



**Robert L. Hilliard, Michael C. Keith.** *Waves of Rancor: Tuning in the Radical Right.* Armonk, New York and London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1999. Xv + 288 pp. \$32.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7656-0131-5.



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## **Degrees of Authoritarianism in Contemporary America: A Survey of Radical Rightists**

This is a very useful book for those interested in the radical right in the United States and Canada and the broad spectrum of its manifestations. The book also incorporates interesting end-of-chapter appendices containing relevant documents, speeches, press releases, reading lists, letters, web pages, logs, laws, and other resources. These also make for fascinating reading since they either corroborate or expand upon themes and content developed in the preceding chapters.

The two authors are Boston-area academics experienced in both investigative research and book publication as well as mass media trends in the United States and the world. Scholars should be interested in this book mainly because of its broad scope, but also because it consolidates many detailed research findings on specific right-wing organizations and individuals. These are compiled into comprehensive reports on the sources and causes of rightist authoritarianism, their major arguments and ideologies, their media preferences, major spokespersons, and the spectrum of their beliefs; specific groups like neo-Nazis and other violent extremist organizations are covered as well.

At the end of the book appear the counter-propagandists or those (from the American perspective) who can be considered as such. Edward Bernays once called them distributors of “proper”-ganda in support of the democratic process, pluralism, rationality, and Bill of Rights freedoms (especially the First Amendment). However, the latter do not merely subscribe to a “free marketplace of ideas” rationale for their tolerance of hate speech, but also recommend specific courses of positive action to offset, balance, and countermand far right extremism and violence. For example, these groups (such as Radio for Peace International, the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and others) have proposed a variety of potentially effective countermeasures. Among these are insisting that mainstream media cover the extreme right (not just Rush Limbaugh, G. Gordon Liddy, and Oliver North), using citizen coalitions to threaten media and producer-advertiser boycotts if necessary, and establishing web sites to track hate mongers and educate the public about reasonable alternatives to messages of despair, distrust, division, violence, and hopelessness.

Along the same lines, other proposed antidotes for extremist propaganda include broadcasting constructive messages about conflict resolution, social justice, human rights, gender equality, tolerance, and cross-cultural understanding. When mainstream media are used for ethnic stereotyping, civic groups can pressure owners not to carry these hurtful, cruel, and inciting programs. In-depth reports on the extreme right's media campaigns have also been published much to the chagrin of their sponsors. Another proposed suggestion is that civil rights groups can organize large-scale responses to these hate groups when they appear in public.

Still other useful techniques mentioned to limit the hurtful hatred promulgated through extremist activities are for moderate clergy to challenge Christian Identity purveyors and to compassionately defend homosexuals and AIDS victims from disparagement. Schools should also be encouraged to promote civility, democracy, pluralism, and "the American way" of life. Ensuring that state anti-militia statutes are enforced, dangerous substances are controlled, military and police are not co-opted by patriot and militia groups, and suspicions of political terrorism are being reported to the proper authorities are other proposed activities which citizens can use to offset the widespread rancor such hate groups engender.

These specific proposals for taking back the initiative from extremist groups are one of the book's greatest strengths. All too often, observers merely shrug their shoulders and cite the First Amendment and Supreme Court guarantees of protection for such groups absent a "clear and present danger" of imminent violence or personal harm.

It is also gratifying to read about the activities of other groups such as Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, Political Research Associates, and the Center for Defense Information in terms of their reports on Limbaugh's "lies, exaggerations, and inaccuracies;" Buchanan's "racism;" and the perils of militarism and unbridled nationalism. Such groups, unlike their opponents, do not want to silence debate. Instead, they prefer to expose obvious fallacies through counter-education while actually trying to raise the quotient of overall public support for free speech everywhere, not just for left, liberal, moderate, or middle-of-the-road groups. The positive measures amply summarized in this book are especially important when we also read about the recent rapid growth of both hate groups and their expanding Internet sites, especially among neo-Nazi and KKK cells. Fortunately, all but ten

states have hate crime laws which can be used to limit real threats of planned violence.

*Waves of Rancor* is a sound, scholarly study of an important political and mass media phenomenon in the United States. It provides an historical and contemporary context for domestic terrorism and the growth of a diseased conservatism which has run amok, mutating into the extremely deformed phenomenon of hate groups in their myriad forms (neo-Nazis, patriots, anti-Semites, militias, Freemen, survivalists, anti-environmentalists, conspiracy theorists, the KKK, revisionists, and Holocaust deniers). Each of these groups is meticulously described and analyzed, interviews with some of their leaders are reported, and many of their favorite media technologies are depicted in great detail. These include radio, television, shortwave radio, microstations, low-power television, cable access stations, fax, film, and, most recently, the Internet.

Most revealing is the hidden communications system used to spread hate messages with devices unknown to the average citizen. The man/woman on the street has easily been lulled into complacency regarding the extent of the threat from the millions of people involved in one phase or another of this movement. For example, while talk radio and TV may be very public expressions of these activities, this book makes clear that these media are not the medium of choice for American rightists. Rather, it is shortwave, fax networks, pirate radio, microstations, and low-power television which are the new devices political extremists choose as their vehicles for rapid communication and cheap networking. The reasons for these choices as well as the extent of usage are all fully developed topics in Hilliard and Keith's treatment of radical right political paranoia.

Such groups are "at war" with the country and do not care what they are called ("kooks," "sickos," or neo-Nazis). Since they are true believers with a monopoly on the truth, anything goes, including threats, falsehoods, and violence. The individuals who join such groups are often frustrated, disaffected, or disappointed people who are aimless, rootless, and suffer from anomie. They are cynical and distrustful of government; they await a leader who will espouse an ideology they can grasp and internalize which, in turn, will help them to understand the confusing world around them. Since they do not understand much about the new world order, the UN, the Trilateral Commission, NAFTA, the Council on Foreign Relations, or post-industrialism, they flock to those rightist simplifiers who put all these mysteries in context for

them along with basic NRA, anti-abortion, and populist Republican/free-enterprise and Christian fundamentalist dispositions, orientations, policies, and positions. Their basic view, as the authors say, is the Nazi credo, "God is with us."

The other goals of these ultra-conservative groups are Aryan superiority, unrestrained capitalism, rigid religious and family customs, and promulgation of US nationalism and military might. Among the various groups described, it is the religious terrorists who are the most dangerous, according to the authors, because they are answerable only to God and use force without the strictures of guilt, conscience, or regret. Even David Duke, it is explained, based his recent self-reinvention on a personal religious redemption. The authors also say that it is important to expose these radicals because they know how to use the enormous power of the mass media, so their popular influence is growing without much opposition or debate. For example, they tell us that more than fifty percent of New Orleans radio stations today are extremist/right-wing. There are also over one thousand microstations in operation whose owners believe radio is their "bomb."

Another useful aspect of this book is its encyclopedic coverage of major rightist figures such as *The Turner Diaries* author, William Pierce, and the source of the neo-Nazi web site Zundel site, Ernst Zundel. To provide historical context, the authors take us back to the 1920s and 1930s to the era of Father Charles Coughlin and Walter Winchell and to the war years before the Cold War era with "Axis Sally" and "Tokyo Rose." Later figures covered include Joe Pyne, William Buckley, and Martin Agronsky. Filling in this historical background adds to the book's effectiveness. Touches such as these help this volume fulfill its stated purposes (i.e., to expose some of the political sources of domestic violence, to uncover the right's media systems, messages, and leadership, as well as to place radical communications in the context of conservative dominance of the US mass media structure and institutions).

The authors also want to describe the right as a three-dimensional object consisting of "moderates" (such as Liddy, North, Limbaugh, and Buckley); the far right of racists, anti-Semites, and anti-government ideologues (such as David Duke, Pat Buchanan, Chuck Baker, Eric Rhoads, and Louis Beam); and the extreme or radical right (including Ernst Zundel, William Pierce, Kurt Saxon, Chuck Harder, "Bo" Gritz, William Cooper, and Bob Hallstrom). One could also include the KKK, the Na-

tion of Islam, and the Promise Keepers in the far right category. These organizations/persons clearly reflect the broad spectrum of political fascism and the popularity of right-wing authoritarianism in the United States today.

The broad scope, admirable purposes, and in-depth treatment of significant content material make this book a well-documented and unique study of American authoritarians and authoritarianism. Sources used are current and the footnoting is extensive. The book is well-organized, well-written, and achieves its major purposes. It is quite well-suited for a reading audience of various disciplines, including scholars of communications, politics, and sociology.

There are only a few weaknesses in the book. The indexing is not complete or thorough enough. Reference to the Zionist Occupation Government, or ZOG, for example, is indexed for one page, but there are a number of other such references. There is also a lot of repetition in descriptions and references (some using practically the same words) to William Pierce and the National Alliance as well as Ernst Zundel and the Zundel site.

Another more serious problem with this otherwise excellent book is its lack of a tie-in to a theoretical context such as (in political science and political psychology) the theories of authoritarianism as a political system and authoritarianism as a personality construct, syndrome, or political malaise. In other words, this book would be improved if it used key features of political authoritarianism to organize the political goals of right-wing extremists – for example, those extremist efforts directed at a fascist future with its racial myths, *Fuehrer* principle, state capitalism, and super nationalism. Also, the psychological concept of authoritarianism has other classic manifestations in addition to rabid anti-Semitism, racism, militarism, and nationalism. The three most prominent are aggression or threats against so-called "inferiors," a passion for obedience to conventional norms (such as sexual propriety and homophobia), and submission to one's "betters" – leadership elites, strongmen, or the avenging man astride a white horse, leading the docile masses.

If we examine the major features of right-wing extremism as described in *Waves of Rancor*, they easily fit into the fascist or authoritarian personality modes as described previously in the classic study by T. W. Adorno, et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* [1]. Using these well-known dimensions, we can more easily classify and organize the right-wing world around us. For example, there are authoritarian trends in our schools today which need to be identified and reversed into a more liberal direc-

tion. In Florida at the present time, there are at least fourteen country school districts which use the Bible as a history textbook despite numerous court decisions citing this practice as violating the First Amendment and its free exercise and establishment clauses [2]. In early 2000, perennial Republican and Reform Party candidate Pat Buchanan (supposedly a moderate centrist, but in reality an authoritarian fascist) has been attacking “mass immigration,” the “Balkanizing” of America, illegal immigrants, and America’s loss of sovereignty. When heralding southerners’ flying the Confederate battle flag over the South Carolina statehouse, Buchanan claimed it to be “a banner of heroism” [3]. Others involved in the South Carolina rebel flag dispute have also revealed their fascist authoritarian stripe; they have helped to broaden the controversy. One Republican state senator did so by excoriating his opponents, the NAACP (which he called “that corrupt organization known as the National Association for Retarded People”), clearly assuming a racist and states rights/Dixiecrat position [4]. Jesse Helms, Republican senator from North Carolina, has also repeatedly attacked the United Nations in recent days as a “utopian” organization seeking to impose its will on the American people, thereby encouraging, he says, eventual American “withdrawal” from that body [5]. Just calling such militaristic, chauvinistic super patriotism “right wing” does not do it either theoretical or practical justice. It is clearly right-wing authoritarianism and is best identified as such [6]. In sum, *Waves of Rancor* would have been vastly im-

proved if it referred to authoritarianism as a guiding analytical theme on more than one occasion.

Notes:

[1]. Adorno, T. W. (1950). *The Authoritarian Personality*.

[2]. McEvoy, G. (January 19, 2000). “Rotten Apples for School Districts Teaching Bible History as Fact,” p. 13A in *Palm Beach Post*.

[3]. Associated Press (January 19, 2000). “Buchanan Vows to Slow ‘Mass Immigration’ Rate,” p. 2A in *Palm Beach Post*.

[4]. Cox News Service (January 19, 2000). “Clinton Wants S. C. Rebel Flag to Come Down,” p. 5A in *Palm Beach Post*.

[5]. New York Times (January 21, 2000). “Helms Gets Message to U.N. – Forcefully,” p. 3A in *Palm Beach Post*.

[6]. For a recent and more complete discussion of contemporary authoritarianism, see Russell Farnen and Jos Meloen, *Democracy, Authoritarianism, and Education*, London, England: Macmillan and New York, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000.

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