



Extremism in CONNECTICUT:

A S T A T E S T U D Y





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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The Anti-Defamation League introduces a new series of reports dedicated to exploring in detail extremism in contemporary America. Hate organizations, anti-government terrorists and other fringe groups and movements pose threats that range from acts of violence or terrorism to the online recruiting of children to the complexities of “paper terrorism.”

The *Topics in Extremism* series allows the Anti-Defamation League to provide extensive information about a number of these threats. Some *Topics in Extremism* reports will concentrate on particular groups or movements, while others address specific tactics or problems caused by extremists. Though the reports should be of interest and use to most readers, they are particularly designed for law enforcement officers and agencies who face the delicate problem of protecting members of the community from extremist acts even as they preserve freedom of expression for all.

The inaugural report in this series focuses on extremism in one particular state. State studies describe the beliefs and activities of a wide range of groups and, using specific examples, indicate the kinds of threats extremists may pose to a particular region and its communities. The state chosen here, Connecticut, is especially important because it defies a popular stereotype — that extremists are found only in remote rural areas such as Montana or west Texas. It demonstrates that no region of the country enjoys immunity from the dangers of ideologically driven extremism.

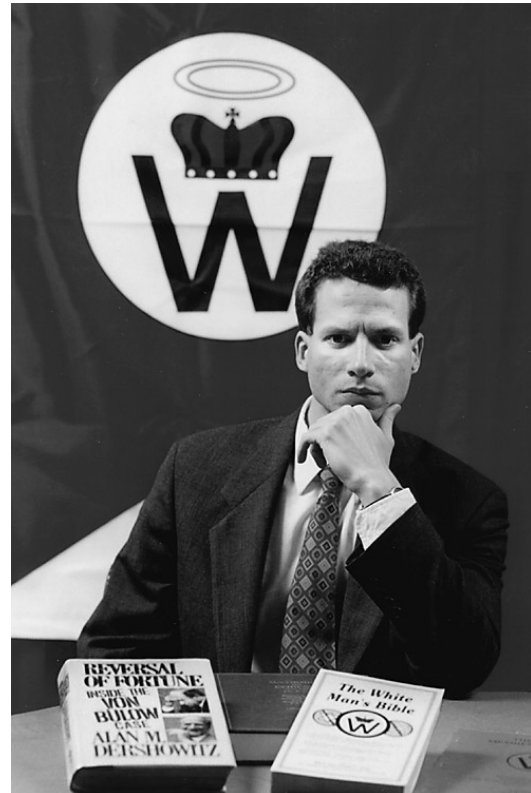
INTRODUCTION TO EXTREMISM IN CONNECTICUT

TUMULT IN WALLINGFORD

Public libraries are normally quiet places, but little was quiet at the public library in Wallingford, Connecticut, on March 10, 2001. White supremacists from throughout the northeastern United States had converged on Wallingford to join their local brethren; roughly 80 supporters gathered outside the library to hear Matt Hale, “Pontifex Maximus” of the racist and anti-Semitic World Church of the Creator (WCOTC), speak. According to organizers of his visit, Hale chose Wallingford because of the controversy in that town the previous year over its mayor’s refusal to give city workers a paid holiday for Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday.

The group, composed of an unsavory mix of skinheads, Klansmen, neo-Nazis, WCOTC members and others, came to hear Hale talk about the decline of the white race and promote the doctrine of his “church,” which alleges that nature’s greatest accomplishment was the creation of the white race. Its core precept is that whatever is good for whites is the highest virtue; whatever threatens whites is a sin.

Around Hale’s supporters an even larger crowd of protesters gathered, some



White supremacist Matt Hale, leader of the World Church of the Creator, in his East Peoria, IL, office in 1999.

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simply opposed to Hale's racist message, others members of radical anarchist cells. Angry demonstrators had come from as far away as New York to confront Hale and his followers; some expressed willingness to resort to violence to disrupt his lecture.

With both sides poised for a confrontation, clashes began as the two groups came face to face outside the library. Protesters stormed the crowd of Hale supporters, forcing Wallingford police, dressed in riot gear, to use pepper spray and batons to separate the two groups. Both sides suffered minor injuries and one person was arrested; the police confiscated numerous knives and one gun.

In the early afternoon, the library quickly filled to capacity as people were let inside. Hale spoke using a bullhorn, but few could hear him above the noise of the hecklers, who made up much of the audience of 150. After the speech, he was whisked out, leaving his followers to confront the demonstrators once more. More violence ensued before police gained control of the situation.

Afterwards, police declared their management of the event a success, but it was clear that Hale too considered his appearance successful. The upheaval simply generated more publicity surrounding his visit. Wallingford Police Chief Douglas L. Dortenzio admitted to a Hartford newspaper reporter that Hale "told us pretty straightforward that whether or not things turned out fine or violent didn't matter to him, as long as he got the press."

In fact, Hale was so pleased that he immediately scheduled a return trip to Wallingford. The notorious white supremacist appeared at a local park in April, with similar results: confrontations, several arrests, and a struggle by state and local police to prevent riots or mass violence.

Of the New England states, Connecticut — despite its small size — has witnessed some of the most intensive and varied forms of extremist activity.

EXTREMISM IN THE NUTMEG STATE

Hale's visit to Connecticut surprised and alarmed many people across the state. Though he was neither a Connecticut native nor a resident, his appearance in Wallingford drew local supporters and attracted those from farther away. In fact, local racists helped prepare for and promote his appearance. Connecticut citizens visiting the Church's Web site could find local WCOTC contacts based in Wallingford and Clinton. Hale himself was only visiting, but his group had already established itself in Connecticut.

Nor was Hale's group alone. Because of organizations like Aryan Nations and the Ku Klux Klan, or events like the Montana Freemen standoff, the public often associates extreme anti-government or hate groups with remote, rugged states in the Pacific Northwest or the rural South. Despite these perceptions, extremism in America is spread far and wide; no region of the country is immune to its presence, none has escaped its effects. New England is home to its share of extreme groups and movements, just as are the Pacific Northwest and the South. The region has been lucky enough to have avoided the more notorious bombing plots and conspiracies that have occurred across the nation during the past few years, but it has still experienced armed stand-offs, murders and other crimes relating to extremist groups.

Of the New England states, Connecticut — despite its small size — has witnessed some of the most intensive and varied forms of extremist activity. From anti-government “sovereign citizens” and tax protesters to virulent hate groups like the World Church of the Creator and the Klan, extreme ideologies have taken root in Connecticut's soil.

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Most extremist activity, whatever its underlying ideology, can be divided into three broad categories: public distribution of propaganda, civil disobedience and criminal activity. All three pose serious problems for the communities in which they occur.

Propaganda efforts (including literature distribution, radio and television

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broadcasts, Internet sites and rallies and marches) generally break no laws and enjoy legal protection under the First Amendment. But the messages themselves can frighten or intimidate people, or goad those who harbor hatreds to lash out against perceived enemies. Even though laws may not be broken in such instances, and thus no law enforcement response warranted, communities themselves need to respond appropriately and effectively.

Civil disobedience — passive obstruction or refusal to comply with laws with which one disagrees — not only conveys a message but also may break the law. Civil disobedience can range from environmentalists encasing themselves in cement to stop a housing development to tax protesters refusing to leave a house seized for nonpayment of taxes.

Civil disobedience is traditionally associated with left-wing groups and movements. Overt criminal activity, on the other hand, in the past decade has been more often associated with the far right. This activity can range from hate crimes to major terrorist acts, and can also include associated criminal activity such as theft or fraud designed to raise funds.

This study examines different extremist movements and groups present in Connecticut in order to provide communities with the knowledge necessary to develop rational and effective ways to deal with the problems extremists cause. It provides background information about Connecticut extremists, as well as their tactics and activities. Additionally, it details significant extremist-related events and events that have occurred in the state within recent years. The report is arranged topically, with one section exploring different hate groups active in Connecticut, while a second section looks at anti-government movements and events.

PART ONE: HATE GROUPS IN CONNECTICUT

Broadly defined, a hate group is any organization whose ideology or agenda is based on intolerance or hatred of particular races, ethnicities, religions or sexual preferences. Most hate groups in the United States are comprised of white supremacists who promote racism and anti-Semitism as well as hatred of gays, but there are also, for instance, African-American and Latino groups that espouse racism, anti-Semitism or other forms of intolerance.

The most prominent hate movements in the United States include the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, Christian Identity (a racist, anti-Semitic religious sect), racist skinheads (not all skinheads are racist), and “genteel” racist movements or organizations, such as the Council of Conservative Citizens. Most, though not all, have made inroads in Connecticut.

THE KLAN IN CONNECTICUT THE EARLY DAYS

Of the different extreme groups or movements that have operated in Connecticut, perhaps the most visible over time has been the Ku Klux Klan. Given its nearly 150-year history, the Klan is also the most notorious hate group in the nation. There have, in fact, been several different incarnations of the Ku Klux Klan over the decades. The very first Klan was formed by ex-Confederate officers in Pulaski, Tennessee, immediately following the Civil War and used terror and violence to obstruct the efforts of Reconstruction state governments to govern the South. It faded away by the mid-1870s as Southern whites reestablished control of the Southern states. The second Klan was founded in 1915 by a fraternal organizer who sought to capitalize on the success of the film *Birth of a Nation*, which depicted an idealized view of the first Klan. Membership in this second Klan reached into the millions by the mid-1920s, but scandals involving its leadership caused membership to decline sharply through the 1930s. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Klan enjoyed a resurgence fueled by white opposition to the Civil Rights movement.

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During the 1970s, membership once again declined, partially as a result of prosecution of Klan crimes and partially due to liberalizing American attitudes toward race. For the past several decades, Klan membership for the entire country has not topped 10,000.

Despite nearly universal references to “the Ku Klux Klan,” there has been no single, universal Klan organization since its heyday in the 1920s. Instead, a myriad of independent groups have claimed the group’s heritage and used “Ku Klux Klan” in their names. Some of these groups operate on a purely local level, while a few have chapters in numerous states.

The last Klan that could credibly lay claim to a national following was the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (IE); this Klan faction has also had the greatest impact on Connecticut. Bill Wilkinson, a Louisiana Klan leader and contractor, organized the IE in 1975; at its peak in the early 1980s, it was the largest Klan group in the country, with more than 2,500 members. Some of its rallies attracted audiences of thousands. The IE had units in at least 20 states, including Connecticut, which developed one of the most active IE chapters. In attempting to build support and publicity, Wilkinson utilized tactics that were both provocative and threatening, including encouraging his followers to bring weapons to public meetings and conducting counter-demonstrations against civil rights rallies whenever possible.

Wilkinson was forced to step aside as the IE’s Imperial Wizard in 1982 after it was revealed that he had been supplying information to the FBI on the activities of competing Klans and other rivals for over a decade. Wilkinson’s Klan had also been seriously injured by a major lawsuit launched by the Southern Poverty Law Center and by federal prosecutions of several Klan members. Already, followers in several states had threatened to break away; in Connecticut in 1981, New Britain Klan leader Gary Piscottano took several members over to the rival Invisible Klans of America.

For several years, the IE floundered. Then, in 1986, in a major departure from Klan tradition, James Farrands, a Connecticut Klan leader, was named Imperial Wizard. Farrands, a tool-and-die maker from Shelton, had been one of

Wilkinson's most active lieutenants, masterminding rallies — in towns such as Meriden — where Klansmen clashed violently with counterdemonstrators. Such rallies helped get him promoted to Grand Dragon of the Connecticut chapter in 1981. Farrands was not a typical Klan leader; for one thing, whereas the Klan was historically anti-Catholic, often vehemently so, Farrands himself was Catholic and openly recruited other Catholics. Farrands maintained other Klan traditions, however, especially regarding confrontations and violence. Not long after he was arrested for disorderly conduct in 1981, four of his Klansmen were picked up in Sterling on weapons and breach of peace charges after walking down Main Street armed with swords and knives. The following year, Farrands and three other Connecticut Klansmen were charged in Vermont with possessing loaded long-arm weapons. Farrands or John Dillon, another Klan leader, held rallies or marches in such towns as Meriden, Norwich, New Britain, Stratford, and East Windsor. The group's activities in Connecticut reached such a pitch that in 1982

Farrands —

'We believe that blacks are inferior culturally and intellectually.'

the Connecticut House of Representatives voted 128-15 to raise the legal penalties for civil rights violations committed by persons wearing hoods or masks.

As the new leader of the Invisible Empire, Farrands attempted to recast the Klan's public image from a group of robed thugs into an ostensibly reputable conservative political organization. In this, he may have been imitating the public relations emphasis of Klan leaders like David Duke rather than the cruder tactics of Bill Wilkinson. It was Farrands' hope that he could move the Klan away from overt racism and emphasize instead its objection to affirmative action as well as other mainstream issues. Even as state leader, Farrands had occasionally made such efforts, telling a *Christian Science Monitor* reporter in 1982 that the Klan was "against busing, affirmative action, welfare and crime. We're conservatives. Some people in the government — like Ronald Reagan — are sympathetic to our goals." Yet Farrands was unabashedly white supremacist. "We believe that blacks are inferior culturally and intellectually," he told the same reporter. Because blacks were inferior, it was to their advantage to be segregated, he said. "Then they won't have to fight prejudice."

As Imperial Wizard, Farrands set his sights farther than Connecticut, arranging

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and appearing at rallies from Maine to California. John Dillon succeeded him at state command, but luckily for Connecticut did not display the same energy as his predecessor. Even more fortuitously, in 1990, Farrands relocated his headquarters to Gulf, North Carolina, ending a major chapter in Connecticut extremist history. His Invisible Empire was subsequently crippled in a 1993 judgment that stemmed from a lawsuit brought against the Klan for disrupting a Forsyth County, Georgia, civil rights march by pelting participants with rocks and bottles. Losing in federal court, the IE was ordered to disband, turn over its membership list and pay marchers \$37,500 in damages.

After the collapse of the IE, Bristol Klansman William Dodge, succeeding Dillon as the Klan's Grand Dragon for Connecticut, followed Farrands into a rival Klan faction, the Unified Klan. Dodge was named head of the Unified Klan of Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut. He was aided by Scott Palmer, a Meriden resident who served as Grand Titan. Connecticut's Unified Klan (UK) conducted itself like the Klan of old, appearing to devote little effort to embrace the ideal of a kinder, gentler Klan.

THE KLAN IN CONNECTICUT AFTER RUBY RIDGE AND WACO

By 1993, right-wing extremist groups across the country were becoming larger and more militant, in part as a reaction to the controversial standoffs at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, in 1992, and Waco, Texas, in 1993. Connecticut became one of the first states in the country to experience this resurgence when it was revealed in January 1994 that local, state and federal law enforcement agents arrested six members of the Connecticut UK, including Dodge and Palmer, on a variety of conspiracy and weapons charges. Both Klan leaders were taken into custody, along with four other Klansmen: George Steele, Martin Regan, Stephen Gray and Edmund Borkoski. The arrests stemmed from a seven-month investigation into the group by Wallingford police, state police and the ATF and FBI in which police observed as Grand Dragon Dodge attempted, in his words, to “take care of business the way the old-style Klan used to.”

Dodge took care of business both alone and with the help of other Klansmen,

even though Palmer, for one, faced charges of assaulting a customer of a Wallingford bar that catered to homosexuals (for which he was later convicted). At the end of the investigation, police alleged that Dodge tried to purchase a pipe bomb and handgun silencer, requesting that the bomb be large enough to destroy a wall and set fire to a building (although he never identified a particular target). Palmer (already a convicted felon) was arrested for possessing a Tec-9 machine pistol, which constituted a major probation violation. Palmer further exacerbated his already precarious legal situation when it was revealed at his sentencing that he had mailed a hand-drawn Christmas card from prison that read: “White Power” and “Kill all the Niggers for Santa Claus.” Palmer’s sketch ended up costing him an extra year in prison, a point the presiding judge stressed several times in his ruling.

Grand Dragon Dodge attempted, in his words, to ‘take care of business the way the old-style Klan used to.’

Charges against the other four Klansmen involved weapons violations or threats of violence. Ed Borkoski was convicted of purchasing a silenced handgun with which to murder a Jamaican man who was dating his sister; surveillance tapes recorded Borkoski stating several times that he wanted to shoot the boyfriend, at one point saying that he was so angry at the Jamaican that he would “like to blow his brains out.” This outburst helped earn Borkoski four years in a federal prison. Stephen Gray served six months for having given an SKS semi-automatic rifle to convict-turned-Klansman George Steele even though he knew that Steele could not legally own a weapon. A twice-convicted burglar, Steele first pleaded guilty to the charge, then took his own life before being sentenced. Martin Regan pleaded no contest to illegal possession of explosives, illegal bomb making, illegal storage of explosives, possession of drug paraphernalia and drug possession. He was sentenced to one year in jail and three years’ probation on the possession-of-explosives charge.

The 1994 arrests caused Klan activity in Connecticut to decline significantly, but it never disappeared entirely. Near the end of the decade, in fact, the Klan showed signs of life once more. Past Grand Titan Scott Palmer’s conviction apparently failed to teach him self-control; in December 1999, Palmer was arrested by Meriden police after shouting racial slurs at a Black woman walking a picket line at a care facility. A search of his car produced a cache of

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Klan insignia badges, hate literature and a machete. Palmer was charged with intimidation based on bias (a felony) and possession of a weapon while on parole. He pleaded guilty to the former charge in June 2001.

Despite his absence, Klan activity picked up in the fall and winter of 1999. In August, North Haven and Hamden were leafleted by the Klan, as were Windsor and Bloomfield in October, and Durham in late November. Once more calling themselves the Invisible Empire, the Klansmen were now based in Hamden and led by Exalted Cyclops Louis Wagner. Adopting the latest technology, the IE operated an Internet Web site on a free server for a time, though it was removed by the server operators after the racist content became apparent. A national IE Web site operating in 2001 acknowledges the group's Connecticut chapter but contains little information.

Connecticut Klansmen remained active in the early part of 2000 by holding a series of marches in Wallingford to protest the city's acceptance of the Martin Luther King holiday. In January, a one-time member named Harry Pender marched with two others in full Klan regalia to challenge the city's actions. Media coverage of the marches provided the Klan with a wealth of free publicity reminiscent of the Farrands days. Three months later, the scene was repeated when a mixed crowd of about 12 Klansmen and members of other white supremacist groups tried to disrupt a speech by Rev. Jesse Jackson in support of Wallingford's action. Although vastly outnumbered by the estimated 600 people who came out to support the King holiday, the Klan reaped another publicity bonanza.

At the start of the 21st century, the Hamden-based Invisible Empire could no longer claim to be the only Klan faction in Connecticut: a small group operated out of the Meriden area, calling itself the Nutmeg Knights. The Knights kept a lower profile than their Hamden brethren, but made their presence known by distributing a Klan-style neighborhood watch poster featuring a hooded Klansman who announced, "This area is now under surveillance by the Ku Klux Klan." The group attached a business card listing the Knights' address. Also coming out of Meriden was a newsletter possibly associated with the Nutmeg Knights. Calling itself the *Nutmeg Informer*, early issues

contained various Klan-related items, although it identified itself as associated with the National Socialist White People's Party, then later the Texas-based National Front. In addition to standard white supremacist fare, the *Informer* provided the addresses of extremists in prison, describing them as "POW's" serving time in the "enemy's concentration camps." Ads in the bulletin sold "Whites Only" stickers, along with the recommendation that they should be placed "on the door of a restaurant or rest room, then just sit back and watch the fun begin." Lest readers lose their focus, each issue reminded them that "Your Skin is Your Uniform, Wear it Proudly."

The Klan in Connecticut as elsewhere has suffered from the trend by many would-be members or supporters to move toward more "fashionable" racist groups such as the World Church of the Creator. Several Klan groups, ranging from the Southern White Knights of the KKK to the International Association of the Knights of the KKK of the Invisible Empire, boast chapters in Connecticut, the latter claiming several klaverns and over 40 members. If such groups do have Connecticut chapters, however, they are largely inactive. After three years, for instance, the *Informer* stopped publication in November 2000; its editor, "Mr. White," complained that he had failed to form a "true movement cell" in the region, although he stated he would remain active in the white supremacist National Front.

It is difficult to estimate accurately the membership of Connecticut Klansmen today, but total numbers are probably no more than two dozen. Yet while their numbers are small, the threat posed by the Klan remains real, as the incidents recounted above demonstrate. Furthermore, the ease with which extremist groups, including Klansmen, can get publicity in Connecticut by staging rallies and other public events, suggests that the Klan will continue to make its presence felt in Connecticut for years to come.

WORLD CHURCH OF THE CREATOR (WCOTC)

One of the most publicized white supremacist groups in the United States in recent years has been the World Church of the Creator (WCOTC), led by Matt Hale, the Church's "Pontifex Maximus." The group's notoriety escalated in July 1999 when Benjamin Smith, a Church member and acquaintance of Hale, went on a shooting spree in Illinois and Indiana, firing on African Americans, Asian Americans and Jews before taking his own life as police closed in. Though Hale disclaimed any responsibility, he also refused to condemn the shootings; in fact, in 2001, the WCOTC offered a "Benjamin Smith Memorial Scholarship" to white students. Over the years, Church members have also been linked to a number of violent crimes around the country, most notably in Florida in the 1990s. The WCOTC thus entered the new century with a deserved reputation for hate and violence.

The Church's origins date back to the early 1970s, when veteran Florida white supremacist Ben Klassen (inventor of the electric can opener) abandoned his tiny Nationalist White Party to found a new group organized ostensibly as a religion. While the Church claims to be a religion, in fact it incorporates no spiritual or theistic doctrine. The WCOTC asserts that the white race is "Nature's" highest achievement; the Church's "Golden Rule" is that "what is good for the White Race is the highest virtue; what is bad for the White Race is the ultimate sin." Klassen directed his anger primarily against Jews, secondarily against non-white races.

After Klassen committed suicide in the early 1990s, Hale eventually stepped forward to fill the leadership vacuum; he was then a law student at Southern Illinois University. Under his leadership, the Church increased its activity, making a particular effort to attract women and children, and has created Internet forums and Web sites targeting both groups. Church membership tends to be young, including a large number of skinheads. Although it claims a large worldwide following, this assertion is suspect, since a number of "chapters" are one- and two-person efforts. Despite this, the WCOTC is one of the few white supremacist organizations that can claim something resembling a nationwide presence.

The exact number of WCOTC members in Connecticut is not known, although WCOTC members and publications have claimed at different times several different chapters (including Wallingford, Fairfield, and Hawleyville). In an August 2000 interview with the *Hartford Courant*, one Church adherent reported that there were around 30-40 sympathizers in Connecticut. For a small state like Connecticut, this represents a fairly significant following.

One of the most visible of Connecticut's WCOTC supporters has been Brian Davis of Wallingford. Although not a "dues-paying member," Davis was responsible for the airing of "White Revolution," a television program hosted and moderated by Hale, on public access channels in seven Connecticut communities: Wallingford, North Haven, North Branford, East Haven, Branford, Guilford and Madison. "White Revolution," explains Hale, is intended to teach children "to be as racist as possible." Davis, along with Harry Pender, was also instrumental in organizing both of Hale's Wallingford appearances.

WCOTC members did not limit their activities to helping Hale gain access to the airwaves. Just as Connecticut Klansmen engaged in illegal acts, members or supporters of the Connecticut WCOTC chapter committed several crimes during the group's brief history in the state. In late 1995, Plymouth residents Bruce Silvernail and Gerald Gleason Jr., the latter a teenager, were arrested for posting signs with swastikas and racial slurs on utility poles in Plymouth on Route 6, an act that Silvernail claimed was meant to protest the acquittal of O.J. Simpson. He was convicted on a charge of racial intimidation and given three years' probation (Gleason was also convicted).

It is unclear if Silvernail was a WCOTC member at the time of his initial arrest; however, not long after completing probation, Silvernail was again arrested, along with Brian Davis, this time in upstate New York. Police in Cambridge, New York, initially pulled over the pair after seeing Davis drinking a beer while driving. Upon searching their car, officers found hundreds of rounds of ammunition, a loaded shotgun, a semi-automatic rifle and a stolen handgun. The weapons were accompanied by a large cache of hate literature and other materials from WCOTC and other extremist groups. Both Davis and Silvernail claimed they were traveling for "target practice" in New York, but never stated

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where. For his part, Silvernail asserted that he was not a racist but, while booking him, police noticed that his back was covered with white supremacist tattoos, including swastikas and a portrait of Hitler. He was charged with possession of stolen property and criminal possession of a weapon; in March 2001, he pleaded guilty to a federal gun charge, which carries with it a sentence of up to 37 months in prison. Davis was charged with drinking while driving and with two counts of possessing a loaded firearm in a car.

The most brutal crime to date in Connecticut attributed to a WCOTC member did not occur on the highways, however, but within the walls of the Northern Correctional Institution at Somers. In August 2000, WCOTC member John Barletta, an inmate, brutally attacked the prison warden, disfiguring him for life.

Barletta's case illustrates not only the propensity of WCOTC members for violence, but also the attraction that WCOTC has for people who may have a propensity for violence. "Creativity," which bills itself as a "warrior religion" and adopts the slogan "Rahowa" (for "racial holy war"), may easily be used to rationalize violent acts or tendencies. When Barletta first entered prison, at the age of 22, he was not a WCOTC member, but he was clearly violent. He was arrested in December 1992 after committing a drive-by shooting in Norwalk that killed one woman and injured a second (according to police, they were bystanders; Barletta was shooting at another target).

Convicted and sentenced to 60 years in prison, Barletta was not a model prisoner. In 1998, while an inmate at Northern Correctional Institution, he received an additional year to his sentence for throwing urine on two prison guards. He was moved to Garner Correctional Institution less than a year later, where he terrorized his cellmates. According to prison officials, one cellmate was so afraid of Barletta that after three months he bit a guard in order to get transferred out of Barletta's cell. Kenneth Briggaman, Barletta's next cellmate, was not so lucky. In March 1999, Barletta strangled him to death within a day because Briggaman had "disrespected" him.

Briggaman's slaying brought Barletta back to the maximum security Northern

Correctional Institution. Yet despite the security, on August 3, 2000, Barletta was able to attack Warden Lawrence Myers with a knife made out of a razor blade, lacerating Myers' face with a 6 1/2-inch gash, and injuring other prison officials who tried to subdue him. Barletta's attack was brutal, but it was not an act of random violence. In fact, it was retaliatory; Barletta had lately become interested in the WCOTC, and some days earlier guards had confiscated WCOTC materials from his cell. Myers refused to return them, thus prompting the attack. After the incident, guards searched Barletta's cell and found various racist and anti-Semitic cartoons, including one which pictured Barletta choking the warden. Barletta had also written Matthew Hale, criticizing the warden for being Jewish and the prison chaplain for being a "nigger."

For the WCOTC, as for many other extremist groups, prisons simply provide yet another venue for Church activity. Prisoners may be potential recruits; imprisoned WCOTC members may actively engage in a variety of propagandizing or proselytizing activities. It is through such efforts that prisoners such as Barletta learn about and become attracted to groups like WCOTC. Hank Kelm, a Church member from Newtown, admitted to a *Hartford Courant* reporter that he learned about WCOTC through magazines and literature the group sent him while he was in federal prison. Once a member, he helped form and lead a chapter made up of other inmates.

In fact, WCOTC prisoners actively network with each other. Even though Barletta claimed that the WCOTC ejected him after the slashing incident because they were "nonviolent," the convict established contact with fellow Connecticut prisoner and WCOTC member Michael Scatena while the two resided at Wallens Ridge Prison in Virginia (Connecticut has sent some of its inmates to Virginia to ease prison overcrowding). In fact, Barletta later claimed in prison hearings that Scatena was his "legal counsel" and that therefore they should be able to engage in interprison mail with each other (inmates are normally not permitted to correspond with one another). Connecticut Superior Court Judge Richard Rittenband initially allowed such correspondence, but subsequently reversed himself, agreeing that communication between the two "would be detrimental to the security of the correctional institutions involved."

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Scatena himself caused a stir in the summer of 2000 when he demanded that Northern Correctional Institution officials provide him with “non-rabbinical” food as well as drinks free of Jewish kosher food symbols. Instead, he wanted a vegetarian diet as prescribed by the WCOTC. To consume other food or drink, he claimed, would violate his “religious beliefs as a member of the [WCOTC] and as a former Mormon.” Judge Rittenband, hearing this case as well, stated that “there is no specific definition of a religion that would exclude” the WCOTC, and that therefore he was willing to accept the extremist group as a religion. Rittenband also accepted that “being required to eat foods approved for Kosher could be a violation of such religion” because it states in the *White Man’s Bible* that “as the White Race becomes united, informed and aroused we will boycott every Jew and every aspect of Jewish influence in our society.” However, Rittenband’s solution to Scatena’s objection was that the prisoner simply abstain from eating such foods.

REFINED RACISM: THE COUNCIL OF CONSERVATIVE CITIZENS

Not all hate groups operating in Connecticut are as crudely or blatantly racist as the World Church of the Creator. Some abstain from the most explicit displays of hate or racism, hiding their angry agenda in a cloak of mainstream conservative activism. Since the 1990s, perhaps the most prominent of these groups has been the Council of Conservative Citizens (CofCC). Descended from the White Citizens Councils that fought against integration in the 1960s, the CofCC bills itself as a grass-roots organization addressing issues of concern to all conservatives, such as affirmative action, racial quotas and immigration. “Are you beginning to think you are all alone,” asks an advertisement for its newspaper, the *Citizens Informer*, “in a country menaced by black militants, third-world immigrants, homosexuals, feminists, and geeky, boneless conservatoids?” The CofCC’s North Carolina chapter sells bumper stickers billing that state as “Mexico’s Newest Colony,” while the CofCC’s main Web site sells books that claim the Bible forbids “race-mixing.”

The Council co-opts both the language and issues of conservative causes in

order to camouflage its true aim, which is to solidify what it believes to be the eroding power base of white Americans. The group also asserts that it is fighting to restore America's Christian heritage, and it has led the battle to preserve the use of the Confederate flag in the South. State chapters have invited many extremists from other groups and organizations to share their platform with CofCC members.

Connecticut is served by the Tri-State Chapter of the CofCC, a group that claims its purpose is “to promote true populist non-beltway style conservatism in Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey.” The dominant figures behind the chapter are Tri-State Chairman Carmine Basciano of Mt. Vernon, New York, and Kenneth Schmidt of Upper Montclair, New Jersey. Schmidt, editor of the *Nationalist Dawn* newsletter, has worked to bring prominent CofCC figures such as Samuel Francis — admired by Schmidt for his “consistent, pro-White stance” — to the tristate area to speak. Francis, editor of the *Citizens Informer*, is a former *Washington Times* editor and columnist fired for, as Francis described it, his “racially insensitive” and “offensive” writings. The CofCC has also raised funds for other extremist groups, including the American Friends of the British National Party, a racist organization established to support a fringe political party in Great Britain. The majority of the tristate CofCC's membership is from New York and New Jersey, but there is an active contingent of Connecticut members within the organization, and it appears to be growing.

THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE

One of the most recent hate groups to establish a foothold in Connecticut is one of the largest and most well-established of all. The National Alliance, an openly revolutionary neo-Nazi organization founded in 1974, is headquartered in West Virginia, but has chapters in states across the country. Its founder, William Pierce, gained notoriety as the pseudonymous author of *The Turner Diaries*, a novelistic blueprint for white revolution that has inspired terrorists from The Order in the 1980s to Timothy McVeigh in the 1990s.

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National Alliance cells (called “units” or “proto units,” depending on their size) are usually better organized and more disciplined than other white supremacist groups. In the 1990s, some Connecticut towns experienced Alliance literature drops.

The stated goal of the site is ‘to promote the advancement and protection of the White race’

In August 2001, one Alliance member, East Hartford resident Walt Galanek, announced the creation of a Web site for Connecticut members of the National Alliance. The stated goal of the site, currently online and registered to Ken Lagret (who has also written for the site), is “to promote the advancement and protection of the White race” and to increase awareness of issues “currently endangering the rights and welfare of White Citizens of Connecticut.” The site promotes the works of William Pierce, as well as regional figures such as a white supremacist radio talk show based in Rhode Island.

Connecticut currently has few National Alliance members—only enough to qualify for “proto unit” status, as opposed to full unit status. The creation of the Web page suggests there may be increased activity in the future.

PART TWO: ANTI-GOVERNMENT GROUPS AND ACTIVISTS

Hate groups like the Klan and the World Church of the Creator direct their anger at people who are different from them; their extremism is based on intolerance. Not all extremist groups, however, have hate as a primary motivating factor (although it may well be a secondary factor). For some groups, fear and loathing of the government takes center stage. These anti-government groups and movements are not simply anti-government in the sense that they disagree with certain policies of the government, or certain laws, or certain administrations. Rather, they are anti-government in the more extreme sense that they contest the legitimacy of the government itself. Believing that the government is illegitimate in some fashion, they find it easy to rationalize actions taken against it.

On the extreme right in the United States, three main anti-government movements exist, loosely joined together under the rubric of the “Patriot” movement; these include the tax protest movement, the “sovereign citizen” movement, and the militia movement. These groups have differing ideologies and goals, but share in common a belief that all or part of the government is illegitimate, and that powerful conspiracies are at work to hide this illegitimacy and subvert the freedoms of Americans.

MILITIA GROUPS AND PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATIONS

Of the various “Patriot” movements, certainly the most notorious is the militia movement, which gained fame following the April 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Militia groups were initially but erroneously linked to the bombing, then became newsworthy in their own right. The movement began in the mid-1990s as a reaction to a number of events, ranging from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to the Brady Law, but especially the deadly standoffs at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, in 1992, and Waco, Texas, in 1993, where anti-government activists believe the government deliberately targeted nonconforming individuals or groups. These activists argued that Americans needed to form paramilitary groups that would “protect” Americans and ensure that an incident like Ruby Ridge or Waco never occurred again. They called such groups “militias” to claim the legitimacy of the statutory militia and trade on the mythology of the militia of the American Revolution and early American history.

The militia movement is an anti-government movement heavily imbued with conspiracy theories, many of which center around firearms. Many militia members fear imminent gun confiscation, which they believe would be the first step toward a tyrannical government that would suspend all rights. Many adherents believe that the U.S. government collaborates with various inimical forces to create a “New World Order”—a socialist, authoritarian, one-world government. These beliefs have given birth to a variety of conspiracy theories about United Nations troops hiding in national parks and forests, concentra-

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tion camps established to hold American dissidents, and even mysterious planes spraying unknown chemicals on Americans through their exhaust fumes (dubbed “contrails” or “chemtrails”).

New England states have played a role in the militia movement since its inception.

Militias are commonly thought of as being racist or white supremacist, but the truth is more complex. The militia movement is primarily anti-government, not white supremacist. Relatively few militias have overtly espoused bigotry. More common are militia groups with racists or white supremacists among their membership or leadership, or who share some of the objectives promoted by racist groups. Most militias stop short of an open endorsement of racism and anti-Semitism, preferring instead to emphasize issues like the preservation of gun ownership and the perceived threat posed by the United Nations.

New England states have played a role in the militia movement since its inception. Prominent New England militia groups included the First and Second Maine Militias and the White Mountain Militia and Granite State Irregulars of New Hampshire. One New Hampshire militia leader, Fitzhugh MacCrae of the Hillsborough Dragoons, was arrested in 1996 along with two members for stealing goods from a U.S. military base (he later pleaded guilty).

Connecticut was a militia trailblazer of sorts, having had one of the earliest groups that could credibly be called a militia: the Connecticut Free Militia (CFM). In the years before the militia movement arose, several groups around the country anticipated the movement by creating fringe groups they labeled “militias.” Most did not last; those militia prototypes that survived until 1994 essentially merged with the militia movement when it arose. The CFM was one prototype militia. Established by a Shelton gun dealer named Douglas Oefinger in early 1989, the CFM failed to attract more than a handful of members. Its purpose, though, was primarily as a legal stratagem to circumvent federal restrictions on automatic weapons, rather than to serve as a group of armed “patriots” protecting freedom. In 1989, Oefinger applied for a permit to import 90 machine guns for the “use of Militia members in the state of Connecticut and members of other state militias.” Denied a permit, Oefinger

and the CFM brought suit in federal court, challenging the 1968 Gun Control Act and the 1986 Firearms Protection Act. The court concluded in a 1991 ruling that the CFM's claims were unfounded. The group itself disbanded when Oefinger relocated to Florida in 1992, although a former member told the *Hartford Courant* in 1998 that he and several other members still met and trained on occasion.

Oefinger's militia was not the only militia-like or paramilitary group active in the state in the early 1990s: the Manchester-based Military Studies Group (MSG), established in April 1993 and operated by Marc Parent, offered military training in subjects ranging from ambushes to night reconnaissance and waterborne assaults. It claimed to have a cadre of instructors with a wealth of military experience between them, and advertised its training programs extensively in *Soldier of Fortune* magazine. In 1993, five men (including three Connecticut residents) participating in an MSG-sponsored exercise were arrested for firearms violations in a forest in Ware, Massachusetts. Police seized shotguns, rifles, handguns, a few thousand rounds of ammunition and possible explosive device components. Additionally, several of the weapons had been brought into the state illegally. Eventually, one man was convicted as a felon possessing a firearm, while the other charges were dropped. However, the arrests brought an end to the activities of the short-lived group.

Perhaps because of the failures of these early groups, Connecticut was not fertile ground when the militia movement emerged in 1994. Though some Connecticut natives sympathized with the movement (see the example of Thomas Read, below), or participated in militia activities in neighboring states, groups were slow to form in the Constitution State itself. In 1997, when Michigan militia leader Dave Rydel visited Connecticut on a recruiting mission, he found interested individuals, but no active groups. "They wouldn't be what I would consider to be a serious militia, not that I can see," Rydel told a reporter that fall.

In November 1999, however, a young Terryville resident and computer programmer, Chris Duke, tried forming a group he called the Connecticut 51st Militia, deriving its name from the 51-day standoff at the Branch Davidian

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compound in Waco, a recurring theme among militias. Duke also operates the unit's Web site and an Internet message board, the maintenance of which seem to be the group's main activities.

The Connecticut 51st Militia is an unusual entity. The group claims to be a "constitutional militia" that "supports the Constitution to the fullest extent," and to believe that "our American and civil liberties must be protected by the people for the people." Yet the group's Web site prominently displays the logo of the virulently white supremacist World Church of the Creator, a logo that also acts as a link to the WCOTC's Web site. Such direct and explicit connections to prominent white supremacist groups are relatively rare in the militia movement. The 51st Web page also displays an anti-Semitic graphic as well, a small kosher-foods symbol with a slash mark through it. Duke has avowed that the 51st Militia is not bigoted. "Unlike many of our brother groups, we are not a racist group," he asserted to the *Hartford Courant* in December 1999. The group's goal was merely "to protect our families and our community from tyranny, crime, etc." Yet the post office box listed as a contact point for the 51st was also used by a (currently inactive) Klan Web site.

The reaction of other extremist groups to the 51st Militia's open embrace of the World Church of the Creator was foreseeably mixed. The guestbook on the group's Web site, in which visitors can record their comments for others to see, displayed a range of opinions, from a 17th Wisconsin Militia member who praised the site to a member of the Indiana Citizens Volunteer Militia who wrote that "I am not knocking the WCOTC itself, but I am EXTREMELY disappointed to see that you've bought into the racial stuff." White supremacists were naturally pleased. A WCOTC member, using the e-mail address CTCreator1488 (1488 is, commonly used code phrase for the "Fourteen Words," a white supremacist slogan, and "Heil Hitler," H being the eighth letter of the alphabet), proclaimed that he was "happy to hear that we have a Racially Concious [sic] Militia." The Connecticut 51st Militia, all things considered, is probably closer to a white supremacist group than to a typical militia group.

One other Connecticut group, the Connecticut Survivalist Alliance (CSA),

tries to attract militia members and sympathizers, though it is not really a militia group itself. Based in Meriden, it defines itself as “a little bit Militia because we are loosely organized and heavily armed” but also “a little bit Survivalist” and “a little bit Libertarian.” There is, however, little evidence that the CSA has a real world presence that extends beyond its Internet activities. The CSA’s Web site explains how to select ammunition, radio equipment, how to cache munitions and food, and a list of regional and state militias the reader can contact for more information. The CSA is led by “Thomas Icom,” previously most noteworthy for having edited for many years the newsletter *Cybertek*, aimed at survivalists and computer hackers.

SOVEREIGN CITIZENS IN CONNECTICUT

The “sovereign citizen” movement is a loosely organized network of groups and individuals who have adopted a right-wing, essentially anarchist ideology that has its origins in the beliefs of a group called the Posse Comitatus, which first emerged in the 1970s. Those who adhere to Posse ideology maintain that virtually all government in the United States is illegitimate, the result of a long-term conspiracy to subvert the true government of the United States and replace it with a tyranny. Posse followers claim to be restoring an idealized, decentralized state—one that in fact never existed, save in their overheated imaginations. To this end, sovereign citizens defy the government and other forms of authority by using tactics that range from violence to “paper terrorism.” Sovereign citizens in recent years who have attracted attention include the Montana Freeman, who engaged in an 81-day standoff with the FBI in 1996; convicted Oklahoma City bomber Terry Nichols was also a self-declared sovereign citizen. During much of the 1990s, the most popular sovereign citizen tactic of intimidation, which also gained wide publicity, was the formation of vigilante “common law” courts.

Most characteristically, sovereign citizens engage in “paper terrorism,” an unusual term that refers to the use of bogus or the misuse of legitimate legal documents, filings and other items in order to harass and intimidate public

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officials, law enforcement officers and private citizens and businesses. Paper terrorism includes filing frivolous lawsuits, submitting fraudulent liens, creating fictitious forms of money and checks using counterfeit car registrations and driver's licenses, as well as the misuse of valid documents like IRS forms and change-of-address notifications. Sovereign citizen groups have also conducted numerous large-scale frauds and scams, bilking thousands of people out of millions of dollars. Indeed, even a single sovereign citizen can be capable of intimidation and harassment to a degree that may be difficult to imagine without experiencing it firsthand.

Overall, sovereign citizen activity in New England has been lower than in other parts of the country. However, Connecticut has been an exception; since the mid-1990s, the state has experienced a surprising amount of activity. By late 1997, sovereign citizen actions had occurred in at least ten municipalities, and the total number was likely much higher.

Often those people who have suffered financial or other personal reverses are most susceptible to the lure of extreme anti-government ideology, and this has been true for many of Connecticut's anti-government activists. Bristol resident Thomas Read provides a textbook example of this dynamic. He purchased a home in Ridgefield in 1980, apparently unaware that it came with claims against it from the previous owner's creditors. After a legal battle that lasted over a decade, the home went into foreclosure in 1992. Refusing to vacate, Read was served papers by police, and eventually even arrested by sheriff's deputies in front of his family, although charges were eventually dismissed.

Read's pro se activism put him in contact with others of similar backgrounds, as well as with the publications of the sovereign citizen movement such as the *Anti-Shyster*, a Texas-based magazine (now only an Internet Web site). Eventually, Read formed a small group of about a dozen activists from around the country, mostly those with particular animosity toward Bankruptcy Court. Read and a handful of allies decided that the only solution was to "recapture" the judicial system and try what he termed "cases of high-level government corruption."

His anger at the government eventually attracted Read to the militia movement. While never forming his own militia group, he allied himself with Massachusetts militia leader Leroy Crenshaw and hosted visiting militia leaders such as the Militia of Montana's John Trochmann in 1995 and Michigan militiaman David Rydel in 1997. Along with other like-minded Connecticut residents, though, he also dreamed of reclaiming the corrupt judicial system, establishing a court of "ordinary citizens" that would try cases of government corruption. "I keep getting mad, I mean dangerously mad," he told a *Hartford Courant* reporter in late 1997.

While Read acknowledged that his alienation from the government had essentially disenfranchised him, other Connecticut residents were willing to go further — not merely to rage against the system but to remove themselves from it, becoming full-fledged "sovereign citizens." One of the most notorious Connecticut sovereigns was the late Edwin Thrall, an East Windsor resident who waged a one-man war against city and state officials for more than 20 years, after the city council refused to issue him a permit for a dance hall he built on his property. Thrall's case provides a pointed example of the way even a seemingly minor conflict with government can become a serious problem if sovereign citizen ideology is present.

Read and a handful of allies decided that the only solution was to 'recapture' the judicial system and try what he termed 'cases of high-level government corruption.'

East Windsor's entanglement with Thrall began in 1978, when building officials declared that his dance hall was not up to code and would not grant a certificate of occupancy. Thrall refused to make changes to the hall and decided to operate it anyway. Moreover, he elected not to pay property taxes on a structure he was told he could not use. Throughout the 1980s, Thrall refused to pay taxes, threatened city officials, held dances in open defiance of city ordinances and made it clear to anyone who would listen that East Windsor would get the land over his dead body.

Thrall's behavior backed up his boast. His first arrest in 1978 led to a 30-day sentence for refusal to pay fines on the hall; six months later, he shot at sher-

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iff's deputies and local police with a high-powered rifle, taking out the tires of a pair of cruisers and cracking the engine block of a third. He later received a 90-day sentence for reckless endangerment as a result. Undeterred, Thrall served a hand-written lawsuit on court officers; he was arrested again, but managed to avoid jail again until 1983 (when he was compelled to serve the remainder of his 90-day sentence). In 1984, Thrall upped the ante when he offered his land to Klan Grand Dragon William Dodge for a regional Klan rally and cross lighting. Two years later, he hosted a second Klan rally. Thrall said he hosted the rallies because only the Klan could instill fear in local officials. Tactically, Thrall's dalliance with the Klan misfired, worsening his image and costing him whatever residual sympathy he had among his neighbors.

The Klan rally also exhausted the patience of Connecticut's courts. In September 1984, a permanent injunction was issued that barred operation of the dance hall under any circumstances. Thrall ignored it, and he and his wife served a month in jail in 1986 for holding a dance there and failing to pay fines. By the time East Windsor began foreclosure proceedings in 1990, with Thrall also owing \$70,000 in unpaid property taxes, he had taken to showing up at town assemblies and parks in a tricornered hat, declaring to all that he was a "sovereign citizen at law."

By the mid-1990s, Thrall was the best known and most active sovereign citizen activist in Connecticut. Yet, despite his age (he was 77 in 1995), his most notorious feat was still ahead of him. Although local officials had foreclosed on the property, Thrall still considered it his. In September 1995, to illustrate the point, he entered the property and began using a crane to load supplies onto the roof of his hall. Police were called and warned Thrall and the crane operators they had to leave or face arrest. Retrieving a shotgun from inside the dance hall, Thrall fired over the heads of police, beginning a standoff that lasted for hours, following which Thrall evaded a SWAT team, only to be finally arrested peacefully in his living room, after taking the time to change and eat dinner. News of the siege spurred several sovereign citizens to rally in support of Thrall; several of the ralliers would presently be engaged in their own standoffs.

Thrall's confrontation eventually led to a six-month prison sentence, following a boisterous trial, but it finally marked the end of his conflict with the city: released in late 1996, his health and spirit seemed to be broken. By 1998, Thrall had turned 80, and was in serious physical decline. A settlement was eventually reached, in which his daughter and son-in-law were allowed to purchase the land and dance hall from the city, with the proceeds going to vacate the property's tax debt. Thrall had finally won a victory of sorts.

While Thrall eventually ended his activities, several potential successors soon emerged in Connecticut to replace him as the state's foremost sovereign activist. Most prominent among them was Enfield resident Andrew Melechinsky, who spent the better part of 20 years protesting against state and federal authority and refusing to pay taxes. While not as well known as Thrall, he nonetheless managed to tally over 50 arrests between 1979 and his death two decades later, and was jailed by seven different communities during that time.

According to Melechinsky's own account, there was nothing remarkable about his life until the late 1970s, when he became involved in the tax protest movement. Convinced he had no legal obligation to pay taxes, he abruptly stopped. Fashioning himself a "constitutional scholar," he even wrote a book about tax protester and white supremacist Gordon Kahl (a North Dakota tax protester and a Posse Comitatus leader who murdered two federal marshals and a sheriff in a pair of violent confrontations in 1983, the second of which resulted in his own death, elevating him to martyr status in the eyes of right-wing extremists). Melechinsky also gained some notoriety in the 1980s for picketing over 130 law schools around the country.

In January 1992, Melechinsky's refusal to pay taxes eventually led to a tense confrontation with federal marshals dispatched to evict him from his Enfield home, which had been seized to pay for some of the more than \$700,000 in back taxes and interest that he owed. Although he had previously threatened to use a gun, Melechinsky settled for nonviolent resistance; he later moved in with the Thrall family. Four days after his ejection, another Enfield sovereign citizen and tax protester, Juanita Martin, broke into Melechinsky's former

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home and barricaded herself there, holding police at bay with a handgun. Martin, who had previously made threats about shooting federal agents, held police off for a full day before being arrested. SWAT officers found her with two guns and several hundred rounds of ammunition. Then 43 years old and unemployed, she led a local anti-government group called Constitutional Revival which was formed by Melechinsky in the 1970s. Martin was later convicted on several charges, including criminal trespass, threatening and interfering with a police officer.

Refusing to let his home go, Melechinsky soon organized a picket line composed of fellow sovereign citizens who, during the next three years, protested in front of the house every time it was offered for sale. Over time, Melechinsky filed countless appeals and suits against Enfield officials, and lobbied unceasingly on behalf of the Thralls, spending countless hours arguing that only a “citizens’ grand jury” could legally rule on cases such as his and the Thralls’. The “grand jury” must consist of fellow sovereign citizens, of course, since only they knew which laws were valid and which were not. Failing health finally caused Melechinsky to cease his activities; he eventually moved to Kansas, where he died in April 1999. Summing up his legacy, Massachusetts attorney David Grossack, who markets legal aids to sovereign citizens and other anti-government activists, called him “America’s last patriot.”

Juanita Martin, considerably younger than Melechinsky, remained active. She continued to deny the legitimacy of elected authorities and persisted in operating her car without a license, even after it was towed three times in one day. For five years, like her mentors, Martin refused to make mortgage payments on her home. Sheriff’s deputies eventually seized her house in 1997, a process that took place without incident because Martin was at work.

Other sovereign citizens seemed to be more active in acquiring real estate than in losing it. For example, John Barney of Avon, his sister Nina Barney of Salisbury and his associate Barbara Frankl of Simsbury engaged in a dubious pattern of property purchases and opposition to authorities that began in the late 1980s.

According to Hartford County law enforcement officials, John Barney and Barbara Frankl were among about a half-dozen people who purchased depressed properties in various towns in Connecticut, then refused to repay bank mortgages. Barney allegedly began making such purchases in the mid-1980s, receiving by 1992 hundreds of thousands of dollars in mortgages for various properties. Frankl is alleged to have engaged in similar transactions. They would then use a variety of mechanisms to obstruct foreclosure procedures, ranging from transferring property to trusts to changing their legal names. Eventually, eviction would occur — Frankl, for instance, was forcibly evicted by police in February 1997 from a Simsbury house after defaulting on a \$160,000 mortgage — but then the process started all over again. The 1997 Simsbury eviction was typical; it followed three years of foreclosure proceedings. Barney and his sister had barricaded themselves in Frankl’s house, placing boards across the door and signs on the lawn warning government officials to stay away.

When authorities finally arrived to take possession of the property, the two sovereign citizens claimed that the government had no jurisdiction over them. Eventually, they were arrested (Frankl was not) and charged with criminal trespass and interfering with police. After the arrest, John Barney’s behavior was typical of sovereign citizens. He refused all cooperation with authorities, even to the extent of confirming his name or giving his age, and refused all legal counsel. He soon filed federal civil rights lawsuits against the judge in his case, a deputy sheriff, two Simsbury police officers and others. At the time of the seizure of Frankl’s home, Barney himself had avoided payments on his house in Avon since 1992, according to Avon town records. Barney’s obstructive efforts included filing a bogus “common law lien” and demanding that a “common law jury” hear his case.

Although foreclosure proceedings against sovereign citizens were probably the most frustrating for authorities, traffic stops involving anti-government activists could be almost as maddening. The case of David Connolly provides an excellent example. Connolly, a resident of Woodbridge (and a convicted criminal who had spent five years in federal prison for possessing a weapon while on parole), was pulled over by police in August 1997 for having no

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license plate on his vehicle. He explained that his status as a sovereign citizen gave him immunity from state vehicle codes, and produced an “international driver’s license” to support his claim. The officer was unreceptive and cited Connolly for driving without a valid license and operating an unregistered vehicle. Unfortunately, in carrying out her duties, the officer had unleashed a whirlwind. In the weeks that followed, Connolly bombarded her with legal documents that implied that a lien would be placed against her property if the charges filed against him were pursued. What began as a traffic stop had developed into a legal joust between the state and Connolly.

But Connolly was used to such jousts; in fact, he claimed to have authored many of the common law liens then appearing in Connecticut courts, including a \$100,000 claim leveled against a state representative by Joseph Kluczinsky, an ally of Connolly’s from Oxford. Continuing to harass police and public officials by filing nuisance liens, Connolly showed no inclination to stop, until police were called to his home in October 1998 to investigate reports that he fired a rifle into the woods behind his home. Connolly barricaded himself in his home and engaged authorities in an armed standoff for more than four hours. He eventually surrendered and was charged with possession of an assault weapon, unlawful discharge of a firearm and threatening and interfering with a police officer. He pleaded guilty soon thereafter to possession of a firearm by a convicted felon; the other charges were dropped and he received a 40-month sentence.

Unfortunately, jail does not necessarily stop the activities of sovereign citizens, who often continue filing frivolous lawsuits and bogus filings from behind bars. They may also recruit other prisoners into the movement or teach them their tactics. This has occurred in federal and state prisons around the country, and Connecticut has not been immune. In fact, the most recent example of sovereign citizen tactics in Connecticut comes from behind prison walls, involving bogus liens filed by an inmate, Kenneth Speight.

Speight, a resident of Glastonbury, was a felon with a history of prior convictions (ranging from dealing drugs to passing bad checks) who was arrested in 1996 on various weapons charges and sentenced the following year to 105

months in prison. He initially entered a federal prison in New York, but later became a federal inmate in the state Corrigan Correctional Institution. According to federal officials, while in New York, Speight encountered a prisoner who was a sovereign citizen, perhaps associated with the Montana Freemen. The other prisoner began teaching Speight various sovereign citizen tactics.

At first glance, Speight might have been an unlikely ally for a sovereign citizen, because Speight himself was involved in an extreme movement of a very different ideological stripe, the Black African movement. In fact, it was revealed at his trial that Speight had engaged in paramilitary training. The Montana Freemen, on the other hand, were not simply sovereign citizens but were virulent white supremacists. Yet ideology often makes strange bedfellows: a number of African-American groups, for instance, have adopted the sovereign citizen ideology to their own ends (the so-called “Moorish” movement). Moreover, both white separatists and Black separatists are typically anti-government and believe in elaborate (often anti-Semitic) conspiracy theories. At any rate, Speight learned the tactic of filing bogus liens and quickly put it to use.

His tactic was an effective one: bogus liens have been one of the sovereign citizen movement’s most popular harassing tactics for more than two decades. Valid liens are those placed against people who owe the lienholder money, such as a lien placed on the property of a house whose owners failed to pay a roofer for putting a new roof on the house. Such a lien would cloud the title to the property, and the owner could not easily sell the property until he or she settled with the person who placed the lien. Bogus liens are placed not because the lienee owes any money, but rather simply because they have angered the person who placed the liens. While liens are so easy to place that every citizen can do it, they are only removed against the wishes of the lienholder with effort and expense. As a result, the placing of bogus liens became a popular tactic for anti-government activists who wished to retaliate against public servants, companies or private citizens. Speight was a perfect example. In the spring of 2001 it was revealed that Speight had filed a \$10 billion lien against the federal judge in Hartford who heard his case, and million-dollar

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liens against a U.S. attorney and another prosecutor. He also threatened to place liens on a Glastonbury police officer and prison officials.

In some states in the 1980s, and in many more states in the 1990s, the number of bogus liens placed against government officials and other victims grew so large that many states passed laws making these liens easy to remove, illegal to file, or both. Connecticut has not as yet passed any such laws, however, making it difficult and costly for victims to seek redress.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, Connecticut has experienced a breadth and scope of extremist activity disproportionate to its small size. From hooded Klansmen to lien-wielding anti-government activists, extremists have attempted to carve out niches for their fringe views in the towns and cities of the Constitution State.

The Klan presented Connecticut both with its traditional face of crude and blatant racism, as well as an unhooded, more moderate and “mainstream” Klan — a tactic that proved unconvincing and largely unsuccessful. In that vein, however, organizations without the Klan’s historical baggage — like the Council of Conservative Citizens — may make some inroads by advocating a racist ideology couched in terms more attractive to traditional conservatives.

As the Klan’s numbers and appeal declined in Connecticut, newer and more dynamic extremist groups like Matt Hale’s World Church of the Creator stepped forward. Attracting mainly younger racists, WCOTC increased its visibility in the state with public rallies that turned into near-riots when Hale’s supporters and counterprotesters squared off.

The activities of anti-government extremists such as militia members and sovereign citizens also confronted Connecticut with frustrating problems, including armed standoffs, tortuous legal battles and a flood of paper terrorism. Such activists tended to view almost all government in Connecticut as illegitimate and often sub-

scribed to bizarre conspiracy theories about the United Nations and the “New World Order.”

While some formerly popular extremist groups are now on the decline in Connecticut, others are growing, and are becoming increasingly active and vocal in communities throughout the state. The impact of the Internet, greatly decreasing the size of the world, will make Connecticut, like other states, even more vulnerable to new extremist movements originating from elsewhere.

While extremists have in no sense flooded Connecticut, they nevertheless have repeatedly demonstrated through the years an ability to cause fear, suffering and aggravation far greater than their numbers would suggest. To deal with the various complex problems caused by extremists and to protect people from their ill intentions, all citizens of Connecticut need to play a role. Public officials must insure that laws and ordinances give citizens the proper tools to defend themselves from ideologically inspired malice. Law enforcement officers must use those tools to counter those extremists who cross the line into criminal activity, while at the same time insure that freedom of expression remains protected. Community leaders and activists must use their own freedom of expression to make clear to all that the citizens of the towns and communities of Connecticut do not condone hatred or intolerance. They must bend their efforts toward creating an umbrella of tolerance under which goodwill can flourish.

In the past, Connecticut has produced many citizens willing to do just that. The official state hero of Connecticut, the patriot Nathan Hale, is reputed to have regretted that he had but one life to give for his country. Less well known is the official state heroine, Prudence Crandall who, in 1833, established the first school for African-American women in New England, despite hardships, threats and violence. Yet the patriotism of Nathan Hale and the humaneness and courage of Prudence Crandall are among Connecticut’s most precious natural resources. Connecticut citizens, if willing, can successfully combat the threats posed by extremism.

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