

Bring the War Home

The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America

Kathleen Belew

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on targets that included a public housing complex in Ohio, the National Afro-American Museum, also in Ohio, and a black church in Los Angeles.⁷²

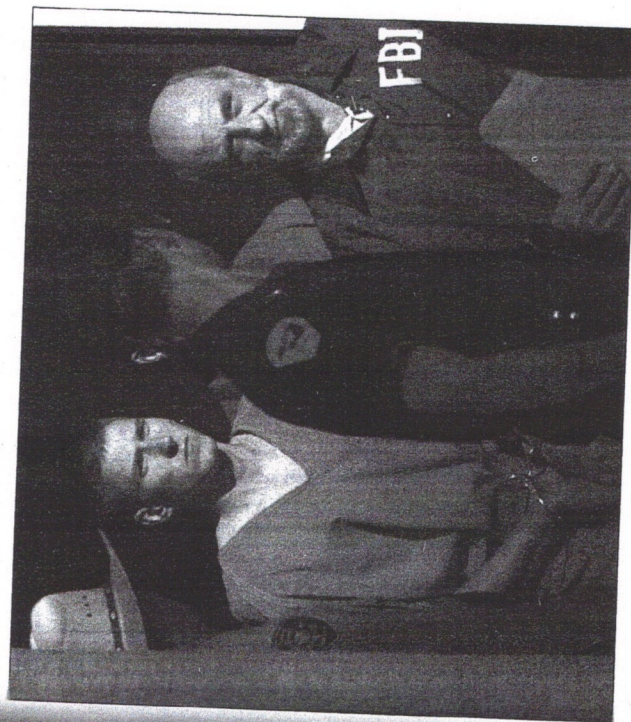
Meanwhile, the Michigan Militia, where McVeigh was attending meetings, had grown to 12,000 members. When police stopped leader Mark Koernke and three members of his security team in September 1994, they were carrying three military assault rifles, three semiautomatic pistols, and a revolver—all loaded—as well as 700 rounds of armor-piercing ammunition, twenty-one magazines, and six knives and bayonets. This armament revealed a continuing paramilitary fixation on weapons, paired with increasing rage. As militia leader John Trochmann said that December, “The battle lines are drawn.”⁷³

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The Bombing of Oklahoma City

This kind of hell.

—Timothy McVeigh describing the bombing



Federal agents escort Timothy McVeigh (left) after his arrest for the 1995 bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building. (John Gaps III, Associated Press Photo)

ON APRIL 19, 1995, a Ryder moving truck filled with fertilizer exploded in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The blast ripped through its glass façade and damaged its concrete columns, collapsing much of the edifice and rendering the rest structurally unstable.

The explosion wounded more than 500 people and killed 168, including 19 young children in the building's day care center. The nation turned, horrified, to the young white veteran who quickly became the focus of the investigation and trials. In the first admission of his role in the bombing, after he was convicted and sentenced to death by lethal injection, Timothy McVeigh gave an interview saying that he acted alone. He called the dead children "collateral damage" of a military action, and would later tell a fellow inmate that he found it ironic to be imprisoned because "in Desert Storm I got medals for killing people." McVeigh said he bullied his co-conspirators into helping him by threatening them and their families, and he stridently denied his connection to any movement. He said he was not racist. "You can't handle the truth," he told two reporters, quoting the famous speech from the 1992 military film *A Few Good Men*. "Because the truth is, I blew up the Murrah Building, and isn't it kind of scary that one man could wreak this kind of hell?"¹

Indeed, it was terrifying. Commentators searched for some psychological trigger in McVeigh's past. Was it about his mother leaving, they wondered, or his failures with women? They worried about copycats who might follow in his footsteps. The trials of the other indicted men seemed far less important than the questions of why and how McVeigh acted. For a wide variety of reasons, most journalists and law enforcement officers alike failed to follow leads about additional suspects in the bombing. McVeigh appeared to be a lone madman, acting in concert with only a few co-conspirators, and easily dismissed as a mad outlier.

However, in no sense was the bombing of Oklahoma City carried out by one man. The hell McVeigh described represented the culmination of decades of white power organizing. McVeigh, trained as a combatant by the state, belonged to the white power movement. He acted without orders from movement leaders, but in concert with movement objectives and supported by resistance cell organizing. The plan for the bomb came directly from *The Turner Diaries*, the book that had structured the activity of the white power movement since the late 1970s. The choice of target came from an earlier white power movement incident: members of the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord (CSA), closely affiliated with the Order and Aryan Nations, had cased the Murrah Building and attempted to blow it up with rocket launchers back in 1983 but failed. The Oklahoma City bombing represented the triumph of the white power paramilitary violence that had

reverberated through the American home front in the years following the Vietnam War.²

The bombing became popularly understood as the work of one man, or a few men, through several processes that eroded contextual understanding. One of these was the broad historical impact of the Gulf War in the early 1990s: although politicians hoped it would vanquish "Vietnam syndrome" and end the public's reluctance to engage in militarism abroad, its legacy on the ground was more complex. The quick victory in the Gulf War cemented a right-wing narrative that the Vietnam War had been lost only through government betrayal—in other words, victory in the Gulf became, for the right, further evidence of the threat presented by the federal government even as it reasserted a positive image of the U.S. military. The Gulf War also produced a new generation of combat veterans, and a militarization of American society more broadly, that white power could exploit as it pursued its new iteration of paramilitary mobilization through militias.³

Another erosion of meaning arose from the lack of convictions in the 1988 Fort Smith sedition trial, after thirteen white power activists were acquitted of charges including seditious conspiracy despite overwhelming evidence of their war on the state. This failure, along with the even more damaging public relations disasters of Ruby Ridge and Waco, caused the Department of Justice and some agents in the FBI to be reluctant to portray the Oklahoma City bombing as the work of a movement and hence reluctant to pursue investigative and prosecutorial strategies based on that view. Indeed, the Bureau had institutionalized a policy to pursue only individual actors in white power violence, with "no attempts to tie individual crimes to a broader movement."⁴ This strategy not only worked to obscure the bombing as part a social movement but, in the years following McVeigh's conviction, effectively erased the movement itself from public understanding.

Even the FBI's own assessment of McVeigh in a criminological study of personality types fit poorly with his portrayal as a lone terrorist acting on his own motivations. "This is an easily controlled and manipulated personality," one FBI agent would tell the *New York Times* after the bombing. "They are looking for . . . some ideology. They have difficulty fitting into groups, but they are more mission-oriented, more focused."⁵ This picture of McVeigh didn't fit the man who would later speak as though he had organized the entire bombing, as though he had been "one man" wreaking "this kind of hell." But the analyst's depiction of McVeigh did fit the details of his life and

personality. Such a contradiction pointed, instead, to McVeigh as a soldier of leaderless resistance, motivated by the white power movement.⁶

McVeigh was born in a small town in New York and was by all accounts a quiet kid who never showed much interest in anything but guns. His mother left home when he was an adolescent. Forgotten by his teachers and dismissed by his peers, he took a job as a security guard. He liked to brandish "a huge . . . pistol out of his car window" and came to work with bandoliers of ammunition hung across his chest, like the fictional supersoldier and Vietnam War veteran Rambo. Clearly McVeigh was deeply attached to the popular culture deployments of the Vietnam War story.⁷

McVeigh found his footing when he joined the U.S. Army on May 24, 1988. His obsessive neatness made him a model soldier—clean, in control, and quick to follow orders. In the army, he met Terry Nichols and Michael Fortier, both of whom would be involved in the plan to bomb Oklahoma City. Fortier would later say that Nichols, the platoon leader, also led them as a social group, while McVeigh was the follower.⁸ McVeigh and Nichols did their basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia, the same post that housed the School of the Americas. There they chanted cadences like "Blood makes the grass grow! Kill! Kill! Kill!" and one that sounded remarkably like the famous *Soldier of Fortune* motto espoused by Tom Posey and other mercenaries, "Kill 'em all, let God sort it out."⁹

After basic training, the group transferred to Fort Riley, Kansas—a post that was somewhat segregated and racially tense. McVeigh participated in this culture, exhibiting racist behavior while in the service. He kept a copy of *The Turner Diaries* and showed it to his fellow soldiers. Some of his former army buddies would later tell the *New York Times*, "McVeigh assigned 'dirty work' around the barracks to black soldiers."¹⁰ He also felt that young black soldiers were disrespectful to him, and at one point bought a "White Power" shirt after seeing several "Black Power" shirts around the post; he didn't wear it, but he showed it to friends. McVeigh would later claim he was not racist, and that there were a few black soldiers he respected. Still, people remember him using racial slurs and singling out black soldiers for negative attention because of their race. Around this time, McVeigh joined a Klan group in North Carolina.¹¹

He served at Fort Riley until he shipped out to the Gulf War with Big Red One, the 1st Infantry Division, in which he served as an infantryman and then a gunner on a Bradley armored vehicle (similar to a tank). He

clashed frequently with his Latino platoon leader but was otherwise regarded as an excellent soldier. McVeigh received a promotion to sergeant and a Bronze Star, as well as Army Achievement Medal, Army Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Expert Rifleman's Crest, and other decorations.¹²

While in the Gulf, McVeigh got a long-awaited call to try out for Special Forces. One of the sergeants who knew him in the military said McVeigh had trained for this opportunity on his own time, marching with a 100-pound pack—but that was before the war. After going to Fort Bragg for the twenty-one-day Special Forces assessment and selection course, a tired and out-of-shape McVeigh washed out on the second day. He was extremely disappointed. After that, the sergeant said, he "became involved with extreme right-wing political groups off-post."¹³

After his subsequent discharge from Fort Riley, McVeigh appeared rootless. He took another short-lived security guard job, where a coworker said, "He was a loner, a follower, not a leader."¹⁴ His ties to the white power movement deepened. A few publications later reported that McVeigh had been a member of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (KKKK) branch in Zinc, Arkansas, in 1992.¹⁵ The leader of that branch, Thom Robb, was a national-level white power movement figurehead who had taken over the KKKK from Don Black after the attempted mercenary invasion of Dominica; Black had previously taken over the leadership from David Duke. Robb also published *White Patriot*, a regular and widely read movement newspaper.¹⁶

McVeigh's connection to the Klan in Zinc was more than casual or local—it connected him directly to the highest levels of the white power movement's war-on-the-government leadership and messaging. In February 1992, McVeigh wrote a letter to the Lockport, New York, *Union-Sun and Journal* in which he noted that he was not surprised racism was on the rise. "Is civil war imminent?" he asked. "Do we have to shed blood to reform the current system? I hope it doesn't come to that, but it might."¹⁷ His use of the term "system" echoed *The Turner Diaries*; at very least, McVeigh had tapped into the resources and strategies of the established white power movement, subscribing to *White Patriot* and talking with a coworker about stealing guns from a military installation.¹⁸ The theft of weapons from military installations was a longtime strategy of white power activists, especially in North Carolina—the same state where McVeigh had written the Klan for more information and to purchase his "White Power" shirt.¹⁹

McVeigh took the federal civil service exam to work as a U.S. marshal and scored high but was never hired; he blamed this and other career dead ends on equal opportunity laws, and said black people had put him out of a job.²⁰ In June 1993, McVeigh moved to Canyon West trailer park in Kingman, Arizona. His place was clean and sparsely furnished, with guns hidden all over the trailer. One woman who spoke with him at a party said McVeigh talked a lot about the government and about Hitler. "He said he didn't necessarily agree with all those Jews being killed," she said, "but he said Hitler had the right plan." McVeigh's phone records would later reveal several different calls, placed before the bombing, to an Arizona representative of the National Alliance—*Turner Diaries* author William Pierce's white separatist organization. Although he would later claim he was just looking for a place to hide out after his attack on the Murrah Building, rather than forming a relationship with or seeking guidance from the National Alliance, these calls evinced a strong and continued connection to the movement.²¹

One newspaper would later report that authorities suspected links between McVeigh and the Arizona Patriots, the group one official described in Order-era arrests as "cavemen with bombs" who had watched *Red Dawn* over and over and had plotted to destroy dams in Arizona. Their leader, Jack Oliphant, lived in Kingman, Arizona, as well, and claimed he was a former CIA mercenary who trained guerrillas from around the world in the use of explosives. He had a mailbox near McVeigh. A neighbor saw McVeigh and Nichols with Oliphant in the winter of 1993–1994. Though Oliphant said he didn't know McVeigh, and he died before the completion of the bombing investigation, it is clear that McVeigh lived in close proximity to the Arizona Patriots, and the group shared his worldview.²² McVeigh, like the Patriots, watched *Red Dawn* over and over. He also met repeatedly with a neo-Nazi activist, and met skinhead leader Johnny Bangerter. Fortier would later say that McVeigh wanted to start a militia in Arizona in 1994.²³ Another resident told the local newspaper that McVeigh—who regularly wore fatigues—was terrifying at the shooting range, firing hundreds of rounds. "He pretty much went crazy, emptying on anything—trees, rocks, anything there," the man said. "He just went ballistic."²⁴ As had earlier white power activists, McVeigh and Fortier broke into a National Guard armory in an attempt to steal guns and explosives, but they found only a few tools to steal.²⁵ Once again, McVeigh was drawing heavily on the experiences of the white power movement.

In 1994, McVeigh quit his security guard job at a local trucking company and moved to Michigan. There, he spent time off and on with Terry Nichols and his brother, James Nichols, who owned the farm near Decker where they stayed. An informer would later testify that James Nichols had been talking about leveling a federal building with a "megabomb" since 1988. The witness remembered Nichols saying that "a small bomb could cause such a disaster," and looking through his tool shed for a news clipping that showed the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City. When he didn't find it immediately, he began to draw a diagram freehand.²⁶ Thus, McVeigh lived with a militia movement member who had long fixated on blowing up the Murrah Building—enough so that he could draw it from memory.

While staying and working on James Nichols's farm, Terry Nichols and McVeigh experimented with explosives and attended Michigan Militia meetings. Terry Nichols sent a letter to the government renouncing his right to vote, participating in a widely used white power and militia movement strategy called "severation" in which members broke their official ties to the state by destroying Social Security cards, birth certificates, and other documents. Terry Nichols also subscribed to several white power publications. Michigan Militia members would later claim that James Nichols urged them all to go through severation, but that they asked him to leave because he was too radical. Still, McVeigh seems to have risen within the Michigan Militia. One newspaper reported that witnesses saw McVeigh at a militia meeting in Florida as a bodyguard to its leader, Mark Koernke. Although Koernke denied knowing him, McVeigh's promotion to security guard at such a meeting indicated that he had entered the ranks of the heavily armed upper echelons of the militia movement.²⁷ Throughout the history of the post-Vietnam War white power movement, private security forces had been a place to groom and train future movement leaders as well as elite paramilitary operatives such as members of the Order. A casual movement member would rarely, if ever, rise to a position of such trust.

In addition to his militia activity, McVeigh's lifelong obsession with guns also gave him entry into a national network of weapons dealers. Under the alias Tim Tuttle, McVeigh traveled the gun-show circuit, reading, selling, and distributing *The Turner Diaries* in uniform or in camouflage fatigues. He also took another page from the strategy first proposed at the 1983 Aryan Nations World Congress as the movement turned to revolution: he distributed information about movement enemies, perhaps in hopes

of coordinating others in the underground. His call was heavily framed by the defense of white women: McVeigh passed out cards with the name and home address of the sniper who had killed Vicki Weaver at Ruby Ridge. At a gun show in Tulsa, Oklahoma, he met Andreas "Andy the German" Strassmeir, a German army veteran who lived in a nearby white separatist compound, Elohim City. McVeigh also read other white power publications and sent them to his sister, Jennifer McVeigh. His reading list included the paramilitary mercenary magazine *Soldier of Fortune* and the white power newspaper *Spotlight*.²⁸

Zinc, Arkansas, the site of McVeigh's Klan chapter, sat between Elohim City and the CSA compound; the three groups had substantial contact over the 1980s, and the Elohim City-CSA relationship was particularly close. One can draw a triangle between Fort Riley, where McVeigh was stationed; the CSA compound near Bull Shoals Lake, Arkansas; and Elohim City, just over the Oklahoma border. The triangle included no drive longer than six hours, and included both Zinc and Fort Smith within the routes connecting those three sites. McVeigh appears to have had connections to all these places: he once received a traffic ticket in Fort Smith, Arkansas. He and his sister subscribed to *The Patriot Report*, published in Fort Smith by a white separatist who lived at Elohim City. He was cited for crossing a double yellow line less than twenty-five miles east of Elohim City on October 12, 1993, six months after the Waco siege and during a frenzy of movement activity; and in 1994 he stayed at a hotel in Vian, Oklahoma, twenty miles from Elohim City on the route back to Fort Riley. Connections between Elohim City and McVeigh were ample and sustained over at least the two years prior to the bombing, discrediting his later claim that he only wanted to hide out in the compound after the explosion.²⁹

Founded by Robert Millar in 1973, Elohim City—"City of God," in Hebrew—consisted of some seventy-five white separatists living on a 400-acre wooded compound, mostly in trailers parked on cement slabs. Residents trained with homemade napalm, Claymore mines, grenades, assault rifles, AR-15s, and Ruger Mini-14s. Strassmeir would later describe it as "a mix of the Afghani mountains and the Vietnam jungle," locating the camp in a global paramilitary geography.³⁰ Residents called Millar—the silver-haired leader in a clergyman's shirt and stiff white collar—"Grandpa," and for thirty-four of them, this was literally true.³¹ They were dedicated to what Millar called "cultural and genetic integrity," and were careful—in light of

the CSA and Waco busts—to give the government no excuse to lay siege to their compound. Millar claimed the residents possessed no illegal weapons, although he refused to allow searches of the compound. He claimed he was not anti-government, although he frequently said that the ATF and FBI had "exceeded their legal mandates." In interviews, Millar called himself a voice of moderation, and denied that the community was racist or paramilitary.³² However, several clear markers of white power movement involvement and paramilitary armament belied these claims.

Millar preached Christian Identity and separatism, and said that the wealth of the white race proved that they were God's chosen people. He foretold civil war and race riots, and talked about "black helicopters." Members of the compound brought semiautomatic weapons to church, even in front of outsiders. Elohim City residents called themselves "racialists," believed in a Zionist conspiracy to control the government, and refused to participate in Social Security. Some didn't pay taxes. One resident, a respected elder, was a Vietnam veteran who "went into the Vietnam War as a gung-ho patriot and came out feeling betrayed by his government." Three neo-Nazi skinheads lived nearby and attended church in the compound, and two worked at its sawmill. All of these factors point to a white separatist paramilitary compound consistent in its beliefs, and armament, with the broader white power movement.³³

Although the community itself had little to offer by way of a paramilitary force—only fifteen residents were adult males or teenage boys, with most being women, children, and old men—it served as a hideout and way station for other Aryan soldiers. James Wallington of the Order had hidden at Elohim City, and Kirk Lyons traveled there frequently.³⁴ Elohim City regularly hosted white power movement leaders, including Tom Metzger, and had close ties with a cell of white power bank robbers called the Aryan Republican Army (ARA). Federal agents had tried twice to search the compound; on one of these occasions, related to a child custody dispute, Millar and other armed men confronted agents on the road and refused to let them in. Worried about a showdown like the one at Waco, the agents left without entering the premises. Much later, Millar's son would concede that Elohim City had periodically given refuge to Aryan Nations members and other people in the movement.³⁵

Jack Knox, the lead FBI agent who resigned in frustration after the sedition trial, believed that the government should have investigated Elohim

City following the CSA bust in 1985, and later spoke about the second time federal agents were denied legal entry to the compound. Knox believed that immediately after the CSA bust, a member of the Order who had masterminded the Ukiah armored car heist holed up in Elohim City. When Knox and another agent tried to enforce a warrant for that man's arrest, Millar and his grandsons confronted them at gunpoint until they agreed to leave. Knox saw this chain of events as government failure to prevent the disaster at Oklahoma City. "I think something should have been done prior to the bombing. I think something should have been done in connection with the CSA/Aryan Nations investigation," Knox told the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* in 2003. "I think there should have been a thorough investigation of Elohim City."³⁶

Millar claimed that there was "not a long or profound connection" between Elohim City and the CSA, saying he thought his group was "labeled in with them because we are both members of the Christian Identity."³⁷ In fact, the connection between the CSA and Elohim City was remarkably long and profound. It was Millar who anointed Ellison "King James of the Ozarks" in the early 1980s. Ellison, Noble, and others from CSA attempted to travel to Elohim City in late December 1984, as the movement attempted to respond to the death of Order leader Bob Mathews. Federal agents called upon Millar to negotiate Ellison's surrender during the 1985 CSA bust.³⁸ Millar's granddaughter would marry Ellison—who, at the time of the sedition trial, had at least two other wives—at Elohim City in May 1995, just after the Oklahoma City bombing.³⁹

For all that Millar touted nonviolence—"I believe destruction is coming, but I want no part in starting it," he told a *New York Times* reporter in 1985—the compound did have a thoroughly armed paramilitary force led by Strassmeir, who would later be implicated in the bombing investigation.⁴⁰ Millar claimed this was only to send "a message to the area that our little village here shouldn't be violated and we will protect ourselves."⁴¹ Millar believed in the same impending apocalyptic race war—and the role he would play in that fight—as did Ellison and other white power activists.

Millar acted as spiritual advisor to another CSA member who, unlike Ellison, had stayed loyal to the white power movement through the Order and sedition trials. Richard Wayne Snell was the man who had blown up a natural gas pipeline in Fulton, Arkansas, in 1983, and killed a pawnshop owner and a pursuing black state trooper before hiding out in the CSA com-

pound. He was arrested during the 1985 bust with Beam's *Essays of a Klansman* and three hand grenades in his trunk.⁴² This was another strong connection between the bombing and the movement. Snell was scheduled to be executed by lethal injection on the day of the bombing, April 19, 1995. This was also the ten-year anniversary of the federal action at the CSA compound and the two-year anniversary of the fiery end to the Waco siege, which McVeigh had watched on television, weeping.

Snell and Ellison had come up with the idea to bomb the Murrah Building some ten years earlier. In October 1983, during intense Order activity, the CSA considered using rocket launchers to destroy the building's glass façade. Snell and Ellison had just attended the Aryan Nations World Congress, the meeting where Beam and others declared war on the state and laid out the strategy of leaderless resistance, and of targeting federal officials, institutions, and buildings. Kerry Noble, Ellison's right-hand man, cased the building with Snell several times that summer. They found Kent Yates, a former U.S. Army munitions specialist who claimed to have devised a system to simultaneously launch twelve to sixteen rockets from the back of a van parked on the street. They planned to carry out the attack while people were inside. "We knew people would die," Noble said. "But the war against the government meant nothing if people didn't die." They abandoned the plan when a rocket misfired, exploding in Yates's hand and burning him. "Ellison interpreted this as a sign from God that it wasn't what we [were] supposed to do," said Noble. Instead, the group attempted to assassinate Knox and others in 1983, but failed after a car accident delayed them. Charges around the attempted assassination became part of the 1988 sedition trial.⁴³

In the months leading up to the 1995 bombing, the government received specific warnings about Elohim City. Undercover informant Carol Howe reported "dangerous, apocalyptic statements" from Millar, Ellison, and others. Although the government dismissed this information—the ATF and FBI said Howe was "deactivated" as an informant in March 1995—Howe said she warned the agencies that something big was coming, and her warning was substantial and specific. She heard the leaders saying that "a 'cataclysm' was pending in the spring of 1995 and that federal buildings in Oklahoma City or Texas were being targeted for a bomb that would signal a 'racial holy war' in the United States." It would coincide, Howe later said, with the second anniversary of the Waco inferno on April 19, 1995. The flock at Elohim City was preoccupied with the Waco raid, and residents held daily

meetings about bombing a building in late 1994 and early 1995. Howe's former boyfriend was Dennis Mahon, a former National Guardsman who had belonged to White Aryan Resistance and the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and was by then living in Elohim City. Howe said Mahon had blown up a truck with a 500-pound ammonium nitrate and fuel oil bomb in 1989 or 1990 in Michigan, where he was in contact with longtime racist leader Robert Miles. Mahon and Strassmeir, she reported, were talking about bombing federal buildings in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. Howe also said that while she was never formally introduced to McVeigh—and may never have seen him—she believed he was in Elohim City prior to the bombing.⁴⁴

Howe would later claim that the government had attempted to suppress this information, and that if she had been “deactivated,” no one had ever told her so. The government said that her information was not specific enough to prevent the Oklahoma City bombing or to justify a potentially disastrous raid of Elohim City. Howe was acquitted of subsequent conspiracy charges related to an alleged bomb threat, which many saw as government retaliation for inconvenient testimony.⁴⁵ Because of this residual doubt about her credibility, the jury in McVeigh's trial never heard about Howe or what she witnessed in Elohim City. Stephen Jones, McVeigh's attorney, told the *Tulsa World* that

throughout Howe's tenure as an AFT informant in 1994–1995, she filed 70 reports and frequently was polygraphed. . . . “They . . . found her to be a reliable, credible informant,” Jones said. “The documents further show a group of people associated with Elohim City were planning, actively, to engage in assassinations, mass murder and bombings directed against the federal government. . . . She reported it. She watched while smaller bombs exploded, and reported it.”⁴⁶

Between Howe's information, which gave the nature, date, and origin of the threat—and even went so far as to specify the details of a truck bomb and a federal building in Tulsa or Oklahoma City—and the descriptive example of the bombing given in *The Turner Diaries*, state agencies did have substantial and historical information about what was about to happen. McVeigh was carrying out a planned and logical act, one that drew directly on the resources and strategies of the white power movement and targeted a building that had been at the forefront of the movement's collective conscience for more than a decade. He was motivated by the same events that drove the

movement at large. After the passage of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act in August 1994, which outlawed nineteen types of semiautomatic weapons, McVeigh wrote to Michael Fortier in exasperation: “What will it take,” he asked, to foment the revolution, to spur the war on the government promised by the movement and *The Turner Diaries*? Within weeks, their plan to bomb Oklahoma City was under way.⁴⁷

McVeigh would even carry the messages of the white power movement on his body during the attack. He bombed the Murrah Building wearing a T-shirt that depicted the tree of liberty with the slogan “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.” It was nearly the exact phrase Beam had used to rally the movement after Ruby Ridge, at the 1992 Estes Park summit of white power leaders and activists.⁴⁸

Later, guards would say that McVeigh told them about his plans for the bombing while in prison awaiting trial. He said he had considered federal buildings and other sites in Denver, Kansas City, Texas, Little Rock, and South Dakota as potential targets. In the end, he chose Oklahoma City for the Murrah Building's architectural vulnerability. It had nine floors with large glass windows, and had no courtyard or plaza that separated it from the street. A truck could park almost directly under its expansive glass facade. His aim was to damage not just the ATF—although that agency had offices in the Murrah Building—but as many federal agencies as possible. The building also faced an open park, meaning that the blast damage would be largely confined to people in the federal building, whom McVeigh saw as complicit with the New World Order.⁴⁹

McVeigh, Nichols, and Fortier worked as a cell, amassing the supplies and funds needed to carry out the bombing. They used the moralized robberies of the Order as their model of operations. In September 1994, McVeigh and Nichols stole blasting caps, dynamite, and fuse cords from a quarry in Marion, Kansas, not far from Terry Nichols's home. In November 1994, they carried out an Order-style robbery to support the costs of the bombing, Nichols taking some \$60,000 worth of goods including guns, cash, silver bars, and gold coins from the home of gun dealer Roger Moore, who lived in a rural area near Hot Springs, Arkansas. McVeigh had stayed at Moore's home prior to the robbery, and Moore immediately suspected his involvement. Some of the stolen guns were later found in the search of Nichols's house.⁵⁰

In the weeks before the bombing, McVeigh wrote a letter to a female friend that hinted he was going underground. *The Turner Diaries* called for

a separation of legal and paramilitary wings of the movement, stating "It would be a breach of Organization discipline for a member of an underground unit to engage in any direct recruiting activity, however minimal. That function has been relegated to the 'legal' units."⁵¹ In other words, operatives in the guerilla war were to leave the distribution of pamphlets to "legal" units while they worked on assassinations and bombings. In the letter, McVeigh told his friend he would no longer do leafleting or recruiting because he had "certain other 'militant' talents that are in short supply and greatly demanded." He encouraged her to continue leafleting in his stead.⁵² McVeigh also wrote to his sister Jennifer, telling her that he had become a member of a "Special Forces Group involved in criminal activity."⁵³

The *Turner Diaries* gave a very specific example of a truck bombing of the sort McVeigh was planning. In the novel, Turner and his cell unit bomb the FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C. They use a truck bomb with around 5,000 pounds of ammonium nitrate fertilizer with blasting gelatin and dynamite, and they drill holes so that the driver can light the fuse from the cab of the truck. They plan to drive the truck into the freight area, set the fuse, and walk away. They are fully aware that their action will hurt or kill the people who work in the building. In the novel, the bomb detonates at 9:15 A.M., catching people at the beginning of their workday and killing more than 850. Turner worries about one pretty twenty-year-old white girl trapped under a steel door.

When I stooped to stop the girl's bleeding, I became aware for the first time of the moans and screams of dozens of other injured persons in the courtyard. Not twenty feet away another woman lay motionless, her face covered with blood and a gaping wound in the side of her head—a horrible sight which I can still see vividly every time I close my eyes. . . . All day yesterday and most of today we watched the TV coverage of rescue crews bringing the dead and injured out of the building. It is a heavy burden of responsibility for us to bear. . . . But there is no way we can destroy the System without hurting many thousands of innocent people—no way. It is a cancer too deeply rooted in our flesh. And if we don't destroy the System before it destroys us—if we don't cut this cancer out of our living flesh—the whole race will die.⁵⁴

Even as Turner stops to help the iconic injured white woman, he insists that innocent civilians—including white women and children—must die in order to "cut the cancer" of the federal government out of the "living flesh" of white

society. While Turner considers the deaths of civilians a "heavy burden of responsibility," he still sees the "pawns" killed in the bombing as unavoidable collateral damage in the cause of race war and in preventing the apocalypse of racial extinction. McVeigh would describe the civilians he killed in much the same way.

Drawing on the *Turner Diaries*, then, McVeigh drove his 1977 yellow Mercury Marquis to Oklahoma City, where he parked in a downtown garage near the Murrah Building. He called Nichols to come pick him up, and they drove north to Junction City, Kansas—the nearest city to Fort Riley, where McVeigh had long held a storage unit—and rented a Ryder truck using his 10 percent military discount. Just afterward, on April 5, McVeigh placed a two-minute phone call to Elohim City. He was trying to reach Strassmeir, who had lived there off and on since 1991 and had become head of security. This position indicated Strassmeir's involvement with the compound's paramilitary side; watchdogs have pointed out that after Waco, he was instrumental in upgrading the compound's arsenal to include assault rifles. By the time of McVeigh's phone call, however, Strassmeir had already left the compound for good because he did not approve of the imminent arrival of Ellison, who would marry Millar's granddaughter weeks after the bombing.⁵⁵

In another connection, one that the archive does not fully explain, McVeigh also called Lyons's law office a few days before the bombing.⁵⁶ Perhaps McVeigh wished to coordinate a defense. Perhaps he was prepared to be a scapegoat after the bombing. Perhaps the cell was prepared for any man caught to take the fall for the others and go to jail. After all, McVeigh—who after the bombing was caught on a routine traffic stop—later claimed credit for the attack even as Lyons spirited Strassmeir out of the country before he could be thoroughly investigated.⁵⁷

In the days before the bombing, McVeigh stayed on task. When Nichols and Fortier expressed doubt or reluctance, McVeigh circulated *Armed and Dangerous: The Rise of the Survivalist Right*, a book by journalist James Coates who had covered the emergence of the Order in the 1980s. A copy of *Armed and Dangerous* from Kingman, Arizona's Mohave County Library turned up in the FBI search of Terry Nichols's house in Kansas. The book included a chapter on the Order, many references to Louis Beam, material on the CSA, and a comprehensive description of the movement as a whole. Having read it and required its reading by his compatriots, McVeigh could not have been ignorant of the white power movement in which he now planned to participate.

And what would arrest matter to a soldier in that kind of war? "We are the legions of the damned," read a passage by Order leader Bob Mathews in the book's epigraph. "The army of the already dead."⁵⁸

As they marshaled the will to carry out the attack, McVeigh and his co-conspirators continued to gather the supplies they would need. On April 17 or 18, a witness reported seeing five men with a Ryder truck parked near Geary State Lake. The site was less than a half hour's drive on the route from Junction City, Kansas—where McVeigh had rented the Ryder truck—to Oklahoma City, via US-77, a back road that passed through Herington, Kansas, where Terry Nichols lived. The witness said he saw a Ryder truck loaded down with ammonium nitrate fertilizer parked on the side of the road. Thinking the truck was stuck, he stopped to help, but he changed his mind after a menacing look from one of the men. Descriptions of the men matched those of militiamen and white power figures active in the area—and indicated that at least three other people besides McVeigh and Nichols were present. The other vehicles parked near the Ryder truck were a pickup, a large stakebed truck, and a brown car. McVeigh had already parked his 1977 yellow Mercury in a downtown garage in Oklahoma City, ready for the getaway, and had removed its Arizona license plate. Nichols drove a pickup. Federal agents never followed the lead about the other two vehicles, nor did they locate and interview these other suspects. After assembling the bomb at Geary State Lake with unknown accomplices, McVeigh drove the Ryder truck from Kansas to Oklahoma City on 250 miles of back roads, in order to avoid being pulled over.⁵⁹

The night before the bombing, McVeigh slept in the Ryder truck with the 7,000-pound fertilizer bomb. The morning of April 19, he drove into Oklahoma City, inserted earplugs, lit a five-minute fuse and then a two-minute one as he approached the target, parked the truck in the delivery pull-off in front of the Murrah Building, checked that the fuses were burning, got out of the truck, and walked away. He made it about 150 yards before the explosion lifted him off the ground.⁶⁰

The bomb killed 167 people, and a nurse died on the scene when she was hit by falling debris, bringing the death toll to 168. More than 500 were injured. Nineteen children died in the blast. The number of deaths in Oklahoma City exceeded the 148 Americans who had died in combat during the Gulf War. One Vietnam veteran on the scene compared the blast to war, but said that the bombing was worse. "In the war, you knew the enemy was

coming after you. You were prepared. You could defend yourself. . . . We had no warning for this."⁶¹

Many of the victims, and most of the children, were disfigured, burned, or maimed. Parents used birthmarks to identify their dead children. "I couldn't see anything in his face at all. It was all puffed up, all bloody with scratches and stitches and black eyes," said Jim Denny, father of Brandon Denny, three, who had a strawberry birthmark on his thigh. "But his legs, his little legs. His legs were so clean." McVeigh and Fortier would both claim later that they didn't know about the day care center on the second floor of the building, directly over the place where the Ryder truck had exploded. Rescue workers lined up the small bodies in a playground.⁶²

The structural instability of what remained of the Murrah Building complicated the rescue effort; falling pieces of debris and swinging electrical lines threatened rescue workers. It rained on and off during the days that followed the bombing, and crews frequently had to abandon the crane they were using because of concerns about lightning. One victim, pinioned under fallen steel, had to have her right leg amputated on the scene because moving the debris might have caused the building to collapse. An assistant fire chief spoke of the people still stuck in the wreckage. "There are places we have to crawl over bodies to get to other people," he said. "People are crying out to us. There are areas where we can reach through and try to touch their hands. There are some areas we can't get to at all." As the days passed, the presence of putrefying bodies further hampered the rescue effort, with workers slowed by the sheer volume of blood and bodily fluids.⁶³

In the chaos after the blast, McVeigh got in the parked getaway car and drove slowly away from Oklahoma City, heading north. He would later say that he forgot to put a license plate on the car, and this oversight led to his arrest when he crossed a double yellow line in Perry, Oklahoma, seventy-five minutes after the bomb went off. The timing indicates that he carefully drove at or under the speed limit from Oklahoma City to Perry, on a route that would have led him back to Fort Riley. McVeigh, who owned a radar detector and frequently drove recklessly, far above the speed limit, was exercising unusual caution.⁶⁴

When he was arrested, McVeigh had no money with him.⁶⁵ He did have a semiautomatic handgun loaded with a Black Talon "cop killer" bullet.⁶⁶ The standard protocol for white power operatives being pursued was to shoot the police officer and flee. Snell had done so, as had Order member David

Tate.⁶⁷ McVeigh, however, was polite to the arresting officer, perhaps because the policeman quickly drew his weapon. McVeigh told the officer he had a gun, and then surrendered peaceably.⁶⁸ He was arrested with Strassmeir's card in his wallet.⁶⁹ It was a strange oversight, and this—along with McVeigh's unusually strict observance of the speed limit in his getaway—indicated that he did not set out to be arrested. Perhaps he thought, when he surrendered, that he could not be linked to the bombing and would be quickly released. Indeed, only through a lucky and rapid John Doe description issued to the Perry jail was McVeigh held for anything other than the routine traffic violation and a concealed weapon charge.⁷⁰ McVeigh never attempted violent evasion or jailbreak and was consistently cooperative with his jailers.

Also in the car at the time of his arrest was a thick packet of extremist literature, quotes from Patrick Henry and Winston Churchill, and writings on Waco and on Samuel Adams. The envelope that held them was sealed; perhaps McVeigh carried them in case he was apprehended and unable to tell his story for himself. One of the items in the packet was a quote from *The Turner Diaries*:

More important, though, is what we taught the politicians and the bureaucrats. They learned this afternoon that not one of them is beyond our reach. They can huddle behind barbed wire and tanks in the city, and they can hide behind the concrete walls of their country estates, but we can still find them and kill them.⁷¹

McVeigh wanted the bombing to send a message to the New World Order: that white American men could still wage war on the state.

As McVeigh sat in one lockup, perhaps wondering if authorities would release him on the traffic violation or discover his connection to the bombing, Snell awaited execution in another. There he received Robert Millar, who had come from Elohim City to counsel him as his death approached. An FBI review of the prison log would later report that Snell spent the hours before his execution lying on his bunk and watching television coverage of the Oklahoma City bombing, "smiling and chuckling." As guards prepared to administer the lethal injection that night, Snell's final words were of race war and a warning for the Arkansas governor. "Look over your shoulder, justice is on the way," Snell foretold. "I wouldn't trade places with you or any

of your political cronies. Hail His victory. I am at peace." After the lethal injection at 9:10 P.M., men from Elohim City collected his body. He was buried at the compound, with a funeral officiated by Millar that revealed, again, the close ties between that community and Snell's CSA.⁷²

In the days that followed, more and more links between the bombing and the white power movement emerged. Authorities transferred McVeigh to prison to await trial. They identified and located Terry Nichols after he turned himself in to the state police in Herington; a search of his house produced some thirty weapons, including a replica Uzi machine gun. In the home and car of McVeigh, officials found writings and letters about his belief in a right to carry firearms without government restraint. He also had a book, *Sinister Twilight*, and a video, *Day 51*—both about Waco.⁷³

Meanwhile, doubts arose that one truck bomb could have inflicted so much damage. Two anonymous Pentagon experts said the damage was consistent with five separate bombs, but the ruins were demolished before an independent forensic team could investigate. The government cited health concerns as the reason for expediting the demolition. This part of the story generated complicated conspiracy theories, as did witness reports of a "John Doe 2," never located, described as an olive-skinned, dark-haired man.⁷⁴

Regardless of the specifics of the explosion, McVeigh could not have acted alone. Regardless of whether only the Ryder truck bomb or an additional series of smaller explosions caused the damage, Nichols and Fortier were very likely joined by the Geary State Lake accomplices in helping McVeigh with the bombing. When McVeigh wrote that he had become a member of a "Special Forces Group involved in criminal activity," it signaled membership. Such groups, the paramilitary elite of the white power movement, were not newly wrought by the militiamen: they had led mercenary expeditions in Central America, conducted vigilante border watches, confronted Vietnamese refugees on the Texas coast, and robbed and killed in the Order and in affiliated local groups. McVeigh's membership in such a cell during these years positioned him as a soldier of the white power movement. It also pointed to the continued power of violence in binding white power actors together. McVeigh, who wanted more than anything to be a member of the U.S. Army Special Forces, instead found the equivalent position in the paramilitary war on the state, a campaign that had always been modeled on the Vietnam War story.⁷⁵

The image of McVeigh as a working soldier was emphasized by his trial, which began on the tenth anniversary of the Fort Smith sedition trial, and that of Terry Nichols. Further links between the white power movement and the bombing emerged while McVeigh and Nichols were in jail. After authorities decided Strassmeir was a person of interest, movement lawyer Lyons helped him flee the country before the investigation could produce any more information to tie him to the bombing. And because McVeigh refused to acknowledge his role in the bombing until after his conviction, McVeigh's defense team went so far as to issue a false confession in hopes of baiting white power leaders into giving affidavits. The *Rocky Mountain News* later reported that the confession was meant to make Beam think McVeigh was acting as the perfect operative by accepting blame for the bombing. The defense team thought Beam was a possible suspect in the bombing but was unable to get him on record in a useful way. Beam, purportedly plagued with ongoing personal crises, including custody battles and health problems he attributed to Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam, had begun to quietly withdraw from the movement. During the investigation, Beam said through an intermediary that he could not be held responsible for how others might misuse his ideas.⁷⁶

Unable to prove that McVeigh was carrying out Beam's strategy of leaderless resistance, the defense team argued that there had been a conspiracy. It was based, they said, in Elohim City, where resident "members of the Aryan Nations, the Posse Comitatus and former Kansas City Ku Klux Klan leader Dennis Mahon" assisted McVeigh. Jones argued that in the weeks before the bombing, Elohim City was "populated by individuals who previously had engaged in armed confrontation with the federal government including neo-Nazis with training manuals on how to make ammonium nitrate bombs."⁷⁷ Jones relied on the testimony of Carol Howe, allowed as a witness in Nichols's trial, who maintained that Mahon and Strassmeir cased the Murrah Building three times just before the bombing. Jones also referred to an Order-style spree of bank robberies in the area carried out by the Aryan Republican Army. That group certainly followed the directives of the Order's war on the state: it carried out a chain of bank robberies from 1994 to 1996, eventually robbing nineteen banks in eight states. Of six suspects in those robberies, four had lived at Elohim City or had close ties there. One was wanted for the triple murder of a gun dealer and his family. ARA members included Michael Brescia and Mark Thomas. Some suspected Brescia

of being involved in the Oklahoma City bombing as John Doe 2, although such suspicions were never investigated or confirmed. Dennis Mahon—of Tom Metzger's White Aryan Resistance in California, and Carol Howe's former boyfriend—was close friends with Brescia and Thomas. Thomas was also the leader of the Pennsylvania branch of Aryan Nations. These connections pointed persuasively to Elohim City as a refuge and staging ground of a continued war on the state waged by the unified white power movement. "If the bombing or anything like that was planned here, it was certainly not to my knowledge," said Millar in an uncharacteristically weak denial. A local witness claimed to have seen McVeigh with one of the accused ARA bank robbers.⁷⁸

The conspiracy defense did not succeed: McVeigh was found guilty and sentenced to death by lethal injection. Perhaps Jones lost the case, commentators ventured, because McVeigh refused to offer sufficient information to sustain the defense. Wrote author Gore Vidal, who undertook a lengthy correspondence with McVeigh after his conviction, "Jones's case led some reporters to speculate that McVeigh himself was limiting his own defense in order to prevent evidence that might implicate others in the bombing from entering the record."⁷⁹ Later, in Terry Nichols's trial, Vidal pointed out that the jury forewoman, after reporting a hung jury, told the press, "Decisions were probably made very early on that McVeigh and Nichols were who they were looking for, and the same sort of resources were not used to try to find out who else might be involved. . . . The government really dropped the ball." The forewoman received bomb threats soon after saying so. Some jurors, Vidal wrote, believed that other conspirators were still at large.⁸⁰

Vidal also wrote, "I unearthed evidence that the FBI did not follow up on solid leads, or, if they did, failed to turn those over to the defense. I uncovered information provided to the FBI by Kansas law enforcement, and by very reliable eyewitnesses who were apparently disregarded," including the story of the five men at Geary State Lake. He also "found evidence that the FBI may have withheld certain information from the defense teams during discovery, potentially tainting the verdicts against both McVeigh and Nichols."⁸¹ Indeed, the FBI deliberately withheld such evidence in its strategic pursuit of a single perpetrator. Attorney General John Ashcroft would delay McVeigh's execution by a month, at the end, to allow the defense to review materials not disclosed during the trial. The FBI turned over thousands of pages of documents that the agency had not revealed even under a

direct order from the judge.⁸² Nevertheless, McVeigh's execution in June 2001 cemented the popular perception that he had acted alone.

Meanwhile, most reactions to the bombing within the white power movement fell into two categories: those who condemned the act and believed McVeigh was an innocent scapegoat, and those who approved of the bombing as violence necessary in the war on the state. Militia of Montana leader David Trochmann said federal government operatives had carried out the bombing in order to discredit militias.⁸³ Incarcerated Order member David Lane published a lengthy open letter to McVeigh in his newsletter. Angry that Richard Matsch, the same judge who had sentenced him and his fellow Order members, was presiding over McVeigh's trial, Lane wrote that McVeigh had surely been set up.

Timothy, you are dealing with a government that over the last two centuries has traveled from Dixie, to Cuba, to Mexico, to Panama to Grenada, to a dozen Latin American countries, from the halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli, to Italy, to Germany twice, to Japan, to Korea, to Vietnam, to Iraq, to Waco, to Whidbey Island, to Ruby Ridge and dozens of lesser known wars, occupations and assassinations, in pursuit of their . . . New World Order. In the process they have killed and maimed many tens of millions of very real people.⁸⁴

Lane placed the battles of the white power movement—the standoff between Mathews and the FBI at Whidbey Island, the siege at Ruby Ridge and the fire at Waco—in a history of brutal U.S. interventions all over the world. Under the power of such a superstate, a man set up to take a fall could not expect justice. The *Jubilee*, following this line, called the bombing a tragedy, but also defended McVeigh from what it saw as unjust federal prosecution.⁸⁵

Meanwhile, *Turner Diaries* author and National Alliance leader William Pierce lauded the bombing and promised more violence to come. "Terrorism is a nasty business. Most of its victims are innocent people," Pierce said. "But terrorism is a form of warfare, and in war most of the victims are noncombatants."⁸⁶ Other movement figures recognized the violence as part of their war on the state. The National Socialist Workers' Party said it had no connection to the bombing, but that members of the movement were probably involved. In an ethnographic interview, one white separatist woman said people in her group "were happy about what happened in Oklahoma. There's

a lot of anger out there. The people, some felt sorry for the children but the rest of them got what they deserved, the government deserved. The government provoked this."⁸⁷

Beam offered a call to action. In a long "historical analysis" of the bombing in the *Jubilee*, he decried the "horrendous explosion and senseless loss of life in Oklahoma City" and wrote that the bombing would fuel the police state, which would crack down on the militias and on gun ownership. Then, Beam asked the reader to put aside assumptions of conspiracy: what if the government had not set up the Oklahoma City bombing? What if McVeigh and Nichols were not government agents, but ordinary men? "What then would produce the amount of frustration necessary to motivate decorated Gulf War veterans to carry out such an act independent of any government collusion?" he asked. "Two things come to mind: Failure of government to punish those who killed Mrs. Weaver and her son at Ruby Ridge, and failure of government to punish those in law enforcement who murdered innocent men, women, and children at Waco." From this invocation of martyrs, Beam moved fluidly into a new call to arms.

When the law breaks down, the vigilante is called forth. . . . To control this disease of the American spirit we must go straight for the command and control center in Washington. We still have the power to take back America so long as free elections are held. Between now and the next national election we must all arm ourselves with a voter registration slip and use it like a .308 sniper weapon to "take out" the infectious bought whores of the new world government who are now proposing to rule us all with an Orwellian iron fist—forever beating us into submission, while claiming to protect us.⁸⁸

Likening a voter registration slip to a sniper rifle was a strangely unwieldy metaphor for Beam. Perhaps it is better read as a coded message to movement followers and to underground resistance cells. The .308 was the weapon proposed in the Order's plan for six-member cells to avoid police pursuit by killing policemen and disabling their cars. And the target, clearly embedded in the message, was "the command and control center in Washington." Beam was calling for soldiers to follow McVeigh's lead in acting against the federal government.

Indeed, the bombing launched an almost immediate and widespread wave of violence as the militia movement, and the broader white power movement,

took action around the country. Four militiamen were arrested in Oklahoma, where they were allegedly planning to bomb several buildings. Federal documents said that they had planned to practice at Elohim City; while Millar admitted that he knew one of the men, he said he knew nothing about their plan.⁸⁹ Three members of the Georgia Republic Militia were convicted of stockpiling bombs. Militia members from West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania were accused of planning to blow up the FBI's national fingerprint center, another idea taken directly from *The Turner Diaries*. A federal mine inspector and his wife were injured in a copycat bombing in Vacaville, California. There was an Oklahoma-based conspiracy to blow up the Anti-Defamation League offices in Houston.⁹⁰ Bombings, bomb threats, murders, and armed protests plagued gay bars in the South and abortion clinics there and in the Midwest. Confederate Hammer Skins—skinheads armed with assault weapons—chased law enforcement officers away from a "White Man's Weekend" in Dawsonville, Georgia.⁹¹ In 1995, seven Militia of Montana members stormed the sheriff's department to demand the return of confiscated property; five—including leader John Trochmann—were arrested on concealed weapons charges, and authorities suspected they had planned to kidnap and hang a district court judge. The *New York Times* reported on several other fugitives holed up in Idaho and Montana, each man waiting for, and perhaps even hoping for, his standoff with the feds.⁹²

Several familiar white power activists reemerged after the bombing. In 1997, a jury convicted navy veteran Veren Jay Merrell of domestic terrorism bombings and bank robberies in eastern Washington, including bombing a Planned Parenthood clinic, a U.S. Bank branch, and a suburban bureau of the Spokane-based *Spokesman-Review*. Merrell, who had written for the *Jubilee*, was a member of the Arizona Patriots not convicted after the 1986 bust. The group had relocated to Idaho (possibly following Bob Mathews), had reorganized, and had continued to wage war on the state. Merrell, who practiced severation, was a nuclear expert from his time in the navy and easily translated this skill set to bomb-making.⁹³ Ex-mercenary and Civilian Military Assistance head Tom Posey also turned up again after the Oklahoma City bombing, and was convicted of conspiracy to sell night-vision goggles—nearly a quarter of a million dollars' worth—stolen from the army post at Fort Hood, Texas.⁹⁴ In 1999, Buford Furrow—who had married Debbie Mathews, the widow of Bob Mathews—opened fire on a Jewish community center and killed a Filipino postal worker in Los Angeles, California.

Furrow, who was using an Uzi, also wounded three children, a teenager, and an old woman. In his van, police found 2,000 rounds of ammunition and an Army Ranger handbook; he was also armed with other weapons, including hand grenades. Furrow may have been attempting to get into the Phineas Priesthood, a Christian Identity group that required its soldiers to wage acts of race war in order to gain membership. Furrow was a longtime Aryan Nations member with a history of violent activity. In an earlier court appearance for assault, he had said he fantasized about committing a mass killing; even so, he was able to obtain an Uzi and carry out further crimes.⁹⁵

On July 27, 1996, Eric Rudolph bombed Atlanta's Centennial Park in the middle of the Olympics. Because the bomb had shifted, orienting its explosion vertically rather than horizontally, its shrapnel wounded only 111 people and killed two; the bomb had been intended for a much higher death toll. Rudolph, escaping arrest, followed with three more bombs in 1996 and 1997, targeting two abortion clinics and a gay bar. Those blasts injured another six people and killed two more. All four bombs, the FBI would later confirm, were "powerful antipersonnel devices, containing nails, that were designed to kill and maim," with secondary blasts or advance warning phone calls calculated to target rescue workers.⁹⁶ Rudolph, who signed his letters "Army of God" in reference to a violent anti-abortion crusade, had grown up around white separatism. As a freshman in high school, he wrote a paper denying the Holocaust, a common intellectual exercise for white power movement members and their children. His family lived in the North Carolina wilderness; Rudolph was anti-abortion, anti-gay, and dedicated to war on the state.⁹⁷

Rudolph, an experienced woodsman, disappeared into the mountains of western North Carolina, where he remained on the run—and on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list, with a reward of \$1 million—for five years. He chose a region, reported the *New York Times*, where white separatist organizations were known to take refuge. And indeed, the locals did little to help authorities catch Rudolph. FBI director Louis Freeh and Attorney General Janet Reno made impassioned pleas, describing the horrific details of the Olympic Park bombing, to attempt to generate help finding Rudolph. When Rudolph was apprehended near Murphy, North Carolina, he had buried four caches of dynamite around the town, including a twenty-five-pound bomb across the road from the Army National Guard armory that served as the base for the FBI manhunt. This revealed a continued engagement with the Order's

attempts to target law enforcement officers, the White Patriot Party's theft of military weapons from North Carolina armories, or both.⁹⁸ Meanwhile, a string of less publicized incidents showed a white power movement still active and violent. The Arizona Patriots plotted to blow up abortion clinics in the mid-1990s. In 1999, Benjamin Smith, linked with the white power World Church of the Creator, went on a shooting spree in Illinois and Indiana, wounding six Jews and killing two people of color before killing himself.⁹⁹

The Oklahoma City bombing, as Beam foretold, resulted in a federal crackdown that dampened the white power movement somewhat in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Thom Robb's Klan in Zinc, Arkansas, disbanded under the pressure of the bombing investigation. In March 1996, the FBI attempted to round up the Montana Freeman at Justus Township, provoking a long siege, but one that ended peacefully and avoided creating a membership surge like the one that had followed Ruby Ridge and Waco. Lyons turned up at Justus Township to help with hostage negotiations. The *Jubilee* called the raid the culmination of three years of government harassment, political persecution, and judicial suppression. McVeigh said his bombing had curbed state violence. Perhaps he was right: after all, there had been no fiery end to the siege at Justus Township.¹⁰⁰

Until his execution in 2001, McVeigh maintained that he had acted alone, with coerced help from Fortier and Nichols, in carrying out the bombing. He said that his attorney was wrong about the conspiracy idea, that he had never met Mahon, and that he had encountered Strassmeir only once, at a gun show. He said he had made calls to Elohim City and the National Alliance only to secure a place to hide after the bombing.¹⁰¹ The evidence, however, from McVeigh's life history, to his associations, to the ideas that shaped his life and actions, points to his long participation in the white power movement and as a soldier of its cell-style underground. It didn't matter that McVeigh had no demonstrable contact with white power leaders. He could be no greater an acolyte had he gone into battle under direct command. McVeigh referred to the bombing as a "military action," and the bombing was indeed the culmination of decades of white power organization, bringing to bear years and years of paramilitarism. The successful strategy of leaderless resistance meant that movement leaders could never be linked to the bombing—and that even the white power movement itself could become invisible, its coordinated violence misunderstood as disconnected acts carried out by lone terrorists.

Epilogue



A police car decorated with the slogan "We Will Never Forget" sits before the wreckage of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, April 1995. (Rick Bowmer, Associated Press Photo)

THE BOMB IN OKLAHOMA CITY left an eight-foot crater in the street and a massive hollow in the edifice of the federal building. Survivors spoke of the material void they encountered in the immediate aftermath of the blast: the empty space where that part of the building should have been. "It was like the end of the world when the blast hit, this tremendous noise and pressure against you, and I could see everything disintegrating," said Wanda Webster, a sixty-five-year-old employee of the Office of Native American Programs. "When I finally did remove the rubble and stand up, there was nothing there."¹

Such descriptions of absence serve as an apt metaphor for the way the bombing distorted, or even destroyed, what had been a popular awareness