



# Rage Grows in America: Anti-Government Conspiracies

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# RAGE GROWS IN AMERICA: ANTI-GOVERNMENT CONSPIRACIES

<b>Introduction: A Year of Growing Animosity.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Part One: Anger in the Mainstream.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The Tea Parties.....</b>	<b>4</b>
April 15 and July 4 Tea Parties .....	4
<b>The Town Hall Meeting Disruptions.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Confronting Officeholders with Angry Rhetoric .....	6
Nazi Comparisons.....	7
<b>A Building Anger .....</b>	<b>9</b>
September 12 Tea Party Events.....	9
The “How to Take Back America” Conference.....	11
Press Conference in D.C. Against Health-Care Reform.....	12
<b>The “Birther” Movement .....</b>	<b>13</b>
The “Birther” Conspiracies .....	13
Major “Birthers” .....	14
Philip Berg.....	14
Orly Taitz.....	15
World Net Daily.....	16
<b>The Influence of the Mainstream Media .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Part Two: Anger on the Fringes .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Alex Jones, the Conspiracy King .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Jones and Obama.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Conspiracy Theories Imagine Government Plots .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Anti-Government Conspiracy Theories and Their Transmission.....	21
Conspiracy Theories Prompting Action: Reaction to the Iowa National Guard.....	23
Nancy Genovese Incident .....	24
Conspiracy Theories Prompting Action: Richard Poplawski.....	24

<b>Resisting the Government .....</b>	<b>25</b>
The Oath Keepers.....	26
The Three Percenters .....	27
The Resurgence of the Militia Movement.....	28
 <b>Conclusion.....</b>	 <b>30</b>

## Introduction: A Year of Growing Animosity

Since the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States, an undercurrent of anger and hostility has swept across the country, creating a climate of anti-government fervor and activism that manifests itself in ways ranging from incivility in public forums to acts of intimidation and violence. Though precursors to the wave of anger can be found in the 2008 election campaign itself (as some partisan Republicans attempted to prevent Obama's election by demonizing him as a socialist or even as a "closet" Muslim), many Americans have been taken aback by the sudden rise and strength of the anti-government animosity that has swelled in the first year after the election.

What characterizes this anti-government hostility is a shared belief that Obama and his administration actually pose a threat to the future of the United States. Some accuse Obama of plotting to bring socialism to the United States, while others claim he will bring about Nazism or fascism. All believe that Obama and his administration will trample on individual freedoms and civil liberties, due to some sinister agenda, and they see his economic and social policies as manifestations of this agenda. In particular anti-government activists used the issue of health-care reform as a rallying point, accusing Obama and his administration of dark designs ranging from "socialized medicine" to "death panels," even when the Obama administration had not come out with a specific health-care reform plan. Some even compared the Obama administration's intentions to Nazi eugenics programs.

At rallies and public events around the country, as well as across the Internet, President Obama is being painted as someone intent on destroying American culture and values. He is portrayed as "the other," a dangerous foreign element in the United States. Some of these assertions about Obama, or the sentiments behind them, are motivated in whole or in part by racism. But more common is an intense strain of distrust and anger towards the government, an ultra-libertarianism combined with a streak of paranoia and belief in conspiracies.

This wave of anti-government rage is something that has surprised and dismayed even a number of conservative writers and politicians, some of whom have found themselves victims of the anger. In October 2009, to give just one example, Lindsey Graham, the Republican senator from South Carolina, was accosted at a town hall meeting in October 2009 by an angry man in a "Don't Tread on Me" T-shirt who accused him of being a "traitor" and of betraying the nation.

The anti-government anger encompasses a large portion of the right side of the political spectrum. It emanates from mainstream groups and politicians, but also from undeniably extreme groups and individuals, such as the suddenly resurgent militia movement. Together these individuals and groups form a continuum of anti-government fervor, with few sharp divisions or distinctions. Nevertheless, the animosity can be generally characterized into three loose categories:

- **Mainstream Political Attacks.** In its most “mainstream” version, the animosity consists largely of partisan attacks against the Obama administration by some conservative politicians and media figures. Upset and anxious about their loss of power following the 2008 elections, they seek primarily to energize their political base and to delegitimize the Obama administration at the same time. For the most part, these individuals eschew the conspiracy theories and more outlandish notions and tactics propagated by others. Some of their activities parallel Democratic tactics during the Bush administration. These mainstream political attacks fall outside the bounds of this report. One of the most important effects of these activists, however, is to help create a body of people who may be predisposed to believe the assertions and claims of more extreme individuals and groups.
- **“Grass-roots” Hostility and Conspiracy Theories.** Still mostly in the mainstream, the next phase of anti-government sentiment is represented by a variety of grass-roots and quasi-grass-roots movements and events, such as the various “Tea Party” protests held around the country, as well as other, similar events, and the disruptions that occurred at town hall meetings during the summer of 2009. This middle category is also characterized by a fairly widespread acceptance of conspiratorial notions about Obama and his administration, of which the most popular is the so-called “birther” movement, which contends Obama is not a legal citizen of the United States.
- **Anti-Government Extremists.** On the extreme end of the continuum is a wide array of anti-government extremist movements and groups. The anti-government extremists believe that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other government agencies are preparing concentration camps and mass graves for American citizens, that the U.S. government will engage in “door to door” gun confiscation, and that it is plotting to establish martial law in the United States. Many such groups and individuals implicitly or explicitly promote resistance, even armed resistance, to the government. The growth of these sentiments has been paralleled by a resurgence in the anti-

government militia movement, which has considerably increased in size over the past year.

This wave of anti-government anger is in many ways reminiscent of a similar surge of such hostility in the early to mid-1990s, in the years before the Oklahoma City bombing. In fact, many of the more extreme conspiracy theories common today actually had their origins back in 1994; that was also the last period of growth in the militia movement.

This hostile wave of anti-Obama anger and paranoid anti-government conspiracy theories goes well beyond mere transgressions of civil political discourse. Anti-government agitators launch many attacks that do not merely disagree with government policies or positions, but rather attempt to delegitimize the government itself. Indeed, an increasing number of anti-government activists are convincing themselves, or have already done so, that the government is illegitimate. These growing beliefs threaten to create a large pool of people more susceptible to extreme anti-government conspiracy theories and even calls to resistance on the part of extremist groups and movements, such as the militia movement, which may grow as a result.

Significantly, many of these activists have appropriated an idealized version of Revolutionary War history for their own purposes, stressing the armed resistance of the American colonists to British “tyranny” and suggesting, in varying degrees of openness, that Americans today should act as their revolutionary forebears did and throw off the perceived shackles of the allegedly tyrannical government. Some of these notions have even percolated beyond extremist groups and movements into the mainstream. One example is the Appleseed Project (also known as the Revolutionary War Veterans Association), a marksmanship program that combines firearms training with historical/political lectures on the battles of Lexington and Concord in the Revolutionary War. Trainees are taught not only marksmanship but the idea that they are equivalent to the Revolutionary War patriots and might have to fight for their liberty in the near future. “We believe that if we teach it,” the Appleseed organizers state, “it’ll wake our fellow Americans... We want Lady Liberty to be safe.” Not surprisingly, more radical anti-government groups such as militia groups tend to support the Appleseed Project, because they have more extreme forms of many of the same beliefs.



## Part One: Anger in the Mainstream

### *The Tea Parties*

The Tea Party movement is made up of individuals and groups, at the grass-roots level and from established conservative organizations, who plan and attend rallies around the country to express their anger at the government. Some conservative media outlets, such as the FOX News Network, have also played a role in promoting Tea Parties.

The Tea Parties take their name from the historic “Boston Tea Party,” staged by American colonists in Boston in 1773 to protest taxes levied by the British government. Anti-government protesters often memorialize that event to protest what they believe are abuses of the federal government. Although a few events similar to the Tea Parties occurred late in the Bush administration, they took on a new tone and tenor after the election of President Obama.

While most people attending Tea Party events claim they harbor no extreme views, many of the ideas they promote fall outside the mainstream, especially the more conspiratorial ones. Angry protesters have frequently made claims ranging from proclaiming Obama’s “socialist” intentions to making explicit Nazi comparisons to suggesting that the President is defying or even subverting the Constitution.

- **April 15 and July 4 Tea Parties**

Rick Santelli, a market commentator at CNBC who covers the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, helped promote the first major Tea Parties held to protest the Obama administration. The idea of the Tea Parties took off after he railed on television in February 2009 about the government’s plan to help bail out homeowners who had defaulted on their mortgages. Santelli suggested there should be a “Chicago Tea Party” in July at Lake Michigan, where people could dump “derivative securities” into the water.

Building on this suggestion, people and groups upset with Obama and his policies organized Tea Parties across the country. Conservative and grass-roots groups began promoting a bigger, more organized set of Tea Parties on April 15 (the income tax filing deadline). The idea caught on and a number of conservative pundits and



bloggers, as well as media personalities on FOX News, heavily promoted the event. At Tea Parties held in locales across the country, attendees expressed frustration and anger at the government bailout plan, with President Obama as the focal point of their rage. A number of conservative organizations and elected officials participated in the Tea Parties. Some local protests reportedly attracted as many as a few thousand people.

During the April 15 protests, signs depicting President Obama as Hitler began to appear as some protesters equated his bailout plan with socialism or Nazism. Some speakers claimed that Obama was intent on taking away civil liberties by destroying the Constitution or the American way of life. According to one report on a rally in Beacon, South Carolina, various speakers talked about “taking back the nation.” A local Republican Party chairwoman at the event described participants as “people standing up for their Constitution...They’re ready to fight for their country. Socialism is being pushed and we don’t want any part of it.” At a rally in Madison, Wisconsin, one woman reportedly even had a sign comparing President Obama to the anti-Christ.



Sign held at April 15 Tea Party protest.

At later events, demonization of President Obama became more common and began to morph into more anti-government conspiratorial thinking. On July 4, numerous rallies once more were staged across the country. At one rally in Ventura, California, a common theme again emerged. A man who later posted his video to YouTube said, “We want our America back which is being stolen by Barack Obama.” He later talked about Obama bringing socialism to the country. People also held up signs at the rally asking for Obama’s birth certificate. Obama’s alleged lack of a U.S. birth certificate [See “The ‘Birther’ Movement.”] became another piece of the “proof” that he was a usurper intent on destroying America’s freedom.

The July Tea Parties appeared to attract fewer attendees and less media attention but they did gain the attention of white supremacists, a number of whom joined protests in different places around the country. White supremacists saw the Tea Parties as an opportunity to express their own opposition to Obama and to see how receptive other protesters might be to their message. Many later posted photographs of their participation to social networking sites. However, such extremists were a tiny minority of Tea Party protesters.

## ***The Town Hall Meeting Disruptions***

During the summer of 2009, President Obama stepped up his call for national health-care reform. Senators and representatives held town hall meetings around the country to discuss questions about the issue. These meetings became a fertile ground for anti-Obama protests and stunts. Various conservative and far-right organizations encouraged people to attend the town hall meetings. Protesters expressed rage at elected officials and many of the meetings erupted into chaos. In some cases, police were called to eject people who were disrupting the events.

### **Confronting Officeholders with Angry Rhetoric**

Anti-Obama anger was the focus of many town hall meetings, with themes similar to those of the Tea Parties: that Obama is creating a socialist or Nazi state, and that he is destroying the country or trying to destroy the “real” America. At several meetings, attendees even asked government officials why they or the President were trying to destroy the Constitution by instituting “socialistic” health-care reform policies.

In July 2009, when members of the Obama administration, including Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, came to a town hall meeting in Reserve, Louisiana, to discuss health care, one man shouted at them to tell President Obama that “it will be will be a cold day in hell before he socializes my county.”

In August 2009, the reaction at a number of town hall meetings intensified:

- At a town hall meeting in Washington State, a member of the audience informed Representative Brian Beard that he was a Marine Corps veteran who had taken an oath to defend the Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic. He angrily accused Beard of trying to “indoctrinate” his children and shouted, “Stay away from my kids.” He then stated that the Nazis took over finance, the car industry and health care, in an apparent comparison to the actions of the Obama administration. The man then demanded of Beard, “I’ve kept my oath. Do you ever intend to keep yours?”
- At a town hall meeting held by Representative Tim Bishop in Setauket, New York, a woman outside yelled, “We want our country back.” Inside the

meeting, rage boiled over as one woman railed about the President allegedly shoving “government-run socialistic health care...down our throats.”

- A similar scene took place at a town hall meeting held by Senator Arlen Specter in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. One man demanded that Specter “tell Obama to represent us as an American and if not, there’s other countries.” Another person in the audience told the Senator, “You are trampling on our Constitution.” Still another attendee yelled, “This is the Soviet Union, this is Maoist China. The people in this room want their country back.”
- Reaction was even more extreme at a town hall meeting held by Senator Ben Cardin in Hagerstown, Maryland. A man, later turned over to the Secret Service, held up a sign that read “Death to Obama” and “Death to Michelle and her two stupid kids.”
- Outside a town hall meeting given by President Obama in New Hampshire, a man with a pistol strapped to his thigh (he was legally allowed to carry and display the gun) stood near where the meeting was held with a banner that said, “It’s time to water the tree of liberty,” an allusion to Thomas Jefferson’s quote, “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.” This quote is popular among anti-government extremists.
- In Phoenix, a number of people wearing guns (it is legal to openly display firearms in Arizona) showed up at a demonstration at a site where Obama had given a speech to veterans.

## **Nazi Comparisons**

Much of the language used by angry protesters at town hall meetings compared Obama or the government to Hitler or Nazi Germany.

- In August 2009, at a town hall meeting held by Representative Barney Frank in Massachusetts, one woman held up a picture depicting President Obama as Adolf Hitler and asked Frank, “Why do you continue to support a Nazi policy as Obama has expressly supported this policy?” This question was echoed at other meetings.
- At a town hall meeting attended by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that same month on a visit to Denver, Colorado, a young man wore a T-shirt depicting

President Obama and the words, “Hitler gave great speeches, too.” A young child in a stroller was given a sign to hold that read, “No to fascism,” and contained a swastika image in a circle with a line through it.

Others at town hall events made claims about the government’s health-care plan allegedly involving rationing care or setting up so-called “death panels” to dispose of the elderly and disabled, sometimes implicitly or explicitly drawing comparisons to Nazi eugenics programs.

- According to an article in the *Florida Baptist Witness* in September 2009, Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission president Richard Land said, “What they are attempting to do in healthcare, particularly in not treating the elderly, is...precisely what the Nazis did...Let us remember, the first 10,000 victims of the Holocaust were not Jews, they were mentally handicapped German children who were gassed and burned in ovens because they were considered to have...lives unworthy of life.” In October 2009, Land retracted his statement and apologized for his remarks.
- Other Nazi references to Obama’s health-care plan came from followers of conspiracy theorist Lyndon LaRouche, leader of a fringe political cult that defies categorization. His followers have produced and disseminated materials that compare President Obama and other government officials to Hitler, Nazis and fascists, and have attended town hall meetings and other events around the country.

The widespread use of Holocaust and Nazi analogies and comparisons, which still continues, goes well beyond legitimate or even exaggerated criticism of the Obama administration and its policies. By comparing Obama to Hitler, a man widely perceived as the epitome of evil in the modern world, people who use such



A number of people, including these supporters of conspiracy theorist Lyndon LaRouche, compared President Obama to Hitler during health-care debates.

comparisons demonize Obama and make even the most extreme conspiracy theories about his ultimate intentions more plausible.

In these Nazi analogies, Obama and his supporters are being cast as opponents to be destroyed rather than fellow citizens with whom dialogue, debate, and compromise are possible. The ready use of such propaganda is symptomatic of the radicalization of some segments of the

American populace, and contributes to a self-perpetuating cycle of radicalization, in which ever more extreme ideas seem plausible or acceptable.

### *A Building Anger*

The anger and uncivil expressions at town hall meetings in the summer of 2009 gave rise to even more virulent sentiments at subsequent public events. By the time of the large Tea Party rally held in Washington, D.C., on September 12, 2009, anti-Obama feeling ran high among conservatives, particularly in light of an episode during a presidential speech to Congress on health-care reform three days earlier. Echoing what had happened at town hall meetings, Representative Joe Wilson from South Carolina breached Congressional decorum by shouting “You lie!” when the President stated that his health-care bill would not cover undocumented immigrants.

### **September 12 Tea Party Events**

The September 12, 2009, rally in Washington, D.C., attracted the largest attendance of any of the protests held against the government and President Obama—most estimates ranged from the tens to hundreds of thousands. Conservative organizations and individuals, particularly FOX News media personality Glenn Beck, heavily promoted the event. The anger and rage that had been expressed at town hall meetings a few weeks earlier and at Tea Parties across the country became even uglier.

In addition to signs questioning Obama’s birth certificate and comparisons of President Obama to Hitler, there were also racist signs and even some signs that promoted implicit or explicit violence against the government. One sign called the President “parasite in chief,” suggesting that he was feeding off the country for his own benefit. Many attendees shouted “liar, liar, liar,” echoing Representative Joe Wilson’s outburst during the joint session of Congress.



Sign at September 12 rally that implied a comparison between President Obama and Hitler.



Examples of the extreme levels of anti-government anger were present in abundance at the D.C. rally, including:

- **Nazi imagery:** One woman held a sign that depicted President Obama giving a Nazi salute in front of a swastika banner, along with the words, “Hey America, You Want Change. Hitler Did Too!” An attendee placed a sign on a dog, which read, “I am a member of Obama’s National Socialist Party. I am cute, young...limited intelligence.” This was an example of another common theme displayed by protesters, implying that Obama



Comparing Obama's health-care plan to Hitler's eugenics program at September 12 rally in D.C.

brainwashed the country's youth to worship him, as Hitler did in Germany. One sign depicting the president as the evil “Joker” character from the *Batman* movie read, “Stop Him Now Before It's To [sic] Late. It's Not About Obama Care. It's About Power! When we smell the burning flesh from the ovens it will be to [sic] late for us all.” The sign ended with the word, “Socialism.” One sign read, “Oh S#!t It's 1939 Germany all over again. Obama's HR 3200 = Hitler's T4,” making a comparison between Obama's health-care plan and Hitler's euthanasia plan.

- **Racist imagery:** A number of people carried signs depicting President Obama as an African witch doctor. One woman held a sign that read, “The Zoo Has An African And The White House Has A Lyin' African!” Another person held a sign that read, “Somewhere In Kenya A Village Is Missing An Idiot.” One individual's sign, alluding to a time when blacks were slaves in America, depicted a hand with the middle finger held up, which read, “My New Presidential Salute! Kumbaya My A--! Obama—Your Massa On His New Plantation!”



Racist sentiment at the September 12 rally in D.C.

- **Violent imagery:** Signs implicitly or explicitly promoting violence against the government were another more disturbing aspect of the September 12 rally. One man held a sign that said, “We came unarmed [this time.]” Another sign

alluded to Thomas Jefferson's famous quote, "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants," but with an ominous message that said, "The Tree Of Liberty Must Be Refreshed From Time To Time...Pennsylvanians Are Armed And Ready." A man held a banner with a huge image of an assault rifle and the words, "Come And Take It." Yet another man wore a T-shirt that said, "Civil Liberty Or Civil War."



Man holds banner showing assault rifle at September 12 rally in D.C.

Even some ostensibly mainstream political figures expressed views that the President was defying the Constitution or creating a fascist state. At the September 12 rally, Dick Armey, a former House Republican leader whose group, FreedomWorks, helped organize the rally, said to the crowd, "He [Obama] promised a commitment of fidelity to the United States Constitution." Echoing Representative Joe Wilson's words, the crowd shouted back, "Liar, liar, liar."

At another, similar rally held in Little Rock, Arkansas, the same day, Deborah Johns, a leader with the conservative organization Our Country Deserves Better, told a crowd that "Our men and women took an oath when they put on the uniform to defend and protect this country from enemies both foreign and domestic. I think we've got some domestic enemies in the White House." A few minutes later, she called President Obama a communist.

## **The "How to Take Back America" Conference**

Just two weeks after the September 12, 2009, D.C. rally, a number of conservatives held a "How to Take Back America" conference in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 25-26. One of the speakers, Kitty Werthmann, the South Dakota representative of the Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, reportedly made various statements comparing President Obama to Hitler. According to one account of the event, when an attendee asked her what she suggested people do if asked to give up their guns, Werthmann allegedly replied, "Don't you dare give up your guns! Never, never, never!" Another attendee reportedly said, "Give them back one bullet at a time!"



The conference also included Joseph Farah, the publisher of the right-wing on-line publication *World Net Daily*, which has led the charge that Obama is not a citizen of the United States. [See “The ‘Birther’ Movement.”]

### Press Conference in D.C. Against Health-Care Reform



A sign at the D.C. event equated the government health-care plan to the destruction of freedom in America.

On November 5, 2009, a number of conservatives, including Representative Michele Bachmann of Minnesota and Representative Joe Wilson of South Carolina convened a press conference near the Capitol in Washington, D.C., to rally supporters against the health-care reform bill. An estimated ten thousand people attended the event, where various speakers charged that America’s freedoms were under attack. Some of the speakers even encouraged the crowd to “storm” the office buildings of their representatives to protest the health-care reform bill.

Many people in the audience were more extreme than the speakers. A number of people in the crowd held signs with Nazi imagery; others promoted anti-Obama conspiracy theories or equated health-care reform with the imposition of tyranny or socialism on the United States. One attendee held an anti-Semitic sign that said, “Obama takes his orders from the Rothchilds [sic; the Rothschilds are a prominent Jewish family with ties to government and banking in several countries],” an allusion to the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory that Jews control the government. One sign at the rally depicted murdered victims of the Holocaust and declared, “National Socialist Health Care/Dachau Germany - 1945.” Another sign that depicted murdered Holocaust victims included the phrase, “Progressivism = Tears and Tyranny Not Utopia.” Still another sign pronounced that “Obama = Gov’t Take Over” and ended with “Just like Nazi Germany!”

Other angry attendees brought signs that made references to the “birther” conspiracy theory that claims that the President was born in Kenya and not the United States and is therefore an illegitimate president. One person held a sign that said, “Ken-Ya Trust Obama.” Another individual’s sign asked, “If Obama’s Birth Certificate is Legal, Why is He Spending \$100,000 to Conceal It?” Others signs depicted health-care reform as the destruction of America. One person’s sign proclaimed that “A Vote for Health

Care Is A Vote to Destroy America.” A number of people held signs asserting that the Obama administration is creating a tyrannical government. One typical sign claimed that “Obama and his Marxist Buddies Are After Your Freedom.” Another sign declared, “Gov Health Destroys ‘Liberty.’”

In response to criticism chiding conservative leaders for not speaking out against the Nazi imagery at the rally, Representative Bachmann wrote a letter to the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas in which she said that Holocaust imagery and labels “have no purpose in a policy debate about health care.”

### ***The “Birther” Movement***

In addition to the anger against the Obama administration, there has been an attempt by a wide range of Obama opponents to delegitimize him by claiming that he is not an American citizen. This conspiracy theory started even before Obama became president and its believers have become part of what is known as the “birther” movement.

The “birthers” assert that the President has never produced a valid birth certificate showing that he was born in Hawaii. Since the Constitution stipulates that only a natural-born citizen of the United States can be president, they claim that Obama is not legally in office. The conspiracists believe that President Obama, whose mother was American and whose father was Kenyan, was actually born in Kenya. This anti-Obama conspiracy theory has spread quickly.



Signs questioning President Obama's birth certificate were common at Tea Party rallies.

### **The “Birther” Conspiracies**

There are a number of variations on the “birther” conspiracy theory. Some “birthers” claim that even if Obama were born in Hawaii, he still does not qualify to be president because he allegedly has dual citizenship. They base this claim on Obama's father being a Kenyan with British citizenship, which they allege would have been passed on

to his son. Others say that Obama became a citizen of Kenya when that country won its independence from Great Britain. Still, others have alleged that Obama is an Indonesian citizen, because he was reportedly adopted by his mother's second husband, an Indonesian.

The claim that Obama was not born in the United States has received widespread exposure and has even been promoted by media pundits. For example, in July 2009, on his syndicated radio show, Lou Dobbs raised questions about the notion that President Obama had failed to produce a birth certificate. "Just produce it and be done with it," he demanded.

In addition, a number of state and federal legislators have pandered to the theory, with some even trying to pass legislation demanding that Obama prove he has an American birth certificate.

In response to the allegations about his birth, which emerged during the campaign, Obama's staff posted a copy of his birth certificate on the campaign's Web site to show that he was born in Hawaii. The birth certificate, known as the "short form," is used officially in Hawaii to prove that someone was born in the state. However, this form only added fuel to the fire for the conspiracy theorists, who claim that only the "long form" providing more detail about President Obama's birth is acceptable proof that he was born in the United States.

Despite the fact that government officials in Hawaii and non-partisan groups have all authenticated Obama's birth certificate, the "birther" movement continues to gain adherents. They are egged on by very vocal proponents, including Joseph Farah, publisher of *World Net Daily*, a right-wing on-line newspaper, and two attorneys, Philip Berg and Orly Taitz. Berg and Taitz are also known for promoting other anti-government conspiracy theories.

### Major "Birthers"

**Philip Berg.** Berg, a Pennsylvania-based lawyer, filed one of the first lawsuits challenging Obama's citizenship in August 2008. In that lawsuit, which was eventually dismissed, Berg



Philip Berg, a Pennsylvania lawyer, filed one of the first lawsuits challenging Obama's citizenship.

charged that President Obama was ineligible to be president because he was either a citizen of Kenya or Indonesia. This was not the first time that Berg brought a lawsuit against a president based on anti-government conspiracy theories. In 2004, he filed a lawsuit against George W. Bush in which he alleged that the government secretly allowed the September 11 terrorist attacks to occur. According to one report, Berg's suit alleged that the World Trade Center was actually destroyed from within and that FEMA actually had a plan in place that would replace elected officials with a secret government. He has gained a following as he continues to promote the conspiracy theory that President Obama is not an American citizen.

**Orly Taitz.** Orly Taitz, a California-based lawyer and dentist, has attracted a following with her anti-Obama conspiracy theories. She has filed numerous lawsuits against Obama charging that he does not have a legal birth certificate. The plaintiffs in many cases have been members of the armed services challenging their responsibility to obey someone they believe is an illegitimate Commander in Chief. Just about all of the lawsuits have been dismissed.

In one of her last cases challenging Obama's citizenship, Taitz filed a lawsuit on behalf of a number of plaintiffs, including Alan Keyes and Wiley Drake, 2008 presidential and vice presidential candidates, respectively, for the fringe American Independent Party. Drake, a California pastor, is known for publicly admitting that he prays for President Obama's death. In late October 2009, the judge dismissed the lawsuit saying his court did not have the jurisdiction to rule on a case that involved removing a sitting president. The judge also reportedly stated that the plaintiffs "have attacked the judiciary, including every prior court that has dismissed their claim, as unpatriotic and even treasonous for refusing to grant their requests and for adhering to the terms of the Constitution."



Orly Taitz, a California lawyer and dentist, has filed a number of lawsuits regarding President Obama's citizenship.

In September 2009, after another judge dismissed a different birth certificate lawsuit brought by Taitz, she accused him of treason. The following month, that judge fined Taitz \$20,000, saying that she was abusing "her privilege for practicing law" and was using "the courts as a platform for a political agenda disconnected from any legitimate legal cause of action."

As Taitz's cases have been dismissed, she has turned more to conspiracy theories to expound on Obama's alleged illegitimacy as president. She



has referred to Obama as a “usurper” and has reportedly promoted the ideas that Obama is creating a civilian army and that FEMA is building concentration camps. According to one account, she has also charged that the government will use the swine flu as an excuse to round up American citizens.

Both Taitz and Berg and their conspiracy theories regarding Obama’s citizenship have been embraced by other anti-government extremist figures. The two were speakers at a December 2008 conference organized by We the People Foundation for Constitutional Education. Robert Schulz, who heads the organization, is perhaps the leading figure in the right-wing, anti-government tax protest movement. Schulz also placed full-page ads in the *Chicago Tribune* demanding President Obama provide a team of forensic scientists who could validate his birth certificate.

**World Net Daily.** *World Net Daily* (WND) often blurs the distinction between fact and opinion, or even fact and fiction. The publication has spearheaded efforts to convince the public that Obama does not have a legitimate birth certificate. Over 700 articles dealing with President Obama’s citizenship status have appeared on WND’s Web site. It has also created an on-line petition demanding the “public release” of Obama’s birth certificate. Over 400,000 people have reportedly signed the petition.



Jerome Corsi, a journalist for the right-wing *World Net Daily*, promotes anti-Obama conspiracy theories.

One of the main reporters for WND, Jerome Corsi, has been a major promoter of the “birther” conspiracy theory, as well as other conspiracy theories. He is well-known as the co-author of *Unfit for Command: Swift Boat Veterans Speak Out*, a book that claimed that 2004 Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry lied about his service during the Vietnam War.

Corsi is also the author of *Obama Nation: Leftist Politics and the Cult of Personality*, a negative portrayal of Obama written before he was elected president. Corsi alleged the existence of a “depth of racial rage that may still inform his life decisions and his politics today.” In October 2008, the Kenyan government expelled Corsi, who had traveled to the country both to promote his book and to investigate alleged ties between Obama and Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga.

Corsi has promoted other conspiracy theories including the idea that there was government involvement in the September 11 attacks and that the U.S. government has a hidden agenda to form a North American Union, which would allegedly join together the United States, Canada and Mexico into one large country. Corsi has also been a guest speaker on the radio show of Alex Jones [see “Alex Jones, the Conspiracy King” section], one of the main promoters of anti-government conspiracy theories.

In July 2008, Corsi appeared on the *Political Cesspool*, a white supremacist Internet and AM radio show that regularly features white supremacists, Holocaust deniers, and other conspiracy theorists as guests. On the show, he discussed his financial newsletter and promoted his book. He had previously appeared on the show in 2007.

### ***The Influence of the Mainstream Media***

Although much of the recent anti-government anger has been generated by a combination of partisan politics, grass-roots activists, and extreme groups and movements, the mainstream media has also played a role in promoting anti-government anger and pandering to people who believe that the Obama administration is illegitimate or even fascistic.

The most important mainstream media figure who has repeatedly helped to stoke the fires of anti-government anger is right-wing media host Glenn Beck, who has a TV show on FOX News and a popular syndicated radio show. While other conservative media hosts, such as Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, routinely attack Obama and his administration, typically on partisan grounds, they have usually dismissed or refused to give a platform to the conspiracy theorists and anti-government extremists. This has not been the case with Glenn Beck. Beck and his guests have made a habit of demonizing President Obama and promoting conspiracy theories about his administration.

On a number of his TV and radio programs, Beck has even gone so far as to make comparisons between Hitler and Obama and to promote the idea that the President is dangerous.

- On an August 2009 radio program, after claiming that President Obama was lying about his health-care plan, Beck told his audience to read Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. Beck said that Hitler told Germans what he was going to do but no one

listened. Beck then urged his audience not to make the same mistake with Obama: “Please America...take this man for what he says.”

- That same month, David Bellavia, a former army staff sergeant who wrote a book about his experiences as a soldier in Iraq, appeared as a guest on Beck’s TV show. Bellavia discussed the claim that President Obama was trying to create a “civilian national security force” and compared this to the efforts of Hitler and Saddam Hussein to create sinister military forces composed of political loyalists that answered only to them.
- On a July 2009 TV show, Beck said that President Obama is a “dangerous” man.
- In March 2009, as a guest on another FOX News show, Beck also promoted an anti-government conspiracy theory popular among right-wing extremists--that FEMA is building concentration camps to house “dissidents.” Beck declared that he could not debunk the theory. Before introducing the topic of FEMA camps on that show, Beck claimed that the United States was “headed towards socialism, totalitarianism beyond your wildest imagination.” Later, he also promoted the FEMA camps conspiracy theory on his own show. After much controversy, Beck later backed away from the FEMA camps theory. The FEMA episode, however, is a good example of Beck’s key role as a “fearmonger-in-chief,” using constant laments such as “I fear for my country” to create a sense of anxiety about and hostility towards the government in his audience.

These kinds of claims from Beck create an intersection between the mainstream and the extreme. They play an important role in drawing people further out of the mainstream, making them more receptive to the more extreme notions and conspiracy theories.



## Part Two: Anger on the Fringes

### *Alex Jones, the Conspiracy King*

If, in mainstream America, Glenn Beck may be the radio talk show host most involved in stirring up anti-government hostility and anger, his counterpart on the extreme fringes is Alex Jones. Though unknown to most Americans, Jones may currently well be the most prominent conspiracy theorist in the United States, and has been responsible for spreading and popularizing a wide variety of conspiracy theories, the majority espousing some form of anti-government viewpoint.

The Austin, Texas-based Jones has engaged in conspiracy mongering virtually his entire adult life, coming of age during the surge of anti-government activities in the mid-1990s. Today, Jones runs a syndicated radio show, *The Alex Jones Show*, which is



Alex Jones, conspiracy talk show host, stirs up anti-government hostility on his broadcasts.

broadcast on some AM and FM stations, on shortwave radio, and over the Internet. He also operates two popular Web sites, Infowars and Prison Planet, and appears on a cable access television show, many videos from which end up on the Internet on such sites as YouTube. He has rounded out his conspiratorial media empire by producing a variety of conspiracy videos, with titles such as “America: Destroyed by Design” and “Martial Law 9/11: Rise of the Police State.”

Though popular among anti-government circles in the 1990s, Jones reached prominence in the years after the September 11 terror attacks, as he became one of the most energetic of the “truthers,” the conspiracy theorists who believe that the attacks were an “inside job” by the U.S. government. He has also collaborated with “celebrity truthers” such as actor Charlie Sheen, and far-right icon Ron Paul, a U.S. Representative from Texas, has often been a guest on his show. In March 2008, media figure Lou Dobbs was a guest on Jones’ show.

Jones’ various programs, Web sites, and videos have become incredibly popular among anti-government activists and conspiracy theorists. He promotes a variety of conspiracy theories, and allows his guests to promote others, but Jones’s own favorite conspiracies tend to converge on the following points:

- There is a conspiracy by malevolent globalists to take over the world and institute a “New World Order” with high-tech slavery;
- In the United States, conspiratorial figures such as “international bankers” and entities ranging from the Federal Reserve to the Council on Foreign Relations to the Bilderberg Group are engaged in a variety of strategies to take over (or extend their hold over) the government and to strip Americans of their rights, especially their rights to free speech and to own firearms;
- Some sort of final conspiratorial takeover of America is imminent, including a declaration of martial law and the incarceration of American citizens in FEMA-run concentration camps.

### *Jones and Obama*

It did not take Jones long to respond to the election of Barack Obama as president. Less than two months after the inauguration, Jones released a nearly two-hour long video called “The Obama Deception.” It has been viewed nearly four million times on YouTube. Jones billed it as a film “looking past the frontman in the White House to the real owners on Wall Street, in the Bilderberg Group and at the Federal Reserve.” Jones has expanded on these ideas in a second video, released in late October 2009, titled “Fall of the Republic: The Presidency of Barack Obama.” In the promotions for this video, Jones describes Obama as the “Trojan Horse” manufactured “to pacify the people just long enough for the globalists to complete their master plan.” He also claims to provide information how people can “retake control of our government, turn the criminal tide and bring the tyrants to justice.”

After the election of Obama, Jones began to develop ties to mainstream conservative media outlets such as the FOX News Network. In March 2009, not long after the release of “The Obama Deception,” he appeared on the FOX News program “Freedom Watch,” which allowed him to simulcast his portion of the show over his radio program. Three months later, he appeared as a guest on the FOX News program “Geraldo.” In August 2009, FOX News reporter Katie Cobb cited an article on Jones’ Infowars site about alleged government plans to implement martial law in response to the swine flu virus. Cobb’s only description of the nature of the anti-government conspiracy site was to say that it “has been tracking disturbing developments in swine flu preparedness.”

Not only do Jones' anti-government conspiracy theories flood the airwaves and the Internet, they also influence people to take action. In August 2009, for example, a Virginia man, Jeffrey Weaver, pleaded guilty to sending a threatening communication. The incensed Weaver posted obscenity-laden messages threatening to kill a San Francisco police officer and his family on Jones' Infowars site after reading a discussion about a subway shooting by a police officer in Oakland in January.

### ***Conspiracy Theories Imagine Government Plots***

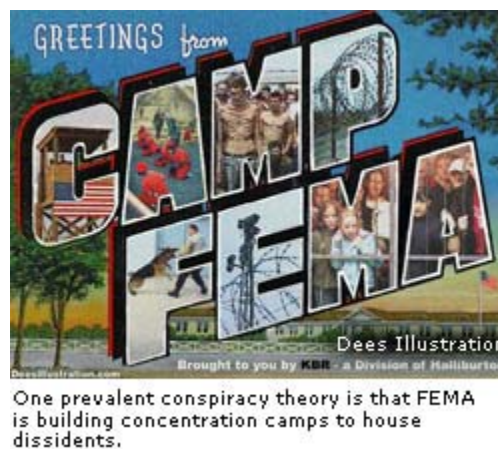
With host Alex Jones leading the way, one of the most disturbing trends in 2009 has been the resurrection and proliferation of some of the same anti-government conspiracy theories that so riled up domestic extremists in the 1990s. Such theories had been less popular in the 2000s, but Obama's election gave anti-government conspiracy theorists a new focus for their efforts, a new light in which they could recast some of the old theories, and a willingness to come up with new conspiracies. More extreme than the "birther" conspiracy theory, these theories allege dark, violent designs on the part of the federal government.

### **Anti-Government Conspiracy Theories and Their Transmission**

Though there are many conspiracy theories and numerous permutations, three are particularly entrenched among anti-government extremists:

- **Imposition of Martial Law.** The federal government is plotting to declare martial law in the near future as a way to strip Americans of their freedoms and institute the New World Order. The government may utilize or even manufacture a crisis, such as the swine flu epidemic, in order to have an excuse for imposing martial law.
- **Gun Confiscation.** The government is plotting to embark upon a massive program of gun confiscation, going door to door to take firearms away from American citizens so that they will be unable to resist the New World Order. Police, the military and even foreign troops may be used in the gun confiscation efforts.
- **FEMA Concentration Camps.** The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has constructed hundreds of concentration camps in the United States, designed to hold "dissidents" and other American citizens following some imminent crackdown such as a declaration of martial law.

All three conspiracy theories were popular among anti-government extremists in the early and mid-1990s. However, in the 1990s, such theories spread through speeches at rallies and meetings, through books and videotapes sold at gun shows, through fax networks and computer bulletin boards, and through shortwave and satellite radio. In 2009, with a new focus involving Obama and his administration, conspiracy theories have spread at “viral” speed, posted to Internet message forums, social networking sites and video sites. Facebook and MySpace are full of messages and entire discussion forums fixating on alleged FEMA concentration camps in the United States. One Facebook group, for example, with the name “SHUT DOWN FEMA CAMPS,” reports that “there are over 600 prison camps in the United States, all fully operational and ready to receive prisoners.” This group alone has nearly a thousand members.



In recent months, the Twitter service has become yet an even quicker way to spread conspiracy theories. In July and August 2009, for example, “Cris2365” posted a tweet linking to a Web page about alleged FEMA concentration camps. Meanwhile, “BrandyReid” tweeted about a Web page claiming FEMA was preparing for martial law. “RoxyLuv823” used Twitter to warn people that “FEMA Concentration Camps are out there prepare yourself they are in the US and in use.” Another user, “Tatunsky,” tweeted to his friends about using Google Earth to track FEMA concentration camps in the U.S. Countless other Twitter users sent similar messages during the same period.

As these conspiracy theories become more popular, they are starting to cross over from the fringes into more “mainstream” venues. On August 14, 2009, for example, right-wing radio talk show host Michael Savage, whose listeners are estimated to number over eight million, proclaimed on his *Savage Nation* show that the government would declare martial law. “Martial law,” he announced, “will be declared in this country over a pretext. I think the likelihood is very high that the gang that has taken over this country will declare...a pretext...the equivalent of the Reichstag fire [an event that helped the Nazis take over the German government]...to put in a form of martial law.”

## Conspiracy Theories Prompting Action: Reaction to the Iowa National Guard

Unfortunately, though many anti-government conspiracy theories are wild and unfounded, people may act on this information as if it were accurate. One incident caught an Iowa National Guard unit by surprise in February 2009 after it announced a four-day training exercise in the towns of Carroll and Arcadia. In anticipation of possibly being sent to Iraq to engage in urban patrolling efforts, the unit obtained the permission of local officials for a training scenario in which Guard troops would patrol local streets to apprehend a hypothetical weapons dealer.

News of the planned exercise quickly spread through the Internet. Alex Jones spread the news even further on his radio show and Web sites. Extremists and conspiracy theorists were outraged; to them, these exercises were clearly not intended for operations in Iraq, but rather for operations in the United States. The military, they claimed, was being trained to disarm American citizens, as part of Obama's sinister plan to institute gun confiscation.

"This false flag treasonous gun grab is a direct insult against the 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> amendment protections," wrote "Jill" on one protest blog. A "Ray Burns" predicted on the same blog that things were heading to the "utter destruction of our country and the bloodiest 'civil' banker-led war the earth has ever witnessed." Many people demanded some sort of action. "Everything is accelerating so fast," declared one poster to a message forum operated by Alex Jones. "We need to organize now." On a blog on the "Campaign for Liberty" Web site, "fadestyle" announced mass protests: "Iowa people are organizing in mass to protest the guards from training to take your guns....YOUR STATE NEEDS YOU NOW!"

As a result, hundreds of angry phone calls and e-mails from around the country flooded government and National Guard offices, especially after Alex Jones featured the incident on his show. He also appropriated a local news story on the planned training, putting it on one of his own Web sites with an altered headline that read "Iowa National Guard to train for gun confiscation." Some people merely criticized or protested the planned operation, while others, according to a local newspaper, threatened to show up at Arcadia with weapons or even set booby traps to injure the soldiers.

The sudden and unanticipated angry protest had its effect. Within days, the Iowa National Guard decided to cancel the urban training. A National Guard spokesperson denied that the abrupt about-face was due to the angry protests from angry conspiracy theorists, but few others seem convinced. "Nothing this serious has

ever happened in Arcadia,” said its mayor, Oran Kohorst. “I really feel sorry for the National Guard having to justify their actions.”

## **Nancy Genovese Incident**

Not only did the gun confiscation conspiracy theories cause the reaction to the Iowa National Guard exercise, but, in a ripple effect, the extremist reaction to the exercise actually may have helped to create another incident. In late July 2009, a 53-year-old mother of three from Long Island, Nancy Genovese, was arrested for allegedly trespassing on a nearby Air National Guard base. Since the election of Obama, Genovese had become increasingly anti-government and fearful of President Obama. A fan of both Glenn Beck and Alex Jones, Genovese had become transfixed with conspiracy theories about one world government, FEMA, and more.

In February 2009, Genovese learned of the planned Iowa National Guard exercise in Arcadia. “This is the beginning of the end,” she posted to one Web site. “They will do this in some other town, but it’s just the beginning. Tell me how do I buy a gun? Do I buy a rifle or shotgun?” In the end, Genovese bought both, purchasing a shotgun and an XM-15 assault rifle. In subsequent months, she became particularly focused on FEMA, which she was convinced was operating concentration camps and preparing for martial law. She also began trying to take pictures at a nearby New York Air National Guard base, despite repeated warnings by base personnel (taking photographs of military bases is not permitted). It was on one of these trips on July 30 that military personnel allegedly found her just outside the base, taking photographs. Authorities found an assault rifle, as well as a shotgun, in the front seat of her car. She was arrested for third degree criminal trespassing, but the charge was later dropped because it was determined she had been in her vehicle the whole time.

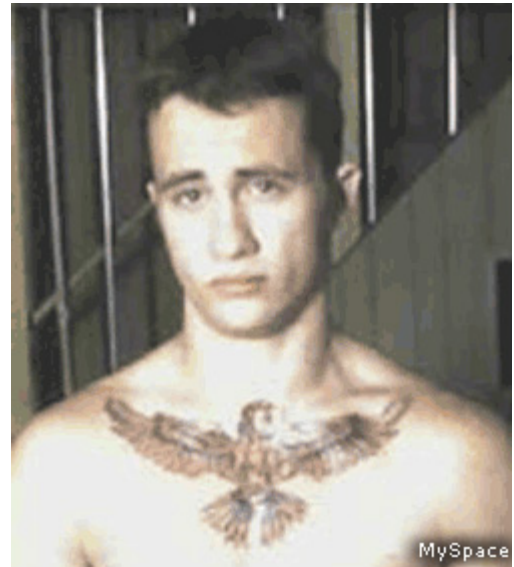
## **Conspiracy Theories Prompting Action: Richard Poplawski**

Anti-government conspiracy theories seem clearly to have played a role in April 2009, in Pittsburgh, when a young man named Richard Poplawski allegedly gunned down three Pittsburgh Police Bureau officers responding to a 911 domestic disturbance call at his residence.

Poplawski was a budding white supremacist who became angry after the election of Obama. Like Nancy Genovese, Poplawski paid attention to Alex Jones and other

conspiracy theorists. He, like Genovese, became concerned about issues like gun confiscation, the military being used against citizens, and FEMA concentration camps. And, like her, he also purchased an assault rifle.

Poplawski began studying the government he feared. In February 2009, when Pittsburgh residents flocked to the streets to celebrate the Pittsburgh Steelers' Super Bowl victory, Poplawski went into the streets, too. However, Poplawski was there not to celebrate but to observe the Pittsburgh police, and how they engaged in crowd control. As he watched the police use buses to help manage crowds, Poplawski later wrote that he imagined government buses transporting people to FEMA facilities.



Richard Poplawski's conspiratorial beliefs led him to allegedly murder three Pittsburgh police officers.

Poplawski, though, went further than mere surveillance. When his mother called 911 after the two argued, Poplawski readied himself for a showdown, donning body armor and grabbing his weapons. When police arrived at the home, Poplawski allegedly opened fire on them, killing all three, and began a standoff, which ended in a shootout that left a fourth officer wounded before Poplawski was subdued. He currently awaits trial on murder charges.

### ***Resisting the Government***

Since Obama's election, an increasing number of people have urged that the government—and Obama—must be resisted, even including armed resistance. These sentiments emerged first among the most extreme sections of the population, such as white supremacists. "Just help start a war," urged one Texas white supremacist calling himself "88 Charles 88" on the social networking site MySpace.

As anti-government anger grew, however, calls for resistance began to emerge from other quarters, including not only a variety of anti-government extremists, but even from more mainstream circles. In September 2009, John L. Perry, a columnist for the right-wing news Web site Newsmax even postulated a military coup that would limit Obama to "ceremonial speech-making." "A coup is not an ideal option," he wrote, "but Obama's radical ideal is not acceptable or reversible." After readers complained, Newsmax removed Perry's column.



Hints of this attitude of resistance could be seen when people—some with extremist ties—showed up armed to town hall meetings and other events. But some groups have gone much further, implicitly or explicitly suggesting armed resistance to the government of some sort. Open calls to violent action are rare; what is more common is rhetoric that speaks of resisting the government, “restoring” the government, or using weapons to defend one’s rights from the “tyrannical” Obama administration.

Significantly, many of these groups have appropriated an idealized version of Revolutionary War history for their own purposes, stressing the armed resistance of the American colonists to British “tyranny” and suggesting, in varying degrees of openness, that Americans today should act as their revolutionary forebears did and throw off the perceived shackles of the allegedly tyrannical government.

## **The Oath Keepers**

One manifestation of the ideology of resistance to the government was the creation of the Oath Keepers group in March 2009. Formed by Stewart Rhodes, a Nevada lawyer and sculptor and former staffer for Representative Ron Paul, the Oath Keepers is a group that deliberately targets police officers and military personnel for recruitment into the anti-government movement. Its basic pitch is to remind such people that they swore an oath to defend the Constitution “from all enemies, foreign and domestic,” and to suggest that now is the time to live up to that oath by resisting an allegedly tyrannical government. “Such a time is near at hand again,” declares the Web page of the Oath Keepers. “The fate of unborn millions will now depend, under God, on the courage and conduct of the military and police.” The Oath Keepers refuse to cooperate with the “tyrannical government” by making a declaration that there are certain “orders” from superiors that they will refuse to obey.

The “orders” the Oath Keepers refuse reveal their extreme conspiratorial mindset, because the “orders” are not instructions ever likely to be actually handed down by Obama or his officials; instead, they are reflective of the anti-government conspiracy theories embraced by the extreme right. The first “order,” for example, that they refuse to follow is any order “to disarm the American people.” They also pledge to disobey any order to impose martial law or to support foreign troops on American soil. The other “orders” they refuse to follow are of a similar sort.



Oath Keepers logo tattooed on man's arm.

The Oath Keepers are essentially a new version of a similar 1990s group, Police Against the New World Order, started by retired police officer Jack McLamb (who endorsed the Oath Keepers in March 2009 on Alex Jones' radio show). Indeed, in a message posted to the Oath Keepers' Web site and "recommended" by Stewart Rhodes, one member using the pseudonym Elias Alias claimed that the United States was currently ruled by an "imposter government" and warned against the encroachment of a "New World Order."

For many members and supporters of the Oath Keepers, some sort of confrontation with that "New World Order" is inevitable. One Oath Keepers adherent, "Radar," posted to an Oath Keepers blog in April 2009 that now was the time for action: "First through the courts (if possible), then the ballot box (if this administration doesn't preclude this option by fraudulent means) and finally from the streets! (as the LAST resort)." In June 2009, another supporter, "Oxi," posted to an on-line forum that the Oath Keepers should consider forming a "military structure," because, although not presently "at war," the group "must prepare for one." After Oath Keepers first formed, so many posts about resistance and guerrilla war were posted to the official Oath Keepers blog that Rhodes had to step in and rein them in, saying that "we want active duty to visit this site and if you transform it into a hard-core 'how to wage 4<sup>th</sup> [generation] guerrilla war' or 'how to fragg' site, many of them will be wary of participating." However, Rhodes did not oppose such discussions; he merely asked that they be carried on somewhere else, so that they would not tar the Oath Keepers' blog.

## **The Three Percenters**

The Three Percenters are a loosely organized movement that apparently formed in late 2008, centered around an obscure and not particularly accurate Revolutionary War "statistic" that suggested that only 3% of the American population during the Revolutionary War participated as combatants in the war (the actual figure was nearly twice that). Three Percenters claim that they are a modern counterpart to that mythical 3% of American Revolutionary-era patriots.

In the words of one Three Percenter:

“The Three Percent today are gun owners who will not disarm, will not compromise and will no longer back up at the passage of the next gun control act....We will not obey any further circumscription of our traditional liberties and will defend ourselves if attacked...We are committed to the restoration of the Founders’ Republic, and are willing to fight, die, and, if forced by any would-be oppressor, to kill in the defense of ourselves and the Constitution that we all took an oath to uphold against enemies foreign and domestic.”

The movement started on the Internet but eventually moved into the real world, with members designing a flag and military-style patches (some of which appear to have been applied to their uniforms by active duty soldiers). One of the active proponents of the Three Percenters is the Alabama-based Mike Vanderboegh, who in the past has been involved with the militia movement and the anti-immigration border vigilante movement.

To date, the movement is still small, but appears to be growing.



The Oath Keepers have reported that active duty soldiers are wearing patches from their group, as well as those from the Three Percenters.

## **The Resurgence of the Militia Movement**

Of the different groups and movements mentioned in this section, the militia movement, which formed in 1993-1994, is the oldest and largest. Militia groups are armed paramilitary groups of varying sizes that organize and train in preparation for possible future armed resistance to an encroaching “New World Order” conspiracy that seeks to render the American people disarmed, defenseless slaves.

One of the effects of the tide of anti-government sentiment that has swept the United States since the election of Barack Obama has been a sudden and surprising resurgence of the militia movement. The movement peaked around 1996 and then fell into a long decline before beginning a modest recovery in the mid-2000s. In 2007, there were only around 50 militia groups in the United States, many in the Midwest, the movement’s strongest base of support.

However, beginning in 2008, militia groups once more began to proliferate, and their expansion accelerated in 2009 following the inauguration of Obama. As of late 2009, there are over 200 militia groups across the United States, and it seems likely that the number will continue to increase.

While anti-government anger has certainly spurred the rapid growth of these groups, modern technology has also played a role in the ability of militia groups to form and recruit, especially the use by militia groups of social networking sites such as MySpace to spread their message and recruit new members (and inspire new groups to form). One result of these developments, though, is that the 2009 version of the militia movement is more loosely organized than its predecessor, and many of the individual groups are considerably smaller. Many militia groups have no more than around ten regular members. Some groups are essentially “Web only” and conduct little real world activity.



The Christian Liberty Guard is an Indiana-based militia group.

In addition to the groups, there are increased numbers of people who identify with the militia movement, and may even attend various trainings or events, but do not officially belong to any particular group. These unaffiliated members now make up an important part of the movement.

The militia movement is a major source of anti-Obama and anti-government hostility, and a major audience for the extreme conspiracy theories revolving around FEMA, martial law, and gun confiscation. Because the militia movement has had a fairly strong association with criminal activity, especially related to illegal weapons and explosives, or conspiracies to use them, the resurgence of this movement is a matter of some concern to law enforcement.

## Conclusion

One of the conservatives unpleasantly surprised by the tide of anti-government anger that has swept across the United States since Obama's election is David Frum, a former speechwriter for President George W. Bush. In September 2009, Frum described the hostility as "wild accusations and...paranoid delusions coming from the fever swamps." Frum acknowledged his conservative opposition to the Obama administration, but admitted, "Still, you have to be aware that there's a line where legitimate concerns begin to collapse into paranoid fantasy."

Unfortunately, for many Americans that line has not only been blurred, but virtually erased. Rage has simply replaced reality in many cases. For example, conspiracy theories about mass gun confiscation abound at a time when, judging by either a recent decision of the Supreme Court or recent laws passed by Congress, individual gun ownership rights are more secure than ever. Despite these facts, after Obama was elected, people flocked to gun stores to buy weapons and ammunition.

Unchecked, such anger is likely to have negative consequences. At minimum, it tarnishes and impedes civil discourse. At most, the attacks on the legitimacy of the government itself could be destructive. The fact that these attacks are coming from such a broad spectrum makes it more likely that some of the individuals who are in the mainstream camp will become so inflamed with anti-government anger, they may move further towards the fringes. This could result not only in the swelling of the ranks of anti-government extremist groups and movements, but could give rise to individuals who are willing to act out on their anger.

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