

From Republican Rhetoric to Right-Wing Terror

By Jon Perr
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The slaughter of three [Pittsburgh policemen](#) by an assailant who "didn't like our [gun] rights being infringed upon" has again highlighted the growing danger from [incendiary Republican rhetoric](#) spawning right-wing terror. After all, just days ago, Rep. [Michele Bachmann](#) (R-MN) announced, "I want people in Minnesota armed and dangerous." Fox News host [Glenn Beck](#) warned of a "Constitution under attack" and predicted a coming "civil war" while featuring guests like NRA chief [Wayne Lapiere](#) whose group spent millions in 2008 denouncing Barack Obama's supposed "deep-rooted hatred of firearm freedoms."



Disturbingly, the paranoia in action of Pittsburgh cop killer [Richard Poplawski](#) is hardly an isolated episode. As I've [suggested previously](#), whether concerning guns, abortion, gay Americans, immigration or judicial appointments, the line connecting the rhetoric of the Republican Party and the mainstream conservative movement behind it to right-wing terror is a very short one.

Pro-Gun and Anti-Government

Two other recent cases shed light on the phenomenon of right-wing terror. In a little noticed story, white supremacist [James Cummings](#) murdered by his wife last December in Maine had been assembling materials to manufacture a "dirty bomb." And in Tennessee, a follower not of Hitler but conservative hate merchant [Bernard Goldberg](#) cited the author's writings as justification for his July shooting at a Unitarian church. In his suicide note, the shooter [James Adkisson](#) informed Americans his was a "hate crime" against "damn left-wing liberals":

"This was a symbolic killing. Who I wanted to kill was every Democrat in the Senate & House, the 100 people in Bernard Goldberg's book. I'd like to kill everyone in the mainstream media. But I know those people were inaccessible to me. I couldn't get to the generals & high ranking officers of the Marxist movement so I went after the foot soldiers, the chickenshit liberals that vote in these traitorous people. Someone had to get the ball rolling. I volunteered. I hope others do the same. It's the only way we can rid America of this cancerous pestilence."

Like Poplawski, while Cummings and Adkisson may have existed on the fringes of the conservative movement, some of their rhetoric parrots the words of mainstream Republican politicians and right-wing pundits.

Judicial Intimidation

The not-too-thinly veiled threats to American judges offer a particularly telling example. In June 2007, [Judge Reggie Walton](#) was only the latest to receive threatening calls and letters, just days after he handed down his sentence in the Scooter Libby case.

Sadly, many of the leading lights in the Republican Party have it made clear that judicial intimidation is now an acceptable part of conservative discourse and political strategy. Senator John Cornyn (R-TX), himself a former Texas Supreme Court Justice, has been at the forefront of GOP advocacy of violence towards members of the bench whose rulings part ways with conservative orthodoxy.

Back in 2005, Cornyn was one of the [GOP standard bearers](#) in the conservative fight against so-called "judicial activism" in the wake of the Republicans' disastrous intervention in the [Terri Schiavo](#) affair. On April 4th, [Cornyn took to the Senate floor](#) to issue a not-too-thinly veiled threat to judges opposing his reactionary agenda. Just days after the murders of a judge in Atlanta and the spouse of another in Chicago, Cornyn offered his endorsement of judicial intimidation:

"I don't know if there is a cause-and-effect connection, but we have seen some recent episodes of courthouse violence in this country...And I wonder whether there may be some connection between the perception in some quarters, on some occasions, where judges are making political decisions yet are unaccountable to the public, that it builds up and builds up and builds up to the point where some people engage in, engage in violence."

As it turns out, Cornyn was merely echoing the words of the soon-to-be indicted House Majority Leader Tom Delay. On March 31st, Delay issued a statement regarding the consistent rulings in favor of Michael Schiavo by all federal and state court judges involved:

"The time will come for the men responsible for this to answer for their behavior, but not today."

The impact of tacit conservative endorsement of violence against judges cannot be dismissed. After all, it extends to members of the Supreme Court of the United States. In March 2006, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg revealed that she and Justice Sandra Day O'Connor were the [targets of death threats](#). On February 28th, 2005, the marshal of the Court informed O'Connor and Ginsburg of an Internet posting citing their references to international law in Court decisions (a frequent whipping boy of the right) as requiring their assassination:

"This is a huge threat to our Republic and Constitutional freedom...If you are what you say you are, and NOT armchair patriots, then those two justices will not live another week."

Neither O'Connor nor Ginsburg are shy about making the connection between Republican rhetoric of judicial intimidation and the upswing in threats and actual violence against judges. Ginsburg noted that they "fuel the irrational fringe" O'Connor blamed Cornyn and his fellow travelers for "creating a culture" in which violence towards judges is merely another political tactic:

"It gets worse. It doesn't help when a high-profile senator suggests a 'cause-and-effect connection' [between controversial rulings and subsequent acts of violence.]"

When [anthrax spores were mailed](#) to the Supreme Court in 2001, it did not require a leap of imagination to speculate on the ideological persuasion of the culprit. Aided by best-selling conservative author and media personality [Ann Coulter](#), who joked in January 2006, "We need somebody to put rat poisoning in Justice Stevens' creme brulee," the right-wing endorsement of retribution against judges increasingly permeates the culture.

Beyond Gay-Bashing

Judges, of course, aren't the only target of conservative venom. [The GOP crusade against gay Americans is a strategic centerpiece of 21st century Republican political strategy. Despite the seemingly endless parade of Mark Foley, Jim West, Ted Haggard, Ed Shrock, Larry Craig and a host of other once-closeted conservatives, the demonization of gay Americans and their supposed "[homosexual agenda](#)" by the Republican leadership and its radical right allies like Tony Perkins remains the reddest of red meat for so called "[values voters](#)."

To be sure, the tactics and rhetoric of the gay-bashing are right are tied at the hip. In 2004, same-sex marriage ban ballot measures in key battleground states helped bring [Karl Rove's](#) four million new evangelical voters to the polls, ensuring President Bush's reelection.

Then, of course, there are the words of the Republican leadership and its echo chamber. Ex-Senator [Rick Santorum](#) (R-PA) and his one-time Texas colleague [John Cornyn](#) equate same-sex marriage to polygamy and bestiality, with "man-on-dog" and "man-on-box turtle" analogies. Columnist [Ann Coulter](#), a Mitt Romney supporter and fixture on right-wing media, called [John Edwards](#) a "faggot" and [Al Gore](#) a "total fag."

(For her part, Coulter also defended the racist the [Council of Conservative Citizens](#), a successor to the White Citizens' Councils of Jim Crow days. [Among those Republicans](#) appearing at CCC events or contributing to its magazine *Southern Partisan* are former Senator Trent Lott, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour and former Attorney General John Ashcroft.)

There is a continuum of hate that runs from the fringe of the conservative movement directly to the Republican leadership; the distance from [Fred Phelps](#) to the Republican National Committee is also a short one. As you'll recall, Phelps' Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, organizes virulent anti-gay protests at U.S. military funerals, complete with signs such as "God Hates Fags" and "Thank God for IEDs," deaths it deems divine punishment for America's tolerance of gay lifestyles. Though [Phelps later lost](#) an \$11 million lawsuit brought by a grieving father, President Bush and his amen corner share responsibility for giving the likes of Phelps aid and comfort.

Anti-Abortion Terrorists

Then, of course, there is abortion and reproductive rights. In [December 2004](#), for example, anti-choice forces cheered as Sam Brownback (R-KS) and Tom Coburn (R-OK) were placed on the Senate Judiciary Committee. Brownback has been among the prime architects of so-called "fetal pain" legislation would have required a woman seeking an abortion to be told

that the fetus might feel pain. Coburn, the freshman Senator and and obstetrician, has advocated the death penalty for doctors who perform abortions.

The logical leap from Coburn's office to the legions of anti-abortion extremists is a short one. No doubt, Atlanta Olympics and family planning clinic bomber [Eric Rudolph](#) or [James Kopp](#), killer of doctor Bernard Slepian, would applaud these Republican leaders. To paraphrase Tony Perkins, "It is hard not to draw a line between the hostility" the conservative movement foments towards reproductive rights advocates and the violence of 2007 would-be Austin, Texas clinic terrorist [Paul Ross Evans](#).

Of course, to former Republican vice presidential candidate and conservative heartthrob [Sarah Palin](#), the likes of Rudolph, Kopp or Evans don't qualify as terrorists. While even Attorney General Ashcroft [used the "T" word](#) to describe Rudolph upon his arrest in 2003, during an October 2008 interview with NBC's Brian Williams [Palin refused](#) to similarly brand violent right-wing radicals as the terrorists:

WILLIAMS: Is an abortion clinic bomber a terrorist, under this definition, governor?

PALIN: (Sigh). There's no question that Bill Ayers via his own admittance was one who sought to destroy our U.S. Capitol and our Pentagon. That is a domestic terrorist. There's no question there. Now, others who would want to engage in harming innocent Americans or facilities that uh, it would be unacceptable. I don't know if you're going to use the word terrorist there.

But we should. As Charles Blow suggested in a [New York Times op-ed](#) which coincidentally appeared the same day as the carnage in Pittsburgh, the "hotheaded expostulation" of Chuck Norris, Glenn Beck, Michele Bachmann and their ilk isn't "all just harmless talk."

Increasingly, the conservative movement finds its strongest support at the dark nexus inhabited by gun rights advocates, religious zealots, white supremacists, anti-immigrant xenophobes, pro-life activists and anti-government crusaders. (To be sure, the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995, the deadliest terrorist attack on American soil prior to 9/11, wasn't the product of the liberal media.) And as [David Neiwert](#) warns in his new book, *The Eliminationists: How Hate Talk Radicalized the American Right*, those ever more dangerous elements are no longer the fringe within the conservative movement.

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