny of the masses, similar to a riot. This tension over the role of the government and the notion of domestic tyranny would carry forward, even to the present, and would underline the militia's construction of the enemy. Realizing that the United States government under *The Articles of Confederation* was too weak to handle domestic chaos and insurrections, the *Constitution* was ratified and adopted in 1787 to allocate greater power to the federal government.

Although it might seem that the notion of the militia was problematic as a check on domestic 'tyranny', the militia nevertheless found its way into the *United States Constitution* as the Founding Fathers pressed its urgency as a political tool. For example in the *Federalist Papers*, a collection of articles and essays from a variety of authors supporting the ratification of the Constitution, Alexander Hamilton stated "The advantages obtained in one place must be abandoned to subdue the opposition in others; and the moment the part which had been reduced to submission was left to itself, its efforts would be renewed, and its resistance revive."²⁵ Here he highlights the possibility of tyranny behind an organized military and presses for the militia as a testament to

²⁴ Robert H. Churchill, *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant's Face: Libertarian Political Violence and the Origins of the Militia Movement*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 40-41.

²⁵ Crothers, *Rage on the Right*, 30.

safeguarding American liberties. In addition, James Madison when discussing how the early nation would oppose impulses of tyranny wrote:

“To [this army] would be opposed a militia amounting to near half a million citizens with arms in their hands, officered by men chosen from among themselves, fighting for their common liberties and united and conducted by governments possessing their affections and confidence. It may well be doubted whether a militia thus circumstanced could ever be conquered by such a proportion of regular troops.”²⁶

In his writing, Madison explains his belief in the power of the militia over conventional armies and its direct tie to American political values. Their rhetoric resonated well with the American people and state representatives and likewise Article 1, Section 8 of the ratified Constitution states:

"The Congress shall have the power ... To provide for calling forth the militia to execute the laws of the Union, suppress insurrections and repel invasions ... To provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining, the militia, and for governing such part of them as may be employed in the service of the United States, reserving to the states respectively, the appointment of officers, and the authority of training the militia according to the discipline prescribed by Congress."²⁷

Furthermore, the Second Amendment to the Bill of Rights, ratified in 1791 as a guarantee of personal freedoms for those fearing the governments expanded power under the Constitution, still upheld the importance of the militia in stating: “A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.”²⁸ While some of the rhetoric was changed to nix the term ‘unorganized’ and replace it with ‘well regulated,’ little changed in political theory with the militia being a manifestation of an institution to the resistance of tyranny and embodying the early ideals of American government.

²⁶ Crothers, *Rage on the Right*, 30.

²⁷ *United States Constitution*, Article 1, Section 8.

²⁸ *United States Constitution*, Amendment II, Section 1.

However in spite of the support militias received following the collapse of the British Empire over the American colonies, some elaborated on the dismal realism behind the militias. While some militia groups succeeded militarily though such as the citizens at Lexington and Concord, Daniel Morgan's Sharpshooters, and Francis Marion's Swamp Fighters, most did not and many harped upon their lack of prowess in battle.²⁹ General George Washington remained skeptical of the militia as a whole, even stating:

“The dependence, which Congress have placed upon (them)... I fear will totally ruin our cause. Being subject to no control themselves, they introduce disorder among the troops... while change in living brings on sickness; this makes them impatient to get home... and introduces abominable desertions.”³⁰

Washington's fears of the lack of organization and inevitable chaos within the American militia system proved true in the Early Republic. After he became the first President of the United States, a tax was imposed on whiskey in order to recompense some of the unpaid Revolutionary War debts. However, the Whiskey Tax was met with hostility as many Americans saw it as an assault on their right to get drunk. Just like before with Shay's Rebellion, in 1791 protestors in Western Pennsylvania formed a militia, used fear, intimidation and even violence against tax collectors and believed they were fighting for the principles of the revolution.³¹ But unlike Shay's Rebellion, the US government used its now authorized army to put down the rebellion in a much quicker and more effective manner, turning the government's focus away from using militias to handle domestic disputes.

²⁹ Crothers, *Rage on the Right*, 28.

³⁰ Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, 43.

³¹ Balleck, *Allegiance to Liberty*, 29-31.

As an institution, the militia began to operate independently from the government, even though legislation still strongly encouraged participation. The Militia Act of 1792 required most free white males between eighteen and forty-five to own firearms and attend regular training. However, neither the state nor federal governments enforced this.³² In this way, the militia remained as an American institution of resistance to tyranny that embodied the early national principles of limited government. Outside of a few major events like defending the City of Baltimore from British siege during the war of 1812, the militia would play a limited role in assisting the federal government for defensive purposes from the 19th century onwards.³³ American expansion in the West and the Civil War gave militias the conditions to operate independently, while remaining an institution of resistance to tyranny and embodying the early ideals of American government.

The Civil War Antebellum Period: The Development of a Domestic Tyrant

In the early nineteenth century, the notion of the militia began to shift away from its previous role of serving alongside the federal government as it struggled to reckon with the expansion of federal power and national reign. In the post-revolution through antebellum period, the American militia became characterized by three major facets: its organizational changes which occurred due to its not being as directly connected with government, its association with the expanding Western frontier, as well as its strong discontent versed towards the actions and expansions of federal power.

³² Barry M. Stentiford, *The American Home Guard: The State Militia in the Twentieth Century*, (College Station, TX, USA: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, 7.

As opposed to receiving military objectives from the federal government in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, American militias gradually received less and less government oversight in the antebellum period. Much of this rationale stemmed from the growing fear of standing armies and militias heavily managed by government. Up until to the 1820's, militia participation was mandated and there were approximately 1.5 to 2 million males slotted for service at one point.³⁴ While these might appear to be impressive figures, many of these individuals did not report for service and those who did were often poorly equipped and trained. In addition to this, militia volunteers were often drafted from the lower classes of society and labor unions frequently held protests and riots to protect their members from service in the 1840's and 50's.³⁵

As a result of the ineffectiveness and discontent versed towards the previous system based on civil duty, state governors took over to exclusively manage their state militias and switched to an all-volunteer system.³⁶ The movement against mandatory military service and standing armies was so prevalent that some legislators even tried to push a bill through congress shutting down the United States Military Academy at West Point, which they dubbed a mercenary institution that would lead the United States to failure in the same way that Rome, Carthage, and Greece failed by having their armies built out of mercenary greed rather than loyalty. As a countermeasure they proposed diverting the funds into these now volunteer militia organizations. Some individuals, like Edward Black, a congressman from Georgia, professed: "The best army we can have is the armed people – the citizen of this country who will fight for a great stake – for their

³⁴ Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, 80.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

wives and children, their homesteads and their honor.”³⁷ While these radical changes failed to pass through Congress, Congress did cut the permitted amount of enlisted soldiers from 10,000 to 5,642 in 1821 and halved the funding allocated for defense fortifications.³⁸ The new volunteer-based militia system required members to pay for their uniforms and equipment, but states incentivized participation by cutting the taxes of militia members; in return, militias often functioned as a military wing to local and state law enforcement units.³⁹ Still ideologically valued as a better alternative to massive standing armies, these militia units also served as a reserve force during wartime as militia volunteers consisted of 70% of the troops deployed in the Mexican-American War.⁴⁰

Militias fell under scrutiny with some of their actions as serving as law enforcement for some controversial state laws, especially regarding slavery. Many, like Reverend George B. Cheever, criticized their enforcement of slavery in some states like Massachusetts, and believed the operations were not only morally wrong, but completely negated the militia’s purpose of providing “just and legal armed resistance to unjust law.”⁴¹ Just like in its organization, the American militia would be faced with ideological questions over the role of government as sectional differences continued to grow in the antebellum period, eventually leading militias to function autonomously of government control.

³⁷ Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, 79.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 92-94.

⁴¹ Churchill, *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant’s Face*, 103.

Another major trait that the American militia gained in the antebellum period was a militant aversion to the expanding role of the federal government. Due to his humble upbringing and charisma President Andrew Jackson was originally hailed as a hero of the common man and a friend to the farmers and rural Americans. Conversely, Jackson's actions as President caused many former supporters to question the legitimacy of his actions as his administration marked some of the greatest expansions of federal power which he often defended with coercion.

In the "Toledo Strip" Dispute from 1835-1836, the state of Ohio and the (then) territory of Michigan waged a small war over controlling a piece of highly sought after land. Because Michigan had no army, they mustered a fighting force composed of citizen-soldier militia units. About a year into the violence, Andrew Jackson ordered Michigan to give up its claim, which it regretfully did, after the President threatened to use the army as a measure of enforcement. Many Michigan militia members and their supporters saw this as an extreme intrusion of federal power over handling state disputes, and harbored their resentment by keeping their militias active and trained to resist any more perceived federal acts of tyranny.⁴²

Furthermore, the Federal Tariffs of 1828 and 1829, dubbed by their opponents as the "Tariff of Abominations", proved another pivotal point in shaping anti-federal movements. The tariff was geared towards stimulating the North's economy based on manufacturing and at the expense of harming the South's agricultural economy, and was successfully pushed through Congress without a single Southern vote. To many Southerners, the passage of this legislation demonstrated the failure of government to

⁴² JoEllen McNergney Vinyard, *Right in Michigan's Grassroots: From the KKK to the Michigan Militia* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 8.

protect Southern interests. This began the Nullification Crisis where Senators Daniel Webster and John Calhoun spurred the idea that states could ‘nullify’ or declare any undesirable federal laws null and void in their state. Essentially, the debate revolved around the competing arguments for state’s rights and federal superiority. Both sides maintained that states had a natural right to resist tyranny, but disagreed over whether the tariffs manifested tyranny and the notion of ‘tyranny in government’ altogether.⁴³ When Jackson decided to crush the Southern resistance by deploying federal troops to South Carolina, many Southerners were outraged at the aggressive use of federal power. Just like in the “Toledo Strip” Dispute, many Americans supporting the early notions of limited government were frustrated by the increasing emphasis on using federal authority and threat to handle constitutional disputes.⁴⁴ As a countermeasure, many individuals reverted to the spirit of the militia as a safeguard against this federal tyranny. Some government officials like Edward Livingston, a well-known Louisiana jurist, continued to use militia rhetoric arguing: “An organized body, ready to resist either legislative or executive encroachment, round which the people, whenever oppressed, might rally, will always keep oppression in awe.”⁴⁵

Although militias and resistance to the growing federal government thrived in the South and West where individuals felt like they were helpless to the demands of the government, the Supreme Court cases of *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819) and *Gibbons v. Ogden* (1823) legally justified the trump of the federal government over the state

⁴³ Churchill, *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant’s Face*, 95-97.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

governments in economic matters spreading national discontent as state's rights supporters and constitutionalists once again felt out voiced across the nation.⁴⁶

Like in the post-Revolutionary period, militias were sometimes used to resist unjust state legislation such in Dorr's Rebellion of 1841-1842. Thomas Wilson Dorr, an American reformer and politician, organized a militia to protest Rhode Island's law requiring voters to own at least \$134 in property by arguing that the law was elitist in preventing the poor from exercising their fundamental right to vote. His posse attempted to seize an arsenal and was aggressively put down by federal troops under the command of President Zachary Taylor who quoted "If resistance is made to the execution of the laws of Rhode Island, by such force as the civil peace shall be unable to overcome, it will be the duty of this Government to enforce the constitutional guarantee – a guarantee given and adopted mutually by all the original states."⁴⁷ His statement validating the use of federal force to put down non-compliance only further highlights the growing tension between the interests of the federal and some state governments, and states and people who felt underrepresented and powerless in governments and the militias that accompanied them. His reference to the United States Constitution, although viewed in a very different way than Dorr, highlights the importance of the document in political culture.

In addition to being argued as constitutionally necessary, militias and their resistance to tyranny even began to gain a moral context. For instance, in 1854 Richard Hildreth, a Massachusetts abolitionist, argued that there is a moral requirement to resist unjust laws and advocated for popular nullification of oppressive laws supporting slavery,

⁴⁶ Balleck, *Allegiance to Liberty*, 40-41.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

and the Alien and Sedition Acts, which targeted immigrants.⁴⁸ John Brown, a fervent religious abolitionist, took this rhetoric substantially further by forming a militia and attacking the armory at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia in 1857 as the first step in securing arms for a national militia campaign to free all of America's slaves. Although he failed against the US Marines led by Robert E. Lee, Brown echoed that "The storm every day thickens; its near approach is hourly more clearly seen by all... The great drama will open here, when will be presented the great struggle in arms, of freedom and despotism in America. Give us the arms, and we are ready for the contest."⁴⁹ Brown highlights his belief that the growing sectional differences over slavery within the nation could be solved through war, and his use of a militia as an agent to resist his perceived despotism echoes the earlier American beliefs. While individuals like John Brown, Thomas Wilson Dorr, and John C. Calhoun may have disagreed politically over a variety of issues, their actions and arguments involving the government's actions and right to fight back highlight the national disunity and growing discontent over the role of the federal government as sectional differences widened in the antebellum period. These sectional differences and the belief that state and local interests were helpless to the federal government's demands and threat of force, revitalized and the role of the militia as a protective force against the now domestically perceived tyranny.

In addition to the reorganization and focus on the tyrannical threat as being domestic, the militia also experienced changes in the antebellum period by shaping its identity around the West and frontier areas, including Florida and Michigan.

Coincidentally, the militia's frontier identity has carried forward since the antebellum

⁴⁸ Churchill, *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant's Face*, 102.

⁴⁹ Balleck, *Allegiance to Liberty*, 50-51.

period as the modern American militia movement's presence is strongest and most active in Montana, Texas, California, Michigan, Idaho, Arizona, Missouri, Colorado, and Florida – all frontier areas in the antebellum period or shortly after.⁵⁰ The frontier not only served as a call for militias to organize but also provided a symbolic basis for their legitimacy and core values. The militia movement used and continues to use “frontierism” as a symbol of the beliefs in independence, self-reliance, and individualism. It also signified freedom from government and the need for autonomy, and to justify violence to support these ideals.⁵¹

This “frontierist” attitude interplays with the militia's history in the region. On one hand, western history contributed to generating the militia's spirit in the antebellum frontier regions. Simultaneously, the spirit and sentiment of the militia purposely shaped the conceptualization of history. In the 1830s, Americans began to flock to the frontier seeking a new way of life, economic prosperity, religious freedom, and the excitement that exploration brings.⁵² These people were known to have both a history of a religious citizen base as well as an attitude of self-reliance to face the danger and uncertainty of the West.⁵³ Self-reliance proved a crucial value for the frontier's people as their expansion stirred violent conflict with indigenous peoples. Without the aid of the government, but under the encouragement of President Andrew Jackson, frontier societies formed unorganized militias to fight against Native Americans to continue their expansion. In 1831 and 1832, militias successfully pushed Native Americans out of Northern Florida with troops numbered at about 10,000. When the Seminole tribe pushed an offensive

⁵⁰ Mulloy, *American Extremism*, 135.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁵² Vinyard, *Right in Michigan's Grassroots*, 6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 13.

campaign to push settlers out of their lands in 1835, the unorganized militia massed another 30,000 troops to defeat their adversary in the Second Seminole War.⁵⁴

In the 1850's militia units began to completely operate, form, and act autonomously of the federal government to combat Native Americans, exemplified with the Third Seminole War in Florida in 1855 as well as the Walker War in Utah throughout the 1850's.⁵⁵ Some militias even began to resist the federal government such as those during the Mormon War of 1857, when President James Buchanan declared the Utah territory in open rebellion because of Mormon dissidents and sent more than 2,500 troops to demonstrate the rule of the federal government. In response, Mormon communities formed militias; people fled, and even purposely destroyed their property so the federal government could not confiscate it.⁵⁶ Although often viewed specifically in its Mormon context, this event is notable because it was one of the earliest examples of militia groups forming out of their personal identification as dissenting minorities out of fear of an oppressive federal government. Although uncommon at the time for militia organizations, this mold would become all too common in the 1990's as the militia movement began to not only gain a religious connotation but also have its members politically identify with one another.

With history rooted in violence, attitudes of self-reliance, and dissidence from the federal government, the modern American militia movement remembers the West and the frontier as the beginning of its struggle against others. Discussing the memory of the American West in militia culture, Robert Athern, an American historian described:

⁵⁴ Mahon, *History of the Militia and the National Guard*, 88-90.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁶ Balleck, *Allegiance to Liberty*, 50.

“It is not only the westerner but also the American at large who, knowingly or not, lives in two worlds: the day-to-day scene and the make-believe or fantasized world that has, for a great many people, actual substance. The factual frontier is gone, but the possibilities, the promise that it held, are very much alive in the national mind.”⁵⁷

The notion of “frontierism” has both been articulated from a historical perspective as well as conceptualized as an appropriated attitude that militias derive their ideological base. In a political context, “frontierism” specifically refers to the notion that government should provide minimal resources to its citizens; instead, self-reliance and competition should drive society to survive. Many militia leaders still discuss the importance of the American frontier on their core principles such as Kay Sheil of the Missouri 51st Militia who wrote: “I am inspired by the common people who made such sacrifices to get to this country and who went into the wilderness and created homes and raised families. When you think about all they faced and what they did with just their hands, a few animals, and crude tools it’s awesome.”⁵⁸ “Frontierism”, along with changes in the militia’s organization and growing discontent of the expansion of federal power, radically transformed the militia from the post-Revolutionary to the antebellum period. The militia would begin to become a less foreign object and work its way into mainstream American political thought in the post-WWII period as a changing social landscape surged radical right-wing populist movements, which fit well into the institution of the militia.

The Post-WWII Period: Radical Right-Wing Populism and a Changing Social Landscape

While the militia’s history in the early republic built the militia as an institution of resisting tyranny and the antebellum period painted tyranny as being within the federal

⁵⁷ Mulloy, *American Extremism*, 137.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

government, the post-WWII period gave the militia movement its more immediate political roots, centered on right-wing populism.⁵⁹ This period from the 1940's to 1970's saw ethnocentrism, individualism, and Christian fundamentalism combined with a militant aversion to communism posed by the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. This radicalization was not produced and characterized by a single historical event, but rather a national tract of changing social and political atmospheres, which reflected a greater role of government in the lives of its citizens and a shifting focus from the individual to society.⁶⁰

Although seemingly unconnected, the Civil Rights Movement, the rise in drug-related crime, massive immigration, and the advancement of policies such as welfare spending, bilingual education, school busing, and affirmative action, led many Americans to see the country they once knew as disappearing before their eyes. This country was centered around a harmonious social order centered on middle-class Christian whites. To many, this legislation eased the difficulties and harshness of life for minority groups at the expense of the liberties of white Christian America. These Americans, although a minority, reflected a larger changing attitude with the expansion of right-wing populism, as they saw the destruction of their nation coming both from class-based and minority struggles along with an elitist government agenda that they were helpless to change.⁶¹ To them, the militia seemed to be an appropriate and logical institution both with its traditional advocacy of gun ownership and violent resistance to tyrannical government

⁵⁹ Neil A. Hamilton, *Militias in America*, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1996), 8.

⁶⁰ Crothers, *Rage on the Right*, 46.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

authority as well as its belief that the “common American people,” specifically white Christians, existed as the ideal moral and political force in society.⁶²

Although the radical right-wing populist movement gained motion after the end of World War II, the Black Legion was one of the earliest examples of the combination of religious values and ethnocentrism that used violence, coercion, and intimidation to preserve the existing social order centered around white Christians. The Legion, a Klu Klux Klan splinter group, focused on pushing right-wing and libertarian politics and resisting the liberal reforms of the Roosevelt Administration, with some members even being convicted of trying to overthrow it in September 1936.⁶³ Operating out of the Ohio area and donning black robes with their unique skull and crossbones insignia, the group killed Charles Poole, a leader of the Works Progress Administration, as well as Silas Coleman, an African American laborer.⁶⁴ While not hugely influential, the Black Legion marked one of the earliest attempts to blend racism and anti-communism with Christian values.

In the post-WWII period, Father Charles Coughlin began some of the earliest efforts to enforce the same agenda. Although originally beginning to combat the anti-Catholic efforts of the Klu Klux Klan, Coughlin, a controversial Roman Catholic priest in the Detroit area, used mass broadcasting to specifically target Jews and those who abused the welfare state and leached off of the taxes of society’s ‘producers.’⁶⁵ His fiery sermons juxtaposed the communist and atheist national agenda with his support of God, family,

⁶² Crothers, *Rage on the Right*, 41-42.

⁶³ Churchill, *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant’s Face*, 146.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 162-163.

⁶⁵ Crothers, *Rage on the Right*, 45.

and the true 'nation' tied to the values of early America.⁶⁶ Coughlin also marked some earliest notions of conspiracy theories to advance the right-wing populist cause, also present in the modern American militia movement. He argued that ultra-corporate capitalism was only a communist guise and directly accused Henry Ford, one of Detroit's most prominent auto manufacturers of controlling the entire industry and enslaving the working class.⁶⁷

In addition to Father Charles Coughlin and his followers, the John Birch Society emerged as another important player in the development of right-wing populism and its eventual ties to the militia movement. Founded in 1958 by businessman and University of North Carolina graduate Robert Welch, the interest group centered on uniting business leaders to fight big government and communist policies, such as the income tax, social security, and the Federal Reserve – all seen to be indicative of a shift towards a totalitarian command economy.⁶⁸ The group gained its name from John Birch, an American Army Officer who led a special task force of Americans, Chinese Nationalists, and Koreans into China in 1945 to fight the rise of communism from within. Birch was shot, bayoneted, and killed by Chinese Communists and to the Birchers was considered to be the first casualty of World War III – the battle between communism and democracy.⁶⁹ Mainly conceptualized by Dan Smoot, the John Birch Society theorized the idea of One World Government, under the Illuminati, seeking to remove the United States' autonomy and have the globe ruled by global corporatism, which had already begun under the United States' greater political and economic entanglement in world

⁶⁶ Vinyard, *Right in Michigan's Grassroots*, 99-105.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶⁸ Hamilton, *Militias in America*, 11.

⁶⁹ Vinyard, *Right in Michigan's Grassroots*, 197.

affairs. The right-wing populist ideology under the John Birch Society divided from the mainstream Republican party as it came out as strongly against the Vietnam War, by claiming it as an inside plot by communists to discredit the United States and the democratic and capitalist causes.

While this organization could not be considered a militia as it did not possess a paramilitary wing or engage in armed training, it provided an ideological foundation for the right-wing populist voice.⁷⁰ Though it never possessed a large membership base, its political rallying was sympathetic to a larger minority of Americans and the organization still exists and plays a major role in supporting the efforts of today's militia groups. It has always been highly active by doing things such as trying to impeach Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren, a liberal reformer, distributing anti-communist propaganda, and supporting conservative politicians advocating limited government such as Barry Goldwater.⁷¹ Like the Black Legion, Father Charles Coughlin, the John Birch Society combined anti-communist and Christian rhetoric to gain a larger membership base. It even once referred to communism in a publication as "A Satanic debasement of both man and his universe... Utterly incompatible with all religion and it is contemptuous of all morality and destructive to all freedom. ... We believe that the continued coexistence of communism and a Christian-style civilization on one planet is impossible."⁷²

While figures like Coughlin and organizations like the John Birch Society were not militia, they directly led to the formation of militias that advanced a right-wing populist agenda, such as the Minutemen. Founded in 1961 by Robert Depugh, a

⁷⁰ Hamilton, *Militias in America*, 11.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷² Balleck, *Allegiance to Liberty*, 69.

veterinary pharmaceutical firm manager and a prominent member of the John Birch Society, the Minutemen was one of the most feared and praised armed organizations. Like earlier militias, it embraced the rhetoric of the American Revolution in its plan to resist communism with force if necessary. Embodying his beliefs in the common American, DePugh famously stated: “If this nation is saved, it must be by [its] backbone... by those who are willing to sacrifice, by those who are willing to work, by the little people.” “If you are ever going to buy a gun, buy it now... we’re going to crawl out of this hole as a well-knit combat outfit.” DePugh and about fifty of his followers established a training camp in California to rehearse combat operations to prepare to engage in an armed struggle against communism. They also established small sleeper cells nationwide that stockpiled weapons and plotted to overthrow the eventually communist government.⁷³ Some of the group’s members were even involved in a plot to assassinate Arkansas Senator J. William Fulbright, an American politician who urged for the United States to be more active in the United Nations, as well as another plot to gas the United Nations building with cyanide through its ventilation system.⁷⁴ Many other militias followed in the Minutemen’s footsteps by stockpiling weapons, training, and distributing propaganda.

Although most armed political groups of the post-WWII period were involved in the right-wing populist movement, there were others on the complete opposite end of the spectrum such as the Weathermen, a communist faction that advocated terrorism, and the Black Panthers, a Black Nationalist movement that advocated firearm ownership. Technically “militia” due to their willingness to threaten and resort to violence to achieve

⁷³ Balleck, *Allegiance to Liberty*, 71.

⁷⁴ Hamilton, *Militias in America*, 14.

political aims, these organizations existed outside of the militia trajectory that preached right-wing populism and would affect the current product today.⁷⁵

While these groups may have disagreed on many particular elements of their political strategies, they marked the combination of ethnocentrism, anti-communism, with Christian rhetoric in the right-wing populist movement. They radicalized and banded together to protect the existing social order produced through the cultural shockwave and the policies that accompanied it in order to defend American individualism from collectivism.⁷⁶ Historians have often cited the 1950's as the beginning of the decay of the American political system and the debate over the power dynamics between the federal and state governments reaching mainstream audiences with decisions like *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, which set the federal government above state governments in matters of education.⁷⁷ Furthermore, many feared that the global expansion of communism about in the 1970's was related to a communist threat from within the United States that entirely challenged the notion of American exceptionalism. Radical left-wing political movements and armed advocacy groups like Peru's Shining Path, Columbia's FARC, Japan's Red Army, and Germany's Baader-Meinhof Gang aroused suspicion among members of the militia movement that the United States sponsored communism abroad as an appealing global phenomenon in hopes of drawing it in domestically.⁷⁸ The radicalization of opinion and the failure of government to make radical reforms in any direction led to only 19% of Americans trusting the government

⁷⁵ Hamilton, *Militias in America*, 15.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁷ Balleck, *Allegiance to Liberty*, 63-64.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

according to a speech by President Lyndon Johnson in 1969.⁷⁹ To many on the right, the American Revolution and specifically the militia symbolized a victory for individual freedom, and personal and economic liberty through the common man resisting tyrannical authority.⁸⁰ This concept would become increasingly important as domestic events in the 1990's would lead to militia movements entering mainstream politics and tensions between the right-wing populist ideology and militia movements reaching violent levels.

⁷⁹ Balleck, *Allegiance to Liberty*, 71.

⁸⁰ Hamilton, *Militias in America*, 10.

Chapter Two

Why Now? The Modern American Militia Movement as a Product of Fallujah and Fear

To many, the last place one would expect a threat to national security to come from would be the United States Military, a force comprised of individuals sworn to protect and defend the nation. In this way, it seems strange that 11 Active Duty soldiers working together stationed at Fort Stewart Georgia would be charged with their participation in a plot to overthrow the federal government amongst a wide variety of felony crimes. Culminating in the murders of Michael Roark, a discharged soldier, and his 17 year old girlfriend, Tiffany York, the group, and self-considered ‘militia’, referred to itself as FEAR, an acronym for Forever Enduring Always Ready. These individuals established a “family” network, stockpiled \$87,000 worth of firearms intended to be used against the federal government, and became highly active in the drug trade, smuggling ecstasy, cocaine, and marijuana across the Army base, all while under Active Duty orders.⁸¹ The group’s philosophy, rooted in a violent fear and hatred of the United States Government, gave members the opportunity to test each other’s ‘loyalty’ to the ‘Patriot’ cause and continuously push the moral boundaries of the group.⁸² Based on a core

⁸¹ Don Terry, “Eleventh Person Charged in Fort Stewart Militia Plot,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, published 15 NOV 2012, accessed 1 DEC 2015, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2012/11/15/eleventh-person-charged-fort-stewart-militia-plot>.

⁸² Nadya Labi, “Rogue Element: How an Anti-Government Militia Grew on a U.S. Army Base,” *The New Yorker*, published 26 MAY 2014, accessed 1 DEC 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/05/26/rogue-element>.

foundation of distrust, the group evolved from a defensive militia concerned about civil and economic liberties to a band of trigger-happy bloodthirsty dissidents.

From an analytical perspective, the question remains not ‘how’ but ‘why’ would these men be motivated to pursue such a course of action. Many superficial explanations have been offered with some pointing to the influence of the video game ‘Rainbow Six Patriots’ in shaping the ideology of the group and inspiring their call to action while others blamed psychological imbalances within FEAR’s members.⁸³ Looking at the issue from a deeper perspective, the actual cause for these men’s ghastly acts of violence may be directly related to their military service, and the ways that the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have shaped their notions of freedom and patriotism. This factor does not stand alone however, as domestic events like the Waco Siege and the Ruby Ridge Shooting of the 1990’s were also highly responsible for leaving a legacy, not only of a populist anti-government militia movement, but a fear of the government’s use of force against its own citizens.

As Michael Burnett, a member of FEAR and a close personal friend of the militia’s leader, Isaac Aguigui, stated in an interview with *The New Yorker*: “We’ve been fighting a war for over ten years with no political gain... I have friends who went to Iraq and Afghanistan who have been killed or wounded by roadside bombs and terrorists blowing themselves up, and nothing has changed... [In reference to his participation in the militia] You need to be able to protect yourself... Any good government must be

⁸³ Caitlin Dickson, “Inside the Georgia Militia Murders,” *The Daily Beast*, published 20 SEP 2013, accessed 1 DEC 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/09/20/inside-the-georgia-militia-murders.html>.

overthrown every ten years.”⁸⁴ His statements are not unique, but serve as a common sentiment of many Active Duty troops, or recently discharged veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. Furthermore, FEAR’s actions are not an isolated incident, but embody the same rhetoric of an aversion to government power and a belief that individual liberties are threatened under the Obama Administration, which leans left and inevitably clashes with the belief systems of the MAMM. Likewise, this rhetoric has accompanied other incidents of anti-government violence like Andrew Stack’s 2010 intentional plane crash into a Texas IRS building as well as Paul Ciancia’s 2014 attack on the TSA in the Los Angeles Airport; both of which are seen to be symbols of federal authority and control.⁸⁵ Although it is very rare for other Active Duty military personnel to perform acts of anti-government violence, it is important to note that one of the reasons the Army gave for not investigating the militia before the murders was the large prevalence of unofficial militia-like organizations within the United States Armed Forces. They stated that it was impossible to determine the difference between the militia organizations rooted around defense, and those like FEAR who would actually carry out violent crimes.⁸⁶

Building off the previous chapter that established the militia as a changing element of resistance throughout American history, this chapter will explain the immediate preconditions of the legacy of the 1990’s and the impact of the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan on the MAMM. These factors had a profound impact in characterizing the Modern American Militia Movement as it is today, and as a unique militia movement

⁸⁴ Labi, “Rogue Element.”

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Dickson, “Inside the Georgia Militia Murders.”

in history that have even been met with some positive public recognition. Not only has the current movement managed to significantly change its image and identity, but it has also vastly altered its organization, ideology, and operational actions

The 1990's: The Rise of Anti-Government Rhetoric and the Militia

Skinheads, Sawed-Off Shotguns, & Snipers – The Recipe for Disaster at Ruby Ridge

Inspired by the Christian Identity Movement, a racial interpretation of Christian theology, Randy Weaver, his wife Vicki, and their three children left the East coast on April 20, 1989 to resettle in an isolated mountain cabin in Naples, Idaho.⁸⁷ To the Weavers and others a part of the Christian Identity movement, the West represented a bastion of independence, isolation, and freedom where they could practice their controversial beliefs. Because of the radical political and religious beliefs of the area as well as the high proliferation of firearms, parts of the West were met with great federal oversight. In October of 1989, Randy Weaver, a Vietnam veteran and former Green Beret, met with his “friend” Kenneth Fadeley, an undercover informant for the federal agency of the Department of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms.⁸⁸ When Fadeley expressed a need for buying twelve-gauge shotguns, Weaver responded that he could provide him with them, and that he could saw-off the barrels if the market demanded. It is important to note that years later in court Fadeley’s conversation would be classified as illegally

⁸⁷ Mark S. Hamm, *Apocalypse in Oklahoma: Waco and Ruby Ridge Revenged*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 16.

⁸⁸ Alan W. Bock, *Ambush at Ruby Ridge: How Government Agents Set Randy Weaver Up and Took His Family Down*, (Irvine, CA: Dickens Press, 1995), 23-24.

entrapping Weaver to pursue an illegal action.⁸⁹ Due to federal regulations, short-barreled shotguns require an additional permit and a \$200 tax payment even though the process can be cheaply done by anyone with a hacksaw.⁹⁰

On June 12, 1990, two plainclothes ATF agents approached Randy Weaver outside of a Naples Hotel who told him that they had evidence that he had illegally manufactured and sold sawed off shotguns and that the case had already been presented to federal judges. However, they offered him the opportunity to have the charges dropped if he could provide them with the gunrunning activities of his friends Howarth and Trochmann, to which Weaver responded, “You can go to hell” and stormed out of the parking lot.⁹¹ On January 17, 1991, Randy Weaver was arrested by the ATF but was quickly released on bond. Although his court date was set for February 19th, the federal prosecuting attorney in Boise falsely told him that it was on March 20th.

On February 7th, the US attorney received a mysterious letter signed by Mrs. Vicki Weaver addressed to the “Servant of Queen of Babylon” explaining the corruption and evil apparent in the United States Federal Government. It contained a quote by Robert Mathews, an American neo-Nazi and the leader of the militant group The Order, “A long forgotten wind is starting to blow. Do you hear the approaching thunder? It is that of the awakened Saxon. War is upon the land. The tyrant’s blood will flow.”⁹² After Weaver failed to show up for his trial, which he was unaware of, the ATF issued a failure-to-appear warrant for the arrest of Randy Weaver. Upon hearing the news and out

⁸⁹ “The Federal Raid on Ruby Ridge,” Collection of Speeches, (Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology, and Government Information Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, Washington, D.C., SEP & OCT 1995), 1.

⁹⁰ Hamm, *Apocalypse in Oklahoma*, 17.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 19.

of fear of the federal government, Weaver and his family retreated to their Ruby Ridge Cabin in Idaho for the next eighteen months where they stockpiled weapons, food, and provisions.⁹³

In response, the ATF along with the FBI launched the two million dollar Operation Northern Exposure to arrest Weaver. ATF agents failed to coerce Weaver's friends into convincing him to surrender, and then began months of surveillance efforts attempting to learn Weaver's schedule and eventually corner him.⁹⁴ The stealth operations failed when Striker, the Weaver's dog, discovered six camouflaged marshals with M16s without their designated insignia in patrolling Weaver's property. When the dog began barking, one of the agents shot and killed the dog. In response, Sammy, one of Weaver's sons who was only fourteen years old, returned fire, but was shot by the agents in the back as he tried to run back to the cabin.⁹⁵ After his death, Kevin Harris, a Weaver family friend, shot and killed Marshal William Degan. As the two groups reconsolidated, the newly appointed FBI director of the situation, Larry Potts, revised the FBI team's rules of engagement to allow the agents to kill anyone on Ruby Ridge they saw. As one of the FBI snipers testified to Congress: "[We were told...]If you see 'em, shoot 'em."⁹⁶ The FBI escalated the situation by sending in Armored Personal Carriers who crushed the Weaver's dog's body. As the Weavers walked out in their yard to recover Striker's body, FBI Agents open fired on them, wounding Randy and his son, and killing an unarmed Vicki Weaver.⁹⁷ The standoff continued as the Weavers became subject to the FBI's

⁹³ Hamm, *Apocalypse in Oklahoma*, 20.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁹⁵ "The Federal Raid on Ruby Ridge," 9.

⁹⁶ Bock, *Ambush at Ruby Ridge*, 23-24.

⁹⁷ Hamm, *Apocalypse in Oklahoma*, 25.

psychological operations as they played the noises of ominous Tibetan chimes and dying rabbits over loudspeakers at night to prevent the Weavers from sleeping.⁹⁸ Randy Weaver also recalled hearing ATF agents yell out to him mockingly “Did you sleep well last night, Vicki?”⁹⁹

The standoff continued for ten days after the initial shootings and death of Sammy Weaver and Marshall William Degan, and only became resolved after third-party intervention. With help from Jack McLamb, a local police officer (ret.) LTC James “Bo” Gritz, a prominent militia figure, negotiated with the held-up Weaver eventually leading to the family’s peaceful retreat from the cabin and into law enforcement hands.¹⁰⁰ Understandably so, the Ruby Ridge incident was met with a great deal of criticism and backlash from a variety of points. Throughout the standoff, a strange mix Weaver family friends as well as those associated with the Aryan Nation, the Constitutionalist Movement, and Vietnam veterans protested in front of federal authorities. They held signs displaying “Stop the Killings” “Ruby Ridge Cover Up!!” “Am I next?” (With a target sign), as well as the American Flag displayed upside down, signifying a nation in distress.¹⁰¹

The Ruby Ridge screen bore additional scrutiny in government, as years later, the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology, and Government Information in the House of Representatives conducted a hearing on the incident. Bipartisan legislators vilified the handling of the incident and the FBI and ATF administration by pointing out the Justice

⁹⁸ “The Federal Raid on Ruby Ridge,” 11.

⁹⁹ Jess Walter, *Every Knee Shall Bow: The Truth and Tragedy of Ruby Ridge and the Randy Weaver Family*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1995), 218.

¹⁰⁰ Bock, *Ambush at Ruby Ridge*, 171.

¹⁰¹ Walter, *Every Knee Shall Bow*, 123, 204.

Department conducted its investigation of the killings through the FBI, the same organization who was accused.¹⁰² Others pointed out the blatant violation of doctrine, the extreme use of militarization, and the fact that the FBI's plans were based on rumor and hyperbole instead of concrete facts.¹⁰³

The intense militia movement that would rock the 1990's saw its earliest roots directly stem out of Ruby Ridge. Friends of the Weaver family formed the United Citizens for Justice with about 250 people.¹⁰⁴ Although the movement gradually fell apart, it represented the fear and distrust of the government that the Ruby Ridge incident spread throughout the American West. In addition, the Militia of Montana (MOM), led by Randy Trochmann, began its work in educating others on the federal government's blatant disregard for the lives of its citizens and perceived injustice. While MOM did not advocate for violence, their actions led to the radicalization of many anti-government individuals.¹⁰⁵ Discontent would only grow after the Waco Siege of the following year would only confirm the suspicions of many.

The Fifty-One Day Siege at Waco and its Legacy of Fear

The events that unfolded in Waco, TX in 1993 stand alongside the Ruby Ridge Shooting as tragedies that rocked the trust and faith of many Americans in government to the core. Just as in Ruby Ridge, the FBI and ATF's actions at Waco not only violated department policy, but constitutional doctrine, civil rights, and arguably a basic ethical code. Through fear and a growing populist movement, Waco gave the militia movement

¹⁰² "The Federal Raid on Ruby Ridge," 7.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰⁴ Bock, *Ambush at Ruby Ridge*, 214-215.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 215.

the energy it needed to become a major force of reckoning throughout the American West. In order to best understand, the motivations and reasons of many to take arms up with the militia cause, the events at Mount Carmel Church, in Waco must be fully explained.

Crucially surrounding the Waco Siege lays the religious group known as the Branch Davidians. Originally founded as a pacifist splinter movement of the Protestant Seventh Day Adventist Church in the mid-twentieth century, the Branch Davidians gained their new leadership in the 1980's under David Koresh (born Vernon Howell), a key figure in the Waco Siege.¹⁰⁶ Under his leadership, the sect, whom many dubbed a cult, became increasingly focused on the Bible's Book of Revelations and the perceived upcoming apocalypse that he along with others believed would take place in the United States.

With these beliefs in mind, Koresh modified the buildings of Mount Carmel Church, reminiscent of a compound, to meet a more defensive end state. Around the same time a UPS driver reported delivering mass quantities of ammunition and explosive materials to the church's address, and rumors circulated around the Texas community that the group had become a cult that abused children and fired illegally obtained fully automatic weapons on their property.¹⁰⁷ Eventually the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms got a hold of the information, still speculated to be mere rumors,

¹⁰⁶ Brad Steiger and Sherry Steiger, *Conspiracies and Secret Societies: The Complete Dossier*, 2nd ed, (Canton, MI, USA: Visible Ink Press, 2012), 491-492. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 28 SEP 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Stuart A. Wright, "Construction and Escalation of a Cult Threat," in *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*, ed. Stuart A. Wright (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 84-86.

and decided to raid the compound to seize the illegal weapons.¹⁰⁸ The armed agents began their operation on February 28, 1993 when they tried to serve a search-and-arrest warrant to the compound for illegally converting semi-automatic AR-15 rifles into weapons with fully automatic capabilities. The exact circumstances of the arrival to the agents are unknown but gunfire immediately broke out between the Davidians and ATF agents, leading to six Davidian deaths and four within the ATF as well as injuries on both sides. When the Davidians refused to surrender, the standoff and siege began and would last a total of fifty-one days.¹⁰⁹

Throughout the standoff, Federal forces engaged in highly questionable behavior from not only a constitutional but also an ethical perspective. Koresh and many of the other Davidians, convinced that the ATF and their raid may be the beginning of the apocalypse incarnate, were infuriated when the FBI publically stated that Koresh engaged in “biblical babble” during the negotiations process. Furthermore, the FBI proved faithless in its demands to the Davidians when it repeatedly failed to fulfill its side of the bargain in “quid-pro-quo” style negotiations when it refused to give the Davidians milk after the group paid for it. The situation was further exasperated after the FBI shut off absolutely all contact between the Davidians and the outside world, making the FBI the only source of information for the American media. In addition and just like Ruby Ridge, the FBI spread false information throughout the media on a variety of topics concerning the situation. For example, agents stated that the cult used illegal drugs, that most members were white, and that they had booby-trapped their property. Also going against negotiations, FBI tanks ran on the property and smashed and desecrated a sacred

¹⁰⁸ Steiger and Steiger, *Conspiracies and Secret Societies*, 493.

¹⁰⁹ Hamm, *Apocalypse in Oklahoma*, 104.

cemetery. Most important to the Davidians trapped in the compound, the FBI did not send the released children to their next of kin as promised but rather government social workers and ‘anti-cult’ specialists.¹¹⁰

The FBI’s Hostage Rescue Team, many of whom were involved in the Ruby Ridge Shooting, shut off the electricity to the compound. Shortly after they began playing loud tapes from the family members of the Davidians to mock them and their leadership. Loudspeaker tactics only continued as the FBI added horrifying noises such as dentists’ drills, dying rabbits, and squawking birds to the mix in order to prevent the Davidians from sleeping soundly and stress them out.¹¹¹

Tragically and coincidentally on ‘Patriot Day,’ the siege finally came to a conclusion on April 19th when M1 Abrams tanks and Bradley armored personnel carriers drove into the compound and broke through the walls. Then ATF and FBI forces hurled gas canisters into the compound flooding it with CS gas. With high winds in the Texas air, the gas met flame and ignited the entire compound ablaze, which was mostly comprised of wood, with its members inside. Initially lying about the effects of CS gas to the office of the US Attorney General, the FBI essentially used an weapon used by the military for riot control in a civilian law enforcement operation gone awry. Unintended to be used indoors, the CS gas proved highly reactive to flames, such as those the Branch Davidians might have in their lanterns as they attempted to brace for the onslaught of the armored federal assault.¹¹² Incidentally, the fire claimed the lives of seventy-six

¹¹⁰ Paul H. Blackman and David B. Kopel, *No More Wacos: What’s Wrong Federal Law Enforcement and How to Fix It*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1997), 133-135.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 155-159.

individuals, including twenty-five children. Federal agents immediately arrested the nine survivors.¹¹³

Following the same pattern of the Ruby Ridge Shooting, very little prosecution was done against the federal agents who seemed to show both a blatant disregard for the safeguarding of lives of Americans as well as following policy. Surrounding Waco, no ATF or FBI official was prosecuted for any of the deaths of the Branch Davidians as a result of either agency's illegal misconduct. To many Americans involved in the militia movement, it's a dangerous idea "when large groups of people, armed with tanks, grenades, automatic weapons, and chemical warfare agents can break the law, violate their superiors' orders, and use those weapons with impunity."¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the Clinton Administration attempted to pass a crime bill, which would have granted federal employees legal immunity from law violations, incurred while on the job, essentially while during the Siege at Waco.¹¹⁵ While this aspect of the bill failed to go through Congress, many Americans saw it as part of the greater trend of federal officials attempting to cover up their 'dirty operations' such as the events at Waco, TX and Ruby Ridge, ID. This fear and anti-government hatred would grow into the large-scale militia movement that would capitulate across the 1990's and would eventually culminate in the 1994 bombing of the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh.

¹¹³ Hamm, *Apocalypse in Oklahoma*, 104.

¹¹⁴ Blackman and Kopel, *No More Wacos*, 269.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.

The Oklahoma City Bombing and its Relationship to the American Militia Movement

On 9:02 A.M. on April 19, 1995, the anniversary of the Waco Siege, 4,800 pounds of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil were detonated in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. The force of the blast was powerful enough to create a vacuum and hit anyone ten feet away from the blast with a force equal to thirty-seven tons. As a result of this, nine stories on the buildings north side pancaked, or flattened and fell to the ground.¹¹⁶ Although local law enforcement and rescue authorities originally deemed to be the cause of the blast to be a natural gas accident and predicting only about a dozen casualties, the truth was far grimmer.¹¹⁷ After months of excavating the mangled and burned bodies from the rubble, the death toll continued to only climb higher until finally reaching 168.¹¹⁸ After the gruesome details were leaked through news and media coverage, Americans, realizing the horror and inhumanity of the situation, had many questions raging through their minds. “Who could do such a thing? Why would someone do this?” The answers lied with Timothy McVeigh and bore a strong, yet indirect connection to the developing antigovernment militia movement in the 1990’s.

Although originally suspecting Ibrahim Ahmad, an Arabic teacher of Palestinian descent, because of eyewitness accounts of three men who observed him driving away from the building just before the bombing as well as a Latin American drug cartel, the FBI’s investigation began to uncover new evidence.¹¹⁹ A truck axle displaying a vehicle

¹¹⁶ 9:02 A.M. April 19, 1995: *The Official Record of the Oklahoma City Bombing*, Oklahoma Today Magazine, Pub. Jan 1996, 10,13.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 19, 22.

¹¹⁸ Hamm, *Apocalypse in Oklahoma*, 240.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 63.

identification number was found near the exact location of the bombing and a meter maid from local police reported seeing a yellow Ryder truck moving toward the building just before the explosion.¹²⁰ Tracing the identification number of the truck, FBI agents uncovered that a fake ID had been used to purchase the truck, but after talking with the seller, the FBI was able to uncover a facial sketch. The FBI began going through local businesses in Junction City, KS the location where the truck was bought. When one motel owner recognized the image, she gave them the name Timothy McVeigh who had signed the guest list sheet. Upon doing some research, McVeigh was found to be in a Noble County Jail serving minor time for a concealed weapons infraction.¹²¹

Although McVeigh's tactics, investigation, trial, and eventual execution give great insight into a multitude of topics like terrorist strategies, and the criminal justice system, the real relevancy of the bombing lies in McVeigh's motives and the way he articulated his aims. Furthermore, both the federal government's and militia movement's response to the bombing would uncover and temporarily halt the rise of right-wing radical ideology.

Throughout his investigation, McVeigh was very clear in articulating his motives and felt that throughout his trial the media may try to warp his message. On April 26, 2001 and while in prison, Timothy McVeigh addressed a letter to Rita Cosby, a correspondent for Fox News. McVeigh explains that "...the bombing was a retaliatory strike; a counter attack, for the cumulative raids that federal agents had participated in over the preceding years..." He directly references the Waco Siege, which he personally visited and witnessed from the lines of protestors, and the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team,

¹²⁰ Hamm, *Apocalypse in Oklahoma*, 65.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

which responsible for a number of deaths at both Waco and Ruby Ridge. He explains that he specifically targeted the Murrah Building due to its “command and control centers” for many government organizations like the ATF and FBI. He concludes by comparing his own actions to the actions in wartime of the United States Military against nations like Serbia and Iraq and argues that the United States federal government has begun its war against the American people.¹²² Many Americans who were ideologically associated with the militia movement shared the same sentiments as McVeigh and an unraveling of his connections reveals the halting truth.

As the FBI investigation into McVeigh continued, agents uncovered that he was aided by a man named Terry Nichols who, when his home was searched, was found with documents of the Michigan Militia, one of the most notorious antigovernment militias of the 1990s.¹²³ Furthermore, Nichols was found with propaganda brochures and videos against the government’s actions at Waco. McVeigh’s younger sister, who authorities theorized had similar anti-government views to McVeigh, was found with right-wing antigovernment documents like *The New World Order, You May Not Have a Country After 1995*, and *Patriot Report*.¹²⁴ While McVeigh bore no proven direct connection to any militia movement and government officials classified him as a ‘lone wolf’, he flirted with the idea of joining a militia and specifically attended a meeting of the Michigan Militia in 1994, but declined membership after he found it “disorganized and unfocused” and wanted “soldiers who are not afraid to engage the enemy (the Federal government).”

¹²² Timothy McVeigh, letter to Rita Cosby, April 26th, 2001.

¹²³ Hamm, *Apocalypse in Oklahoma*, 92.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

However, he still aided militia members in obtaining illegal weapons through gun shows after the 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban.¹²⁵

Although McVeigh and Nichols may have been some of the most radical elements within the 1990's militia movement, their actions and ideologies are somewhat representative of a larger demographical and ideological trend throughout the country. The Militia Task Force element of the Southern Poverty Law Center identified 441 armed militias by 1996 with a total membership count of between 20,000 to 60,000. Militia leaders and some news reports theorized up to a 1,000,000 members as a part of the movement.¹²⁶ While a strikingly large majority of these members bore allegiance to the 'Patriot' ideology of populism and anti-government rhetoric, it is also important to understand that there were many like McVeigh and Nichols who also considered themselves 'Patriots,' but did not officially belong to a militia. Many of these non-subscribing individuals may have also subscribed to the more radical ideologies and for that reason may have found militia membership personally unsatisfactory. Others may have been sympathizers to the militia cause, but chose not to become involved due to a variety of reasons, including a fear of government action or merely the lack of weapons and equipment.

Prior to the Oklahoma City Bombing, militias launched a variety of small attacks across the country on government officials or buildings. For example, members of the Minnesota Patriots Council were found guilty of making ricin, a lethal toxin, and planning to unleash it on Federal agents. In addition, John Trochman and others of the

¹²⁵ Stuart A. Wright, *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing*, (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 173-174.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

now evolved Militia of Montana faced punishment after illegally carrying concealed weapons and planning to kidnap a judge who imprisoned members of the Patriot movement.¹²⁷ Although these attacks are much smaller in scale, they spanned across almost all of the fifty states and still signify the radicalization of many Americans to fight against the perceived tyranny within American government.

The Oklahoma City Bombing was more significant than just illustrating the radicalization and growth of the Patriot Movement in the 1990's; it also became the turning point in the decade for the temporary fall of the militia movement. While the militia movement's participation reached record participation in 1996 with about 850 groups across the country, it quickly fell to only a mere 200 groups by the year 2000.¹²⁸ This breakup and decline was largely due to the ideological fragmentation and splintering that the bombing rippled across the country. Some celebrated the sacrifices McVeigh made to seek revenge against the government, while others condemned the loss of innocent life and vilified McVeigh's violent tactics of seeking a solution. In an interview with Vice News titled "One of America's Most Notorious Militias," Norman Olson, the former leader of the Michigan Militia, described the aftermath of the Bombing and its affect on the militia movement by stating:

“We deactivated after seven years and started to go home. Some stayed. Some stayed. People got frightened then, because the media picked up on it and ran with the militia connection, to the extent that the militia, a third of the militia ran and hid. A third of them went underground. Didn't want to be seen, didn't want to be on a list, didn't want to be photographed. Another third just quit the militia altogether. They realized this wasn't paintball in the woods on the weekend. This was life-and-death stuff. And another third became more aggressive, more adamant about standing up

¹²⁷ Wright, *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing*, 174.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 202-203.

against the government, because we saw the conspiracy against it, against what was happening.”¹²⁹

Olson’s testimony provides unique insight at the reasons for the militia’s breakup; members felt that McVeigh’s actions pushed them to either radicalize and face the government or to take the opportunity to leave the movement. Norman Olson as well as his co-founder Ray Southwell left Michigan and fled to an isolated part of Alaska in the political turmoil and breakup of the Michigan Militia.¹³⁰ While the militia movement may have hidden in the shadows for the next decade, the 1990’s legacy of fear and discontent with the Federal government lay dormant across many Americans and would see a massive resurgence in 2008 with the election of President Barack Obama.

A ‘Failed’ Conquest, Angry Veterans, and a Sacrosanct Oath to the Constitution

Although the Modern American Militia Movement contains members with a vast array of backgrounds, perspectives, and motives for joining the Constitutional militia cause, there is a clear and direct connection to the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These wars impacted the American militia movement by the combination of three important circumstances: (1) the call for massive amounts of troops to combat, especially in the United States Army, (2) the portrayal of the wars, especially the Iraq War, to both the American public as well as the soldiers themselves as being interventional failures and non-essential to United States security interests, and (3) a revival of American Constitutional culture that many disgruntled veterans used to fight the political actions of

¹²⁹ Thomas Morton, Interview with Norman Olson and Ray Southwell, *One of America’s Most Notorious Militias*. Vice. 2010.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

the left-leaning Obama Administration, by portraying the federal government as the real aggressor and threat to American liberties.

Due to both the reluctance of the federal government and organizations apart of the MAMM to release statistics on veteran participation within militia groups, I have compiled a list of some of the most publicized 10 individuals within the MAMM. This method of looking at veteran membership within the militia movement presents a number of issues: it is a small data set; media coverage is not necessarily the same as prominence; militia members may lie or choose not to advertise their military service. However with the absence of statistics, it presents a quick glimpse into the prominence of US military veterans within the militia movement. This outlook may prove helpful before beginning to understand the factors that caused the massive influx of veterans into the Modern American Militia Movement. Many of the individuals and events mentioned will be discussed in the third chapter as well.

Name	Known For	Military Service
Stewart Rhodes	Oath Keepers founder	US Army paratrooper ¹³¹
Jon Ritzheimer	Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupation, anti-Muslim rallies	US Marine Corps, motor transport driver in Iraq ¹³²
Ammon Bundy	Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupation leader, son of Cliven Bundy	None ¹³³
Ryan Payne	Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupation, Bundy Ranch standoff	Former sergeant in the 51 st Infantry Regiment of US Army, Iraq War veteran ¹³⁴

¹³¹ “About Oath Keepers,” *Oath Keepers*.

¹³² “Faces of the Malheur Occupation: Meet the Militants and their Visitors,” *The Oregonian*, published 22 FEB 2016, accessed 21 APR 2016, http://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/index.ssf/2016/01/oregon_militant_profiles_list.html.

¹³³ “Faces of the Malheur Occupation.” *The Oregonian*.

Blaine Cooper	Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupation, Bundy Ranch standoff, civilian patrols along the US-Mexico Border	Attempted to join US Marines, but failed entrance requirements ¹³⁵
Robert “Lavoy” Finicum	Bundy Ranch standoff, killed at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupation	None ¹³⁶
Sam Andrews	Ferguson occupation, leader of YETI after Oath Keepers split	Uncertain, Oath Keepers membership suggests military service ¹³⁷
James Wise (alias)	Oath Keepers occupation of Ferguson	Former US Army Special Forces ¹³⁸
Jerry DeLemus	Bundy Ranch standoff, co-chairman of Veterans for Trump	Former US Marine ¹³⁹
Maureen Pelter	Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupation	Washington Army National Guard, two deployments to Iraq ¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Carli Brousseau, “Refuge Occupation’s Co-Leader Disillusioned by Iraq finds Purpose in Bundy’s Cause,” published 22 JAN 2016, accessed 21 APR 2016, http://www.oregonlive.com/oregon-standoff/2016/01/oregon_occupation_leader_ryan.html#incart_big-photo.

¹³⁵ “Faces of the Malheur Occupation.” *The Oregonian*.

¹³⁶ Breanna Edwards, “Robert ‘LaVoy’ Finicum Killed in Ore. Arrests, Reached for Gun, Authorities Say,” *The Root*, published 29 JAN 2016, accessed 27 MAR 2016, http://www.theroot.com/articles/news/2016/01/robert_finicum_killed_in_oregon_arrests_reached_for_gun_authorities_say.html.

¹³⁷ Ben Swann, “Ferguson Oath Keepers: Guardians or Vigilantes?,” *RT America*, published 1 DEC 2014, accessed 20 MAR 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvzEAZniQ_c.

¹³⁸ Justin King, “Exclusive: Oath Keepers Leave Organization in Protest After Leadership Reportedly Fails to Support Armed Ferguson March,” *The Fifth Column*, published 26 AUG 2015, accessed 20 SEP 2015, <http://thefifthcolumnnews.com/2015/08/exclusive-oath-keepers-leave-organization-in-protest-after-leadership-reportedly-fails-to-support-armed-ferguson-march/>.

¹³⁹ “Veterans for Trump Leader Among 14 Charged in Armed 2014 Standoff at Bundy Ranch,” *Newsmax*, published 3 MAR 2016, accessed 21 APR 2016, <http://www.newsmax.com/Newsfront/arrests-bundy-ranch-standoff/2016/03/03/id/717347/>.

¹⁴⁰ Hal Bernton, “‘Patriot’ Militias Appeal to Some Frustrated Vets, Including Bonney Lake Woman,” *The Oregonian*, published 5 JAN 2016, accessed 21 APR 2016, <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/patriot-militias-appeal-to-some-frustrated-vets/>.

(1) Answering the Call: Combat Manpower in Iraq and Afghanistan

In the turn of the millennium, the United States backed by NATO began engaging in two separate conflicts at the same time, Operation Iraqi Freedom beginning in 2003 centered around stabilizing Iraq after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's Regime, and Operation Enduring Freedom beginning in 2001 to eliminate the Taliban who provided a safe haven for Al-Qaeda and then stabilizing Afghanistan. Because these conflicts were fought simultaneously and heavily involved stabilization efforts and building infrastructure, they required far more troop involvement than former wars primarily devoted towards eliminating an enemy force – an example of this is the First Gulf War of 1991.

In a research finding conducted by the non-partisan RAND Corporation, the Active Duty component of the United States Army alone provided 1.5 million soldiers to deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan as of December 2011, encompassing 54% percent of all deployed soldiers of the total 2.6 million. To compound this, over 73% of all Active Duty Army troops had been deployed to either warzone and those who had not were largely new recruits. Furthermore, the amount of troop-deployments, measured by both longevity and frequency, had increased 50% by 2011 compared to 2008.¹⁴¹ It should be noted that this massive increase also coincided with the beginning of the Modern American Militia Movement and the election of President Barack Obama as statistically it could be argued that his administration's decision to revamp deployment time significantly impacted service members. This is not meant to under shadow the racial

¹⁴¹ Dave Baiocchi, "Measuring Army Deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan," *RAND Corporation*, published February 2013, accessed 2 DEC 2015, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/uncch/reader.action?docID=10744767&ppg=2>.

criticism President Obama faced for his status as the first black president, which likely played on some of the white nationalism strings of the 1990's militia movement's legacy.

Especially during "The Surge" in the Iraq War, an attempt by General David Petraeus to greatly multiply the grounded troops and launch an offensive campaign against the insurgencies, the wars brought in large amounts of individuals into the military who did not have a previous family history of being in the military. In order to create the sheer amount of troops required for the operation, many recruiting centers did not require the same standards they require today for enlistment. Those who wanted to serve in the armed forces and also had a family history in the military were more likely to pursue a lifestyle path centered on fitness, education, and an aversion to crime, and those who were only looking for an available source of employment were not. When these standards could be waived during The Surge to meet recruiting requirements, only 86% of recruits had GEDs and only 67% scored in the top 50th percentile on the Armed Forces Qualification Test.¹⁴² The same principle applied to drug usage as well. As SFC Israel Herrera, a US Army recruiter stated: "Before 2009, we would probably be able to give you an example of a young man or young woman who got in with a simple possession of marijuana charge... They would not get a waiver these days."¹⁴³ In short, these wars created conditions where many individuals were called into military service to work to build stabilization efforts overseas.

¹⁴² Annalyn Kurtz, "Getting into the Military is Getting Tougher," *CNN Money*, published 15 MAY 2013, accessed 2 DEC 2015, <http://money.cnn.com/2013/05/15/news/economy/military-recruiting/>.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

(2) A Botched Campaign: Troops and Public Sentiment Toward American Intervention

In addition to the massive number of troops required to conduct the US-led campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is important to note that these wars, especially the War in Iraq, were viewed negatively and seen to be failed interventions by many including those in the military. Unlike the Vietnam War that raged through the 1960's and 1970's, the United States military carried a well-respected image and military members were celebrated as heroes throughout most national discourse.

While support for the War in Iraq was initially very strong, it consistently fell throughout the course of the war, until 2008, when the US began to pull massive amounts of troops out. Pew Research conducted polls to evaluate public support for the Iraq in February or March of every year from 2003 to 2008. In one question, "Was the Decision to Use Military Force in Iraq Right or Wrong?" 72% percent of individuals polled stated it was "Right" while only 22% considered it "Wrong" in 2003. However looking at 2008, the numbers have practically flipped as only 38% considered it "Right," while 54% considered it wrong. On a second question, "How Well is the Iraq War Going?" in 2003, 88% considered it going "Well" and only 7% responded negatively. On the other hand in 2008, 48% of the public considered it going "Well" and another 48% reported unfavorable responses.¹⁴⁴

While no statistics behind military personnel's support for the war can be found during the conflict, a poll conducted by *The Washington Post* reveals some similarly interesting results after the end of the war. When polling veterans of the two wars about

¹⁴⁴ "Public Attitudes Toward the War in Iraq: 2003-2008," *Pew Research Center*, published 19 MAR 2008, accessed 3 DEC 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/03/19/public>.

whether they believed the costs of the war made it worth fighting, 44% reported positively and 50% reported negatively. Although not quite as significant when asked the same question about the War in Afghanistan, 53% responded positively and 41% responded negatively.¹⁴⁵ Though there is not drastic disapproval of these conflicts, having about half of all veterans returning home with a negative sentiment of the political causes for which they paid so dearly is important and can sow the seeds of national discontent when considered the sheer amount of returning service members.

As discussed earlier about the massive escalation of troop-deployment time under President Obama, it is also crucial to note the beliefs of service members during their two commanders in chief in the conflict, President George W. Bush and then President Barack Obama. While 65% of all veterans considered George W. Bush to be a “good commander-in-chief of the military,” only 42% stated the same about Barack Obama.¹⁴⁶ This also corresponds with the arrival of the Modern American Militia Movement during the Presidency of Barack Obama when many veterans returned home with negative feelings toward the President and his decision-making.

In spite of all the negativity versed towards the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan from veterans and the public, US soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen still retained a highly positive image throughout the midst of the conflict. As Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel stated in an interview with *The Washington Post*, “They [the veterans] have come back to a nation that has embraced them – warmly, strongly, positively — and put

¹⁴⁵ “After the Wars – Post-Kaiser Survey of Afghanistan and Iraq War Veterans,” *The Washington Post*, published 20 OCT 2015, accessed 3 DEC 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/polling/wars-postkaiser-survey-afghanistan-iraq-war/2015/10/20/3e8f2380-b7a6-11e3-9eb3-c254bdb4414d_page.html.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

tremendous value and appreciation into their service.”¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, many political research institutions also theorize that about 75% of Americans appreciate the service of their veteran compatriots in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but only 35% of the same group polled believed the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were both worth fighting. When asked about the data and statistical comparison, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey responded: “I think that this aspect of service, and being true and trustworthy to the man or woman on your left or right, is probably what mostly drives the 90 percent figure. They’re proud of what they did. They believe they did their job, and potentially the elected governments of Iraq and Afghanistan didn’t do theirs.”¹⁴⁸

Without surprise, these conditions began to create an incredibly conducive environment for domestic militia participation. Hundreds of thousands of service members returned home unhappy with the political motivations or outcomes of their actions but at the same time proud of their actions overseas. These individuals were combat-tested and well trained in using weapons and operating as a team with military tactics. As brotherly bonds thickened through the hardship of war, these soldiers returned home with a familial network and easy way to mobilize. Many examples of this can be found online through a variety of media including political blogs, militia webpages, and veterans’ forums.

Many of these modern militia organizations extract identity directly from the armed forces. Whether the connection between the two is related to recruiting tactics among veterans or the attempt of veterans to invest their military servitude into a militia

¹⁴⁷ Rajiv Chandrasekaren, “A Legacy of Pride and Pain,” *The Washington Post*, published 29 MAR 2014, accessed 2 DEC 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2014/03/29/a-legacy-of-pride-and-pain/>.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

organization remains unclear. Nonetheless, symbols and insignia remain a key facet of any organization and the armed forces and groups in the MAMM pose no exception. For example, consider the following similarities between militia aesthetics and the symbols of the United States Armed Forces:



The left image displays the Ranger Tab of the United States Army, a military award given to those soldiers who complete the elite US Army Ranger School which trains critical combat arms related functional skills to develop abilities to lead small unit operations in close combat.¹⁴⁹ Noting the reversed color scheme as well as the visual similarities in text and shape, the right image displays the chief insignia of the Oath Keepers.¹⁵⁰



¹⁴⁹ “Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade,” *United States Army Maneuver Center of Excellence*, published 11 APR 2016, accessed 25 APR 2016, <http://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/ARTB/>.

¹⁵⁰ “About Oath Keepers,” *Oath Keepers*.

Furthermore, observe the above two images. The left image shows the chief symbol of the United States National Guard, while the right is another symbol of the Oath Keepers, who also go by the ‘Guardians of the Republic’.¹⁵¹ Not only do both images share a general shape and outline, but also the iconic colonial Minuteman lies as the core symbol of both pictures.¹⁵²



Similarities in aesthetic symbols between the United States Military and militia organizations exist outside of the Oath Keepers. Viewing the above two images, one can notice similar qualities between the militia patch of the California State Militia with the aforementioned National Guard insignia. Uploaded via the group’s Facebook page, the left image displays a militiaman in uniform during a field training exercise.¹⁵³ Found via a quick Google search on a Pinterest board, the right image is merely the patch on his

¹⁵¹ “National Guard,” *National Guard*, accessed 25 APR 2016, <http://www.nationalguard.mil>.

¹⁵² “About Oath Keepers,” *Oath Keepers*.

¹⁵³ “Timeline Photos,” *California State Militia*, published 13 APR 2015, accessed 25 APR 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/californiastatemilitia/photos/pb.718635861535811.-2207520000.1461609413./870294409703288/?type=3&theater>.

shoulder blown up.¹⁵⁴ Understanding that the military remains a source of identity for many militia groups, many examples demonstrate the frustration of many service members towards the changes under the Obama Administration, much of which channeled into participation in militia organizations.

On a libertarian-leaning blog known as *The Rutherford Institute*, Brandon Raub, a former Marine, wrote a letter home during his deployment in Afghanistan, which well illustrates the sentiment among many returning United States military personnel. It reads:

“America has lost itself. We have lost who we truly are... They are controlling your media. They have dumbed you down through your school systems. They have systematically dismantled the constitution. It is in rags. The bill of rights is being systematically dismantled. Men have spilled their blood for those rights. Your sons and daughters, your brothers and sisters, and America’s best young men and women are losing their limbs. They are losing their lives. They are losing the hearts. They do not know why they are fighting. They are killing. And they do not know why. They have done some extraordinary acts. Their deeds go before them. But these wars are lies. They are lies. They deceived our entire nation with terrorism. They have gotten us to hand them our rights... We gave them the keys to our country. We were not vigilant with our republic. There is hope. BUT WE MUST TAKE OUR REPUBLIC BACK.”¹⁵⁵

Although Raub’s statement suggests his own sacrifice for the nation through military service as well as his opposition to the United States intervention, it suggests a discontent with national politics, specifically a loss of civil rights under the Obama Administration. Furthermore, although not implicit, its closing statement calls others to action to ‘take our Republic back’. It is unclear if he suggests a militant cause, but his

¹⁵⁴ “Militia Style,” *Pinterest*, accessed 25 APR 2016, <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/462674561690978383/>.

¹⁵⁵ John W. Whitehead, “Operation Vigilant Eagle: Is This Really How We Honor Our Nation’s Veterans?,” *The Rutherford Institute*, published 20 MAY 2013, accessed 3 MAR 2016, https://www.rutherford.org/publications_resources/john_whiteheads_commentary/operation_vigilant_eagle_is_this_really_how_we_honor_our_nations_veterans.

writing's focus on violence makes it a possibility. Looking at Raub's testimony, one can observe the rhetoric behind the frustration of many veterans. Now, all these individuals needed was a cause to be impassioned about to assemble. One of the central rallying points behind the Modern American Militia Movement happened not only to be directly related towards military service, but could also serve as an ideological and political defense against the aims of the Obama Administration – the United States Constitution. Like in earlier 'Patriot' and right-wing militia movements, the Constitution would establish the identity of the MAMM, but now it would gain a specific context among military service members.

(3) I Do Solemnly Swear that I Will Support and Defend the Constitution...

Before formally joining the military, enlisted recruits or commissioned officers seeking military service swear an oath of allegiance to demonstrate their loyalty to the nation. While the Oath of Enlistment only differs slightly in terms of some of the wording, the Oath of Commissioned Officers reads:

“I, _____, having been appointed an officer in the Army of the United States, as indicated above in the grade of _____ do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservations or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter; So help me God.”¹⁵⁶

Because of the order of wording and rhetoric of this oath, many currently serving military personnel and veterans have taken this to mean that their first, and primary

¹⁵⁶ “Oath of Commissioned Officers,” DA Form 71, 1 August 1959, accessed 1 DEC 2015, <http://www.army.mil/values/officers.html>.

allegiance is to supporting and defending the United States Constitution. For example, the Oath Keepers, the militia discussed earlier participating in Ferguson that mandates members be prior military, law enforcement, or first responders, has a website that describes the groups commitment to the United States Constitution. The “About” page reads:

“That oath, mandated by Article VI of the Constitution itself, is to the Constitution, not to the politicians, and Oath Keepers declare that they will not obey unconstitutional orders, such as orders to disarm the American people, to conduct warrantless searches, or to detain Americans as “enemy combatants” in violation of their ancient right to jury trial.”¹⁵⁷

In a number of ways, this group represents almost the epitome of the Modern American Militia Movement. Not only was the group founded in 2009, the wake of the Obama Administration and the movements beginning, but it also specifically targets its recruiting efforts at veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and presents a highly different, more refined image as compared to the militia organizations of the 1990’s. Essentially, the ‘Patriot’ identity surrounding the Constitution could appeal to the betrayal that many veterans felt towards the government.

While not as directly connected to veterans of the wars as the Oath Keepers, another militia known as the Watchmen founded in 2008 also asserts its cause as being Constitutional in nature. On their website, they describe themselves and their goal:

“We have united collectively in order to serve a mission that has been long overdue in the patriot movement. Together they have formed the perfect union dedicated to supporting the efforts of every Patriot and Patriot group whose desire is to restore and maintain the values and principles of our founding fathers and the Constitution of the United States of America.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ “About Oath Keepers.”

¹⁵⁸ “Who are the Watchmen?.....” *Watchmen of America: The Patriot Solution for Securing Our Nation*, published 2008, accessed 20 SEP 2015, <http://www.watchmenofamerica.com/index.html>.

First, these modern militia organizations have rooted their cause and ideology around the United States Constitution. In addition, they characterize the notion of ‘patriotism’ around the early ideals of the founding fathers and the principle of limited government. Despite the fact that some may label the veterans who joined militia as only a few radical individuals, the federal government’s actions to the strength of veteran numbers within militias would speak otherwise. Leaked to the American public since 2009 in a Wall Street Journal article, the FBI launched Operation Vigilant Eagle as a law enforcement program intended to track the activities of returning combat veterans and observe any movements of them into radical political and extremist groups, such as militias generally associated with the Tea Party and anti-government causes.¹⁵⁹ To the public eye, very little is known about the breadth, depth, and magnitude of Operation Vigilant Eagle, but the mere idea that the government deemed it necessary to launch such a program suggests more than a slight degree of concern that the movement of veterans into militia movements could pose in the future.

Despite the FBI’s establishment of a surveillance program to track returning veterans’ involvement in anti-government extremist organizations, the Department of Homeland Security had its work on the radical right squashed. In 2009, Daryl Johnson, a DHS analyst, published a report titled “Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Change Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment.”¹⁶⁰ The

¹⁵⁹ Cam Simpson and Gary Fields, “Veterans a Focus of FBI Extremist Probe,” *The Wall Street Journal*, published 17 APR 2009, accessed 20 SEP 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/news/articles/SB123992665198727459>.

¹⁶⁰ Ron Nixon, “Homeland Security Looked Past Antigovernment Movement, Ex-Analyst Says,” *The New York Times*, published 8 JAN 2016, accessed 24 APR 2016,

document warned of the growing right-wing populist threat since the election of President Barack Obama and described the dangers posed by militias and ‘lone wolves’ as well as the attempt of extremist organizations to recruit veterans. Due to its perceived labeling of ‘conservatives’ and ‘veterans’ as terrorists, the report met a heap of backlash from organizations and individuals like the American Legion, Rush Limbaugh, and Michelle Malkin. Frustrated and disillusioned, Johnson and many members of his team quit the DHS when the report was pulled because of the outcry, while the anti-government and ‘Patriot’ movement nationally skyrocketed as the account suggested.¹⁶¹ Johnson’s example highlights the importance of the militia movement’s narrative and popular perception. Meaningful government action and its success in the public eye are directly dependent on the association and brandishing of these militia groups. Conversely, militias and their supporters can fight against government programs by portraying them as a tyrannical and infringing on the rights of political minorities. In this way, narratives, especially communication and rhetoric, behind clashes between federal authorities and antigovernment groups remain incredibly important in setting the course for the future.

While the ongoing service to the Constitution and the American ideals of republican democracy and individual liberty seems like a simple, straightforward cause, the Constitution has always been a highly debated topic throughout the American political world. It has even made its way into the United States’ two-party system as Republicans and conservatives often argue for a stricter interpretation of the Constitution,

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/09/us/politics/homeland-security-looked-past-militia-movement-ex-analyst-says.html?_r=0.

¹⁶¹ Mark Potok, “Foreword” in *Right Wing Resurgence: How a Domestic Terrorist Threat is Being Ignored* by Daryl Johnson (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), ix-xi.

while most Democrats press for a looser interpretation of the document. Through its constitutional rhetoric, the Modern American Militia Movement continues to argue for a specific envisioning of the United States federal government. Although radicalized, it facets a conservative view on government within the United States which can be seen in the Republican Party, political interests groups like the National Rifle Association, and the grassroots Tea Party Movement.¹⁶² Moreover, the militia movement often situates itself within the broader sovereign citizens movement, a non-violent ideological group that asserts people are not beholden to federal, state, and local law that clashes with their original view of the United States Constitution. Looking at government and law enforcement authority as void, sovereign citizens extremists have often pushed their claims through court against paying taxes and following ordinances.¹⁶³ However unlike the aforementioned organizations and movement, which employ the same constitutionalist arguments the militia movement exhibits, the MAMM threatens the government and sometimes acts violently to represent itself and achieve its political means. In the following chapter, I will cover three case studies that not only reflect the ideology of MAMM, but also explain its ongoing battle to represent itself as a defense front to the tyrannical government.

¹⁶² Michael Waltman, *Hate on the Right: Right-Wing Political Groups and Hate Speech* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2015), 166-168.

¹⁶³ "Sovereign Citizen Extremist Ideology Will Drive Violence at Home, During Travel, and at Government Facilities," *Department of Homeland Security*, published 5 FEB 2015, accessed 15 APR 2016, <https://fas.org/irp/eprint/sovereign.pdf>.

Chapter 3

Battle! Not Through Gunfire, But Expression and Image

Unlike the previous two chapters that sought to first historicize the militia movement and then analyze the immediate factors that led to its current form, this chapter will take a different approach. It will focus on scrutinizing three important events in the past several years for the militia movement: the Bundy Ranch Standoff in 2014, the Oath Keepers occupation of Ferguson, MO in 2015, and finally the Occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 2016. With these examples of case studies, it will analyze the current battle that these right-wing populist groups engage with the federal government. While very little blood has been shed between the two groups in recent years, an important rhetorical and ideological struggle is being fought to influence the American public and notions of sovereignty in American culture.

This chapter seeks to situate the Modern American Militia Movement within mainstream political discourse. Political interest groups like the National Rifle Association, grassroots movements like the Tea Party, as well as politicians and their rhetoric are both directly and indirectly related to the militia movement. Not only do the groups address the American public through these events in the same ways as militias, but it is both impossible and insignificant to discern the militiaman from other unarmed members of the movement. Militias, as I will argue, fall only as one part of the modern right-wing populist movement with cynicism towards government and political structure. It does not exist as a separate institution, but rather is situated within a particular niche in American politics.

This movement, like the militia, is growing very quickly as political discontent and isolation seeps through many geographic areas of the country. While the reasons for national fragmentation are an entirely separate issue and deserve separate analysis, the fragmentation is evident in the Modern American Militia Movement. Feeling helplessly isolated, many Americans are willing to risk their own lives, face legal ramifications, and prepare to engage in violence against the government in their outrage.

Due to the incredibly new nature of not only the movement, but also the analyzed events, I offer the constant reminder that very little published work has been done on the militia movement's actions. Most research, especially in this chapter, will be heavily invested in primary sources directly from militia members or witnesses themselves. Because of the visceral nature of images in expressing identity, some sections will also focus on an image analysis to extract meaning.

The Bundy Ranch Standoff (2014)

A great deal of the conflicts in the past several years involving the Modern American Militia Movement and its cohorts have been rooted around the concept of land ownership in the West. Land ownership is a key issue as it directly related to the question of sovereignty in America – whether land, the backbone of agriculture, industry, and property, rests with the people or with the government. In total, the United States Federal Government, mostly through the Bureau of Land Management, owns 640 million acres of land nationwide, or about 28% of national land. Furthermore, an astonishingly large percentage of this ownership is in the American West. Most states on the East Coast have fewer than 10% of land being federally owned, with many especially in the

Northeast having less than 1% federally owned. On the other hand, the Federal Government owns about half of the land in the West, defined as West of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico, as well as Alaska with statistics reaching upwards of 84.5% in Nevada.¹⁶⁴ These statistics would shock many Americans who may not see this government ownership apparent in their lives, states, and communities.

It is also incredibly important to note that because much of the West's economy is agriculturally driven, especially through livestock like cattle, land becomes an important commodity, as it remains a fundamental pillar of the economy. Because the government management who often rarely interacts with it owns so much of this land, many citizens have taken it upon them to use federally owned land adjacent to their own property for their own purposes, typically grazing. From this tract, many of these citizens have morphed the problem into an ideological debate by posing the question of who is sovereign over this territory. Militias and the anti-government populist movement have posed the government as a tyrannical force, which owns the nation at the expense of the people, while the federal authorities have portrayed the militia as a lawless group of opportunists who have sought to use public land while masquerading values of liberty and patriotism. While the federal government typically allows citizens to lease the land for a fee or even buy the land, many ranchers are not wealthy enough to do either adding a dimension of class to the conflict.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Frank Jacobs, "Imbalance of Federal Land Ownership Sheds Light on Oregon Militia," *Big Think*, published 3 FEB 2015, accessed 15 MAR 2016, <http://bigthink.com/strange-maps/291-federal-lands-in-the-us>.

¹⁶⁵ Quoc Trung Bui and Margot Sanger-Katz, "Why the Government Owns So Much Land in the West," *The New York Times*, published 5 JAN 2016, accessed 22 MAR 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/06/upshot/why-the-government-owns-so-much-land-in-the-west.html?_r=0.

While quarrels related to land have picked up in regard to the militia movement and populist movement since the Reagan Era of US politics, the Bundy Ranch Standoff of 2014 stands out as one of the most recent and publicized examples. Cliven Bundy, a Nevada rancher, fiercely fought the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for over twenty years. He asserted that he had the right to use federal land as a grazing area for his cattle and declared void the over one million dollar collection of fines he was facing.¹⁶⁶ In reference to his land ownership, Bundy has stated: “My forefathers have been up and down the Virgin Valley here ever since 1877. All these rights that I claim have been created through pre-emptive rights and beneficial use of the forage and the water and the access and range improvements.”¹⁶⁷ Gathering his strength from the notion that his familial history trumps notions of formal ownership, Bundy’s cry has great political implications. In another interview, Mr. Bundy stated:

“I have raised cattle on that land, which is public land for the people of Clark County, all my life. Why I raise cattle there and why I can raise cattle there is because I have preemptive rights. Who is the trespasser here? Who is the trespasser on this land? Is the United States trespassing on Clark County, Nev., land? Or is it Cliven Bundy who is trespassing on Clark County, Nevada, land?”¹⁶⁸

Evidently, Bundy’s tone contains a great deal of anti-statist sentiment as if the government only serves to constrain and controls his life. The roots of the 2014 standoff that would erupt between militiamen and both federal and state law enforcement officers

¹⁶⁶ Ryan Lenz and Mark Potok, “War in the West: The Bundy Ranch Standoff and the American Radical Right,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, published JUL 2014, accessed 17 MAR 2016, https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/d6_legacy_files/downloads/publication/war_in_the_west_report.pdf.

¹⁶⁷ Jacqueline Keeler, “On Cliven Bundy’s ‘Ancestral Rights’,” *The Nation*, published 29 APR 2014, accessed 17 MAR 2016, <http://www.thenation.com/article/cliven-bundys-ancestral-rights/>.

¹⁶⁸ Lenz and Potok, “War in the West.”

began with a 2013 ruling by a US District Court that acknowledged the government's ownership of the land with the rationale that the United States' government inherited the lands since 1848 when Mexico succeeded the land. To enforce Bundy's illegal grazing, the BLM hired cowboys across the West to roundup Bundy's herd on federal land. Reports also circulated that the Federal government had deployed snipers and militarized agents with automatic weapons to enforce the law.¹⁶⁹ From militia sources as well as some major news outlets, a number of videos and images circulated the Internet that displayed over one hundred federal vehicles at the scene as well as a shockingly high estimated number of federal agents decked in military gear.¹⁷⁰ As Bundy pushed his case for the ongoing events through *The Blaze*, a right-wing news source owned by Glenn Beck, hundreds of militiamen, locals who loathed the BLM, and others associated with the Patriot Movement flocked to Bundy's ranch to engage in an armed standoff.¹⁷¹

As the protestors flocked to the area and the militia members and federal law enforcement officers pointed weapons at each other, the Bureau of Land Management established a zone referred to as the "Free Speech Zone." This zone delegated where protestors could legally protest the BLM's actions. Many refused to follow the policy, which came under harsh criticism from a variety of groups including the American Civil Liberties Union, which stated "We don't like the idea of people being cordoned off or

¹⁶⁹ Lenz and Potok, "War in the West."

¹⁷⁰ Mike Adams, "U.S. Government Snipers, Militarized Police with Automatic Weapons Surround Cattle Ranch in Nevada and Demand \$1 Million in Payments," *Natural News*, published 9 APR 2014, accessed 17 MAR 2016, http://www.naturalnews.com/044654_Bundy_cattle_ranch_government_siege_militarized_police.html.

¹⁷¹ Lenz and Potok, "War in the West."

corralled and told where they can and cannot express themselves.”¹⁷² The standoff lasted for about 12 days and took a turn when a rumor began circulating out of the Oath Keepers encampment about a drone strike. Members believed that under the direction of US Attorney General Eric Holder, a figure despised by the antigovernment movement, federal authorities were planning to launch a drone strike on the ‘free speech zone,’ essentially killing all of the protestors. Chaos ensued and internal divisions arose within the militia encampment as under the leadership of Stewart Rhodes, the founder of the Oath Keepers, the group evacuated the zone, which Bundy’s entourage of body guards dubbed ‘desertion.’¹⁷³ Frustrated with abandonment, Ryan Payne, a 30-year old Iraq War Veteran, addressed the Oath Keepers in a video posted online at the Bundy Ranch.¹⁷⁴ He stated:

“You do not ever leave a man behind on the battlefield. You do not ever turn tail and run in the face of danger. You do not ever leave a fallen comrade to fall under the hands of the enemy and you drive on towards the objective even if you are the last man standing. This is desertion that was done. This is dereliction of duty.”¹⁷⁵

Note the use of language and rhetoric related to military service – Payne uses diction like ‘desertion,’ ‘objective,’ and ‘duty,’ all commonly used in reference to

¹⁷² Sean Whaley, “‘Free Speech Zones’ at BLM Cattle Roundup Put Controversial Areas in Spotlight,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal Capital Bureau*, published 13 APR 2014, accessed 17 MAR 2016, <http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/nevada/free-speech-zones-blm-cattle-roundup-put-controversial-areas-spotlight>.

¹⁷³ David Neiwert, “Back at the Bundy Ranch, It’s Oath Keepers Vs. Militiamen as Wild Rumors Fly,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, published 30 APR 2014, accessed 17 MAR 2016, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2014/04/30/back-bundy-ranch-its-oath-keepers-vs-militiamen-wild-rumors-fly>.

¹⁷⁴ Ted McDermott, “Freedom Fighter,” *Missoula Independent*, published 12 JUN 2014, accessed 17 MAR 2016, <http://missoulanews.bigskypress.com/missoula/freedom-fighter/Content?oid=2054145>.

¹⁷⁵ “Infighting Breaks Out Among Bundy Ranch ‘Patriots’ as Militiamen Oust ‘Oath Keepers’,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, published 30 APR 2014, accessed 17 MAR 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4s_pvufopzs.

military missions and commitment. Furthermore, note the similarity of Payne's comments to *The Warrior Ethos*, a motto of the United States Army that symbolizes commitment, mentality and dedication. It reads:

“I will always place the mission first.
I will never accept defeat.
I will never quit.
I will never leave a fallen comrade.”¹⁷⁶

The similarity is rather evident. While Payne's comments could be dismissed merely as a using military language, the fact that he chose to apply the same language the military voices to its service members to the cause of the militia signifies a larger trend as many militia members have stated similar rhetoric. It reflects the influence that military service has on shaping sentiment towards duty in the militia movement. Veteran identity of militia members was highly apparent in the Bundy Ranch Standoff. In one of the most renowned photos from media coverage of the event, militia members dressed in cowboy apparel are shown triumphantly riding horseback around the Ranch property. Flags bearing the emblems of the United States Army, Marine Corps, and Navy are flying high as to flaunt the notion of military servitude.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ “Warrior Ethos,” *United States Army*, accessed 17 MAR 2016, <http://www.army.mil/values/warrior.html>.

¹⁷⁷ Lenz and Potok, “War in the West.”



On April 12th, the event further culminated when Nevada Sheriff Gillespie met with Cliven Bundy and protestors. Gillespie asserted that the BLM sought peace in the confrontation, to stop its operation, and wanted to talk to Bundy and his entourage about the safest way to deescalate the standoff.¹⁷⁸ Instead of embracing the BLM, Bundy went on a crafted stage and addressed the protestors by stating: “Let’s go get those cattle! All we got to do is open those gates and let them back on the river. We’re about to take this country back by force.”¹⁷⁹ Riling up the militiamen, Bundy led a charge to break through the barrier of the “Free Speech Zone” and local leadership implanted militia snipers on a highway overpass to cover their assaulting force on the ground. Armed BLM Rangers dressed in riot gear yelled through loud speakers for the militia forces to disperse and

¹⁷⁸ Lenz and Potok, “War in the West.”

¹⁷⁹ “The Video the Feds Don’t Want You to See,” *The Alex Jones Channel*, published 13 APR 2015, accessed 17 MAR 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwbIy5DJDFo>.

back down. When the militia kept charging, the BLM simply backed down and left, allowing Bundy to recover his cattle. Despite knowing many identities, federal authorities did not charge any of the militia members who pointed weapons at their agents with criminal proceedings.¹⁸⁰ Supporters of the BLM's tactics often mention that the federal law enforcement's passivity was highly successful in preventing the violence, turmoil, and fear of the Waco and Ruby Ridge outcomes. Their actions of not launching a military confrontation could be interpreted as an attempt to break the narrative of the government being a violent, tyrannical entity to the American public.

Much of the militias' tactics in battling federal authorities rely on pinning down the government as an aggressive totalitarian authority. The Bundy Ranch Standoff of 2014 is a highly significant event in the fact that it was the one of the first major armed standoffs between the Modern American Militia Movement and federal authorities. Needless to say, critics allege that the outcome of the conflict reflects the Bureau of Land Management's unpreparedness to face an armed populist revolt. Although he was arrested several years later for the events at Malheur involving his son, Ammon Bundy, Cliven Bundy still has not paid the over one million dollars in grazing fines that the federal government asserts he owes. The assembled militia succeeded in generating significant appeal and sympathy for its case in defending 'Little Cliven Bundy' from the 'Big Bad Feds.' The militarization of the BLM Rangers and the notion of limited government in regard to property holdings attracted a lot of Americans to support the Bundy family, especially from the right and libertarian side of politics. Militia blogs, local newspapers in the Western United States as well as Fox News, a right-leaning news

¹⁸⁰ Lenz and Potok, "War in the West."

agency, covered the standoff by interviewing militia members, the Bundy family, and protestors and very rarely federal officials.

The militia movement and its supporters made many statements vilifying the federal officials and BLM and violent and oppressive towards the people. On the Pete Santilli Show, part of Guerilla Media Network, a ‘Patriot’ Movement media machine, a protestor when asked about his experience with the federal authorities stated that they were “Enemy aggressors... We’re not the aggressors.”¹⁸¹ Local 8 Nevada News reported “The Bundy Ranch seemed somewhat like a police state to people in this community.” The reporter interviewed Jim Lordy, a militiaman from Operation Mutual Aid who assisted the Bundy Family. Armed with an AR-15 and bearing a long beard, Lordy described “We need guns to protect ourselves from a tyrannical government.”¹⁸² When *The Independent* interviewed a sniper named Aaron supporting the Bundys and asked him if children should be intermingled with the armed protestors, Aaron responded by stating: “It might have been the only thing that kept them [the protestors] from getting gassed. They threatened to shoot chemicals in that crowd.”¹⁸³ These are only a handful of quotes that display the militia view of the federal government as an animosity and an aggressor. With this portrayal, the anti-government forces asserted themselves as the true protectors of liberty. This rhetorically defensive strategy would continue in future events

¹⁸¹ “Bundy Standoff! Bundy Ranch Protestors Tasered by Federal Agents and Attacked by K9’s,” *Pete Santilli Show*, published 9 APR 2014, accessed 17 MAR 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhJ6H9vIEDA>.

¹⁸² “Armed Militia Groups Defend Rancher in Nevada,” *Local 8 News*, published 11 APR 2014, accessed 17 MAR 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFZj6f_luSE.

¹⁸³ Michael Flynn, “Interview with Sniper at Bundy Standoff,” *The Independent*, published 14 APR 2014, accessed 17 MAR 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhNFqaLioD4>.

involving heavy militia presence as would ensue when the Oath Keepers occupied the city of Ferguson, MO in the wake of summer 2015 riots.

The Oath Keepers Occupation of Ferguson, MO (2015)

As heavily discussed in the introduction on pages four and five, members of the Modern American Militia Movement flocked to the city of Ferguson in the wake of the racially driven protests and turmoil after the death of Michael Brown. Within the protests for prosecution of Officer Darren Wilson and reforms in the criminal justice and law enforcement systems were many opportunists. Using the chaos and emotional momentum, these individuals brought arson, looting, and violence to the already tense situation. Opportunism presented a special problem for the black community because not only did looting raids draw crowds of over 180 individuals, according to the St. Louis Police Department, but these raids were also targeted at areas unprotected by local law enforcement and the National Guard. Looters and arsonists targeted an estimated 250 businesses and allegedly caused about \$300,000 worth of property damage to Dellwood Market, a shop owned by Jan Lalani.¹⁸⁴ The National Guard and Governor Jay Nixon faced harsh criticism for concentrating armed troops near government buildings and ignoring the most violent commercial district of the city. Ferguson's mayor, James Knowles III, commented by stating:

“What should have happened last night? They should have had National Guard troops protecting the hard targets in Ferguson and allowed law

¹⁸⁴ Ray Sanchez, “Police Seek Hundreds in Videotaped Ferguson-Area Looting,” *CNN*, published 21 JAN 2015, accessed 20 MAR 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/21/us/missouri-looting-video/>.

enforcement to pursue a very mobile crowd of looters and arsonists. That's the problem. The police could not secure the commercial districts."¹⁸⁵

Similar sentiment resonated from many citizens of Ferguson as well. Deundrake Lewis, a Ferguson business owner, commented: "That's what I thought the National Guard was here for — to protect residents and businesses — but it didn't happen."¹⁸⁶

In a highly different way that does not necessarily convey negativity, the Oath Keepers and other members of the 'Patriot Movement' who gathered in Ferguson could also be identified as 'opportunists.' Although many Oath Keepers viewed their actions of helping the people of Ferguson as moral and benevolent, the situation proved to be an excellent way to flaunt the appeal of the militia movement to the American public.

Echoing the voices of citizens, in an interview with *RT America*, Sam Andrews, arguably the leader of the Oath Keepers ground presence in Ferguson, stated:

"The fact is that they [the National Guard] had over two months to prepare for this. Why was the National Guard not here supporting the St. Louis County Police and supporting highway patrol and protecting these businesses? To me, it is either such a grotesque incompetence or downright criminal negligence."¹⁸⁷

Many Ferguson residents felt threatened by the violence of the looters and arsonists and also abandoned by the government, the force that had always been seen as a vestige of protection. The question is however: "How would a black community react to an armed volunteer force of mostly white males?" Moreover, "How would the Oath Keepers present themselves and craft their image to the people of Ferguson?"

¹⁸⁵ Christine Byers, "Ferguson Mayor Asks Where National Guard Was; Gov. Nixon Pledges More," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, published 26 NOV 2014, accessed 20 MAR 2016, http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/ferguson-mayor-asks-where-national-guard-was-gov-nixon-pledges/article_343a2224-4d61-54fb-b5ac-a13ea99951f7.html.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ben Swann, "Ferguson Oath Keepers: Guardians or Vigilantes?"

Just like the Bundy Ranch Standoff, the militia justified its use of armed civil and paramilitary protest and action through both calling upon its ideals of service as well as its portrayal of government as an aggressor and itself as a defender of liberty and the American people. Throughout their venture in Ferguson, the Oath Keepers prioritized presenting themselves as a force attempting to protect and look out for members of the black community. One of the most well circulated examples of attempting to ally with community members involved the instance of Natalie's Cakes and More, a Ferguson bakery. The business' Facebook page shared an image of Natalie, the owner giving a hug to a smiling, young Oath Keeper dressed in outdoor military apparel with a tactical vest. The picture held the quote: "Thank you to the guys and gals like this wonderful man, protecting me and my bakery" and was shared almost six thousand times on social media and garnered twenty-two thousand "Likes."¹⁸⁸ The Oath Keepers also shared Natalie's post on their own website, pointing out the man as Nick Nesbitt.¹⁸⁹ The picture is displayed below:

¹⁸⁸ Natalie's Cakes & More, "Thank you to the guys and gals like this wonderful man, protecting me and my bakery," *Facebook*, Pub. 29 NOV 2014, Acc. 20 MAR 2016, < <https://www.facebook.com/274915157402/photos/pb.274915157402.-2207520000.1458932937./10152846243627403/?type=3&theater>>.

¹⁸⁹ Larry Diffey, "Meet Natalie – Of Natalie's Cakes In Ferguson," *Oath Keepers*, Pub. 30 NOV 2014, Acc. 20 MAR 2016, < <https://www.oathkeepers.org/meet-natalie-of-natalies-cakes-in-ferguson/>>.



Another example of the Oath Keepers interacting with the black community of Ferguson and pushing its anti-government rhetoric lies in the nightly patrols that militia members would go on. On these routes, militia teams would carry rifles and speak with the people of Ferguson about their grievances and desire for change. In one video published by *The Alex Jones Channel*, a leading edge of anti-government populist media, Sam Andrews addresses a crowd of reporters and black community members. When asked to comment on police brutality, Andrews responded fervently:

“Tamir Rice, a 12 year old boy, from Cleveland, OH was shot by a cop who never should have had a badge. That’s the truth! He had an airsoft gun in his hand. A man on the streets of New York was choked out... was choked out... for not paying a cigarette tax. I ask you a question: Since when... since when is the penalty for not paying a cigarette tax the death penalty in the United States of America?”¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ “Oath Keepers on Black Lives Matter,” *The Alex Jones Channel*, published 11 AUG 2015, accessed 20 MAR 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vrzZR0PBOI>.

In the same interview, Andrews went on to discuss several other examples of policy brutality against African Americans, meeting nods and a sense of approval from the black crowd. Shifting to tie police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement to the militia's anti-government cause, Andrews describes that "They killed a white veteran in North Carolina, broke into his home, and shot him. They killed a white mental health patient in Albuquerque, shot him in the back, and the officers on film on the sergeant's car say "I'm gonna shoot that guy first chance I get."¹⁹¹ Earlier in the footage, Andrews tied the 2nd Amendment and gun ownership toward improving the status of blacks by describing how "Who were the first gun control laws passed on to prevent from defending themselves?" An African American man can be heard shouting "Black people!" reflecting Andrew's attempt and apparent success in sharing his opinions with the black community.¹⁹²

Another important aspect of the Oath Keepers involvement in interacting with the black community radiates from Andrews' planning of a racially integrated open carry march. Open carry marches have traditionally been an instrument of political protest for individuals in the Tea Party and 'Patriot Movements,' largely white groups. These marches involve openly carry rifles in public, usually in front of government buildings, to highlight devotion to the 2nd Amendment and to protest legislation that infringes on that right. Supporters of the action assert that it reminds politicians that they are beholden to the people and the 2nd Amendment's purpose is to give citizens the ability to overthrow a

¹⁹¹ "Oath Keepers on Black Lives Matter."

¹⁹² Ibid.

tyrannical government. On the other hand, opponents assert that it reflects America's fetish toward firearms and creates a climate of fear and subtly threatens violence.

For this reason, open carry marches always generate controversy, and likewise did so in this case when Andrews, a gun shop owner and former defense contractor, began planning a march to involve the black community of Ferguson. Andrews stated: "We intend to show that this right is not just for white people."¹⁹³ The Oath Keepers as an organization pulled its support for Andrews' march. To which, Andrews commented on the militia's leadership under Stewart Rhodes:

"Almost his whole board of directors is retired cops. This whole board of directors was OK with Oath Keepers at Bundy Ranch pointing rifles at feds, but not OK with a black open carry march. I can't have my name associated with an organization that doesn't believe black people can exercise their First and Second Amendment rights at the same time."¹⁹⁴

Another Oath Keeper, going by the alias James Wise, a Cuban and former US Army Green Beret, who decided to follow Andrews and splinter from the central organization commented:

"You know race isn't a huge issue here, but I have to believe that an organization that is OK with a bunch of white guys pointing guns at cops in Nevada over grazing rights shouldn't turn into complete [multiple expletives deleted] [cowards] at the thought of blacks just holding guns in a march protesting people getting beaten and killed by cops."¹⁹⁵

Similar to the Bundy Ranch Standoff of 2014, the Oath Keepers decision-making caused the Ferguson movement to splinter. Splintering remains a constant issue for

¹⁹³ Tim O'Neil, "Open-Carry Gun Group Plans Rally, March in Ferguson," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, published 12 NOV 2015, accessed 20 MAR 2016, http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/open-carry-gun-group-plans-rally-march-in-ferguson/article_1219f03b-2b99-591e-82ed-97227a272cd1.html.

¹⁹⁴ Justin King, "Exclusive: Oath Keepers Leave Organization in Protest After Leadership Reportedly Fails to Support Armed Ferguson March."

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

militia organizations as groups' commitment to battling authority and the importance of individualism can make it difficult to mobilize and unite despite disagreements.

The Ferguson venture by the Oath Keepers rests as one of the arguably most successful ventures by the militia in the American public sphere as its attempt to work with the black community and fight larger institutional issues appealed to Americans outside of the right-wing populist movement. Just like previous encounters, the Modern American Militia Movement framed its actions based on the notions of public servitude and fighting the 'aggressive' government authority. This narrative would not continue quite as well as the militia movement would have hoped as evident in events in early 2016 once again involving Federal ownership of land.

The Occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (2016)

After launching a protest marching through the streets of the small town of Burns, Oregon on January 3rd, 2016, militiamen and others affiliated with the right-wing populist movement occupied the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge about 60 miles away.¹⁹⁶ The protestors came armed with an undermined amount of firearms and ammunition, but one of the group's loudest spokespersons – Ammon Bundy, the son of Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy, reported that they movement was prepared "to be out here for as long as needs be."¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Vinograd et al., "Ammon Bundy, Rancher's Rights Protesters Occupy Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon," *NBC News*, published 3 JAN 2016, accessed 28 MAR 2016, <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ammon-bundy-ranchers-rights-protesters-occupy-malheur-national-wildlife-refuge-n489311>.

¹⁹⁷ Bundy Ranch, "BREAKING! SHARE! Standing for the rights of Men & Women. Calling all freedom loving people to come to Harney County Oregon, come to the Malheur Wildlife Refuge. The people are finally getting some good use out of a federal

Although protestors flocked to the government-owned facility for a myriad of reasons, much of the initial impetus was related to the imprisonment of Dwight and Steven Hammond. In 2001, the Hammonds conducted a control burn on their property. By accident, the fire spread to public lands and controversy generated while federal authorities alleged the men had been covering up illegal poaching operations, while the pair asserted that they were fighting an invasive plant species. In 2006, the Hammonds lit another fire as a back burn, a fire which prevented the larger wildfire caused by a lightning storm from reaching their property. BLM firefighters confirmed their rationale and the spread of their second fire caused less than \$1,000 dollars of damage to public land. However, the Federal government, using an anti-terrorism statute and mandatory minimum sentence requirements, overruled the pair's three months, for the father, and one month, for the son, sentences instituted by a US District Judge. They instead required the men to serve the minimum sentence requirement of five years under the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996... hence, inciting the anger and protest when armed unorganized members of militia and 'Patriot' movements deliberately occupied the federal facility.¹⁹⁸

As Ammon Bundy and others stormed the federal facility, it is important to note that no employees were present at the time. While the protestors may have still believed their cause was defensive in nature towards the Hammonds, authorities and media figures

facility," *Facebook*, published 3 JAN 2016, accessed 28 MAR 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/bundy ranch/videos/vb.623383454405133/938588846217924/?type=2&theater>.

¹⁹⁸ Conor Friedersdorf, "Oregon and the Injustice of the Mandatory Minimums," *The Atlantic*, published 5 JAN 2016, accessed 28 MAR 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/01/oregon-mandatory-minimums/422433/>.

jumped at the chance to indict these protestors as the aggressors, as they had, after all, forcibly occupied a federal facility. For this reason, the Malheur Wildlife Refuge occupation represented some of the most controversial and splintered actions within the modern American militia movement. Oath Keepers leader Stewart Rhodes published a letter online via the organizations website criticized the actions of the occupiers, stating:

“However, as you know, we oppose what you have chosen to do by occupying the wildlife preserve there in Oregon, specifically because it is not being done with the consent of the locals or at their request, without the request of the Hammond’ family, without even their knowledge of what you were going to do, until you did it, and because it is not in direct defense of anyone. The right way to go would have been to respect the right of the locals on the Committee of Safety to call the shots, decide what needs to be done, and to actually let them be in charge of all outside volunteers, including you. You can certainly act as an adviser and instructor, giving input on what you think they should do, but they must be in charge.”¹⁹⁹

To Rhodes and many others within the Oath Keepers movement, the protestors’ actions are framed in an offensive context and do not reflect the wishes of the locals. This is highly unlike the two previous examples discussed, where at the Bundy Ranch Standoff, militia flocked to Bundy’s land to aid him. On the other hand, in Ferguson, the Oath Keepers attempted to interact with members of the black community and to protect their interests.

The motivation for the occupation also began to lose its traction from protesting the imprisonment of the Hammonds and play into the larger anti-government rhetoric of fighting federal control. In his initial interview and in a Facebook video uploaded to the “Bundy Ranch” page, Ammon Bundy described how “We’re here because the people

¹⁹⁹ Stewart Rhodes, “A Recommended Honorable Exit Strategy for Ammon Bundy,” *Oathkeepers*, published 6 JAN 2015, accessed 28 MAR 2016, <https://www.oathkeepers.org/a-recommended-honorable-exit-strategy-for-ammon-bundy/>.

have been abused long enough; their lands and their resources have been taken from them to the point where its literally been putting them in poverty,” and on his idea of a successful protest that: “When the people of Harney County can use the land and resources without being put in fear and without being restricted to the point that it puts them out of business. Once they can use these lands as free men...”²⁰⁰

Defenders of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge occupiers employed similar arguments to portray the government as an aggressive tyrannical overreach. In a widely circulated video on YouTube, KrisAnne Hall, a constitutional attorney, reflected on the situation stating: “The people are not acting lawlessly, it is the federal government that is acting lawlessly. The federal authority has no authority to own any land outside Article 1, Section 8, Clause 17... There is no authority for the federal government to dictate to the states or the people how they operate their land.”²⁰¹

Unlike the two previous events discussed involving the Modern American Militia Movement, the Malheur incident would end in bloodshed. On January 29th, Robert “Lavoy” Finicum, an Arizona rancher and one of the occupier’s loudest spokespersons, broke through an FBI traffic stop and took off at a high speed in an attempt to flee the authorities. Finicum, with Ryan Bundy, the brother of Ammon Bundy, in the passenger seat, crashed into a snow bank after he attempted to get off of the main icy roads and almost hit a dismounted agent. FBI vehicles quickly followed him, surrounded his

²⁰⁰ Bundy Ranch, “BREAKING! SHARE! Standing for the rights of Men & Women. Calling all freedom loving people to come to Harney County Oregon, come to the Malheur Wildlife Refuge. The people are finally getting some good use out of a federal facility.”

²⁰¹ KrisAnne Hall, “What’s Really Going on in Oregon! Taking Back the Narrative!,” *YouTube*, published 5 JAN 2016, accessed 27 MAR 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T424sWq1SkE>.

vehicle, and drew their weapons at him.²⁰² The narrative begins to become controversial at this point with federal authorities asserting that Finicum reached inside of his waistband and attempted to pull a handgun, where he was then engaged with, shot, and killed by the SWAT team. The FBI uploaded a video featuring Greg Bretzing, the FBI Special Agent in Charge. The video showed footage from a helicopter that shows Finicum at a distance exiting his vehicle, but then reaching into his coat pocket. Bretzing describes that Finicum “did have a loaded 9 mm semi-automatic handgun in that [left coat] pocket” as well as the fact that he stated he would not be taken alive.²⁰³

Despite its disagreements with the cause of the occupation, the Oath Keepers jumped on the chance to discuss the shooting of Lavoy Finicum by the FBI and attack the government for its ‘unjustified killing’. The Oath Keepers uploaded a number of posts on the website. In one, Greg McWhirther, an Oath Keeper and veteran SWAT officer, discussed with Stewart Rhodes the danger and lethality of roadblocks and hints that the FBI may have sought a violent outcome.²⁰⁴ Another article asserted that FBI agents might have tampered with the crime scene and removed evidence as seen from video footage.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, another article addresses the American media’s portrayal of the occupiers and militia movements as “right wing extremists [that] are a greater threat than ISIS” and

²⁰² Breanna Edwards, “Robert ‘LaVoy’ Finicum Killed in Ore. Arrests, Reached for Gun, Authorities Say.”

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Jason Van Tatenhove, “Stewart Rhodes Interviews Oath Keeper SWAT Officer About the LaVoy Finicum Shooting,” *Oathkeepers*, published 3 FEB 2016, accessed 27 MAR 2016, <https://www.oathkeepers.org/9870-2/>.

²⁰⁵ David Codrea, “Investigation into Alleged FBI Finicum Shooting Evidence Tampering Faces Credibility Hurdles,” *Oathkeepers*, published 24 MAR 2016, accessed 27 MAR 2016, <https://www.oathkeepers.org/investigation-into-alleged-fbi-finicum-shooting-evidence-tampering-faces-credibility-hurdles/>.

demands that the FBI release the name of the officer who killed Finicum.²⁰⁶ Considering these articles as a response to Finicum's death and understanding that they are only part of a larger voice of anti-government rhetoric and cynicism within the right-wing populist movement, confirms aspects of the movement. Despite not agreeing with the cause of the occupation, others within the movement will not hesitate to criticize the government and continue to portray it as a militaristic, authoritarian state that does not care for the general welfare of its civilians.

On February 11th, the 41-day occupation ended after the final four militants surrendered to federal authorities. Whether disillusioned by the cause or forced to get back to their lives, occupation membership slowly dwindled throughout the operation. After the finale clear out of militiamen and protestors from the refuge, FBI Agent Greg Bretzing commented: "Over the course of the last month, the people of Harney County have lived through an experience that is both highly emotional and physically exhausting... This series of events has been beyond difficult for Harney County families."²⁰⁷ Exemplified by Bretzing's statement, media and government coverage of the Oregon militia was highly unlike the previous examples discussed. Instead of the militia able to articulate themselves public servants, defenders of liberty, and a force against tyranny, the militia were portrayed at an aggressive group of opportunists that threatened American society. NPR released an article displaying the gross destruction of federal

²⁰⁶ David Codrea, "Finicum Shooter Protection Bill Points to Wider Issue of Government Distrust," *Oathkeepers*, published 15 FEB 2016, accessed 27 MAR 2016, <https://www.oathkeepers.org/finicum-shooter-protection-bill-points-to-wider-issue-of-government-distrust/>.

²⁰⁷ Conrad Wilson and John Rosman, "Malheur National Wildlife Refuge Occupation Ends," *Oregon Public Broadcasting*, published 11 FEB 2016, accessed 27 MAR 2016, <http://www.opb.org/news/series/burns-oregon-standoff-bundy-militia-news-updates/malheur-occupation-ends/>.

property and the state of disarray that the occupiers left the refuge in after they left.²⁰⁸

Furthermore, local indigenous Native American leaders blasted the occupiers for being outsiders who neglected the tribes stake and claims over the lands. Charlotte Rodrigue, the leader of the area's Native American tribal council, explained, "Armed protesters don't belong here... [Who were] desecrating one of our sacred sites."²⁰⁹

Crucial to understanding the basis of why the assembled militia and occupiers were portrayed in such a negative light lays the question of identifying the militia as an "outsider." Like Stewart Rhodes explained, because a large number of militiamen and occupiers came from outside of Oregon and certainly not from Harney County, it was difficult for their argument of championing local empowerment over the federal government to resonate when they did not even have the support of the people of Harney County.

²⁰⁸ Camila Domonoske, "Photos: The Mess Occupiers Left At Malheur National Wildlife Refuge," *NPR*, published 25 MAR 2016, accessed 27 MAR 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/03/25/471833029/photos-the-mess-occupiers-left-at-malheur-national-wildlife-refuge>.

²⁰⁹ Morgan Winsor, "Native Americans React to Oregon Armed Occupation: Burns Paiute Tribe Says, 'We Were Here First'," *International Business Times*, published 6 JAN 2016, accessed 27 MAR 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.com/native-americans-react-oregon-armed-occupation-burns-paiute-tribe-says-we-were-here-2252872>.

Conclusion: Looking Towards the Future

Looking at militia action in the Bundy Ranch standoff, the Oath Keepers in Ferguson, as well as the Malheur Nation Wildlife Refuge occupation, the Modern American Militia Movement exists as a living object by continuously asserting itself in the public sphere and confronting federal law enforcement.

Engrained just as much into American history as apple pie and baseball, the militia tradition survived as a fundamental facet of political contention since the nation's birth. Rooted in 18th century political philosophy and enlightenment ideals, the Revolutionary and Early Republic periods characterized the notion of the patriot militia as an institution to resist tyranny and enforce the ideal of limited government. Morphed by a myriad of events including the expansion of the Western frontier as well as growing federal power and coercion under Andrew Jackson, militia organizations began to associate the federal government as the greatest threat to liberty. The militia underwent another significant change when right-wing populist movements spurred in the United States in the post-WWII period to resist a quickly changing social landscape.

Moving into the 1990's as an armed institution centered on anti-communism, ethnocentrism, the United States Constitution, as well as often nationalism and Christianity, the militia began to escalate as a domestic power. To its prospective members, the events that unfolded at the cabin in Ruby Ridge, ID in 1992 marked a lack of government accountability as well as a perceived notion that it blatantly disregarded respect for the lives of its citizens. With another 80 deaths during the Waco Siege in 1993 at the hands of federal law enforcement, hatred toward American government had

become a national epidemic, which finally materialized itself in Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the Oklahoma City Murrah Federal Building. This tragic event rocked American society as well as the fundamentals of the militia movement that McVeigh bore loose connection to.

Pushed underground, the legacy of the 1990's and the ideological foundations of the militia movement remained centered on right-wing populism and the United States Constitution. Finally bearing resemblance to its current manifestation, the Modern American Militia Movement awoke in 2008 with the election of President Obama, the nation's first black president. Crucial to understanding the current identity and organization behind this movement lies United States intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. These wars brought large amounts of combat manpower into overseas military service. Furthermore, both the American public and military service members have echoed an overall negative sentiment towards the wars, especially the Second Gulf War, which many see as failed intervention. Nonetheless, military service remains celebrated by a majority of the American public and pride resonates from within military ranks. Military members, especially from the Army and Marine Corps, returned upset and disgruntled with the politics of President Obama. Invigorated by their oath and service to the United States Constitution, military members found and continue to find the Modern American Militia as a political foothold. This new militia movement exhibits notable changes from previous movements as veteran networking has seen militia scope expand to national horizons. In the MAMM, the militia stakes its identity in military servitude and a commitment to public defense, exemplified in the events discussed in Nevada, Missouri, and Oregon.

To federal authorities, the Bundy Ranch standoff shocked the BLM with its massive turnout of militia forces to support the Nevada rancher. Bundy and his allies in the anti-government movement surrounded themselves with notions of patriotism, military servitude, and successfully portrayed the BLM and its armed law enforcement component through social media and news outlets as a tyrannical arm of government. The anti-government venture proved highly successful as federal authorities backed down, gave in to Bundy's demands, and did not prosecute the individuals who pointed weapons at their agents.

Ferguson and the involvement of the Oath Keepers demonstrated an entirely different venture. Like the protestors at the Bundy Ranch, the Oath Keepers, a nearly all-white organization, represented themselves as public servants to the city's black community who felt alienated and abandoned by government and arguably shed some of the militia movement's racist perceptions.

On the other hand, the occupiers of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge failed to successfully echo the same rhetoric of the previously discussed examples. Originally impassioned by the mandatory minimum sentence requirement placed on Dwight and Steven Hammond at the hands of federal authorities, the protestors lost their original cause, which became embodied in larger anti-government rhetoric. The FBI's highly circulated comments, especially on the video release of the death of Lavoy Finicum, as well as the Oath Keepers and media's criticism of the occupiers became an ultimate public relations front to damage the reputation of the occupiers. Learning the hard lessons from the Bundy Ranch standoff, federal authorities chose to indict and arrest protestors

with criminal charges and successfully won the narrative battle as better serving public interests than the lawless occupiers.

Realizing how current, frequent, and intense events involving the Modern American Militia Movement have become, the question of the future stems from the minds of politicians and militia members alike. Understanding the militia exists not as a new phenomenon but as a force to be reckoned with throughout American history, it would be naïve to assume that it's possible to make the militia disappear or cease to exist. Because it serves as a radical offset of a conservative populist political breed, the militia's presence will continue to be directly related to the movement's prevalence, and more importantly its perception, in government. In the ongoing conflict between the MAMM and the government, questions of perception and the narrative make up the key battlefronts. Federal police militarization programs, federal executive action attempts, the stripping of states rights, and curtailing of the Second Amendment validate and reaffirm concerns within right-wing populist discourse and breathe life into the notion of 'the armed struggle to resist tyranny.' In the same way, hate speech, public display of firearms, threats made to federal agents, and destruction of government property elicit federal authorities to believe the MAMM poses a general threat to the American way of life.

While these two forces may remain at odds for a prolonged time, the battle's real crux lies not in fire superiority, but an ability to communicate a message to the American public to illicit support and change. Will Americans choose to embrace the libertarian political message fighting government authority that the militia has offered? Or will they instead stand by the power of the federal government that currently exists?

Works Cited

Primary Sources

“About Oath Keepers.” *Oath Keepers*. Published 2015. Accessed 10 SEP 2015.

<http://oathkeepers.org/oktester/about>.

“After the Wars – Post-Kaiser Survey of Afghanistan and Iraq War Veterans.” *The Washington Post*. Published 20 OCT 2015. Accessed 3 DEC 2015.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/polling/wars-postkaiser-survey-afghanistan-iraq-war/2015/10/20/3e8f2380-b7a6-11e3-9eb3-c254bdb4414d_page.html.

“Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade.” *United States Army Maneuver Center of Excellence*. Published 11 APR 2016. Accessed 25 APR 2016.

<http://www.benning.army.mil/infantry/ARTB/>.

“Armed Militia Groups Defend Rancher in Nevada.” *Local 8 News*. Published 11 APR 2014. Accessed 17 MAR 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfZj6f_luSE.

“Bundy Standoff! Bundy Ranch Protestors Tasered by Federal Agents and Attacked by K9’s.” *Pete Santilli Show*. Published 9 APR 2014. Accessed 17 MAR 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhJ6H9vIEDA>.

“The Federal Raid on Ruby Ridge.” Collection of Speeches, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology, and Government Information Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, Washington, D.C., SEP & OCT 1995.

- “Infighting Breaks Out Among Bundy Ranch ‘Patriots’ as Militiamen Oust ‘Oath Keepers’.” *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Published 30 APR 2014. Accessed 17 MAR 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4s_pvufopzs.
- “Militia Style.” *Pinterest*. Accessed 25 APR 2016. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/462674561690978383/>.
- “Oath Keepers on Black Lives Matter.” *The Alex Jones Channel*. Published 11 AUG 2015. Accessed 20 MAR 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vrzZR0PBOI>.
- “Oath of Commissioned Officers.” DA Form 71, 1 August 1959. Accessed 1 DEC 2015. <http://www.army.mil/values/officers.html>.
- “National Guard.” *National Guard*. Accessed 25 APR 2016. <http://www.nationalguard.mil>.
- “Public Attitudes Toward the War in Iraq: 2003-2008.” *Pew Research Center*. Published 19 MAR 2008. Accessed 3 DEC 2015. http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/03/19/public-attitudestowardthewariniraq20032008/?utm_expid=530982462.Lly4CF5VQG2lp_hsgKopIg.0&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F.
- “Timeline Photos.” *California State Militia*. Published 13 APR 2015. Accessed 25 APR 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/californiastatemilitia/photos/pb.718635861535811.-2207520000.1461609413./870294409703288/?type=3&theater>.

“The Video the Feds Don’t Want You to See.” *The Alex Jones Channel*. Published 13 APR 2015. Accessed 17 MAR 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwbIy5DJDFo>.

“Warrior Ethos.” *United States Army*. Accessed 17 MAR 2016.

<http://www.army.mil/values/warrior.html>.

“Who are the Watchmen?.....” *Watchmen of America: The Patriot Solution for Securing Our Nation*. Published 2008. Accessed 20 SEP 2015.

<http://www.watchmenofamerica.com/index.html>.

Adams, Mike. “U.S. Government Snipers, Militarized Police with Automatic Weapons Surround Cattle Ranch in Nevada and Demand \$1 Million in Payments.” *Natural News*. Published 9 APR 2014. Accessed 17 MAR 2016.

http://www.naturalnews.com/044654_Bundy_cattle_ranch_government_siege_militarized_police.html.

Alias, Elias. “Sixth Anniversary Message from Stewart Rhodes.” *Oath Keepers*.

Published 20 APR 2015. Accessed 14 OCT 2015.

<http://oathkeepers.org/oktester/stewart-rhodes-sixth-anniversary-essay/>.

Baiocchi, Dave. “Measuring Army Deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.” *RAND*

Corporation. Published February 2013. Accessed 2 DEC 2015.

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/uncch/reader.action?docID=10744767&ppg=2>.

Bundy Ranch. “BREAKING! SHARE! Standing for the rights of Men & Women.

Calling all freedom loving people to come to Harney County Oregon, come to the Malhuer Wildlife Refuge. The people are finally getting some good use out of a federal facility.” *Facebook*. Published 3 JAN 2016. Accessed 28 MAR 2016.

<https://www.facebook.com/bundybranch/videos/vb.623383454405133/938588846217924/?type=2&theater>.

Byers, Christine. "Ferguson Mayor Asks Where National Guard Was; Gov. Nixon Pledges More." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Published 26 NOV 2014. Accessed 20 MAR 2016. http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/ferguson-mayor-asks-where-national-guard-was-gov-nixon-pledges/article_343a2224-4d61-54fb-b5ac-a13ea99951f7.html.

Chandrasekaren, Rajiv. "A Legacy of Pride and Pain." *The Washington Post*. Published 29 MAR 2014. Accessed 2 DEC 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2014/03/29/a-legacy-of-pride-and-pain/>.

Codrea, David. "Fincum Shooter Protection Bill Points to Wider Issue of Government Distrust." *Oathkeepers*. Published 15 FEB 2016. Accessed 27 MAR 2016. <https://www.oathkeepers.org/fincum-shooter-protection-bill-points-to-wider-issue-of-government-distrust/>.

Codrea, David. "Investigation into Alleged FBI Fincum Shooting Evidence Tampering Faces Credibility Hurdles." *Oathkeepers*. Published 24 MAR 2016. Accessed 27 MAR 2016. <https://www.oathkeepers.org/investigation-into-alleged-fbi-fincum-shooting-evidence-tampering-faces-credibility-hurdles/>.

Cohen, Raphael S. "Iraq, Afghanistan, and the US Military's Morale Crisis." *Lawfare*. Published 28 JUN 2015. Accessed 20 SEP 2015. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/understanding-us-militarys-morale-crisis>.

- Cook, Joshua. "Exclusive: Called "Domestic Terrorists" by the Feds, Oath Keepers Help Stop Ferguson from Burning." *Truth In Media*. Published 30 NOV 2014. Accessed 10 SEP 2015. <http://truthinmedia.com/exclusive-interview-called-domestic-terrorists-by-the-feds-oath-keepers-help-stop-ferguson-from-burning>.
- Dickson, Caitlin. "Inside the Georgia Militia Murders." *The Daily Beast*. Published 20 SEP 2013. Accessed 1 DEC 2015. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/09/20/inside-the-georgia-militia-murders.html>.
- Diffey, Larry. "Meet Natalie – Of Natalie's Cakes In Ferguson." *Oath Keepers*. Published 30 NOV 2014. Accessed 20 MAR 2016. <https://www.oathkeepers.org/meet-natalie-of-natalies-cakes-in-ferguson/>.
- Domonoske, Camila. "Photos: The Mess Occupiers Left At Malheur National Wildlife Refuge." *NPR*. Published 25 MAR 2016. Accessed 27 MAR 2016. <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/03/25/471833029/photos-the-mess-occupiers-left-at-malheur-national-wildlife-refuge>.
- Edwards, Breanna. "Robert 'LaVoy' Finicum Killed in Ore. Arrests, Reached for Gun, Authorities Say." *The Root*. Published 29 JAN 2016. Accessed 27 MAR 2016. http://www.theroot.com/articles/news/2016/01/robert_finicum_killed_in_oregon_arrests_reached_for_gun_authorities_say.html.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Hymn to Concord Monument." *American Extremism: History, Politics, and the Militia Movement*. Edited by D.J. Mulloy. London: Routledge, 2004.

Flynn, Michael. "Interview with Sniper at Bundy Standoff." *The Independent*. Published 14 APR 2014. Accessed 17 MAR 2017.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhNFqaLioD4>.

Hall, KrisAnne. "What's Really Going on in Oregon! Taking Back the Narrative!"

YouTube. Published 5 JAN 2016. Accessed 27 MAR 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T424sWq1SkE>.

Johnson, Daryl. *Right Wing Resurgence: How a Domestic Terrorist Threat is Being Ignored*. Plymouth, United Kingdom: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012.

King, Justin. "Exclusive: Oath Keepers Leave Organization in Protest After Leadership Reportedly Fails to Support Armed Ferguson March." *The Fifth Column*.

Published 26 AUG 2015. Accessed 20 SEP 2015.

<http://thefifthcolumnnews.com/2015/08/exclusive-oath-keepers-leave-organization-in-protest-after-leadership-reportedly-fails-to-support-armed-ferguson-march/>.

Keeler, Jacqueline. "On Cliven Bundy's 'Ancestral Rights'." *The Nation*. Published 29

APR 2014. Accessed 17 MAR 2016. [http://www.thenation.com/article/cliven-](http://www.thenation.com/article/cliven-bundys-ancestral-rights/)

[bundys-ancestral-rights/](http://www.thenation.com/article/cliven-bundys-ancestral-rights/).

Kurtz, Annalyn. "Getting into the Military is Getting Tougher." *CNN Money*. Published

15 MAY 2013. Accessed 2 DEC 2015.

<http://money.cnn.com/2013/05/15/news/economy/military-recruiting/>.

Labi, Nadya. "Rogue Element: How an Anti-Government Militia Grew on a U.S. Army Base." *The New Yorker*. Published 26 May 2014. Accessed 1 DEC 2015.

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/05/26/rogue-element>.

Lenz, Ryan and Mark Potok. "War in the West: The Bundy Ranch Standoff and the American Radical Right." *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Published JUL 2014. Accessed 17 MAR 2016.

https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/d6_legacy_files/downloads/publication/war_in_the_west_report.pdf.

McClam, Erin, Jarrett, Tracy Jarrett, and Hasani Gittens. "Governor Nixon Orders 2,200 National Guard Troops into Ferguson." *NBC News*. Published 25 NOV 2014.

Accessed 10 SEP 2015. <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/michael-brown-shooting/governor-nixon-orders-2-200-national-guard-troops-ferguson-n255931>.

McShane, John *Norm's Militia Scrapbook*. Documentary. 2009. Williamsburg, VA: VBS IPTV, LLC., 2009. Film.

McCoy, Terrence. "The Oath Keepers: The Little Known Militia Now Roaming the Streets of Ferguson." *The Washington Post*. Published 1 DEC 2014. Accessed 10

SEP 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/12/01/the-oath-keepers-the-militant-militia-now-roaming-the-streets-of-ferguson>.

McVeigh, Timothy. Letter to Rita Cosby. April 26th, 2001.

Morton Thomas. Interview with Norman Olson and Ray Southwell. *One of America's Most Notorious Militias*. Vice. 2010.

Natalie's Cakes & More. "Thank you to the guys and gals like this wonderful man, protecting me and my bakery." *Facebook*. Published 29 NOV 2014. Accessed 20 MAR 2016.

<https://www.facebook.com/274915157402/photos/pb.274915157402.-2207520000.1458932937.10152846243627403/?type=3&theater>.

O'Neil, Tim. "Open-Carry Gun Group Plans Rally, March in Ferguson." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Published 12 NOV 2015. Accessed 20 MAR 2016.

http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/open-carry-gun-group-plans-rally-march-in-ferguson/article_1219f03b-2b99-591e-82ed-97227a272cd1.html.

Rhodes, Stewart. "Active Duty Troops in Iraq are Wearing Oath Keeper Tabs." *InfoWars*. Published 9 OCT 2009. Accessed 20 SEP 2015. <http://www.infowars.com/active-duty-troops-in-iraq-are-wearing-oath-keeper-tabs/>.

Rhodes, Stewart. "A Recommended Honorable Exit Strategy for Ammon Bundy."

Oathkeepers. Published 6 JAN 2015. Accessed 28 MAR 2016.

<https://www.oathkeepers.org/a-recommended-honorable-exit-strategy-for-ammon-bundy/>.

Sharrock, Justine. "Oath Keepers and the Age of Treason." *Mother Jones*. Published March/April 2010. Accessed 20 SEP 2015.

<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2010/03/oath-keepers>.

Shinkman, Paul D. "Ferguson and the Militarization of Police." *U.S. News*. Published 14 AUG 2014. Accessed 10 SEP 2015.

<http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/08/14/ferguson-and-the-shocking-nature-of-us-police-militarization>.

Simpson, Cam and Gary Fields. "Veterans a Focus of FBI Extremist Probe." *The Wall Street Journal*. Published 17 APR 2009. Accessed 20 SEP 2015.

<http://www.wsj.com/news/articles/SB123992665198727459>.

Swann, Ben. "Ferguson Oath Keepers: Guardians or Vigilantes?" *RT America*. Published 1 DEC 2014. Accessed 20 MAR 2016.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVzEAZniQ_c.

Terry, Don. "Eleventh Person Charged in Fort Stewart Militia Plot." *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Published 15 NOV 2012. Accessed 1 DEC 2015.

<https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2012/11/15/eleventh-person-charged-fort-stewart-militia-plot>.

The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union. Article 6. Clause 4.

U.S. Congress, House of Representatives. Committee on Government Reform. *The Tragedy at Waco: New Evidence Examined; Eleventh Report by the Committee on Government Reform*. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000.

U.S. Congress, Senate. Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate. *Continuation of the Waco Investigation: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Administrative Oversight and the Courts*. 106th Cong., 2nd sess., July 26th, 2000.

U.S. Congress, Senate. Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate. *The Militia Movement in the United States: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology, and Government Information*. 105th Cong., 1st sess., June 15th, 1995.

United States Constitution. Amendment II. Section 1.

United States Constitution. Article 1. Section 8.

Van Tatenhove, Jason. "Stewart Rhodes Interviews Oath Keeper SWAT Officer About the LaVoy Finicum Shooting." *Oathkeepers*. Published 3 FEB 2016. Accessed 27 MAR 2016. <https://www.oathkeepers.org/9870-2/>.

Waters, Rob. "Oath Keepers Say They're on Patrol in Iraq." *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Published 21 OCT 2009. Accessed 28 SEP 2015. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2009/10/21/oath-keepers-say-theyre-patrol-iraq>.

Whitehead, John W. "Operation Vigilant Eagle: Is This Really How We Honor Our Nation's Veterans?" *The Rutherford Institute*. Published 20 MAY 2013. Accessed 3 MAR 2016. https://www.rutherford.org/publications_resources/john_whiteheads_commentary/operation_vigilant_eagle_is_this_really_how_we_honor_our_nations_veterans.

Winsor, Morgan. "Native Americans React to Oregon Armed Occupation: Burns Paiute Tribe Says, 'We Were Here First'." *International Business Times*. Published 6 JAN 2016. Accessed 27 MAR 2016. <http://www.ibtimes.com/native-americans-react-oregon-armed-occupation-burns-paiute-tribe-says-we-were-here-2252872>.

Secondary Sources

9:02 A.M. April 19, 1995: *The Official Record of the Oklahoma City Bombing*. Oklahoma Today Magazine. Published Jan 1996.

"Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau on Government." *Constitutional Rights Foundation*. Published Spring 2004. Accessed 20 OCT 2015. <http://www.crf->

usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-20-2-c-hobbes-locke-montesquieu-and-rousseau-on-government.html.

“Domestic Violent Extremists Pose Increased Threat to Government Officials and Law Enforcement.” *Department of Homeland Security*. Published 22 JUL 2014. Accessed 18 APR 2016. <https://info.publicintelligence.net/DHS-DomesticViolentExtremists.pdf>.

“Faces of the Malheur Occupation: Meet the Militants and their Visitors.” *The Oregonian*. Published 22 FEB 2016. Accessed 21 APR 2016. http://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/index.ssf/2016/01/oregon_militant_profiles_list.html.

“Sovereign Citizen Extremist Ideology Will Drive Violence at Home, During Travel, and at Government Facilities.” *Department of Homeland Security*. Published 5 FEB 2015. Accessed 15 APR 2016. <https://fas.org/irp/eprint/sovereign.pdf>.

“Veterans for Trump Leader Among 14 Charged in Armed 2014 Standoff at Bundy Ranch.” *Newsmax*. Published 3 MAR 2016. Accessed 21 APR 2016. <http://www.newsmax.com/Newsfront/arrests-bundy-ranch-standoff/2016/03/03/id/717347/>.

Balleck, Barry. *Allegiance to Liberty: The Changing Face of Patriots, Militias, and Political Violence in America*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2015.

Blackman, Paul H. and David B. Kopel. *No More Wacos: What's Wrong Federal Law Enforcement and How to Fix It*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1997.

Bernton, Hal. “‘Patriot’ Militias Appeal to Some Frustrated Vets, Including Bonney Lake Woman.” *The Oregonian*. Published 5 JAN 2016. Accessed 21 APR 2016.

<http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/patriot-militias-appeal-to-some-frustrated-vets/>.

Bock, Alan W. *Ambush at Ruby Ridge: How Government Agents Set Randy Weaver Up and Took His Family Down*. Irvine, CA: Dickens Press, 1995.

Brousseau, Carli. "Refuge Occupation's Co-Leader Disillusioned by Iraq finds Purpose in Bundy's Cause." Published 22 JAN 2016. Accessed 21 APR 2016.

http://www.oregonlive.com/oregon-standoff/2016/01/oregon_occupation_leader_ryan.html#incart_big-photo.

Bui, Quoc Trung and Margot Sanger-Katz. "Why the Government Owns So Much Land in the West." *The New York Times*. Published 5 JAN 2016. Accessed 22 MAR 2016.

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/06/upshot/why-the-government-owns-so-much-land-in-the-west.html?_r=0.

Churchill, Robert H. *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant's Face: Libertarian Political Violence and the Origins of the Militia Movement*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009.

Crothers, Lane. *Rage on the Right: The American Militia Movement from Ruby Ridge to Homeland Security*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003.

Friedersdorf, Conor. "Oregon and the Injustice of the Mandatory Minimums." *The Atlantic*. Published 5 JAN 2016. Accessed 28 MAR 2016.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/01/oregon-mandatory-minimums/422433/>.

Hamilton, Neil A. *Militias in America*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1996.

- Hamm, Mark S. *Apocalypse in Oklahoma: Waco and Ruby Ridge Revenged*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997.
- Jacobs, Frank. "Imbalance of Federal Land Ownership Sheds Light on Oregon Militia." *Big Think*. Published 3 FEB 2015. Accessed 15 MAR 2016.
<http://bigthink.com/strange-maps/291-federal-lands-in-the-us>.
- Mahon, John K. *History of the Militia and the National Guard*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1983.
- McDermott, Ted. "Freedom Fighter." *Missoula Independent*. Published 12 JUN 2014. Accessed 17 MAR 2016.
<http://missoulanews.bigskypress.com/missoula/freedom-fighter/Content?oid=2054145>.
- Michael, George. *Confronting Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in the USA*. Edited by Roger Eatwell. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Mulloy, D.J. "Introduction." *Homegrown Revolutionaries: An American Militia Reader*. Edited by D. J. Mulloy. Norwich, UK: EAS Publishing, 1999.
- Mulloy, D.J. *American Extremism: History, Politics, and the Militia Movement*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Neiwert, David. "Back at the Bundy Ranch, It's Oath Keepers Vs. Militiamen as Wild Rumors Fly." *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Published 30 APR 2014. Accessed 17 MAR 2016. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2014/04/30/back-bundy-ranch-its-oath-keepers-vs-militiamen-wild-rumors-fly>.
- Nixon, Ron. "Homeland Security Looked Past Antigovernment Movement, Ex-Analyst Says." *The New York Times*. Published 8 JAN 2016. Accessed 24 APR 2016.

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/09/us/politics/homeland-security-looked-past-militia-movement-ex-analyst-says.html?_r=0.

Potok, Mark. "The Antigovernment 'Patriot' Movement Expands for the Fourth Year in a Row as Hate Groups Remain at Near-Historic Highs." Southern Poverty Law Center. Published 4 MAR 2013. Accessed 10 SEP 2015.

<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2013/year-hate-and-extremism>.

Sanchez, Ray. "Police Seek Hundreds in Videotaped Ferguson-Area Looting." *CNN*. Published 21 JAN 2015. Accessed 20 MAR 2016.

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/21/us/missouri-looting-video/>.

Steiger, Brad, and Steiger, Sherry. *Conspiracies and Secret Societies: The Complete Dossier*. 2nd Edition. Canton, MI, USA: Visible Ink Press, 2012. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 28 September 2015.

Stentiford, Barry M. *The American Home Guard: The State Militia in the Twentieth Century*. College Station, TX, USA: Texas A&M University Press, 2002.

Stern, Kenneth S. *A Force Upon the Plain: The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Vinograd, Cassandra, Elisha Fieldstadt, Gemma DiCasimirro, and Andrew Rudansky.

"Ammon Bundy, Rancher's Rights Protestors Occupy Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon." *NBC News*. Published 3 JAN 2016. Accessed 28 MAR 2016.

<http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ammon-bundy-ranchers-rights-protesters-occupy-malheur-national-wildlife-refuge-n489311>.

- Vinyard, JoEllen McNergney. *Right in Michigan's Grassroots: From the KKK to the Michigan Militia*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011.
- Waltman, Michael. *Hate on the Right: Right-Wing Political Groups and Hate Speech*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2015.
- Walter, Jess. *Every Knee Shall Bow: The Truth and Tragedy of Ruby Ridge and the Randy Weaver Family*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1995.
- Whaley, Sean. "'Free Speech Zones' at BLM Cattle Roundup Put Controversial Areas in Spotlight." *Las Vegas Review-Journal Capital Bureau*. Published 13 APR 2014. Accessed 17 MAR 2016. <http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/nevada/free-speech-zones-blm-cattle-roundup-put-controversial-areas-spotlight>.
- Whisker, James Biser. *The American Colonial Militia: Introduction to the American Colonial Militia*. Vol. 1. Lewiston, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997.
- Wilson, Conrad and John Rosman. "Malheur National Wildlife Refuge Occupation Ends." *Oregon Public Broadcasting*. Published 11 FEB 2016. Accessed 27 MAR 2016. <http://www.opb.org/news/series/burns-oregon-standoff-bundy-militia-news-updates/malheur-occupation-ends/>.
- Wright, Stuart A. "Construction and Escalation of a Cult Threat." In *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*. Edited by Stuart A. Wright. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Wright, Stuart A. *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007.