

Introduction

Homegrown Extremism

What is “domestic terrorism?” The first word is easy to explain, because “domestic” means, according to Merriam-Webster, “of, relating to, or originating within a country and especially one’s own country.”¹ This is exactly what domestic terrorism is, it is terrorism that comes from within one’s own country. For Americans, this means that domestic terrorism concerns terrorist acts committed by other Americans. This contrasts domestic terrorism from what is called “foreign” terrorism, which is terrorism that comes from *outside* of the United States.

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, were the most famous *foreign* terrorist attacks in U.S. history, whereas the Oklahoma City Bombing was a domestic terror attack, committed by a U.S. citizen, who was born in the United States, and who had even served in the armed forces and, therefore, was formerly part of the establishment of American culture.

The difficulty comes when one tries to define “terrorism,” because this term means different things to different people. Google, the collective digital brain of the Internet, defines “terrorism” as “the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims.” This is a perfectly acceptable definition of the term, from a certain perspective, but it also deserves closer inspection.

First, notice that Google’s definition, which comes ultimately from the Oxford Languages system that produces the Oxford Language dictionary, states that terrorism is “unlawful.”² This is stated at the very beginning of the definition before the description of the unlawful act. Why is this important? Because the definition suggests that some acts of violence and intimidation, in pursuit of political aims that target civilians, might *not* be terrorism and that terrorism only occurs if the violence in question is “unlawful.” But when would acts of violence and intimidation be “lawful?” When they are conducted by the state.

Military organizations and police use tactics that overlap with those of terrorists, including the use of explosives, attacks that result in civilian deaths, and other meth-

ods that are both violent and intentionally intimidating. One might say that when the U.S. military bombs a neighborhood in Afghanistan, targeting radical militants, the goal of the attack is, in part, to spread fear and terror among those who would seek to take up arms against American forces. The military, therefore, intentionally “terrorizes,” and yet, by the above definition, these acts would not be terrorism, because they are “lawful” by American standards.

The concept of lawful vs. unlawful political violence raises an interesting and essential point, which is that the definition of terror is completely subjective. A family in Afghanistan whose child was killed or whose home was destroyed by U.S. drone attacks might feel, from their perspective, that U.S. forces are committing immoral acts that violate *their* laws and principles. They might, therefore, consider U.S. forces to be acting as terrorists, and this use of the term is consistent from that perspective. From the perspective of the U.S. military, however, U.S. forces are not acting as terrorists because the violence that they engage in is undertaken within the legal framework of U.S. military politics.

Laws are only “right” and/or “just” to those who view them as such, and military violence is likewise only legitimate to those who consider it so. Americans may view their military apparatus as a righteous and even heroic institution, but this is a subjective interpretation of American militarism, not an absolute, and thus what Americans might consider appropriate for their military, might be viewed, by others, as criminal, immoral, unlawful, even terroristic.

Characteristics of Terrorism

Though the concept of terrorism is subjective, there are certain characteristics that have been used to differentiate terrorism from other kinds of violence and radicalism. In subsequent chapters, we will look at many different violent and destructive acts undertaken by political radicals in America, acts that have been referred to as “terroristic” at least by some Americans, historians, or politicians. As we explore American radicalism and extremism, it is helpful to compare the radical acts described in reference to these characteristics. For an act to be legitimately referred to as terrorism, the violence must meet at least some of the basic characteristics described below.

Historical Timeline

- 1607** Jamestown Colony is established.
- 1619** First African slaves brought to Virginia, beginning the era of white supremacist dominance.
- 1730** Jewish immigrants establish the first synagogue in America.
- 1756–1763** The Seven Years War was the first global conflict.
- 1765** The Stamp Act gets the revolutionary movement started.
Sons of Liberty founded.
- 1767** Sons of Liberty begins “tarring and feathering” loyalists.
- 1770** Paul Revere’s “Bloody Massacre” becomes one of the first examples of political propaganda and fake news in U.S. media.
- 1775** Harry Washington, an enslaved man held captive by George Washington, escapes slavery and joins the loyalists.

The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery becomes one of the first organized anti-slavery organizations in America.
- 1776** The Declaration of Independence is issued.
- 1791** The Bill of Rights is ratified.

New excise tax on liquor sparks the “Whiskey Rebellion.”
- 1803** A rebellion of formerly enslaved people overthrows the French government in Haiti.
- 1804-1806** Lewis and Clark expedition
- 1805** The Chatham Revolt is one of the first famous violent rebellions by enslaved people in America.
- 1812** The War of 1812 begins.
- 1814** The British invade Washington, D.C.

The Battle of Prairie du Chien follows an expedition to eliminate Indian radicals.
- 1830** The Indian Removal Act gives the U.S. Army a mandate to conduct ethnic cleansing in Native American territories.

LIBERTY OR TYRANNY

Terrorism and the Patriot Movement (1765–1776)

1

Introduction

The patriot movement in the United States was driven by the desire for economic freedom and evolved into a propaganda battle that eventually gave rise to violence. Along the way, a number of more radical groups of patriot activists utilized threats of and actual violence against employees of the British government, or loyalists, who wanted to remain part of the British Empire. Traditionally, these actions have been excused or even celebrated by those who believe that the independence movement was just or righteous, but the tactics utilized by members of some groups could also be classified as terrorist tactics.

Topics Covered in this Chapter Include:

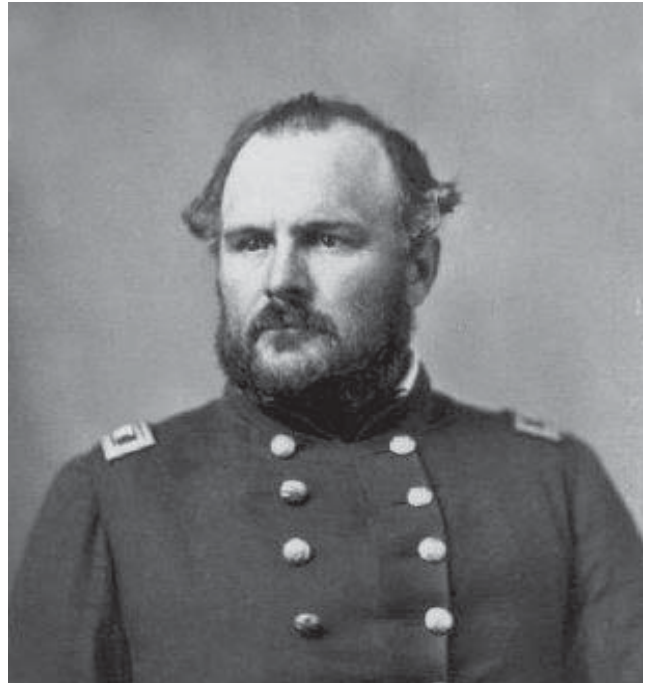
- Sons of Liberty
- Whiskey Rebellion
- George Washington

This Chapter Discusses the Following Source Document:

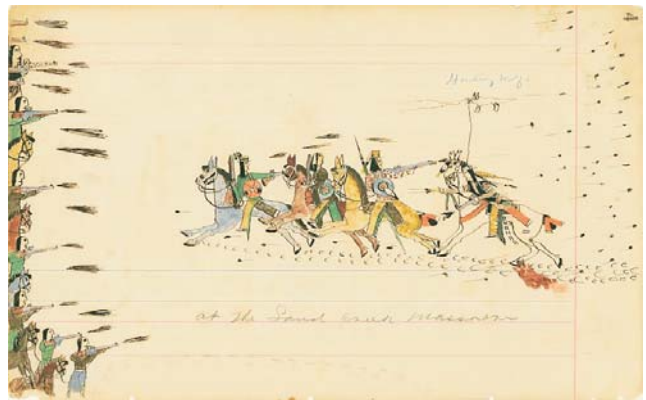
Baldwin, Cyrus, "Letter from Cyrus Baldwin to Loammi Baldwin," August 15, 1765

against Native Americans, Cramer's report demonstrates the enormity of what Native Americans were facing as their lands and lives were being taken in the relentless colonial march across the country. A Native American who killed a civilian farmer or killed a family can still be judged to have engaged in immoral violence, but there is no realistic way to portray the violence perpetrated against Native Americans as equivalent or commensurate. Native Americans were a people being exterminated, and their attacks upon White settlers can just as well be framed as resistance to oppression and as a response to violence undertaken against them.

How one perceives the morality of White American actions in the realm of Native American relations plays a key role in how the history of this era is perceived. Were White settlers and soldiers justified in claiming land when Native Americans proved unwilling to share the land, or perhaps even attacked those who came into their territories? For most of history, most White historians have justified military actions against Native Americans in this way. Many politicians, members of the military, and the historians who wrote history according to this view, alleged that Native Americans, being non-Christians, lacked Christian morality and were, therefore, spiritually and biologically inferior. The settlement of their lands was, therefore, justified by the argument that Americans were "civilizing" the frontier or that there was some underlying spiritual directive to bring Christianity into areas where the Christian mythos was not practiced.



Colonel John Chivington (ca. 1860), National Park Service, via Wikipedia. [Public domain.]



An eyewitness illustration of the Sand Creek Massacre (ca. 1875) by Cheyenne artist Howling Wolf, via Wikipedia. [Public domain.]

*A Full and Complete Account of the Late
Awful Riots in Philadelphia*

John B. Perry

1844

Source Document Excerpt

THE unprecedented success of the newly organised party in the city of New York, who recently elected their candidate (Mr. Harper,) for Mayor, gave an impetus to the party in Philadelphia, who, some weeks since started a daily journal under the name of "The Native American," and have since been industriously placing before the public the political sentiments the advocate; and on the afternoon of Friday last (May 3d, 1844,) they called a meeting at the junction of Second and Master streets, Kensington. The meeting had organised, and one of the speakers was addressing the crowd, when, all at once, a rush from a concourse of Irish people, residing in that immediate vicinity, and who had surrounded the meeting, took place. The native Americans, so fiercely were they assailed by an overpowering force, were driven from the staging they had erected, and fled in all directions, pursued by the missiles and shouts of the Irish. This, of course, incensed men who had assembled peaceably to express their sentiments, as by the Constitution of the United States all citizens have an undeniable right.

Another meeting was called by the Native Americans, to be held at the same place on the afternoon of Monday, May 7th, and at an early hour a large number of persons were on the ground, from all parts of the city and county. "No one will hesitate to say," are the remarks of the Public Ledger, "that the Native American party, having called a public meeting, had perfect right to carry on their proceedings in peace, undisturbed by any per-

sons, and that the disturbance they met with from persons opposed to the objects of the meeting, was as gross an outrage as was ever perpetrated upon the rights of any body of free citizens. The citizens who composed the meeting were assembled in the exercise of a right which is guaranteed to them by the Constitution, and it has come to a pretty pass, if, availing themselves of their constitutional rights, they are to be assailed by others, and their lives sacrificed in the streets.

"They were assembled by public call, their object being a perfectly legal one, and the presumption is that those who were opposed to the meeting were attracted there from some mischievous motive. They were not embraced in the call; they could have had no proper object in being present at, or in the neighborhood of the meeting, and the consequences which resulted, indicate very plainly the folly, if not to say the wickedness of their designs, in going in numbers to the place. The presumption that mischief was intended is confirmed by the conduct of a reckless set of ruffians, who, a few evenings before, broke up a meeting assembled for a similar purpose. Such conduct as this is not to be tolerated with impunity in any country, much less in ours, where the hand of fellowship and good feeling has always been extended to the emigrant from other shores, and political equality so liberally offered them. It is but a poor return for these favors, if they are to turn round and strike at the liberty and rights of those who have so generously given them the power to do so

my hand down and picked it up; it made my heart thump, for I was certain it was gold. The piece was about half the size and shape of a pea. Then I saw another piece in the water. After taking it out I sat down and began to think right hard.”²

Although one might assume that the discovery of gold on his land made Sutter into a very wealthy man, the discovery actually proved disastrous for Sutter. Sutter tried to keep the discovery secret, but word spread, and soon there were hundreds scrambling over his land searching for gold and destroying pretty much everything that Sutter had built there. Sutter virtually went bankrupt, though he managed to save some of his land, which he gave to his son. His son fared far better, starting construction on a new city, Sacramento, that ultimately became California’s capital and one of the most prosperous small cities in the state.³

A NEW AND MAGNIFICENT CLIPPER FOR SAN FRANCISCO.
MERCHANTS' EXPRESS LINE OF CLIPPER SHIPS!
 Loading none but First-Class Vessels and Regularly Dispatching the greatest number.
THE SPLENDID NEW OUT-AND-OUT CLIPPER SHIP

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 HENRY BARBER, Commander, AT PIER 13 EAST RIVER.

This elegant Clipper Ship was built expressly for this trade by Samuel Hall, Esq., of East Boston, the builder of the celebrated Clippers "SURPRISE," "GAMECOCK," "JOHN GILPIN," and others. **She will fully equal them in speed!** Unusually prompt dispatch and a very quick trip may be relied upon. Engagements should be completed at once.

Agents in San Francisco,
 Messrs. DE WITT KITTLE & CO. } **RANDOLPH M. COOLEY, 88 Wall Street, Tontine Building.**

NESBITT & CO., PRINTERS.

Clipper ship advertisement from 1850 aimed at merchants journeying to California for the Gold Rush, G. F. Nesbitt & Co., via Wikipedia. [Public domain.]

RELIGIOUS RADICALISM

Mormonism and Violence in the Nineteenth Century (1857–1858)

8

Introduction

The so-called “Utah War” was a conflict between radicalized Utah settlers in the Utah Territory and U.S government forces, taking place over the course of a year from the summer of 1857 to the summer of 1858. While neither the Mormon forces nor the U.S. government were necessarily acting as terrorists in the conflict, critics have described Mormon militaristic action as terroristic because members of the militant Mormon groups attacked civilians without provocation and attempted to conceal their identities. The incident raised major issues about U.S. governmental responses to radical religious groups and about the degree to which religious groups can expect or deserve autonomy and religious freedom.

Topics Covered in this Chapter Include:

- Utah War
- Nauvoo Legion
- Utah Territory
- Mormonism in the United States
- Joseph Smith
- Brigham Young

This Chapter Discusses the Following Source Documents:

Rigdon, Sidney, “Oration at Far West, Missouri,” 1838

Young, Brigham, “Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints,” 1845

“Conduct of the Late Elections” General Assembly of Louisiana

1869

Source Document Excerpt Continued

Council while transacting the business of their immediate Council, and at no other time, so that the Grand Commander and the Grand Lieutenant of each Council take their own sitting with the Grand Council. Each Council reports to the Grand Council once in each week; the Grand Commander and the Grand Lieutenant take the report of their Council to the Grand Council and sit with them while receiving the report and transacting the business of this Council and retire with the verbal order from the Grand Council, which they deliver verbally to their Council, thus making the number present, while transacting the business of any particular Council, five (5).

The city of New Orleans, Algiers, and Jefferson are divided into military districts, with a Grand Military Commander for the State and subordinate officers for the districts.

The Grand Military Commander for the State of Louisiana is ———

The organization comprises principally ex-rebel soldiers, although any youth of eighteen and upwards can become a member, whether a citizen of the United States or not. All the banished and transported desperadoes now in New Orleans are members of the K.W.Cs or K.K.Ks.

The reckless, disappointed, Democratic politicians are all members. Many merchants, clerks, and brokers, have been drawn into the order under the pretense of uniting to redeem the State

from the so-called negro rule. These men are withdrawing from the order as they discover its criminal designs. Every foreigner, whether he had been in the State a week or no, that could be made to promise that he would vote the Democratic ticket was brought to the Democratic Committee and they (the Committee) would give the friend of the foreigner who brought him a note to the Democratic Judge of the court, who would give said foreigner naturalization papers, so that he could register and vote; thousands of names were registered in this way. Every member of the order who would not procure a revolver was supplied with one by the Councils; the members subscribing according to their means. Muskets were produced also, and armories established where the members (K.W.C.) drilled.

In case the order and signal was given for a general massacre of the loyal whites (scallawags and carpet baggers, as they call them) and blacks, all the members of the order (K.W.C.) could go to the gun stores, or places where arms were sold, and take them, and the Council would afterward pay for them. In case of a massacre, if the military interfered they would fight them too, and they openly boasted that they could “clean the military out in fifteen minutes.”

The house of every prominent Republican was watched, and the hours that each kept, so that in case of a massacre they would know where and when to find their victims.⁷

Attention Workingmen!

G R E A T

MASS-MEETING

TO-NIGHT, at 7.30 o'clock,

A T T H E

HAYMARKET, Randolph St., Bet. Desplaines and Halsted.

Good Speakers will be present to denounce the latest atrocious act of the police, the shooting of our fellow-workmen yesterday afternoon.

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

Achtung Arbeiter!

G r o ß e

Massen-Versammlung

Heute Abend, halb 8 Uhr, auf dem

Heumarkt, Randolph-Strasse, zwischen

Desplaines- u. Halsted-Str.

☛ Gute Redner werden den neuesten Schurkenstreich der Polizei, indem sie gestern Nachmittag unsere Brüder erschoss, geißeln.

Das Executiv-Comite.

Flyer in German and English announcing a rally in support of striking workers, via Wikipedia. [Public domain.]

As of 2024, “ecoterrorism” remains a legally defined form of “terrorism” only because too few Americans agree with Leopold that the protection of nature is not a matter of balancing economic gains versus abstract losses, but a matter of emotional even spiritual responsibility to respect the rights of other living creatures, to protect their lives and their ability to continue living those lives into the undefined future. The corporate entities that destroy ecosystems and slaughter animals, whether for food, for industrial advancement, or any other source of profit, are part of the status quo of American economics and culture; they *are* the establishment of American culture, and thus radical environmentalists are cast as enemies of this American system.

Even other environmentalists often agree that the actions taken by members of these organizations are too extreme, too provocative, or cannot be defended because they are criminal in nature. Arguably, the destruction of property and attacks on corporations are ineffective unless this movement captures the heart and harnesses the will of the American people. If, in the future, a majority of Americans agree that non-human lives and environments are humanity’s moral responsibility, perhaps attitudes about the alleged



Hunt Saboteurs logo, via Wikipedia. [Fair use.]

HISTORICAL SNAPSHOTS

1880-1881

- The plush Del Monte Hotel in Monterey, California, opened
- The country claimed 93,000 miles of railroad
- Halftone photographic illustrations appeared in newspapers for the first time
- Midwest farmers burned their corn for fuel as prices were too low to warrant shipping
- President James A. Garfield was assassinated
- The Diamond Match Company was created
- Marquette University was founded in Milwaukee
- Barnum & Bailey's Circus was created through the merger of two companies
- Chicago meatpacker Gustavus F. Swift perfected the refrigeration car
- Josephine Cockrane of Illinois invented the first mechanical dishwasher
- A U.S. Constitutional amendment to grant full suffrage to women was introduced in Congress this and every year until its passage in 1920
- Thanks to high tariffs, the U.S. Treasury had a surplus of \$145 million
- The U.S. had 2,400 magazines and daily newspapers, and 7,500 weekly newspapers
- The typewriter and the telephone were both novelties at the 1876 Centennial in Philadelphia; in 1880, 50,000 telephones existed nationwide and at the turn of the century, that number tripled
- George Eastman's famous slogan "You Push the Button, We Do the Rest" helped make Kodak camera a part of many American homes

1885

- The Canadian Pacific Railroad reached the Pacific Ocean
- Baseball set players' salaries at \$1,000-\$2,000 for the 1885 season
- The first photograph of a meteor was taken
- Dr. William W. Grant of Davenport, Iowa, performed the first appendectomy
- Bachelor Grover Cleveland entered the White House as president
- Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was published
- The Washington Monument was dedicated
- The U.S. Post Office began offering special delivery for first-class mail
- The Salvation Army was officially organized in the U.S.
- Texas was the last Confederate state readmitted to the Union
- Louis Pasteur successfully tested an anti-rabies vaccine on a boy bitten by an infected dog
- Leo Daft opened America's first commercially operated electric streetcar in Baltimore