Joshua D. Freilich

AMERICAN MILITIAS

State-Level Variations
in Militia Activities

Criminal Justice
Recent Scholarship

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This book is dedicated to my parents, Myra and Dr. Herbert Freilich, who in more ways than one made it all possible.

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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

The militia movement first entered the consciousness of American society in the Spring of 1995, following the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City (see for e.g., Barkun 1997; Bennett 1995; Chermak 2002; Dees and Corcoran 1996; Duffy and Brantley 1997; Dyer 1997; Hamm 1997; Karl 1995; Pitcavage 1998a; 2001; Stern 1996). That terrorist incident, which ultimately claimed 168 lives, awakened America to a social movement that had been operating in obscurity on the fringes of American social and political life. For days, months, and even years following the Oklahoma City bombing, the media and others linked the perpetrators (i.e., Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols) to the militia movement (see for e.g., Barkun 1997; Chermak 2002; Duffy and Brantley 1997; Hamilton 1996; Hamm 1997; Karl 1995).

The militia movement was subsequently accused of involvement in a number of other crimes, both high profile and otherwise (e.g., the October 1994 shooting outside of the White House, the fatal Fall 1995 sabotage of Amtrak lines in the West, and the deadly 1996 bombing in Atlanta during the Summer Olympics). In addition, a number of militia members throughout the country were arrested by various law enforcement agencies in connection with several planned terrorist incidents (see for e.g., Chermak 2002; Dees and Corcoran 1996, Hilliard and Keith 1999; Jakes, Jakes and Richmond 1998; Karl 1995; Snow 1999; Stanton 2002; The Militia Watchdog Organization 1997; 1998; 1999). In the Spring of 2002, for instance, a militia member from Montana was

arrested on charges of plotting to kill local law enforcement officials (Harden 2002). More significantly, in August 2002, an Ohio police officer was killed in a shootout that followed both a speeding stop and car chase. The perpetrator, who was also killed, was said to be a past member of a militia group (Farkas 2002; Villellia 2002). Not surprisingly, the context of media discussions about the militia movement often employed descriptions which intimated negative value judgments. Indeed, Chermak's (2002) analysis found that both the news media and popular culture portray the militia movement as a "legitimate threat- monsters worth fearing" (300; see also Anderson 1996; Bennett 1995; Bock 1995; Curkan-Flanagan 2000; Hamilton 1996; Lambert 1995; Marks 1996; Rimer 1995; Schneider 1994; Shapiro1995; Zeskind 1995).

Paralleling the media, many private watch groups (e.g., the Anti-Defamation League [ADL], the American Jewish Congress [AJC], the Center for Democratic Renewal [CDR], the Coalition for Human Dignity [CHD], Political Research Associates [PRA], and the Southern Poverty Law Center [SPLC]) were also alarmed by the upsurge of the militia movement. The watch groups were concerned that the militia movement might link up with violent neo-Nazi and other racist groups. Moreover, the watch groups considered the militias to be a dangerous phenomenon, exhibiting the potential for lethal violence and lawlessness (ADL 1994; 1995;1997 AJC; 1995; CDR 1996a; 1996b; CHD 1995; SPLC 1997; see also Berlet 1995a; 1995b; Dees and Corcoran 1996; Stern 1996).

A good deal of evidence exists to support the view that the general public accepts these media and watch group reports about the militias. One poll conducted in April 1995, immediately after the Oklahoma City bombing, found that 80% of Americans believed militias were dangerous and 55% thought militiamen were crazy (Anderson 1996). Similarly, Professor Chermak (2002) argues that the media's negative framing of the militia movement "solidified the public's view that militias must reside on the outer boundaries of mainstream society" (301).

These perceptions, although prone to exaggeration, may be warranted. Freilich, Pichardo Almanzar and Rivera (1999) conclude that the militia movement explicitly and implicitly promotes deviant and/or criminal behavior through both its ideology (which legitimizes deviance), and its organizational structure (which often fails to control, not only the actions of its members, but also the flow of information generated by the

movement). Likewise, Dr. Mark Pitcavage (1998a), the founder of The Militia Watchdog Website, believes that "many [militia] members conduct criminal activity. The most common is the collection of illegal weapons and explosives. Sometimes these illegal arsenals are stunning in their size..... some members go further than collecting weapons and actually plan to use them.... As a result.... [the militia movement] includes many people willing to commit criminal acts" (15-16). So too, Robert L. Snow (1999), the former Captain of Detectives for the Indianapolis Police Department, claims that "only skillful, painstaking work by law enforcement agents has prevented... radical militia members from committing... devastating tragedies.... The militia movement presents a very real and imminent threat to everyone" (ix-x; see also Chermak 2002; Churchill 2001; Cook and Kelly 1999; Duffy and Brantley 1997; Gallagher 1997; Hilliard and Keith 1999; Jakes, Jakes, and Richmond 1998; Kelly and Villaire 2002; Mariani 1998; Pitcavage 2001; Seul 1997).

It is clear that the militia movement is perceived by much of the media and public as a deviant and dangerous social movement that is inhabited by deviant individuals[1]. While it is true that presently the militia movement has declined (Johnson 2002), as many groups adopt lower profiles, there is still much to be gained by scrutinizing this movement (see for e.g., Wood 2002). For one thing, the militia movement has not disappeared; it still exists albeit on a lower level (see for e.g., Chaney 2002; Chermak 2002; Claiborne 1999; Discovery Channel 1999; F.B.I. 1999). Secondly, because the United States has a long history of right-wing paramilitary activity it is prudent to assume that it may only be a matter of time until the militia, or a similar type of movement, reemerges (see for e.g., Barkun 1996; Becker, Jipson and Katz 2001; Bennett 1995; Berlet and Lyons 2000; Durham 1996; Freilich, Pienik and Howard 2001; Kaplan 1997; Koeppen 1969; Kramer 2002; Lipset and Raab 1970; Masters and Masters 1997; Stock 1996; Pitcavage 2001). Obviously, insights gained from studying the militias could be helpful in understanding and responding to any new groups that arise. Furthermore, as Dr. Pitcavage (2001) points out, even though the militia movement as a whole may have declined, the threat that it poses to public safety may not have: "there is every reason to think that in the new millennium the militia movement... will continue to be a major source of extremist related criminal incidents, up to and including domestic terrorism" (958).

In sum, since the militia movement may pose a significant danger to the social order, it is apparent that militias are worthy of scholarly attention by criminologists, historians, political scientists, psychologists, sociologists and others (see Duffy and Brantley 1997). However, "despite increased media attention on the new 'citizen militias' following.... Oklahoma City, ... [serious] academic study of militias remains in its infancy. This gap in the literature is particularly curious" (O'Brien and Haider-Markel 1998: 456). O'Brien and Haider-Markel (1998) began filling this void in the literature by examining, on the state level, variation in the distribution of militias and in the level of militia groups activities. Their article is noteworthy because, to date, it is the only quantitative study that has been conducted on the rise of the militia movement (and it will be discussed, in much greater detail, below). All other works that focus on the emergence of the militia movement are either non-scientific journalistic accounts, or qualitative studies that focus on a particular state or region. In short, up to now there has only been a single quantitative national study on the militia movement.

The present project also examines the militia movement on the state l level but it builds and expands upon O'Brien and Haider-Markel's work in several ways. First, O'Brien and Haider-Markel, themselves, note that their study "may not have specified all of the variables important for explaining militia activity" (463). Indeed, their study did not include any variables representing economic dislocation, which is one of the major theses relied upon by many to explain the birth of the movement (see for e.g., Davidson 1996; Dyer 1997). The current study will therefore examine variables, representing concepts from the leading hypotheses on the birth of the militia movement. Second, O'Brien and Haider-Markel compiled and utilized data measuring the level of militia activity from only one source- the ADL (see ADL 1994; 1995). The present project in contrast, will gather information on the distribution and the level of activities of the militia movement from an additional organization- the SPLC. Finally, other outcomes (such as suicide and incidents of child abuse), not studied by O'Brien and Haider-Markel (1998), which have been posited by some to be caused by the same social factors which fueled the rise of the militia movement, will be inspected.

As was alluded to, it is believed that by ascertaining the correlates of militia emergence, the current study could aid in the

development and implementation of programs that address the grievances and/or motivating forces of these groups and thereby prevent the rise of these types of organizations. Moreover, a number of social movement scholars point out that a bias exists in their field against studying right-wing movement formation. Instead, many social scientists, and in particular social movement theorists, have been almost exclusively preoccupied with left-wing social movements which, unlike right-wing social movements, tend to engender sympathetic reactions from academics (see for e.g., Aho 1990; Bennett 1995; Berlet and Lyons 2000; Bruce 1988; Churchill 2001; 1968; Kaplan 1998; Klatch 1999; Lo 1982; Marx and Wood 1975: 364; 413; McCarthy and Zald 1987; Pichardo 1997; Schneider 1999; Smith 1994: 31). Since the militia movement is generally classified as a right-wing social movement (see for e.g., Abanes 1996; Barkun 1997; Hamm 1997; Karl 1995), this study on the emergence of the militia movement begins to fill a void in the social movement literature as well.

To these ends, the focus of this investigation is on the militia movement's distribution and levels of activity across the fifty states of the United States during the years 1994 and 1995. Specifically, this project seeks to answer the following question: What differentiated states that had more militia organizations (which conducted more activities) in the years 1994 and 1995 from those states that had lesser numbers of militia organizations? The goal of this study is to provide some preliminary answers to this question.

As an initial step, a number of significant terms that appear repeatedly in the text will be defined so as to avoid any confusion as to their meanings:

1. Social Movement- Regarding the term 'social movement' there is no single accepted definition since, "sociology has provided a number of mutually irreconcilable modes of understanding social movements" (Eyerman and Jamison 1991: 1; see also Rivera 1997). In fact, each of the major social movement perspectives, which are described below, have set forth their own definitions (see for e.g., McCarthy and Zald 1987: 20; Touraine 1981; Turner and Killian 1984: 4). It does appear though that there are several similarities among the many competing offerings. Most definitions of the term social movement refer to a

collective or group (as opposed to an individual) that is change-oriented in terms of the structure or culture (Curkan-Flanagan 2000; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 1997; Pichardo 1998). In addition, most of the definitions draw a distinction between an overall social movement and a specific social movement organization. The most succinct definition is posited by Dianni (1992) who, after reviewing a number of competing definitions of the term social movement, proffered a unitary amalgamated version: "A social movement is a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity" (13; see also Curkan-Flanagan 2000; Rivera 1997; Touraine 1981).

      2. Right-Wing- Hixson, Jr. (1992) notes that even though there is no standardized definition of the term 'right-wing', "social scientists.... [still] seem remarkably agreed as to what it [i.e., 'right-wing'] constituted" (xv). According to many scholars, right-wing social movements tend to be:

(a) extremely patriotic and nationalistic in outlook as opposed to internationalistic in orientation (see for e.g., Bennett 1995; Berlet 1998; Chesler and Schmuck 1969; Ebata 1997; George and Wilcox 1996; Himmelstein 1990; Merkl and Weinberg 1993; Ramet 1999),

(b) favor individual freedom and liberty as opposed to endorsing collective efforts aimed at achieving greater equality in society (see for e.g., Bjorgo 1995; Himmelstein 1990; Hixson, Jr. 1992; Lo 1982; McGirr 2001; Pitcavage 1998a),

(c) are favorably disposed toward religion and traditional values while opposing the agenda of 'secular humanists' (see for e.g., Diamond 1995; Eatwell and Sullivan 1989; George and Wilcox 1996; Haridsty 1999; Klatch 1999; Lo 1982; McGirr 2001; Merkl and Weinberg 1993; Ramet 1999; Smith 1994),

(d) are strongly anti-communist (see for e.g., Bennett 1995; Berlet 1998; Bjorgo 1995; Chesler and Schmuck 1969; Diamond 1995; Eatwell and Sullivan 1989; Himmelstein 1990; Hixson, Jr. 1992; Klatch 1999; McGirr 2001; McNall 1969; Merkl and Weinberg 1993; Rohter 1969; Wolfinger, Wolfinger, Prewitt, and Rosenhack 1964),

(e) are opposed to the goals of the civil and women's rights movements (see for e.g., Bjorgo 1995; Diamond 1995; Himmelstein 1990; Hixson, Jr.

1992; McGirr 2001; McNall 1969; Merkl and Weinberg 1993; Pitcavage 1998a; Smith 1994; Ramet 1999).

3. Extremist- Scholars have propounded that 'extremist' movements and groups are those which reject the normal give and take of compromise between competing interests that is necessary for successful participation in our political system (see Bell 1963; George and Wilcox 1996; Lipset and Raab 1970; Lo 1982; Martin 1996; Merkl and Weinberg 1993; Pitcavage 1998a: 9; Ramet 1999; Ribuffo 1983).

4. Militia- A militia organization is defined as an organization that: 1) propagates an ideological message of intense hostility to the federal government and 2) enacts affirmative, group-based activities which include either paramilitary maneuvers, or the espousal and/or dissemination of information concerning such maneuvers (see also Akins 1998; Barkun 1997; Curkan-Flanagan 2000; Freilich, Pichardo Almanzar, and Rivera 1999; Freilich, Pienik, and Howard 2001; Hamilton 1996; James 2001; Katz and Bailey 2000; Mariani 1998; O'Brien and Haider-Markel 1998; Pitcavage 1998a: 11; 14; 2001; Snow 1999; Tapia 2000). The ideological component refers to an intense fear and hatred of the federal government, often culminating in the espousal of conspiracy theories that accuse the government-- in concert with the United Nations and supported by the media-- of seeking to deprive citizens of their fundamental rights in an attempt to institute a one world government. Such 'fundamental' rights consist primarily, but not exclusively, of the prerogative to keep and bear arms. In addition, the group must organize like-minded individuals into an association whose purpose is to prepare defensive strategies (e.g. paramilitary training and maneuvers) against perceived threats, or else disseminate information which calls for such actions. The latter part of the definition is important since some of the most prominent militia organizations do not conduct military training themselves. Instead, many militia groups only lobby and encourage others to engage in such military exercises. Churchill (2001) points out that the influential Militia of Montana "never existed as a formal armed association, since Montana law prohibited paramilitary training" (278; see also Bock 1996; Chaney 2002; Karl 1995).

5. Militia Related Activities- This term refers to behaviors, and acts performed by militia members and their supporters to further the ends of the movement and/or to promote militia ideology. Such activities may include partaking in paramilitary training, organizational meetings, community service, discussion groups, rallies, leafleting, recruiting, lobbying, educating others, and criminal or terrorist acts (see Akins 1998; Chermak 2002; Dyer 1997; Homsher 2001; Pitcavage 2001; Seul 1997).

6. Status- Since the term status will be examined in detail, it is necessary to define and describe the term. The following definitions and descriptions seem particularly useful. Hofstadter (1963) states that: "The purpose of the term [status] was to heighten our awareness of a constant political struggle arising not out of the real or imagined contest for gain that is familiar in our interest-group politics.... but out of commitments to certain other values..... Such persons believe that their prestige in the community, even indeed their self-esteem, depend on having these values honored in public. Besides their economic expectations, people have deep emotional commitments in other spheres- religion, morals, culture, race relations- which they also hope to see realized in political action. Status politics seeks not to advance perceived material interests but to express grievances and resentments about such matters, to press claims upon society to give deference to non-economic values. As a rule, status politics does more to express emotions than to formulate policies" (87). Similarly, Gusfield (1963) writes: "Social status refers to the distribution of prestige, sometimes also called social honor. By "prestige" we mean "the approval, respect, admiration or deference a person or group is able to command...."..... A status hierarchy tends to develop among groups which differ in characteristic ways of life. It is the essence of a status hierarchy that within it, some groups can successfully claim greater prestige than others" (14).

7. Social Conservative- In general, social conservatives tend to focus their attention, not surprisingly, on social issues such as abortion, gay rights, religious issues in general and public school prayer in particular, education, and other like issues. In contrast, economic conservatives are said to stress economic matters (Hixson Jr. 1992; Lipset and Raab 1970; Lo 1982).

Now that working definitions of the key terms utilized by this study have been provided, the project first embarks upon a discussion of the structure and ideology of the militia movement. In an effort to provide some descriptive flavor to this discussion, and thereby complement the quantitative methodology employed by this study, a large number of quotations from both militia members themselves as well as observers of the militia movement will be utilized. Second, in a further attempt to provide some richness to the narrative against which the quantitative data of this study may be measured, the history of the militia movement in the state of Michigan- where the militias were, perhaps, most active is outlined. All of this vivid information is drawn from the growing body of literature on the militia movement, much of which utilizes qualitative research methods. The consulted works include scholarly articles and books (see for e.g., Barkun 1996; 1997; Bennett 1995; Chermak 2002; Hamm 1997; Mariani 1998; Pitcavage 2001), Ph.D. and M.A. theses (see for e.g., Akins 1998; Churchill 2001; Labelle 1997; Seul 1997), accounts and analyses by journalists and others (see for e.g., Anderson 1996; Dyer 1997; Kelly 1995; Kramer 2002; Neiwert 1999; Snow 1999; Wood 2002), reports and books by watch groups and their associates (see for e.g., ADL 1994; 1995; AJC 1995; Berlet and Lyons 2000; Dees and Corcoran 1996; SPLC 1997; Stern 1996), transcripts of the June 1995 Senate hearings on the movement (Militia Movement in the United States 1995), and materials produced by the militias themselves (see for e.g., Michigan Militia 1996a; 1996b; 1996c; Militia of Montana 1995a; 1995b; 1995c; 1995d). Following these descriptive chapters, the theoretical and empirical literature on the rise of 'social movements' in general, 'right-wing' and 'extreme' right-wing social movements, and the 'militia' movement is reviewed. Next, a number of hypotheses and predictions are set forth which, flowing from the above mentioned theories and empirical findings, could account for observed variations in the distribution and level of activities of militias. The study then discusses the data that were acquired and the necessary methods that were employed in testing these (often) opposing theories and predictions about the rise of the militia movement on the state level in the United States. After examining the results and implications of the of the study's findings, the text concludes by offering a number of suggestions for future research to pursue.