



WAR IN THE WEST

The Bundy Ranch Standoff and the American Radical Right

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THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER is a nonprofit organization that combats hate, intolerance and discrimination through education and litigation. Its Intelligence Project, which prepared this report and also produces the quarterly investigative magazine *Intelligence Report*, tracks the activities of hate groups and the nativist movement and monitors militia and other extremist antigovernment activity. Its Teaching Tolerance project helps foster respect and understanding in the classroom. Its litigation arm files lawsuits against hate groups for the violent acts of their members.

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After the climbdown: Militiamen and other supporters of Cliven Bundy head for the corral where government agents were holding the Nevadan's cattle. Minutes later, the animals were freed.

RYAN LENZ

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

War in the West

As officers of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department withdrew from Cliven Bundy's Bunkerville, Nev., ranch on April 12, the question had to be asked: How could a scofflaw like Bundy, who owes more than \$1 million in grazing fees but was backed up by hundreds of armed antigovernment zealots, manage to run off federal officials who clearly were in the right for seizing Bundy's cows as payment for what he owes? The standoff very nearly ended in bloodshed, as large numbers of Bundy supporters pointed their weapons at law enforcement officials, a felony that is now under investigation by the FBI. The BLM wisely withdrew, avoiding possible violence.

The Bundy standoff has invigorated an extremist movement that exploded when President Obama was elected, going from some 150 groups in 2008 to more than 1,000 last year. Though the movement has waxed and waned over the last three decades, antigovernment extremists have long pushed, most fiercely during Democratic administrations, rabid

conspiracy theories about a nefarious New World Order, a socialist, gun-grabbing federal government and the evils of federal law enforcement. Today's disputes with federal authority, many long simmering, are an extension of the earlier right-wing Sagebrush Rebellion, Wise Use and "county supremacy" movements.



STEVE MARCUS/REUTERS/CORBIS (SIGNS); AP IMAGES/DR. SCOTT M. LIEBERMAN (HANNITY)

Speaking their minds: Signs proliferated around the Bundy ranch as the standoff heated up — one more signal that anger at the federal government was reaching a crisis point.

Since 2009, there have been 17 shooting incidents between antigovernment extremists and law enforcement. In 2010, a father-and-son team of sovereign citizens, who believe that the law doesn't apply to them, executed two Arkansas police officers during a traffic stop, and a California extremist shot and injured two state troopers. Another extremist in Texas tried to kill two sheriff's deputies. Similar incidents have happened since, some ending in loss of life.

For those harboring deep hatred of the federal government, the BLM pullout was seen as a dramatic victory, one instance where the armed radicals of the right stared through their own gunsights at the gun barrels of law enforcement officials and won. Rather than being condemned, their actions garnered the support of numerous politicians, including the governor of Nevada and commentators like Fox News' Sean Hannity — a truly repulsive spectacle. This pandering to the far right by both politicians and media figures ended in a hurry, however, when Bundy engaged in racist blather about "the Negro." Racism was crossing a line, apparently, but the calls from the ranch for revolution and out-

right defiance of federal law enforcement seemed to be just fine with the Hannitys of the world.

The fallout from the BLM stand down is very troubling: an even more emboldened antigovernment movement. Just in the months since the Bundy "victory," tense standoffs between the BLM and antigovernment activists have taken place across the West — in Idaho, New Mexico, Texas and Utah. The scariest incident happened in Utah, where two men pointed a handgun at a BLM worker in a marked federal vehicle while holding up a sign that said, "You need to die."

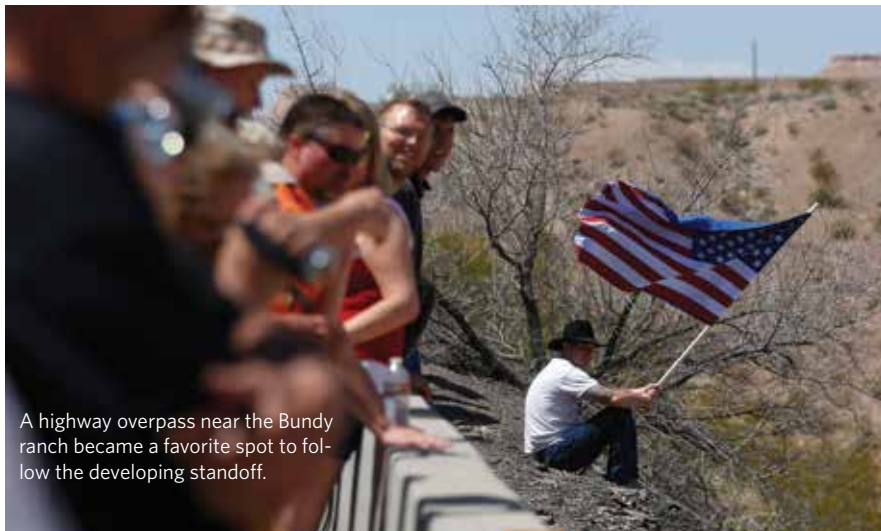
Although these situations have not yet led to violence, a recent encounter with two Bundy supporters ended with three dead.

In early June, two rabid government haters who spent time at the ranch, Jerad and Amanda Miller, strolled into a Las Vegas pizza parlor, walked past a pair of police officers eating lunch, turned and executed the two men. Leaving a Gadsden "Don't Tread on Me" flag, a note saying the revolution had begun and a swastika on the officers' bodies, the couple went on to murder another man before dying in a shootout with police.



Fox News' Sean Hannity was one of many who supported the Bundys' embrace of lawlessness.

JIM UHURHART/REUTERS/CORBIS (PROTEST); AP IMAGES/GEORGE FREY (MACK)



A highway overpass near the Bundy ranch became a favorite spot to follow the developing standoff.

Not long after the shooting, we called Sheriff Richard Mack, a prominent anti-federal government activist who had been at the Bundy ranch, to ask him about Jerad Miller. Mack and Miller had been photographed together at a Feb. 8 debate for libertarian sheriff's candidates held in Clark County, Nev. A surprised Mack told the SPLC, "Oh, no," adding, "I was afraid that [Miller] might have been at the Bundy ranch. As soon as I heard about it, I was afraid of that."

Why the surprise? Bogus political theories and conspiracy-mongering by the likes of Mack are clearly encouraging an increasingly enraged movement. That Miller would be drawn to the Bundy ranch — the movement's latest flashpoint — should have come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the movement's tactics or its rhetoric.

What is puzzling is why the BLM allowed Bundy to get away for 20 years without paying grazing fees that all other ranchers pay. And what is equally surprising is the almost amateurish way the BLM finally moved against Bundy. What both point to is a failure of the federal government to come to terms with the true nature of the war in the West.

Cliven Bundy may have faded from public view, but the movement that spawned him is boiling. Government officials need to understand what motivates this movement because the Millers will not be the last to demonstrate their antigovernment rage with bullets. Law enforcement officials



Former Arizona sheriff Richard Mack was a key supporter of the Bundys.

also need training on a movement that increasingly targets them. Two decades after the Waco debacle, federal officials continue to struggle with their approach to radical right extremists. What they learned from Waco was that a heavy-handed approach risks a major loss of life. Yet, allowing the antigovernment movement to flout the law at gunpoint is surely not the answer.

The recent announcement by Attorney General Eric Holder that the Justice Department is reviving its Domestic Terrorism Executive Committee is welcome news. The committee was established after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and was instrumental in bringing swift prosecutions that stemmed the tide of hardcore antigovernment activity; it should never have been allowed to become moribund after the 9/11 attacks. The militiamen and others who pointed their weapons at BLM and Las Vegas officers need to face criminal prosecution because the rule of law must be enforced or it will be challenged again.

But swift prosecutions are only part of the answer. The Justice Department is a law enforcement agency, not an intelligence-gathering one. To help law enforcement at all levels, the Department of Homeland Security must put more resources into assessing the threat of non-Islamic domestic terrorism. The unit with the primary responsibility for that task was allowed to wither in the face of conservative criticism following the leak of a 2009 report on the resurgent threat from the far right. That, too, should never have been allowed to happen.

Finally, politicians and media pundits need to be called out when they troll for votes or ratings with irresponsible rhetoric. The standoff at the Bundy ranch was news. But Cliven Bundy was certainly no hero. Treating him as such simply emboldens others like him.



JIM LURQUHART/REUTERS/CORBIS

The man at the heart of the confrontation in Nevada carried a pocket copy of the Constitution wherever he went. But the Constitution says nothing that excuses Cliven Bundy's refusal to abide by the laws of the land.

Guns of April: The Bundy Standoff

BUNKERVILLE, Nev. — Rancher Cliven Bundy has long been at odds with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). For 20 years he has taken an increasingly defiant stance toward the agency, refusing to pay what is now more than \$1 million in grazing fees and fines to a federal government he does not recognize.

With a copy of the Constitution ever present in the front pocket of his shirt, Bundy, 68, insists he has rights to public lands that trump federal control. Employing the fringe ideas of the rabidly antigovernment “sovereign citizens” movement to support his bogus constitutional theories, Bundy insists that his Mormon ancestors ran cattle long before Washington, D.C., encroached on the liberty of westerners by, as he claims, stealing their property.

Bundy put it like this on April 8 on “The Blaze,” Glenn Beck’s online network: “I have raised cattle on that land, which is public land for the people of

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

Federal courts have an answer to Bundy’s questions. Bundy’s opposition to federal jurisdiction in Nevada, a U.S. District Court ruled last year, has no legal basis as “the public lands in Nevada are property of the United States because the United



As the climax of the confrontation approached, militiamen and other Bundy supporters trained their weapons on federal and Las Vegas law enforcement officers.



JIM URQUHART/REUTERS/CORBIS

States has held title to those lands since 1848, when Mexico ceded the land to the United States.” In early April, responding to that ruling, the BLM hired cowboys from across the West to begin a roundup of the Bundy herd in lieu of payment for what Bundy rightly owes his fellow Americans for using their land — a bill that had been mounting since 1992, when he stopped paying.

Within four days of his defiant comments on Beck’s network, hundreds of heavily armed militia members had swarmed by the truckload to Bundy’s corner of the desert, angry, armed and ready to take on the federal government. They were drawn from an antigovernment “Patriot” movement that has swelled from around 150 groups when Barack Obama came into office in 2009 to more than 1,000 today.

On April 12, a tense, armed standoff with BLM agents — an event the militias have dubbed “the Battle of Bunkerville” — developed. Bundy ordered a mob of angry antigovernment zealots fueled by conspiracy theories to take back about 900 cattle from the federal government, ignoring pleas from Clark County Sheriff Doug Gillespie to keep the peace and entertain a discussion with federal authorities. Talk was not what Bundy wanted. His remedy — a remedy his allies gave him at the point of their guns — was, in effect, the suspension of the rule of law. And he got it, at least temporarily. The BLM wisely withdrew, clearly unprepared for a confrontation.

Writing on his blog hours after the standoff, Mike Vanderboegh, an aging government-hating propagandist from Alabama who heads the III Percent Patriots, characterized the standoff in grandiose terms. “It is impossible to overstate the importance of the victory won in the desert today,” he gushed. “The feds were routed — routed. There is no word that applies. Courage is contagious, defiance is contagious, victory is contagious. Yet the war is not over.”

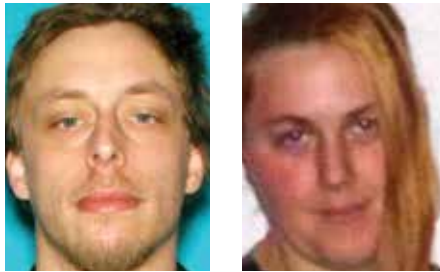
Within weeks, that rhetoric appeared predictive as two people who had spent time on the Bundy ranch before reportedly being asked to leave went on a shooting spree in Las Vegas. On June 8, Jerad

Miller and his wife Amanda entered a restaurant and killed two Las Vegas police officers before running into a nearby Wal-Mart and killing an armed civilian who tried to stop them. Witnesses say the couple shouted, “This is a revolution!” and draped one of the slain officer’s bodies with a Gadsden flag, a militia favorite that reads, “Don’t tread on me”

Jerad Miller had been at the Bundy ranch, telling a Las Vegas TV station, “I feel sorry for any federal agents that want to come in here and try to push us around, or anything like that.” He added, “I really don’t want violence toward them, but if they’re gonna come bring violence to us, well, if that’s the language they want to speak, we’ll learn it.”

The Millers’ violence was extreme, but tense standoffs between the BLM and anti-government activists have taken place across the West — in Utah, Texas, New Mexico and Idaho — in the wake of the ranch standoff. Also, a handful of right-wing politicians and commentators have given cover to Bundy, openly supporting the efforts of a man who is refusing to pay the same grazing fees that every other rancher does and who has invited armed extremists to make sure the federal government can’t enforce the law.

The battle lines have now been drawn. The anti-government movement has come to believe, due to the failed tactics of the BLM, that their guns trump the authority of federal law enforcement — a flat contradiction of the notion of a nation of laws. In the late 1990s, in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing, increased prosecutions of weapons violations and related crimes tamped down the virulence of the antigovernment movement. The militiamen and others who pointed their weapons at BLM and other law enforcement officers need to face crimi-



Jerad and Amanda Miller, who had a certain fondness for dressing up as comic villains, murdered three people, including two police officers, after briefly joining Bundy supporters during their standoff with authorities.

nal prosecution because if the rule of law is not enforced, it surely will be challenged again.

Preparing for a Standoff

The Millers were only two of the hundreds of militia members, conspiracy theorists and other angry antigovernment extremists who responded to Bundy’s call for a “range war” — a call that first came when the BLM arrested Bundy’s oldest son, David Bundy, who was filming the BLM. He was charged with failing to disperse.

In a request for help on his family’s blog, Cliven Bundy claimed federal “thieves” had turned on his family, and he vowed retribution. “They have my cattle and now they have one of my boys. ... Range War begins tomorrow at Bundy ranch.”

There was also a video posted on YouTube that showed an altercation between Bundy’s sons and BLM agents. Ammon Bundy, another of Cliven Bundy’s sons, is seen in a heated exchange that ends with BLM agents using a Taser to subdue him. According to BLM statements, Bundy’s son had attempted to kick a police dog before the agents responded.

Almost overnight, thanks largely to the Bundy’s video going viral on antigovernment websites, the family’s fight with the federal government became a touchstone for various Tea Party Republicans, libertarians, antigovernment Oath Keepers and militia members, many of whom saw in the footage the beginnings of a war.

After watching the video from his home in Anaconda, Mont., 650 miles away, Ryan Payne, 30, an electrician and former soldier who had deployed twice to the Iraq war, became enraged.

Payne is part of a small militia unit, the West Mountain Rangers, but he also sits atop a little-



The Gadsden flag, beloved of colonial-era rebels, has become a key symbol of the militia movement. It was also tossed on a murdered police officer's body by two radical-right cop-killers a month after the Bundy standoff came to an end.

JIM URQUHART/REUTERS/CORBIS

known militia organization called Operation Mutual Aid, a group that he hoped could coordinate militias across the country to respond to federal aggressions.

That night, he called Bundy and asked if he needed the militia's help, Payne told the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) during a nearly two-hour interview at the Bundy ranch weeks after the standoff.

"I said the type of help that I'm going to be bringing is militia units and Patriots from all over the country," Payne said, recalling the conversation. Payne added that Bundy told him, "I'm not going to tell you what to bring, I'm not going to tell you to bring guns or any of that type of stuff. All I'm going to say is we need help, and you use your own discernment and decide what needs to be brought."

Payne left that day with another member of his militia, Jim Lardy, and drove through the night, a few sleeping bags in tow, burning up cell phones hoping to bring every militia member they could. On April 9, he sent out an urgent call for the militias to mobilize.

"At this time we have approximately 150 responding, but that number is growing by the hour," he wrote, offering directions to the Bundy ranch. "May God grant each and every one of you safety, wisdom and foresight, and courage to accomplish the

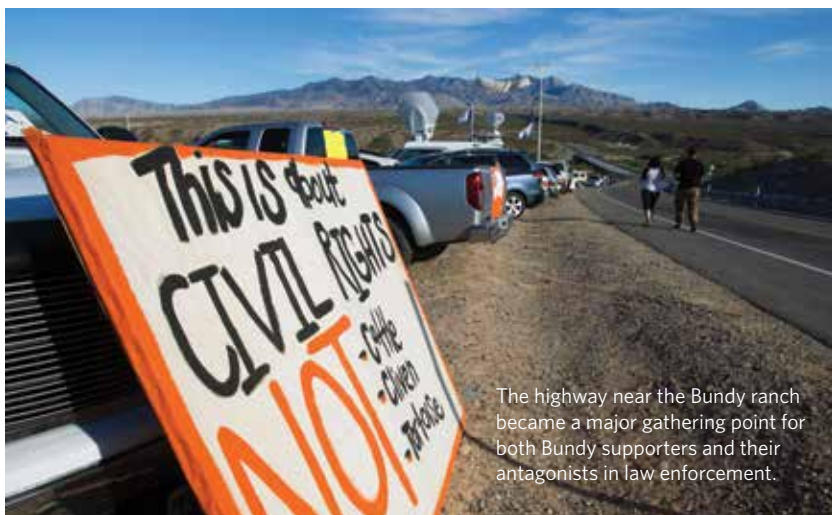
mission we have strived for so long to bring to fruition. All men are mortal, most pass simply because it is their time, a few however are blessed with the opportunity to choose their time in performance of duty."

It was an audacious call for a movement that had been itching for a fight with the federal government for some time, especially in the West where more than half of all land is federally owned. Payne's message caught the eye of other militia leaders and antigovernment folk heroes — people like Alex Jones of Infowars; Richard Mack and his Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association; and Stewart Rhodes' Oath Keepers. Militia units came from Montana, Arizona, Arkansas, Ohio, Indiana, Georgia and California and elsewhere — all promising to bring all they could muster.

By Saturday, April 12, a steady stream of antigovernment fanatics had been arriving in Bunkerville for weeks. There was support, too, from some local ranchers who had given Bundy a certain amount of respect as the last rancher who had not left Clark County due to increased federal strictures on the use of public land.

Their anger grew by the day, with the roadsides surrounding the Bundy compound growing crowded with Gadsden flags, like the one the Millers

STEVE MARCUS/REUTERS/CORBIS



The highway near the Bundy ranch became a major gathering point for both Bundy supporters and their antagonists in law enforcement.

would later leave at the scene of their cop killings. Signs condemning the BLM as a communist agent proliferated. The BLM, fearing that a wrong move could spark chaos and even a bloodbath in the tense atmosphere of the standoff, proceeded cautiously.

Freeloading on the Range

The Bundy family had been at odds with the BLM for almost half of the 20th century, dating back to 1953, when Cliven Bundy's father, David Bundy, applied for his first permit to graze 95 cattle on the BLM's Gold Butte allotment, about 600,000 acres of low-lying desert.

According to a detailed timeline prepared by *High Country News*, David Bundy immediately went into arrears on payments for his permit. Years later, when Cliven Bundy tried to transfer his father's permit to his own name so that he, too, could run cattle, the BLM delayed the transfer.

In 1990, the BLM offered Bundy a 10-year grazing permit on public lands that mandated the protection of the desert tortoise, which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had listed as a threatened species in 1989. Bundy refused. To Bundy and other ranchers, that mandate to protect the tortoise was a federally contrived plan to steal land from American citizens. The tortoise, they argued, was introduced into the area and thus was not indigenous. Bundy continued to graze his herd.

In 1994, the BLM took Bundy to federal court in order to force him to pay what then amounted to about \$25,000 in grazing fees. Even then, Bundy disavowed the federal government. He attempted to pay his fees to Clark County, a government body

he recognized, but was turned away. On his own accord, as he told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, he "fired the BLM."

"[T]hey've never proven to me they own that land, and I'm willing to do whatever's necessary to defend my land," Bundy told the *Rocky Mountain News*.

Bundy's defiance came against a convenient backdrop, where conspiracy theories about federal tyranny had ignited explosive growth in the militia movement. A year earlier, the federal siege at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, had inspired

thousands who would later join militias to believe that a revolution against the federal government was coming.

As Bundy told the *Washington Times* in 1994: "I've got friends who are really worried that this is going to come down to a Waco situation. ... The thing is, we've got the feds in a corner, and I don't know how rabid they're going to be when they're forced to act." It would take two more decades for Bundy's personal Waco to take shape.

For the next four years, Bundy continued to graze cattle on the federal allotment, as his case took a slow and winding course through federal courts. It was during that time that Bundy began filing sovereign citizen-like filings with the court, acknowledging only a "sovereign state of Nevada," not the federal government. In 1998, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department also received information suggesting armed ranchers and Bundy supporters planned to resist any attempts to close public lands.

Bundy, too, had become increasingly extreme in his public response to federal court orders to remove cattle from public lands. In documents obtained by the SPLC, the seeds of the defiance that would ultimately come were readily apparent.

In one letter to the authorities, dated Nov. 27, 1998, Bundy lectured state and federal officials about how they had no authority to restrict these lands. "Nevada officials are hereby given constructive notice that an unconstitutional jurisdiction without limitations is being imposed upon me and my family's life, liberty and property. ... I have been



Cliven Bundy addresses his troops in the moments before delivering an ultimatum to Clark County Sheriff Doug Gillespie.

JASON BEAN / AP IMAGES / LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

a rancher and steward of the range in this area for many more years than there has been a BLM. ... I hereby give notice to all above named persons and entities that this order is coming from a foreign court," he wrote.

In another letter, as the federal government moved to take action against Bundy again in 2012, Bundy wrote, "I will stand and protect my rights, whatever it takes, to defend this valid ranch, the access for the public, and the policing power of the Clark County Sheriff."

The irony, of course, is that not even Nevada's Clark County Sheriff Doug Gillespie could quell the rising fury surrounding Bundy earlier this year, nor stop the events that were to come.

The Moment of No Return

To the invigorated antigovernment movement of the Obama era, Bundy was a kindred soul. What they saw was not a rancher who had operated outside of the regulations regarding public lands, a man who had stolen from the American people by refusing to pay for their use, but rather one of their own, a defiant Patriot with truth on his side.

On the morning of April 12, tensions between

BLM agents and Bundy's militia-backed supporters reached a climax. Gillespie, in an effort to dissolve those tensions, agreed to meet Bundy in front of an angry mob of heavily armed protesters.

For antigovernment zealots like Bundy, the county sheriff is the highest-ranking and really only legitimate law enforcement officer. The concept came out of the anti-Semitic and racist Posse Comitatus movement of the 1970s and is often referred to as the "county supremacy movement." The hope was that if anyone could calm Bundy's supporters, it was Gillespie.

"The BLM is going to cease this operation," Gillespie told the raucous crowd. "The Gold Butte allotment will be reopened to the public, and they will be removing their assets." He then turned to Bundy. "What I would hope to sit down with you and talk about is how to have this facilitated in a safe way."

The audience screamed back, "Where are the cows?" and demanded the release of Bundy's cattle. "Bring the cows back! You're holding them hostage to broker a deal," one particularly voluble Bundy ally cried.

When Gillespie was finished, Bundy walked



Federal agents manned a corral where they held the Bundy's cattle while protesters gathered outside.

JIM URQUHART/REUTERS/CORBIS

quickly toward a jerrybuilt podium on risers. Holding a yellow legal pad in his hands, Bundy spelled out his demands: The federal government would open up all restricted public lands, remove BLM equipment from the area, and end its tyrannical campaign of harassment against his family and other ranchers in the area by returning his cows. Lastly, the BLM would disarm federal agents.

"We want those arms delivered right here under these flags in one hour," Bundy said, his voice creaking with age, before turning his attention to the news media present to ask them to document that his demands were being met. When Bundy was finished, Gillespie turned to his deputies and left without saying a word.

The time that followed was tense. Then, suddenly, one hour and 20 minutes after Gillespie departed, Bundy again took the stage. He ordered the nearby freeway blocked and condemned Sheriff Gillespie for failing to protect the people from federal abuses.

"Let's go get those cattle," he said. "All we got to do is open those gates and let them back on the river." As a final note he offered, "We're about to take this country back by force."

Cowboys on horseback lining the overlooking buttes rode off into the distance. Cars and trucks peeled out of the dusty roadside clearing the BLM

had set aside for protestors, bound for a corral two miles away that was protected by BLM agents, where the federal government had confined Bundy's cattle.

In a low-lying wash where gates held the Bundy herd, an angry, heavily armed crowd grew, defying orders and engaging in a tense game of chicken with BLM rangers in riot gear demanding through loudspeakers that they disperse. They shouted profanities and gripped their weapons. Militia snipers lined the hilltops and overpasses with scopes trained on federal agents.

What happened was not unplanned. As Payne later told the SPLC, he had ordered certain gunmen "to put in counter sniper positions" and others to hang behind at the ranch. "[M]e and Mel Bundy put together the plan for the cohesion between the Bundys and the militia... . Sending half of the guys up to support the protesters... and keep overwatch and make sure that if the BLM wanted to get froggy, that it wouldn't be good for them." Perhaps in an effort to justify his actions, Payne claims that the BLM is a "private corporation," not a government entity.

Law enforcement officials were in trouble. "The hair was up on the back of my neck," Clark County Assistant Sheriff Joe Lombardo recounted later to KLAS-TV. "There was a lot of firepower out there and it made me nervous. Anything could happen."



In the aftermath of the freeing of Bundy's cattle, his supporters declared victory.

JIM LURQUHART/REUTERS/CORBIS

But what actually happened was unexpected. The BLM, without any prior announcement, packed up and left. The Bundys, BLM officials later confirmed, unlatched the gates and left on horses to retrieve their cattle. In a statement provided to news media that day, the BLM said it suspended operations “because of our serious concern about the safety of employees and members of the public.”

For the antigovernment movement, it was a major victory. By threatening violence, they had suspended the rule of law, at least temporarily, in the name of liberty.

Recounting the day several weeks later from the Bundy compound, Payne smiled. In the days before the standoff, he and Cliven Bundy had toured the public lands Bundy was using, looking for ways to defend them if necessary. He knew the battlefield, planned the response by Bundy supporters, and made sure snipers were in position. In his telling, his planning could not have gone more perfectly.

“Not only did they take up the very best position to overwatch everything, they also had the high ground, they were fortified with concrete and pavement barriers,” Payne said. “They had great lines of fire and then, when I sent in that other team, for counter sniper positions, [the BLM agents] were completely locked down. They had no choice but to retreat.”

The reason, he boasted, was “overwhelming tactical superiority.”

Victory at the Ranch

As BLM rangers climbed into their trucks and left on that April afternoon, a handful of Bundy sup-

porters hung a banner from an overpass on Interstate 15. The red, white and blue sign read, “The West Has Now Been Won.” Since then, this sentiment has swept the anti-government movement, which continues to see the federal retreat in the presence of an armed citizenry as an historic moment in defense of the Constitution.

“There is a new spirit of resistance abroad in the land. The folks in Nevada were not cowed by federal guns pointed at them,” Vanderboegh wrote on his blog, before warning officials, “I would look at what happened in the desert today and be very, very afraid.”

Vanderboegh was right. A “new spirit of resistance” had burst forth across the West. Bolstered by populist rage and supported by a far-flung network of militias and a handful of public figures, BLM policies have been characterized as a tyrannical blueprint to destroy state sovereignty, sully the Constitution and steal public lands away from “the people.”

Two days after the standoff, Nevada Assemblywoman Michelle Fiore (R-Las Vegas) posted a picture on her Facebook page showing her feeding a calf at the Bundy ranch. Earlier, she had told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* that federal actions were “horrifying.”

Ignoring the fact that Bundy and his followers were the ones who drew their weapons, U.S. Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah) told *The Los Angeles Times*, “You can’t just show up with guns blazing and expect to win the hearts and minds of the public.” Chaffetz, a firm advocate of those protesting the BLM, concluded, “The federals need a little more Andy Griffith and a lot less Rambo.”

The Fever Spreads

A month after the standoff, San Juan County, Utah, Commissioner Phil Lyman led a protest against a ban on the use of motorized vehicles in Recapture Canyon that was meant to protect archaeological sites from damage. Waving Gadsden flags just like those draped over the slain officer in Las Vegas and decrying the actions of the BLM, Lyman and several



Many of Bundy's supporters were heavily armed, with several carrying semi-automatic weapons.



JIM LURQUHART/REUTERS/CORBIS



dozen ATV riders — including members of Bundy's family — rode into the canyon to defy BLM authority. Lyman told the SPLC that the ride was meant to be a peaceful protest, but he did little to conceal his rage over what he characterized as federal tyranny.

"If things don't change, it's not long before shots will be fired," Lyman said, joining other conservative lawmakers such as Chaffetz in warning of violence if the federal government didn't rein in the BLM. "We can avoid it. But it's not going to be by the people changing their attitudes and accepting more intrusion into their lives. It's going to be by the federal government acknowledging people's freedom."

The Bundy blow up has spawned other imitators. This May in Texas, militias and their allies came to protest a BLM survey of more than 90,000 acres along the Red River, fearing the federal government was planning a land grab. A month earlier in Utah, two men pointed a handgun at a BLM worker in a marked federal vehicle while holding up a sign that said, "You need to die." In New Mexico's Otero County, a brewing confrontation between state and

federal officials ended after BLM officials opened gates cutting off water for grazing cattle to protect the jumping mouse. Again, there were conspiracy theories demonizing BLM efforts to protect the environment.

And in mid-June, more violence erupted, as a BLM ranger and a California Highway Patrol officer were shot and wounded, allegedly by a self-declared sovereign citizen, Brent Douglas Cole, who was camping outside of Nevada City, Calif.

None of this has tamped down the rhetoric. The Bundy standoff has actually brought the spotlight to the antigovernment movement, and its leaders are soaking up the attention. Polarizing figures such as former Arizona sheriff Richard Mack and Stewart Rhodes of the Oath Keepers have been eager to take advantage of the moment.

Mack, a longtime militia darling who has led a push for county sheriffs to stand against federal law enforcement agencies, told

one crowd, "We don't believe that bureaucratic policies and regulations supersede the Constitution. I came here because I don't believe the BLM has any authority whatsoever. Grazing fees do not supersede life, liberty and the pursuit of property."

Domestic Terrorists and Racists

It remains to be seen how the movement will react as law enforcement moves to prosecute possible crimes by those at the ranch who Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) has dubbed "domestic terrorists." Doug Gillespie, the local sheriff, said the FBI was investigating militia members who aimed loaded weapons at law enforcement officers, legally considered assault against an officer, a federal crime carrying a sentence of up to 20 years in prison if a deadly weapon is involved.

"There will be consequences, definitely," Assistant Sheriff Jim Lombardo, who oversaw police operations at the scene of the standoff, added. "That is unacceptable behavior. If we let it go, it will continue into the future."



JIM URQUHART/REUTERS/CORBIS

Cliven Bundy (with cowboy hat) was nearly always accompanied by a personal security detail, headed by a man who calls himself "Buddha" (far left).

Some of Bundy's mainstream political support has fallen away, too, especially after Bundy made racist comments reported by *The New York Times*.

"I want to tell you one more thing about the Negro," Bundy said, talking about black families he'd see as a younger man in North Las Vegas. "Because they were basically on government subsidy, so now what do they do? ... They abort their young children, they put their young men in jail, because they never learned how to pick cotton. And I've often wondered, are they better off as slaves, picking cotton and having a family life and doing things, or are they better off under government subsidy. They didn't get no more freedom. They got less freedom."

The comments quickly spread across national news media, and many former supporters rushed to condemn Bundy as, in the kindest terms, an ignorant rancher, but more accurately a racist. Support from right-wing Republicans and conservative news media vanished overnight, with racism apparently being a greater sin among these folks than antigovernment extremism, hatred of law enforcement or flouting the rule of law. This left a void for a new, more radical cadre of supporters to lionize Bundy's defiance.

Among them are politicians belonging to the Independent American Party (IAP)—the same party whose banner rabidly anti-immigrant former U.S. Rep. Tom Tancredo ran under during his bid for to become governor of Colorado. In late May, at an IAP event to honor Bundy for "his courage in standing

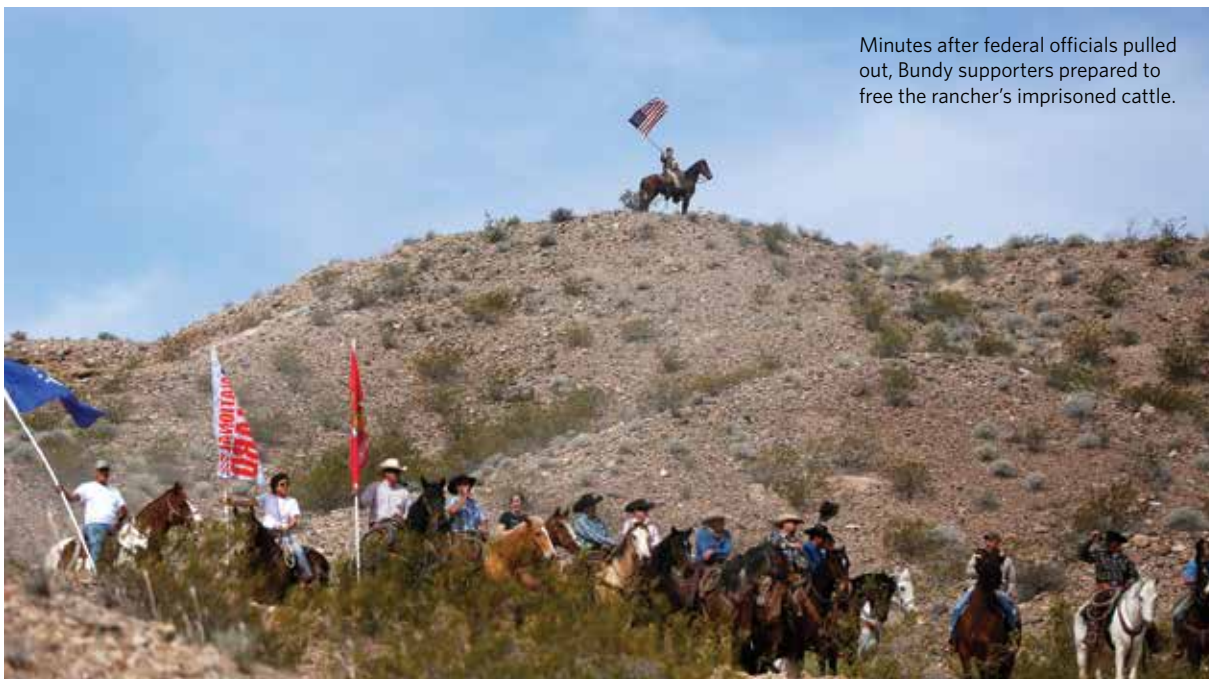
up for state sovereignty," Bundy and his wife, Carol, signed paperwork to join the Nevada chapter.

"Cliven Bundy is my hero," Janine Hansen, an IAP candidate running for Nevada's 2nd congressional district, told a gathering of supporters. "We cannot allow this incredible opportunity that Cliven has given us to die. ... It's time that we are no longer serfs on the land in the State of Nevada. It is time that we become sovereign in our own state, our own sovereign state. It is long past time. We are not the servants of the BLM."

Bundy remains an outlaw, and his ranch is still populated by dozens of heavily armed antigovernment activists. His well-armed supporters have relied on a convoluted network of conspiracy theories to justify their aggression against the BLM in Nevada — "hired thugs," as Payne described them.

"There are not two truths here. In the universe, there's one truth. Who's on the right side of that truth?" Payne told the SPLC. "The people who stand in defense of other people's lives, liberty and property, or the people that stand against other people's lives, liberty and property?"

Having waited so long to move against Bundy, having underestimated the resistance they would encounter once they decided to move, and now facing an entrenched and organized band of anti-government zealots, federal officials are in a very difficult position. They have their work cut out for them.



Minutes after federal officials pulled out, Bundy supporters prepared to free the rancher's imprisoned cattle.

JIM URQUHART/REUTERS/CORBIS

Backgrounding Bundy: The Movement

To hear much of the media describe the Cliven Bundy standoff with the federal government in Nevada this spring, the armed confrontation over Bundy's refusal to pay cattle grazing fees was unique, a shocking conflict joined by militias and others on the radical right that came close to turning into a bloodbath.

And it was, in terms of its utter brazenness. Rarely have even the most militant of members of the antigovernment "Patriot" movement been photographed aiming sniper rifles at the heads of law enforcement officials. Almost never has a group of heavily armed right-wing radicals, facing large numbers of equally heavily armed law enforcement, forced the government to back down.

But, in fact, the confrontation was only the latest in a series that began in the 1970s and 1980s with clashes between militant radical rightists and the government they believe has no authority over them. In the longest view, they go all the way back to the Whiskey Rebellion, an armed 1791 uprising over

federal liquor taxes that ultimately resulted in the strengthening of a still shaky central government.

In addition, the standoff, which erupted when the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) tried to seize Bundy's cattle after he defied court orders to pay more than \$1 million in accumulated grazing fees, quickly led to others, almost as militant, including a May show of force from anti-government populists in Utah who drove ATVs into a federal canyon where motorized vehicles had been banned in order to preserve fragile archaeological remains of American Indian communities. San Juan County Commissioner Phil Lyman, who led that illegal protest, said later that "[i]f things don't

change, it's not long before shots will be fired.”

Where did these ideas come from? How did the radical right come to take on issues pitting local use of the nation's rural lands against the government?

In a sense, the antigovernment movement in America is as old as the country itself. Conceived in rebellion against imperial British authority and raised on a diet of rugged frontier individualism, the United States nurtured resistance to centralized power from the start. The Whiskey Rebellion, which ended after President George Washington marched into Pennsylvania, was the first major conflict that resulted in an increasingly centralized and powerful government. The Civil War, fought under the rebels' slogan of states' rights, also pitted local against federal power and, after the Confederacy lost, helped strengthen the central government. A whole series of later developments, from the New Deal of Franklin D. Roosevelt to the civil rights movement and its resulting legislation, continued the centralizing trend.

Throughout, America's political right almost always sided with local versus federal government, which fought a war to free the slaves and has often defended minority rights. But that historic resistance to federal authority grew far sharper and more ideologically refined with the emergence of the modern radical right in the 1970s and 1980s, in particular the racist and anti-Semitic Posse Comitatus. The Posse, whose name is Latin for “power of the county,” pushed an especially radical localism, originating the doctrine of “county supremacy” even as it married elements of the tax protest movement to Christian Identity — a heretical reading of the Bible that depicts Jews as biologically satanic and people of color as subhuman.

A North Dakota farmer and early Posse leader, Gordon Kahl, showed the violence of the movement, murdering two federal marshals coming to arrest him over unpaid taxes in 1983. Kahl was later killed in a shootout with law enforcement officials after months on the run, but the Posse Comitatus kept on going.

The Posse also was one of the first modern radical groups to take up issues of land use — the same kind of issues exploited by Bundy and the armed militias that supported him in Nevada this spring. It disrupted environmental regulatory hearings, fought farm unionization, and intervened in land disputes. Most importantly, it took advantage of the serious agricultural crisis then forcing hundreds of

thousands of farmers off the land, infiltrating what had originally been a progressive movement seeking better price supports and injecting its anti-Semitism and race hate.

In the end, that hatred, coupled with the violence of the Posse, helped wreck the movement to save American farmers being battered by heavy debt, high interest rates and the Soviet grain embargo. Any sympathy for farmers was swept away as the Posse's infiltration of their movement and its aims were publicized. The whole episode was reminiscent of the way that many Bundy supporters, from politicians to talk show and cable news hosts, fled upon learning of Bundy's racist ramblings about the problems and supposed predilections of “the Negro” in America.

But the Posse left an ideological legacy that lives on in the radical right today, including among the militia members and other radicals who came to defend Bundy and his theft of more than \$1 million from the American people. A key part of that legacy is the Posse's rejection of federal and even state government in favor of the county and the county sheriff, who are seen as the highest legitimate authorities in the nation. The Posse also was the first to create citizen grand juries and “common-law courts” that had no legal authority but still “indicted” various enemies.

The militia movement of the 1990s and beyond was animated by this kind of localism, which also involved furious opposition to any kind of global power (the United Nations, other transnational bodies, and the “New World Order,” described as a cabal of global elites intent on creating a one-world government). It violently opposed, for instance, environmental measures drawn up in Washington that arguably economically damaged ranchers, farmers and loggers in the West. And it was also intensely interested in defending the Second Amendment, saying a heavily armed citizenry is the only defense against a tyrannical central government.

But the militia movement also drew from, and exploited, two more mainstream movements that explicitly sought, as Bundy does today, an end to all federal control of the rural lands of the West and elsewhere and battled for an expansive definition of property rights. These were the Sagebrush Rebellion of the 1970s and 1980s and the Wise Use movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The militias also drew on the burgeoning county supremacy movement of the '90s.

The Sagebrush Rebellion was set off by the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act that ended the longstanding practice of homesteading, effectively meaning that the federal government would retain control of huge swaths of western public lands, mostly dominated by sagebrush. It also coincided with the “unroading” of many federal public lands that came along with a process of considering a major expansion of public wilderness areas. The movement, which gained the enthusiastic support of Ronald Reagan, among others, explicitly sought state or local control of the federal public lands and reductions in the same cattle grazing permit fees that Bundy more recently has refused to pay. These fees, far lower than those charged on the private market, are already a direct government subsidy to ranchers.

The Wise Use movement was essentially an extension of the Sagebrush Rebellion, which was more or less shut down by court rulings finding management of the lands in question was the responsibility of the federal government. It was kicked off by a 1988 conference hosted by anti-environmentalist timber activist Ron Arnold, and it was supported financially by resource extraction industries. Although its primary aim was to expand private property rights and reduce environmental regulation of public lands, the movement in many places essentially melded into the county supremacy movement first popularized by the Posse Comitatus.

The most dramatic example of that came in Catron County, N.M., where radical local officials passed a total of 21 ordinances between 1990 and 1992 that attempted to supersede federal authority on public lands. The ordinances asserted that all Forest Service roads in the county were “public property,” made it a felony for citizens to alter the terms of grazing permits, and gave the county the right to condemn and manage public property for county use, among other things. The county’s 1992 land use plan declared that “federal agents threaten the life, liberty and happiness” of county residents and promised to defend “private property rights and protectable interests held by individuals in federal and state lands.”

The Catron County rebellion brought with it numerous threats against federal officials and environmentalists. Hugh McKeen, a county commissioner at the time, put it like this to an *Albuquerque Tribune* reporter: “This rebellion this time — we’ve had the Sagebrush Rebellion in the past, we’ve had

many skirmishes, but this one will go to the end. It will go to civil war if things don’t change.”

By 1994, militia organizers in the county were warning of the looming New World Order, local activists were burning UN flags, and racist leaders were giving speeches to large crowds, according to *The Second Revolution: States Rights, Sovereignty and Power of the County*, a critical 1997 book. Carl Livingston, another Catron County commissioner, told a reporter: “If a move was made, let’s say for example, a local rancher here, the government threatened to confiscate his cattle, there’s no doubt in my mind they would meet with some kind violence.”

That same year, on Independence Day, a similar confrontation occurred in Nye County, Nev., when County Commissioner Richard Carver illegally bulldozed open a National Forest road that had been closed by the federal government. “All it would have taken was for one of those [forest] rangers to have drawn a weapon,” Carver boasted later. “Fifty people with sidearms would have drilled him.” The action, dubbed Sagebrush II, brought a federal suit over control of public lands in the county. It ended with a judge ruling that federal lands don’t belong to the states.

The militia movement, which first appeared in the mid-1990s, adopted many of the goals of these previously existing movements. Tarso Ramos, an analyst of the extreme right, put it like this in 1996: “While the Wise Use Movement remains distinct from white supremacist and paramilitary groups like the militia, they are linked by crossover leaders, an increasingly overlapping constituency, and some common ideological views — most notably belief in the illegitimacy of the federal government and assertion of state and county ‘rights’ over federal authority.”

The militias, however, described the struggle in the wild conspiracist terms that the movement has become known for. Many of them alleged that the United Nations was planning to create a “biosphere” in North America that would require the murder of millions of people to make way for an oversized nature park. More recently, other militias, along with conspiracist radical groups like the John Birch Society, have attacked Agenda 21, a non-binding UN sustainability plan that they describe as a plot to impose global socialism in the name of the environment.

Another major land use conflict arose in 2001,

when federal officials, facing a severe drought and concerned for the endangered suckerfish, cut back severely on the water allowed farmers downstream from Klamath Falls, Ore. The decision enraged farmers, who lost millions of dollars as a result, and enormous numbers of people, including many from militias, flowed into the area. Protesters forced open the irrigation floodgates four times before federal marshals were sent in. At one point, there were more than 10,000 people there, many of them mouthing the militia message that the federal government had no right to impose controls.

And, as in so many conflicts, some of them spoke of war. A member of the Southern Oregon Militia, for instance, wrote a widely read E-mail fantasizing about militia snipers murdering BLM operatives with impunity. Militia leader J.J. Johnson roared, “We are at war. We did not start this war but, having no choice but to wage it, let us wage it well. ... This may become one of the greatest rescue and re-supply operations ever — and more important than the Historic Berlin Airlift.” A Klamath Falls police officer was more extreme, saying in a speech that he saw “the potential for extreme violence, even to the extent of civil war. ... I am talking about rioting, homicides and the destruction of property.” He was suspended from his job.

Nine years later, in 2010, yet another such conflict came up when the U.S. Forest Service closed off

most motor vehicle access to the San Juan National Forest in Colorado. Militia members and sympathizers mounted an armed protest outside Forest Service offices. Many made the kinds of wild claims the militia movement is known for — that the government was leveraging Colorado’s public lands against U.S. debt to China, that the closures were somehow preparatory to the imposition of martial law, and that the United Nations was secretly involved in events.

Even the local sheriff, Dennis Spruel, joined in, embracing the idea of county supremacy and discussing the conflict on such outlets as “The Political Cesspool,” a radio show that has hosted a Who’s Who of the racist and radical right. “The sheriff, he’s the ultimate law enforcement authority because he’s elected by the ultimate power, and that’s the people,” Spruel said on the show. “If the federal government comes in and violates the law, it’s my responsibility to see that it stops.”

This is the ideology that has informed much of the radical right for the last three decades, and it is also the set of ideas that was behind the radicals who nearly created a massacre when they faced down law enforcement officials on the Bundy ranch this spring. And as this ideology continues to spread in a large and highly energized antigovernment movement, it will certainly drive other, similar battles.

TIMELINE

Land Use and the ‘Patriots’

The so-called “Patriot” or militia movement, which hit the United States in two waves cresting in the 1994-2000 period and again beginning in 2009, is animated by conspiracy theories about the federal government and its alleged intentions to merge the country into a global government ruled by dictatorial, socialistic elites. Although there are many important dates and extremist crimes associated with this movement, the timeline that follows emphasizes Patriot resistance to the federal government, in particular over land use and related issues that came to the fore with the April 2014 Nevada standoff between federal agents and rancher Cliven Bundy, who refused to pay over \$1 million in accumulated federal grazing fees. It also explores some of the antecedents to both the Bundy standoff and the Patriot movement, in particular such themes as the “county supremacy” ideology embraced by Bundy and his many armed supporters in the militia groups. The timeline starts in the infancy of our nation, when the Whiskey Rebellion became the first dramatic confrontation between local power and the growing centralized authority of the federal government.



1791: An armed uprising begins in Pennsylvania in response to the new federal government’s attempt to impose taxes on whiskey, widely used by

poor farmers as a form of currency. What comes to be known as the **Whiskey Rebellion** collapses after President George Washington marches troops into Pennsylvania. The conflict helps to strengthen the still very shaky authority of the federal government.

1828: Vice President John C. Calhoun, a South Carolinian who is one of Southern slavery’s most vociferous defenders, writes “The South Carolina Exposition and Protest,” challenging a federal tariff that favors the North. In it, Calhoun promotes nullification, the idea that states can ignore any federal law that goes beyond powers explicitly granted the federal government by the Constitution. The doctrine,

which will later be rejected by the courts, will be used to defend slavery and segregation and still forms the basis for many far-right attacks on federal power today.

1861-65: Although slavery is the chief cause of the Civil War, not states’ rights, the war and its aftermath (Reconstruction and the military occupation of the former Confederate states) have the effect of greatly strengthening the federal government.

1954-68: The legacy of federal power inherited from the Civil War is bolstered by the government’s growing role in defending black Americans during the civil rights movement that begins with the *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation ruling and ends with the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The association of the American far right with local versus federal power becomes explicit.



1971: William Potter Gale, a leading racist and anti-Semitic activist, issues the manifesto that will form the basis of the

Posse Comitatus, a radical group that will develop some of the key doctrines of the radical right for decades to come, including county supremacy. In his *Guide for Volunteer Christian Posses*, Gale says the Posse should deal with government officials who “disobey” the Constitution by taking them “to a populated intersection of streets... at high noon [to] be hung there by the neck.” Gale issues the first chapter charters for the Posse the following year.

1975: The chairman of the Klamath County, Ore., Posse Comitatus chapter writes state legislators threatening to have them tried for treason if they refuse to repeal an important conservation measure.

1976: Congress passes the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, generally seen as provoking the Sagebrush Rebellion. The act ends the historic American practice of homesteading, leaving huge swaths of public lands in the West under the control of a variety of federal agencies including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Sagebrush rebels, who include Ronald Reagan, seek state or local control of federal lands and also reductions in cattle grazing permit fees. The movement dies off in the 1980s after courts rule that the lands are legally under federal control.

1978: Violent anti-Semite **James Wickstrom**, soon to be the Posse’s “National Director of Counterinsurgency,” calls for a national strike by



struggling farmers and publishes *The American Farmer: Twentieth Century Slave*, calling Jews, who he believes control the federal government, “land-grabbing devils.”

1983: Several hundred members and supporters of the once-progressive American Agriculture Movement, now infiltrated by Posse ideologues, protest the foreclosure sale of a farm in Springfield, Colo. The farm’s owner later uses Posse language when he says the foreclosure was undertaken illegally under “admiralty law.”

1983: Two federal marshals are murdered by North Dakota farmer and Posse activist **Gordon Kahl** when



they try to arrest him for criminal refusal to pay taxes, a leading issue for the Posse. Kahl escapes and evades arrest for four months, traveling through a network of safe houses, before dying four months later in an Arkansas shootout in which he first kills a local sheriff.

1987: The Illinois Supreme Court strikes down the use of “land patents,” a bogus technique promoted by the Posse to erase farmers’ debts.



1988: A conference organized by timber lobbyist and anti-environmental activist **Ron Arnold** kicks off what becomes known as the Wise Use movement, essentially an extension of the earlier Sagebrush Rebellion. The movement, largely funded by resource extraction industries, seeks to expand private property rights and drastically reduce environmental regulation of public lands.

1990-1992: Radical officials in Catron County, N.M., pass a total of 21 ordinances meant to supersede federal authority over public lands. Among other things, the laws define federal grazing permits as private property — not a public service offered by the federal government — just as many Bundy supporters will two decades later. Local county politicians warn of “civil war” if the government doesn’t back off, with one specifically warning of violence if ranchers’ cattle are seized.



June 3-14, 1992: At the United Nations’ so-called “Earth Summit” in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, President **George H.W. Bush** and the leaders of 177 other nations sign Agenda 21, a sustainability planning document. Although the document is completely nonbinding and contains no requirements or enforcement mechanisms, it will come under attack from the John Birch Society and many other Patriot organizations that claim it is an effort, hidden in the guise of environmentalism, to impose socialism and eradicate property rights in the United States.

Sept. 11, 1990: President Bush, describing the post-Cold War world, outlines his vision of a “New World Order.” Conspiracy-minded Patriots take this as confirmation of secret plans to create a one-world government.



Aug. 31, 1992: White supremacist **Randy Weaver** surrenders after an 11-day standoff at his cabin on Ruby Ridge, Idaho, that left his wife, son and a U.S. marshal dead. The incident, which began after Weaver refused to

go to court on illegal weapons charges, galvanizes many on the radical right, who see it as proof that the federal officials will murder those who oppose their growing power.

Oct. 23, 1992: Anti-Semitic Christian Identity pastor Pete Peters hosts the “Rocky Mountain Rendezvous” in Estes Park, Colo., where 160 extremists, reacting to Ruby Ridge, lay out strategies that will help shape the militia movement.

Feb. 28, 1993: Four federal agents and several cultists are killed in a gunfight when the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms raids the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, over illegal weapons charges. The 51-day standoff that follows rivets the nation. Most on the radical right see the Davidians as heroes standing up to federal oppression and unjust gun laws.



April 19, 1993: The FBI tries to end the Waco standoff by injecting tear gas into a building that subsequently bursts into flames, leaving almost 80 Davidians dead. More

than any other event, the debacle ignites the militia movement.

Oct. 31, 1993: A bomb is tossed on to the roof of the state BLM headquarters in Reno, Nev., amid disputes over federal power in the West.

Nov. 30, 1993: The Brady Bill, imposing a waiting period for handgun purchasers, is signed into law, infuriating many gun enthusiasts. Anger at

the bill, along with a 1994 ban on some assault weapons, helps fuel the coming militia movement. Richard Mack, a radical Arizona sheriff and county supremacist who in 2014 will travel to the Bundy ranch, joins others in suing the government over the Brady Bill, eventually winning a weakening of its background check provisions.

1994: Starting this year, at least 20 state legislatures consider or pass resolutions supporting states’ rights and condemning the federal government. Many cite the 10th Amendment, which declares that powers not reserved to the federal government belong to the states. Some states use the 10th Amendment in failed attempts to evade environmental, labor and other kinds of federal regulations.

1994: 10th Amendment advocates and militiamen in the West, angered by President Bill Clinton’s attempts to enforce environmental law, increasingly demonize federal agencies like the BLM, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service, leading to fistfights, death threats and bombings.



Jan. 1, 1994: The first major modern militia, the Militia of Montana, is officially inaugurated by white supremacist **John Trochmann**.

July 4, 1994: Nye County, Nev., County Commissioner Richard Carver, backed by armed supporters, illegally bulldozes open a National Forest road that had been ordered closed, later boasting that if federal forest rangers had resisted they would have been shot. The action is later dubbed Sagebrush II.

Nov. 14, 1994: A militiaman threatens an Audubon Society official with a noose after the official testifies for an environmental measure. The incident is one of hundreds reflecting radical hatred of regulation of the environment.

1995: BLM officials tell their employees not to resist if they are arrested, even unlawfully, by local officials espousing county supremacy, and the Idaho BLM director issues a memo on “County Supremacy Movement Safety Guidance.” The U.S. Forest Service tells workers they don’t have to wear their uniforms or drive government vehicles if they feel endangered by local activists.

March 1995: Reacting to a federal court order closing six national forests to logging, grazing and mining, an Idaho militia leader threatens “blood in the streets” if the order is not rescinded.

March 30, 1995: A Forest Service office in Carson City, Nev., is bombed a day after another bomb blew up a concrete toilet facility in a Forest Service campground near Elko, Nev. The day after the Carson City attack, a Forest Service facility in Sparks, Nev., is evacuated when a caller warns, “You’re next.”



April 19, 1995: A truck bomb brings down the **Oklahoma City** federal building, killing 168 people, including 19 small children in a day-care center, in America’s worst domestic terrorist

attack. Timothy McVeigh, later convicted in the bombing, was angered by the federal government’s actions in Waco and elsewhere.

Aug. 4, 1995: A bomb destroys a van belonging to a Forest Service ranger whose Carson City office was bombed four months earlier. Ranger Guy Pence is not at home when the bombing occurs in his driveway, but his family is.

April 7, 2001: The federal Bureau of Land Reclamation, facing a severe drought and worried about the endangered suckerfish, decides to cut off nearly all water to farmers downstream from Klamath Falls, Ore., costing the farmers millions of dollars in lost production. Huge numbers of people, including militia members, come to the area to protest angrily, forcing the floodgates open several times and, in some cases, threatening violence if the government does not relent. The sympathetic local sheriff declares that his is the highest legitimate law enforcement position, echoing arguments made by the Posse and other county supremacists.

Early 2008: Due to a spike in threats from “sovereign citizens” and others against federal judges and prosecutors, the U.S. Marshals Service opens a clearinghouse near Washington, D.C., for assessing risks. In fiscal 2008, there will be 1,278 threats and harassing communications — more than dou-

ble the number of six years earlier. Also in 2008, the Department of Justice launches a National Tax Defier Initiative to address the swelling number of cases involving antigovernment tax protesters.

April 19, 2009: The Oath Keepers, a Patriot group made up mostly of active-duty members of law enforcement and the military, holds its first muster in Lexington, Mass., site of the opening shots of the Revolutionary War. Vowing to fulfill the oaths to the Constitution that they swore, the Oath Keepers lists 10 orders its members won’t obey, including two that reference U.S. concentration camps — a reflection of the group’s conspiracist ideas about a supposedly imminent globalist takeover. The group’s leader, Stewart Rhodes, will later travel with followers to Bundy’s ranch.

May 21-22, 2009: Some 30 “freedom keepers” meet in Jekyll Island, Ga., in a gathering that helps launch an explosive resurgence of the Patriot movement. Convened by IRS- and Fed-hater Bob Schulz, the conclave warns of “increasing national instability” and a coming New World Order.

Nov. 11-22, 2009: More than 100 delegates from 48 states travel to St. Charles, Ill., to attend an 11-day “continental congress” hosted by Bob Schulz’s We the People. Planned at the earlier Jekyll Island meeting, the event is named after the gathering that was the first step toward the American Revolution.

Feb. 18-20, 2010: The Conservative Political Action Conference is co-sponsored by groups including the Oath Keepers and the John Birch Society, which once charged that President Dwight D. Eisenhower was a communist agent. The arrangement underlines the increasing influence of conspiracy-minded Patriot organizations and their propaganda in relatively mainstream right-wing circles.

March 2010: A CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll finds that 56% of Americans believe the federal government is “so large and powerful that it poses an immediate threat to the rights and freedoms of ordinary citizens.” In 1995, just days after the Oklahoma City bombing, a *USA Today* poll found that 39% of Americans then agreed with the same statement.



March 19, 2010: Former Alabama militiaman **Mike Vanderboegh**, a leader of the recently formed III Percent Patriots, calls on followers to protest health care reform by throwing bricks through the windows of local Democratic Party offices. In

the following days, Democratic offices across the country report their windows smashed. Four years later, Vanderboegh will make his way to the Bundy standoff, where he is joined by other members of the Three Percenters.



April 19, 2010: Patriot leaders including Richard Mack and **Stewart Rhodes** play prominent roles at a Second Amendment March in Washington, D.C.

Dec. 2, 2011: A local hunting and fishing group sues the Forest Service for closing several roads in the San Juan National Forest in Colorado. Over the next year, militia members and others angrily join in protests against the federal government, which they say is taking away their rights. The local sheriff, taking a page from the Posse, declares that sheriffs are “the ultimate law enforcement authority.”



January 2012: **Richard Mack's** new Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association, which believes county sheriffs are “the highest executive authority in a county and there-

fore constitutionally empowered to be able to keep federal agents out of the county,” holds its first conference in Las Vegas, some 60 miles from the Bundy ranch. Mack, who claims more than 500 sheriffs are followers, argues that “the greatest threat we face today” is “our own federal government.”

January 2012: The Republican National Committee passes a resolution denouncing Agenda 21 as a “destructive and insidious scheme” to impose a “socialist/communist redistribution of wealth” on America, a completely unfounded view of the voluntary UN sustainability plan. The resolution reflects how deeply Patriot conspiracy theories about environmentalism have penetrated the political mainstream.

Nov. 16, 2012: The entire Baldwin County, Ala., Planning and Zoning Commission resigns in disgust after the local County Commission votes to rescind a local, prize-winning planning document based on Agenda 21. The County Commission’s killing of the plan, which was followed by a crowd singing “God Bless America,” is one of scores of cases of officials around the nation abandoning environmental planning efforts because of multiplying far-right attacks on Agenda 21.

January 2013: Gilberton Borough, Pa., passes an ordinance “nullifying all federal, state or local acts in violation of the Second Amendment.” The driving force behind the new law is local police chief Mark Kessler, a supporter of Richard Mack who later loses his job after an epithet-filled rant against “libtards” and Democrats.



April 12, 2014: A confrontation between BLM and law enforcement personnel and **Cliven Bundy** and his supporters nearly ends in bloodshed as militia members and others point their weapons at the federal officers. The BLM backs down, calling off the roundup of Bundy’s cattle that precipitated the standoff. Federal officials say later that a criminal investigation of Bundy and his supporters is under way.



MEDIA AND GENERAL INQUIRIES

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