

# The Eliminationists

How Hate Talk Radicalized the  
American Right

David Neiwert



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David Neiwert

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# Introduction

## Unleashing the Demonic

### LIBERAL HUNTING PERMIT

No Bag Limit—Tagging Not Required. May be used while under the influence of Alcohol. May be used to Hunt Liberals at Gay Pride Parades, Democrat Conventions, Union Rallies, Handgun Control Meetings, News media Association, Lesbian Luncheons and Hollywood Functions.

MAY HUNT DAY OR NIGHT WITH OR WITHOUT DOGS.

*A bumper sticker available at some conservative Web sites, spotted near a gay-pride parade in San Francisco.<sup>1</sup>*

In July of 2008, a graying, mustachioed man from the Knoxville suburb of Powell, Tennessee, sat down and wrote out by hand a four-page manifesto describing his hatred of all things liberal and his belief that “all liberals should be killed.”

When he was done, Jim David Adkisson drove his little Ford Escape to the parking lot of the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church in Knoxville. A few days before, the church had attracted media attention for its efforts to open a local coffee shop for gays and lesbians. Leaving the manifesto on the seat of the car, he walked inside the church carrying a guitar case stuffed with a shotgun and 76 rounds of ammunition.

The congregants were enjoying the opening scene from the



church's production of the musical *Annie Jr.* when Adkisson, in a hallway outside the sanctuary, abruptly opened the guitar case, pulled out the shotgun, fired off a harmless round that startled everyone, then walked into the sanctuary and began firing indiscriminately. Witnesses report he was saying "hateful things." An unsuspecting 61-year-old grandmother and retired schoolteacher named Linda Kraeger was hit in the face with a shotgun blast. A 60-year-old foster father named Greg McKendry got up to shield others from the attack and was hit in the chest.

When Adkisson stopped to reload, a group of men, who had already begun closing around him, tackled him and wrested away his gun. Adkisson complained that the men were hurting him. "The only thing he said was he was asking us to get off of him, that he wasn't doing anything," said Jamie Parkey, one of the men who tackled him. "We just looked at each other incredulously, like 'How dare you?'"<sup>2</sup>

Greg McKendry was dead at the scene. Linda Kraeger died the next day. Seven other congregants were wounded.

A detective who interviewed Adkisson and examined his four-page manifesto reported to his superiors that Adkisson targeted the church "because of its liberal teachings and his belief that all liberals should be killed because they were ruining the country, and that he felt that the Democrats had tied his country's hands in the war on terror and they had ruined every institution in America with the aid of media outlets."

When the detective interviewed Adkisson, he said he'd decided that since "he could not get to the leaders of the liberal movement that he would then target those that had voted them in to office."<sup>3</sup>

Knoxville's police chief told reporters the next day that Adkisson was motivated by his "hatred of the liberal movement" and "liberals in general, as well as gays." He was also frustrated by

his inability to get a job, a problem he also blamed on liberals. His neighbors in Powell described Adkisson as “a Confederate” and a “believer in the Old South.”<sup>4</sup>

When detectives went to Adkisson’s home in Powell, they found—scattered among the ammunition, guns, and brass knuckles—books written by leading conservative pundits: *Liberalism Is a Mental Disorder* by Michael Savage, *Let Freedom Ring* by Sean Hannity, and *The O’Reilly Factor* by Bill O’Reilly, among others. Adkisson’s manifesto, released some months later to the public, was largely a distillation of these works, ranting about how “Liberals have attack’d every major institution that made America great. . . . Liberals are evil, they embrace the tenets of Karl Marx, they’re Marxist, socialist, communists.”

And then he went the next step, in the logic of anger:

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 [*sic*]. 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. . . .

If decent patriotic Americans could vote three times in every election we couldn’t stem this tide of liberalism that’s destroying America. Liberals are a pest like termites. Millions of them. Each little bite contributes to the downfall of this great Nation. The only way we can rid ourselves of this evil is Kill them in the streets. Kill them where they gather.

I’d like to encourage other like minded people to do what I’ve done. If life aint worth living anymore don’t just Kill yourself, do something for your country before you go. Go Kill Liberals.<sup>5</sup>

The events that sunny Sunday left the church's pastor, Rev. Chris Buice, with a shattered congregation. "People were killed in the sanctuary of my church, which should be the holy place, the safe place. People were injured," he told PBS's Rick Karr a couple of weeks later. "A man came in here, totally dehumanized us—members of our church were not human to him. Where did he get that? Where did he get that sense that we were not human?"<sup>6</sup>

Shortly after John McCain's second debate appearance with Barack Obama on October 7, 2008—a debate most observers thought Obama won handily—Republican officials from his campaign told reporters they intended to mount a more aggressive series of attacks against the Democratic front-runner, who was widening his lead in the polls. According to the *Washington Post*, they believed that "to win in November they must shift the conversation back to questions about the Democrat's judgment, honesty and personal associations."<sup>7</sup>

Within days, McCain and his running mate, Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, began aggressively attacking Obama for his past associations with radical leftist William Ayers and his supposed lack of trustworthiness. Palin accused Obama of "palling around with terrorists," while McCain told a crowd, "We've all heard what he's said. But it's less clear what he's done, or what he will do."

The anger stirred up at these rallies became palpable in concrete ways. At one Palin rally, the governor was blaming the media for a series of disastrous television network interviews she had recently given. At one point, supporters began turning on members of the press crew in attendance, even haranguing a camera crew covering the event. One Palin backer turned viciously on a black member of the TV crew and told him, "Sit down, boy!" Attendees at McCain rallies began shouting out "Terrorist!" when Obama's name was

mentioned, and one attendee reportedly shouted out “Kill him!” when Palin was describing Ayers’s ties to Obama (though the Secret Service later insisted the report was unfounded).<sup>8</sup> A camera crew at a Palin rally in Ohio interviewed some of the people attending and came away with a series of chilling remarks:<sup>9</sup>

I’m afraid if he wins, the blacks will take over. He’s not a Christian! This is a Christian nation! What is our country gonna end up like?

He’s related to a known terrorist, for one.

He must support terrorists! You know, uh, if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it must be a duck. And that to me is Obama.

Obama and his wife, I’m concerned that they could be anti-white. That he might hide that.

I don’t like the fact that he thinks us white people are trash . . . because we’re not!

When Obama confronted McCain about this kind of rhetoric at their third and final debate on October 15, McCain demurred that he consistently decried this kind of talk from his campaign, and he defended his supporters “categorically” as “the most dedicated, patriotic men and women that are in this nation.” Then he went on not only to dredge up the William Ayers association again but also to accuse Obama of aiding and abetting a community-activist group, ACORN—which had been recently in the news over irregularities involving its voter-registration efforts. He said ACORN was “maybe perpetrating one of the greatest frauds in voter history in this country, maybe destroying the fabric of democracy.”

Almost overnight, ACORN offices at various locales around the country were vandalized. A community activist in Cleveland received an email warning that she was “going to have her life

ended,” and an ACORN staffer in Rhode Island got a phoned-in death threat complete with racial epithets. Voice mails came pouring in, too:

Hi, I was just calling to let you all know that Barack Obama needs to get hung. He’s a fucking nigger, and he’s a piece of shit. You guys are fraudulent, and you need to go to hell. All the niggers on oak trees. They’re gonna get all hung, honeys, they’re gonna get assassinated, they’re gonna get killed.

You liberal idiots. Dumb shits. Welfare bums. You guys just fucking come to our country, consume every natural resource there is, and make a lot of babies. That’s all you guys do. And then suck up the welfare and expect everyone else to pay for your hospital bills for your kids. I just say let your kids die. That’s the best move. Just let your children die. Forget about paying for hospital bills for them. I’m not gonna do it. You guys are lowlifes. And I hope you all die.

Then there were the emails like this one:

You blue gums are not going to steal the election.

All of you porch monkeys need to go back to Africa.<sup>10</sup>

McCain and Palin shortly began ratcheting back their rhetoric, especially after polls showed that such tactics were losing rather than gaining votes. But the fuse had been lit: threats and intimidating behavior continued to be reported around the country. In Ohio, a barn covered with pro-Obama signs was vandalized twice, the first time with racial epithets.<sup>11</sup> In Sacramento, vandals scrawled “White Power,” “KKK” and “Nigger” over the front of a large homemade Obama display. In Idaho Falls, a large Obama sign had a Nazi swastika painted on it.<sup>12</sup> In Tennessee, two neo-Nazi “skinheads” were arrested for plotting to assassinate Obama; according to federal

agents, they planned to kill 102 black people in a murderous spree that would culminate in a suicidal attack on Obama.<sup>13</sup>

As of the date of this writing, nothing indicated that the election's outcome would put this fuse out. Indeed, the Southern Poverty Law Center reported that it had recorded more than 200 hate-related incidents sparked by Obama's election in the weeks immediately following.<sup>14</sup>

These seemingly disparate incidents—the shooting in Kentucky and the increase of hateful speech in the campaign—received prominent coverage in the national news, but few noted the deep and significant connection between them. After all, what does yet another random “lone wolf” shooting spree in a public venue have to do with election-year rhetoric on the presidential campaign trail?

What connects them is that they are both manifestations of one of the most troubling aspects of modern American politics: the impulse to demonize our political adversaries, and the consequences of that demonization on our discourse and our body politic. This impulse has coursed through American politics since its beginnings, and it certainly exists on all sides of the nation's political aisles today.

But more particularly, both episodes reflect a trend that has manifested itself with increasing intensity in the past decade: the positing of elimination as the solution to political disagreement. Rather than engaging in a dialogue over political and cultural issues, one side simply dehumanizes its opponents and suggests, and at times demands, their excision. This tendency is almost singularly peculiar to the American Right. It manifests itself in many venues: on radio talk shows and in political speeches, in bestselling books and babbling blogs. Most of all, we can feel it on the ground:

in our everyday lives, in our encounters, big and small, with each other.

The little Tualatin pancake house was an Oregon woman's favorite breakfast spot because the owner, who often doubled as waitress, had always been friendly to her family, often carrying her youngest son about and serving them with a ready smile. But one morning in 2004, she went there alone for a cup of coffee and a side order of bacon, and wound up fleeing in fear.

An older couple in one of the booths next to hers was playing a card game; they told the waitress they were playing "Al Gore Gin," which they explained meant you could make up the rules as you went along and "anything goes." When the waitress came to the woman's table to fill her cup with an amused look on her face, the woman remarked that it sounded more like a "Bush game" to her. Overhearing this, the card-playing couple started talking loudly about the virtues of President Bush.

Soon the occupants of another booth—three men, one middle-aged and two in their twenties—began chiming in loudly. In the process of declaiming the virtues of the president, the older man turned to the woman and remarked, "I hate all you fucking Democrats. You fucking deserve to die. Hopefully, we can kill the fucking bunch of you soon."

The woman quickly got up, paid for her meal, and left, shaking and shaken. As she did so, she noticed that no one said anything to the man, who had turned to the others and carried on with his tirade.<sup>15</sup>

Timothy Burke, a history professor at Swarthmore College near Philadelphia, probably felt perfectly comfortable driving around campus with a John Kerry sticker affixed to his bumper. But he wasn't prepared for what could happen on the drive home.

Burke lives only about a five-minute drive from campus along a narrow and winding road. He was heading home for lunch one day when he suddenly found he was being aggressively tailgated by a man in a pickup truck, which pulled up to within inches of his rear bumper and stayed there at 45 miles per hour. Burke slowed gradually as he approached the turnoff to his residential street. The pickup stayed right behind him, following him as he made his turn.

Driving slowly through the neighborhood, Burke was further surprised when the truck suddenly passed him on the left at high speed. Burke turned into his driveway as the pickup came to a screeching halt at the stop sign some 75 feet down the street. Burke got out of his car and stared with amazement at the man, who suddenly shifted the truck back into reverse toward Burke's home while simultaneously shouting incoherently out his window at Burke. Burke yelled at him, "Why were you tailgating me like that? I was already going well over the speed limit!"

"Because you're a fucking faggot, fucker! You fuck! I should have fucking hit you! I should hit you now!" The man, a fiftyish fellow with a walrus mustache, continued on in this vein, until Burke yelled back, "What is your FUCKING problem? What did I do to you?"

The man pointed to his car and the Kerry-Edwards sticker. "You faggot, you voted for that war criminal! I'm going to beat the shit out of you." Burke noticed the man turning a shade of purple and realized he wasn't just putting on a show. He pulled out his cell phone to call the police just as the man screeched away, still yelling, his tires smoking. Burke spent about ten minutes "kind of trembling as the adrenaline drain[ed] away."<sup>16</sup>

Another college professor, Tony Van Der Meer, teaches African studies at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. He had a



similar up-close encounter with someone who thought he ought to be shot, though in this case, the aggressor was an on-campus National Guard recruiter. And in the ensuing melee, Van Der Meer was the one tackled by three police officers and arrested.

For Van Der Meer, it all began with a typical cross-campus stroll on his way to lunch in early April 2003. As he entered the lobby of the school's McCormick Building, he saw one of his students, a senior named Tony Naro, in an angry exchange with a Guard recruiter (who was never identified). Naro, who was handing out leaflets commemorating Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, later said the recruiter started the conflict by heckling him. "He called me a [expletive] communist," said Naro.

Someone called the campus police because, according to the police report, someone else was "blocking the guardsmen from handing out informational pamphlets."

Naro spotted Van Der Meer and called him over for help; the professor suggested he move elsewhere, away from the recruiters, to avoid trouble. At this point, one of the recruiters, who had been reading one of Naro's fliers, turned to the young man and told him he ought to be "shot in the head like King." Van Der Meer upbraided the recruiter for talking that way to a student. The recruiter replied that Van Der Meer "should be shot, too." A shouting match erupted. One report said that Van Der Meer responded, "No. You should be shot in the head."

At this point the police intervened, and Van Der Meer took the brunt of it. He was pushed to the ground by the campus officer, tackled by three cops, and handcuffed. The police claimed in their report that Van Der Meer had initiated the contact with the officer by pushing him in the chest, but this was not corroborated by a single witness. Some 12 witnesses later attested that Van Der Meer had not touched anyone until the first officer pushed him down.

Deanna Brunetti, who was selling class rings in the lobby, told authorities that she heard the guardsman say to Van Der Meer, “You should be shot in the head, you and all you peacemaker people.” She added, “I saw the cop grab the black man by the lapel and push him to the ground. He almost pushed the black man into my table. I didn’t see the black man raise a finger to the officer. Not once.”

Eventually, Suffolk County prosecutors dropped the charges against Van Der Meer.<sup>17</sup>

Such incidents—the nasty personal encounters, the ugliness at campaign rallies, the violent acts of “lone wolf” gunmen—are anything but rare. If you’re a liberal in America—or for that matter, anyone who happens to have run afoul of the conservative movement and its followers—you probably have similar tales to tell about unexpected and brutal viciousness from otherwise ordinary, everyday people, nearly all of them political conservatives, nearly all directed at their various enemies: liberals, Latinos, Muslims, and just about anyone who disagrees with them.

What motivates this kind of talk and behavior is called *eliminationism*: a politics and a culture that shuns dialogue and the democratic exchange of ideas in favor of the pursuit of outright elimination of the opposing side, either through suppression, exile, and ejection, or extermination.

Rhetorically, eliminationism takes on certain distinctive shapes. It always depicts its opposition as beyond the pale, the embodiment of evil itself, unfit for participation in their vision of society, and thus worthy of elimination. It often further depicts its designated Enemy as vermin (especially rats and cockroaches) or diseases, and disease-like cancers on the body politic. A close corollary—but not as nakedly eliminationist—is the claim that opponents are traitors or criminals and that they pose a threat to our national security.

Eliminationism is often voiced as crude “jokes,” a sense of humor inevitably predicated on venomous hatred. And such rhetoric—we know as surely as we know that night follows day—eventually begets action, with inevitably tragic results.

Two key factors distinguish eliminationist rhetoric from other political hyperbole:

1. It is *focused on an enemy within*, people who constitute entire blocs of the citizen populace.
2. It advocates the excision and extermination of those entire blocs by violent or civil means.

Eliminationism—including the rhetoric that precedes it and fuels it—expresses a kind of self-hatred. In an American culture that advertises itself as predicated on equal opportunity, eliminationism runs precisely counter to those ideals. Eliminationists, at heart, hate the very idea of an inclusive America.

The origins of such hatred, like slavery and war, are man’s most ancient and savage impulses: the desire to dominate others, through violence if necessary. The expressions of such hatred go largely unnoticed and unexamined, perhaps because they expose a side of human nature so ugly we prefer not to even recognize its existence. Only recently have we even coined a term like eliminationism with which to frame it.

The term was first used meaningfully by historian Daniel Jonah Goldhagen in his controversial text *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. According to Goldhagen, “eliminationist antisemitism” had a unique life in German culture and eventually was the driving force behind the Holocaust.<sup>18</sup> Goldhagen never provides a concise definition of the word, but rather offers a massively detailed description of the eliminationist world view:

The eliminationist mind-set that characterized virtually all who spoke out on the “Jewish Problem” from the end of the eighteenth century onward was another constant in Germans’ thinking about Jews. For Germany to be properly ordered, regulated, and, for many, safeguarded, Jewishness had to be eliminated from German society. What “elimination”—in the sense of successfully ridding Germany of Jewishness—meant, and the manner in which this was to be done, was unclear and hazy to many, and found no consensus during the period of modern German antisemitism. But the necessity of the elimination of Jewishness was clear to all. It followed from the conception of the Jews as alien invaders of the German body social. If two people are conceived of as binary opposites, with the qualities of goodness inhering in one people, and those of evil in the other, then the exorcism of that evil from the shared social and temporal space, by whatever means, would be urgent, an imperative. “The German Volk,” asserted one antisemite before the midpoint of the century, “needs only to topple the Jew” in order to become “united and free.”<sup>19</sup>

*Hitler’s Willing Executioners* is an important and impressive piece of scholarship, particularly in the extent to which it catalogues the willing participation of the “ordinary” citizenry in so many murderous acts, as well the hatemongering that precipitated those acts. His identification of “eliminationism” as a central impulse of the Nazi project was not only heavily borne out by the evidence but was an important insight into the underlying psychology of fascism.

The eliminationist project is in many ways the signature of fascism, partly because it proceeds naturally from fascism’s embrace of what Oxford Brookes scholar Roger Griffin calls *palingenesis*, or a Phoenix-like national rebirth, as its core myth.<sup>20</sup> The Nazi example clearly demonstrates how eliminationist rhetoric has con-

sistently preceded, and heralded, the eventual assumption of the eliminationist project; indeed, such rhetoric has played a critical role in giving *permission* for it to proceed, by creating the cultural and psychological conditions that enable the subsequent violence.

Goldhagen focuses almost solely on the Holocaust and the virulently anti-Semitic form of eliminationism that took root in Europe prior to World War II. However, we can see eliminationism playing a role in human history throughout the ages—including its special role in American history and the shaping of American culture, right up to the present.

At the time I read Goldhagen's text, I was engaged in a historical research project about the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.<sup>21</sup> I was struck by the similarity between Goldhagen's description of the buildup to Nazi power and the rhetoric and behavior of Americans for the 40 and more years preceding the internment toward Asians generally and the Japanese specifically.

A peek into the darker corners of American history tells us that this phenomenon has not been restricted to Asians. Eliminationist rhetoric, followed and accompanied by an actual campaign of often violent eliminationism, has infused the most shameful episodes of our history as a nation: the destruction of the Native American peoples; the subjugation of African Americans from slavery to Jim Crow—the lynching era and “sundown towns”; and the nativist anti-immigrant campaigns of various eras that targeted ethnic minorities—from the Irish to the Germans to the Italians and the Asians, and today, the Latinos. It lives today in the form of hate crimes and hateful rhetoric directed against gays and lesbians, Muslims, and various other minorities.

More recently, eliminationism has been directed not only at these minorities but also at the “liberals” who are perceived as their enablers: antiwar activists, environmentalists, guardians of civil

rights. Indications are that the hateful rhetoric and its poisonous consequences are starting to spread.

I began observing this phenomenon back in 2003 at my blog *Orcinus*, almost as an offhand observation. I asked readers to chip in and tell me their own experiences and to link me to others' stories of the same kind. It was like tapping into a high-voltage power line. Comments poured in to my blog, accompanied by as many if not more emails.

Such incidents are difficult to catalog or quantify. Only on occasion (as in the Van Der Meer case) do matters ever get reported in the press; indeed, it's rare that police are even called or involved. But judging from the outpouring at *Orcinus* and elsewhere, eliminationist rhetoric, as far as many progressives are concerned, has so deeply infected the popular discourse that it is indeed poisoning how we treat each other in our daily lives.

Incidents like those described above—a representative sampling of more than a hundred stories I've collected—are not occurring in a vacuum. People are acting out in an eliminationist manner because they have been inundated with, and have naturally internalized, a broad range of eliminationist ideas and talking points. Such speech is being bandied about in every cultural bandwidth—from talk radio, to the local press and in letters to the editor, to blogs and national mainstream media. And while my readers helped me catalog ugly incidents, they also helped me compile examples of eliminationist rhetoric, and this list is perhaps even more impressive.

Herewith, a sampling:

If I had one dirty bomb I could eliminate all the liberals in Fresno at once.

*Fresno City Council member Jerry Duncan,  
in an email to his colleagues.*

If I were given a choice of pressing one of two buttons—one to do away with terrorism or another to do away with those Democrats up in Washington—I wouldn't even have to think about it. I would do away with the Democrats, and do this country a favor.

*William G. Koehlke, Letter to the editor, published in the Athens Banner-Herald on Saturday, March 15, 2003.*

I am a United States sailor. I have chosen to defend my country and the freedom some take for granted. I love my country, my family, my freedom. Only by the blood which was shed by the service members before me did we receive this freedom.

There are some, though, who do not appreciate this freedom. I call these people traitors; they call themselves protesters. They are nothing more than an infectious disease that infests the minds and hearts of the Americans we are defending. It consumes the honor and courage within its host until it kills the very patriotism that made this country.

No cure exists for this disease. Never will everyone be satisfied. But let it be known what this guardian of America's freedom thinks of these protesters: Traitors should be hanged. I hold our enemies in higher standing. At least they are willing to fight for their beliefs and the country they love.

*Derik L. Jobe, Sonar Technician, U.S. Navy, Letter to the editor, Amarillo Globe News, Amarillo, Texas, December 3, 2003.<sup>22</sup>*

I don't really consider the Democrat party a party of the people anymore, nor do I consider the socialist Democrats (they are not "liberal," that's just a euphemism for socialist anymore) "nice people who are misguided." I consider them to be pure, raw evil, who want to destroy everything rational or beautiful in sight: success, prosperity, even the very security of the country.

*Conservative blogger Amber Pawlik, June 2004.<sup>23</sup>*

WASHINGTON—January 6, 2004. A paramilitary organization calling itself the Christian Liberation Front changed the balance of power in Washington by a pair of brutal attacks this afternoon. A force estimated at about 200 CLF commandos stormed the Supreme Court building, killing 35 people, including five Supreme Court Justices. At the same time, a contingent of 1,000 CLF paramilitaries attacked the Hart Senate Office Building, where a Senate Democratic Caucus meeting was being held. Approximately 50 people were killed in the attack. Once the commandos had seized the building, they systematically killed Democratic senators from states with Republican governors.

*Conservative blogger Mark Byron, “The Usefulness of Civil Disobedience,” an essay describing a “fantasy episode” that “has a following in the darker parts of my mind,” November 13, 2003.*<sup>24</sup>

For many decades, conservative citizens and like-minded political leaders (starting with President Calvin Coolidge) have been denigrated by the vilest of lies and characterizations from hordes of liberals who now won't even admit that they are liberals—because the word connotes such moral stink and political silliness. As a class, liberals no longer are merely the vigorous opponents of the Right; they are spiteful enemies of civilization's core decency and traditions. . . .

That is why the unthinkable must become thinkable. If the so-called “Red States” (those that voted for George W. Bush) cannot be respected or at least tolerated by the “Blue States” (those that voted for Al Gore and John Kerry), then the most disparate of them must live apart—not by secession of the former (a majority), but by expulsion of the latter.

*Mike Thompson, Human Events, November 3, 2004, in a “satire” titled “Declaration of Expulsion: A Modest Proposal.”*<sup>25</sup>



Instead of sitting around, incessantly sniping at President Bush and the U.S. Military, sipping “liberal coward broth,” hating America and Conservatives, the wacko liberal poison Left-Wing Nuts— and the rest of The Enemy Within™—should be rounded-up and put into “re-education camps” and forced to watch 24 hour, nonstop TV news footage of 9/11, Sodomy Insane’s rape/torture/murder rooms, and the unearthing of Iraqi mass graves. Those hard-core Lefty wacko filth who can’t be converted, should be summarily tried and locked away for life; no chance of parole. They’re a waste of oxygen and a “clear and present danger” to America, as is the murderous, degenerate cult of Islam. Free and unfettered speech is guaranteed under the First Amendment, but actively working and trying to destroy this Nation, in a time of war, when our very lives are in peril, is a treasonous and seditious offense, and should be treated as such, and punished by death. The much-maligned Patriot Act provides for that very situation, and should be implemented post haste. All verminous, hate-America, liberal-socialist-commie filth should be contained and selectively eliminated.

*John Shelley, “Liberal Broth,” an essay  
at his personal Web site, July 30, 2004.<sup>26</sup>*

Eliminationism has become an endemic feature of modern movement conservatism (which, as we will see shortly, is something wholly distinct from traditional conservatism). It shows itself as an unwillingness to argue the facts or merits of issues and to demand outright the suppression or violent oppression (and ultimately the purgation) of elements deemed harmful to American society.

This kind of rhetoric is, in effect, the death of discourse itself. Instead of offering an opposing idea, it simply shuts down intellectual exchange and replaces it with the brute intention to silence and eliminate.

As we’ve seen from the preceding examples, a lot of elimina-

tionist talk occurs on a small, personal level, often during chance encounters between strangers. This kind of rhetoric pops up not only in bizarre road-rage incidents, ugly public exchanges, disturbing letters to the editor, and vicious blog posts, but also from the very fonts of public information: the mass media. Figures such as Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly, Ann Coulter, Lou Dobbs, and Glenn Beck routinely engage in it and fuel the flames with bogus stories—nonsensical conspiracy theories and outrageously inflammatory misinformation—derived from fanatical far-right sources. The kind of incident Timothy Burke experienced is becoming commonplace because it's being openly encouraged by major figures in the conservative movement, both in the media and in officialdom.

A brief sampling:

*Rush Limbaugh:* I tell people don't kill all the liberals. Leave enough so we can have two on every campus—living fossils—so we will never forget what these people stood for.<sup>27</sup>

*Ann Coulter:* My only regret with Timothy McVeigh is he did not go to the New York Times Building.<sup>28</sup>

*Bill O'Reilly:* Everybody got it? Dissent, fine; undermining, you're a traitor. Got it? So, all those clowns over at the liberal radio network, we could incarcerate them immediately. Will you have that done, please? Send over the FBI and just put them in chains, because they, you know, they're undermining everything and they don't care, couldn't care less.<sup>29</sup>

*Michael Reagan:* There is a group that's sending letters to our troops in Iraq . . . claiming 9/11 was an inside job—oh, yeah, yeah—and that they should rethink why they're fighting. . . . Excuse me, folks, I'm going to say this: We ought to find the people who are doing this, take them out and shoot them. Really. Just find the people who are sending those letters to our troops to demoralize our troops and do what they are doing, you

take them out, they are traitors to our country, and shoot them. You have a problem with that, deal with it. But anyone who would do that doesn't deserve to live. You shoot them. You call them traitors—that's what they are—and you shoot them dead. I'll pay for the bullet.<sup>30</sup>

*Michael Barone:* Our covert enemies are harder to identify, for they live in large numbers within our midst. And in terms of intentions, they are not enemies in the sense that they consciously wish to destroy our society. On the contrary, they enjoy our freedoms and often call for their expansion. But they have also been working, over many years, to undermine faith in our society and confidence in its goodness. These covert enemies are those among our elites who have promoted the ideas labeled as multiculturalism, moral relativism and . . . transnationalism.<sup>31</sup>

*Dinesh D'Souza:* There is no way to restore the culture without winning the war on terror. Conversely, the only way to win the war on terror is to win the culture war. Thus we arrive at a sobering truth. In order to crush the Islamic radicals abroad, we must defeat the enemy at home.<sup>32</sup>

*David Horowitz:* Make no mistake about it, there is a war going on in this country. The aggressors in this war are Democrats, liberals and leftists who began a scorched earth campaign against President Bush before the initiation of hostilities in Iraq.<sup>33</sup>

*Kathleen Parker:* Here's a note I got recently from a friend and former Delta Force member, who has been observing American politics from the trenches: "These bastards like Clark and Kerry and that incipient ass, Dean, and Gephardt and Kucinich and that absolute mental midget Sharpton, race baiter, should all be lined up and shot."<sup>34</sup>

These are examples of nationally broadcast instances of the rhetoric of elimination, sometimes under the guise of “humor.” Through such statements, underlying attitudes are transmitted to a wide audience and the generally passive acceptance with which they are received sends a powerful message: that such talk, and its accompanying hateful worldview, is acceptable. Likewise, silence on the part of decent mainstream conservatives sounds to the kind of people who would act on this rhetoric like tacit approval.

The threats haven’t been restricted to ordinary citizens and protesters. One of the more disturbing examples of a public target of such ire involved 9/11 Commission member Jamie Gorelick. She was bombarded with death threats, including a phoned-in bomb threat at her home and hundreds of what she called “very vile” emails.<sup>35</sup> All this occurred after then–Attorney General John Ashcroft accused Gorelick of authoring a memo that he and other conservatives blamed for creating a bureaucratic “wall” they said caused the intelligence failures leading to 9/11 (a dubious claim at best, considering that Ashcroft had previously testified elsewhere that this “wall” had existed since the 1980s).<sup>36</sup> The conservative noise machine leapt into action—most notably Limbaugh. He claimed that “Gorelick really ran the place while Janet Reno was the face of the Justice Department” and that she “erected a wall and . . . the Clinton administration determined that they were gonna fight terrorism not as a war but as a legal matter.”<sup>37</sup> Right-wing operative Dick Morris chimed in on Fox News: “Of all of the public officials in the Clinton administration, and the Bush administration, the one who is most directly responsible, in my judgment, for 9/11 happening, is Jamie Gorelick.”<sup>38</sup>

One of the favorite tactics of those who resort to threats is the hoax-anthrax letter. The recipient gets an envelope contain-

ing white powder with a note warning that it is anthrax. This is actually a concrete form of domestic terrorism, otherwise known as “piggybacking,” in which terrorists emulate the acts of other terrorists, using them as a kind of launching pad. In this case, the perpetrators were using the once-real threat of anthrax mailings—the still-unsolved post-9/11 anthrax mailings of October and November 2001, which themselves were a kind of piggyback attack, riding the immediate wave of 9/11 fearfulness. Former president Bill Clinton, MSNBC talk-show host Keith Olbermann, and a number of other liberal luminaries have been recipients of such threats.

Olbermann’s attacker was eventually caught and arrested. He turned out to be a 39-year-old man named Chad Castagana, who lived with his parents in Woodland Hills, California. Before he was caught, he sent out anthrax threats to various perceived liberals in the media, including Comedy Central’s Jon Stewart and CBS’s David Letterman, as well as various liberal politicians, including House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi and Sen. Charles Schumer of New York. In all, he mailed 14 letters. Castagana also had a busy online life, posting at conservative Web sites like Free Republic, where he used the handle “Marc Costanzo.” His profile stated: “Ann Coulter is a Goddess and I worship Laura Ingraham and Michelle Malkin.”<sup>39</sup>

Naturally, these right-wing luminaries can’t be held legally responsible for inspiring a nutcase like Castagana—but that doesn’t absolve them of all culpability for inspiring such acts by him and others. “I have no idea who this loon is. I do not condone his actions or any actions like his by anyone else,” wrote Malkin at her blog in response to queries about the Castagana case. But because of the clear, commonsensical connection—that is, he heard the hatemongering and constant demonization of liberals

coming from these pundits and decided to act upon it—they do carry a moral and professional culpability.

All freedoms entail responsibilities, and when you do media work in America—and especially when you have a nationally prominent platform—you have not only the freedom of the press as your ally but a responsibility to the public as your burden. And chief among those responsibilities is to not abuse your power in a way that harms your fellow citizens or inspires others to harm them. It is possible, after all, to use your megaphone to lie shamelessly. You can use it to smear the good name of public officials. You can use it to rewrite history. You can use it to intimidate the “little people” who don’t possess the same kind of power. And you can use it to dehumanize others, turning them into potential targets for hatefulness and violence.

Eliminationists, as we’ve observed, never act in a vacuum. Someone specific almost always inspires them. When Olbermann discussed the culpability of Coulter, Malkin, and Ingraham for their roles in inspiring Castagna on his show, Malkin retorted that Olbermann was using “the most desperate rhetoric to discredit and stifle our voices.” She further claimed he was trying to “slime me as some sort of domestic terrorist.” In reality, he was trying to hold her accountable for the domestic terrorism that her reckless rhetoric helped set off.

Ironically, Malkin has also been a leader in the contingent of the conservative movement that insists that it is liberals, not conservatives, who have been “unhinged” in their rhetoric and driving the national discourse over a cliff. This retort is standard to any mention of the Right’s proclivity for eliminationist rhetoric. Malkin, in fact, wrote an entire book to support this thesis.<sup>40</sup>

The increasingly nasty tone of liberal rhetoric in recent years, especially on an interpersonal level, is also important to note. Some

of the examples Malkin cites are ugly, indeed, as is some of the bile directed toward George W. Bush in recent years.

However, most of the examples Malkin and her fellow conservatives point to involve anger directed at a specific person—most typically, George Bush or Dick Cheney—and often for reasons related to the loss of American and civilian lives in Iraq. Few of them are *eliminationist*—that is, most do not call for the suppression and eradication of an entire class of people. Rather, the hatred is focused on a handful of individuals.

In contrast, right-wing rhetoric has been explicitly eliminationist, calling for the infliction of harm on whole blocs of American citizens: liberals, gays and lesbians, Latinos, blacks, Jews, feminists, or whatever target group is the victim *du jour* of right-wing ire. This vile form of “anti-discourse” has been coming from the most prominent figures of movement conservatism: its most popular pundits and its leading politicians. And the sheer volume and intensity of the rhetoric dwarf whatever ugliness is coming from the liberal side of the debate.

Moreover, much of the current liberal anger and nastiness is *reactive*—a response to over a decade’s worth of venomous attacks on them by conservative mouthpieces, who have often reveled in their efforts to make the word “liberal” a pejorative. It often expresses outrage over some act rather than a person, something as worthy of it as the Abu Ghraib scandal or the conduct of the war in Iraq. Such reactive hostility is particularly common among people who have found themselves under attack by the Right. If movement conservatives have been behaving like the village loon, wandering about the town square and poking people in the eye with a sharp stick, they probably shouldn’t be surprised when their victims respond angrily. Their wide-eyed protestations of horror at the anger they’ve provoked are in some ways downright comical.

So even if we can see where this kind of rhetoric, and its resulting dysfunctional behaviors, is coming from, the question remains: Where is it taking us?

The problem with eliminationism isn't that it is simply unpleasant or ugly or even uncomfortable discourse, which is what can often be said of the Left's frequently charged rhetoric. The problem, as we already noted, is that it implies the death of discourse, as well as its dissolution into violence and the use of force.

And what the eliminationists call jokes aren't. The humor in their statements—whatever might be funny about them—is entirely contingent on their listeners' underlying attitude about their fellow Americans, an attitude that not only demonizes them but also reduces them to subhuman level, prime targets for violent elimination. Jokes shouldn't have a concrete real-world effect, and these do: at some point members of their audience (particularly the more hate-filled and mentally unstable types) will act on them.

This is where the specter of fascism raises its head on American soil. Eliminationism has always been a signature trait of fascism, the manifestation of its embrace of the myth of national rebirth through the fiery destruction of the existing order. As we shall see, it has a long history in America; but in the context of modern mass politics, it almost always raises the red flag of incipient fascism.

Eliminationists have always minimized, for public consumption, the nature of the demonic beast they unleash. The proponents of Indian genocide in the old West couched their violent intentions in words like “protecting civilization.” The advocates of lynching and Klan terror always cloaked their vicious murderousness in the guise of “the defense of traditional values” and particularly “white maidenhood.” For the Nazis, the Holocaust was ostensibly all about the “racial health” of the body politic. The same is true of modern neo-Nazis. Recall, if you will, that William Pierce



often protested that *The Turner Diaries* was a mere work of fiction; but that did not prevent either Robert Mathews (the leader of the murderous neo-Nazi gang called The Order) or Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh—both of whom were ardent fans of Pierce’s work—from attempting to enact its blueprint. We should remember this when Rush Limbaugh and Ann Coulter claim that they’re just “entertainers” telling “jokes,” and their ever-abundant apologists parrot them.

Perhaps the most disturbing facet of this trend is precisely that mainstream conservatives—button-down types who bridle at the first hint of liberal incivility—seem to have developed an extraordinary, boiled-frog kind of tolerance for the increasing ugliness of their own movement. They can produce reams of ponderous rationalizations for behavior and speech that is simply inexcusable.

These same mainstream conservatives used to be one of the key bulwarks against any kind of fascist impulse in America. Part of our political bloodstream for over a century, such impulses could never find the political space to take root because, in large part, ordinary conservatives had little in common with them. In the span of the past decade, this has increasingly ceased to be the case.

I’ve observed this shift through firsthand experience. I grew up in a conservative family in a conservative state—Idaho—and have lasting familial and friendship ties to many right-leaning folks. More importantly, perhaps, I also worked as a journalist in northern Idaho at a time when white supremacists, most famously the Aryan Nations at Hayden Lake, began making it their home. These people—with their Hitler worship, their swastikas, and their hatred of Jews and blacks—were genuine fascists, and their “Patriot” associates were genuine proto-fascists; that is, they represented a seedbed for nascent fascism, with all of the necessary traits in germinative form. In the course of my work, conducting

interviews and exploring these people's motives and beliefs, I got to know many of them and came to be deeply familiar with their milieu and their value systems. In the process, I was disabused of many of the stereotypes surrounding them.

Not only were they not tattooed thugs with leathers but most of them seemed like perfectly normal people who led perfectly normal lives. Most of them were not hopelessly stupid, uneducated backwoods ignoramuses; indeed, some were better educated than the rest of us, and many held thoroughly detailed and often arcane belief systems based on their own logic, perhaps misguided but rational in its own way. Most of them were former conservatives who had become increasingly radicalized, drawn into the irrational parallel universe of conspiracy theories and scapegoating.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, I began observing greater and greater similarities between mainstream conservatives and these longtime denizens of the Far Right. More and more they shared the willingness—even eagerness—to embrace verifiably false information as fact, as well as subscribe to the increasing dehumanization of those they considered their enemies. Since the events of 9/11, these similarities have intensified.

It has become increasingly easy to lose track of the differences between genuine proto-fascists and mainstream conservatives, but some important ones remain. As much as movement conservatives might threaten and bluster, they lack the visceral, paranoid anger that animates so many actual fascists. They may try to talk and walk like fascists, but underneath, they lack the street violence and thuggery, the actual eliminationist enterprise that is the true fascist's hallmark. These persistent differences are a good thing, for it means that the situation is not yet irretrievable.

So I've devised a term to describe what's taking place: *para-fascism*. Para-fascists are distinct from proto-fascists in that they

lack certain traits of genuine fascists in their nascent form, yet they stand as a constant threat in that they could find the means and motives to eventually turn into the real thing—if not now, perhaps even years down the road. Fascism in its previous manifestations often took root, like all pathologies, after years of subsisting on the fringe of society. So while it would be clearly incorrect to call modern conservatives “fascists,” the transformation of movement conservatism has created, in essence, the groundwork for the eventual outbreak of genuine fascism. You need look no further than the ugly eliminationism now ascendant on the Right to get a good view of this reality.

It is by small steps of incremental meanness and viciousness that we lose our humanity. We have the historical example of 20th-century fascism as a reminder. The Nazis, in the end, embodied demonic inhumanity, but they didn’t get that way overnight. They did this by not simply branding their opponents as the Enemy, but by denying them their essential humanity, depicting them as worse than scum—disease-laden, world-destroying vermin, in desperate need of elimination.

Eliminationism is an acute warning sign: it has historically played the role of creating *permission* for people to act out their violent impulses against its targets. More than any other facet of para-fascism, it poses the greatest specific danger of transforming it into the real thing.

This is why eliminationist rhetoric has a special quality: the distinctive odor of burning flesh. And when it hits our nostrils, we dare not ignore the warning.