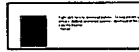


RELEASE IN PART B6

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Subject: Max's new epilogue to paperback edition of "Republican Gomorrah": The Right's Days of Rage

B6



Days of Rage -- The Noxious Transformation of the Conservative Movement into a Rabid Fringe

By Max Blumenthal, Nation Books
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*Editor's Note: The following is
the new epilogue from Max
Blumenthal's book, Republic
Gomorrah, now out in paperback
(Basic/Nation Books, 2009).*

*"He will tell you
that he wants a
strong authority to
take from him the
crushing
responsibility of
thinking for
himself. Since the
Republic is weak,
he is led to break
the law out of love
for obedience. But
is it really strong
authority that he
wishes? In reality
he demands
rigorous order for
others, and for
himself disorder
without
responsibility." --*

*Jean-Paul Sartre,
"Anti-Semite and
Jew"*

I am not sure when I first detected the noxious fumes that would envelop the conservative movement in the Obama era. It might have been early on, in April 2009, when I visited a series of gun shows in rural California and Nevada. Perusing tables piled high with high-caliber semi-automatic weapons and chatting with anyone in my vicinity, I heard urgent warnings of mass roundups, concentration camps, and a socialist government in Washington.

"These people that are purchasing these guns are people that are worried about what's going on in this country," a gun dealer told me outside a show in Reno.

"Good luck Obama," a young gun enthusiast remarked to me. "We outnumber him 100 to 1." At this time, the Tea Party movement had not even registered on the national media's radar.

In September 2009, I led a panel discussion about this book inside an auditorium filled with nearly 100 students and faculty at the University of California-Riverside. Beside me sat Jonathan Walton, an African-American professor of religious studies and prolific writer, and Mark Takano, an erudite, openly gay former Democratic congressional candidate and local community college trustee. In the middle of our discussion, a dozen College Republicans stormed the front of the stage with signs denouncing me as a "left-wing hack" while a hysterical young man leaped from the crowd, blowing kisses mockingly at Takano while heckling Walton as a "racist." Afterward, university police

officers insisted on escorting me to my ride after the right-wing heckler attempted to follow me as he shouted threats.

Who was this stalker? Just a concerned citizen worried about taxes? His name was Ryan Sorba and he was an operative of a heavily funded national conservative youth outfit, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute. Besides founding dozens of Republican youth groups across the country, Sorba has devoted an exceptional amount of energy to his interest in homosexuals. His intellectual output consists of a tract titled *The Born Gay Hoax*, arguing that homosexuality is at once a curable disease and a bogus trend manufactured by academic leftists. Adding to his credentials, Sorba has a history of run-ins with the law, he explained when I called him about the order.

My encounter with this aggressive right-wing cadre seemed a strange, isolated event. But the hostility turned out to be symptomatic of the intensifying campaign to delegitimize President Obama and his allies in Congress. The Right's days of rage were only beginning.

Through his first year in office, Obama seemed oblivious to the threat of the far right. He campaigned against partisanship, declaring that there were "no red states" and no "conservative America." Apparently, he thought it was merely a contrivance or myth that there were people who rejected science, demonized gays, assailed minority and women's rights -- or that they genuinely believed in what they said.

Speaking of changing Washington, Obama seemed to think that the entire history of politics since the rise of Reagan and the Right and their strategies of polarization was not deeply rooted but a superficial problem attributable to certain "divisive" personalities, easily wiped away with gestures toward bipartisanship. His view of the parties was that they were simply mirror images sharing fundamental beliefs but separated by "partisans." The skilled and devoted community organizer could bring them together. Many of his supporters in the media, often part and parcel of political wars over the years, reinforced and amplified his innocence, proclaiming he was the one at last who could "bridge the partisan divide." Andrew Sullivan, a disaffected conservative who once called critics of George W. Bush policies "fifth columnists" but now fervently supporting Obama, wrote that the new president was destined to become "a liberal Reagan who can reunite America." This optimism pervaded the Obama White House as the president and his aides sought out Republicans willing to vote for his programs. After all, why couldn't we all just get along?

In his autobiographical book *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama highlighted a key component of his political strategy: "I serve as a blank screen on which people of vastly different political stripes project their own views." Once he was elected, conservatives concluded that they could reverse Obama's strength by transforming him into a human tableau for the

most fearsome images they could conjure.

Obama's multiracial background was crucial in cultivating resentment among the shock troops. Those who rejected Obama's legitimacy to serve as president on the basis of his background gave birth to the "Birther" movement that sought to challenge his citizenship. The movement's most visible figure, and therefore the most eccentric, was Orly Taitz, a dentist and self-trained lawyer who had immigrated from the former Soviet republic of Moldova to Israel before settling in the conservative bastion of Orange County, California. Convinced by claims on the far-right Web site WorldNetDaily that Obama planned to create a "civilian national security force," Taitz told me she "realized that Obama was another Stalin--it's a cross between Stalinist USSR and Hitler's Germany."

After becoming transfixed by online conspiracy theories claiming Obama's family had forged his birth certificate in Hawaii, Taitz snapped into action. She filed a lawsuit in November 2008 with California Secretary of State Debra Bowen demanding an investigation into Obama's eligibility to serve as president. Taitz's plaintiff in the case was Wiley Drake, an Orange County radio preacher and former second vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention who once publicly prayed for Obama's death. While her lawsuit went nowhere, and subsequent suits earned her angry rebukes from judges, Taitz became an instant media sensation, delivering

heavily accented screeds against Obama before friendly interviewers from Sean Hannity to CNN's Lou Dobbs, who Taitz called her "greatest supporter" and who was eventually fired as an indirect result of his hosting of her.

In March 2009, Texas Rep. Randy Neugebauer signed on to a Birther bill proposing that future presidential candidates must prove their citizenship before becoming eligible to campaign. The Birther movement had found its voice in government and made an indelible impact on the Republican grassroots. By June 2009, 28 percent of Republican respondents to a Kos/Research 2000 poll said they thought Obama wasn't born in the United States, while 30 percent "weren't sure." "Obama should be in the Big House," Taitz shrieked to me, "not the White House!"

When Obama announced health care reform as the first major initiative of his administration, the conservative movement activated a campaign of demonization -- transformational politics -- designed to turn Obama into the "Other," making him seem as unfamiliar, and therefore as threatening, as possible. When the president urged the Congress to deliver a health care reform bill in 2009, the Right staged a living theater of political hatred, Obama's dream of bipartisanship transformed into a nightmarish version of "Marat/Sade." On September 12, 2009, tens of thousands of far-right activists belonging to a loose confederation of anti-government groups called the Tea Party Patriots converged on

Washington's National Mall for a giant protest against the Obama health care plan. The date was significant: Fox News's top-ranked talk show host Glenn Beck had declared the birth of the "9-12 Project" to restore the sense of unity -- and siege mentality -- that Americans experienced on September 11, 2001. But this time, Obama -- not Osama -- was the enemy.

While covering the rally, I witnessed sign after sign declaring Obama a greater danger to America's security than al-Qaida; demonstrators held images that juxtaposed Obama's face with images of evildoers from Hitler to Pol Pot to Bin Laden; others carried signs questioning Obama's status as a U.S. citizen. "We can fight al-Qaida, we can't kill Obama," said an aging demonstrator. Another told me, "Obama is the biggest Nazi in the world," pointing to placards he had fashioned depicting Obama and House Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi in SS outfits.

According to another activist, Obama's agenda was similar to Hitler's: "Hitler took over the banking industry, did he not? And Hitler had his own personal secret service police. [The community-organizing group] ACORN is an extension of that."

The seemingly incongruous Tea Party propaganda recalled signs waved by right-wing Jewish settlers during rallies against Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and his support of the peace process, portraying him as an SS officer and as the French collaborator Marshall Petain. In 1995, amid the provocative atmosphere, a young right-wing Jewish zealot assassinated Rabin.

The Israeli tragedy was a cautionary example of targeted hatred leading to violence.

Members of the Tea Party "Patriots" did not seem to care that their rhetoric was irrational, or that comparing Obama to Hitler and Stalin was contradictory and obviously hyperbolic. Their motives were entirely negative. By purging government of the multicultural evil that had seized power through illicit means (several activists told me they believed ACORN helped Obama steal the election), they were convinced that a mythical golden American yesteryear would return. They had no interest in building anything new or even articulating an agenda, much less discussing the merits of policies. The Tea Party's primary concern was cultural purification -- freedom from, not freedom to. Against the dark image of the president and his liberal allies, Tea Party activists defined themselves as the children of light. The racial subtext was always transparent.

The Tea Party's strategy rested on a guerrilla campaign of chaos and sabotage designed not only to intimidate Democrats but also to disorient independent voters who might have supported health care reform. The Tea Partiers were convinced this would be an easy feat, since they believed the majority of the country was on their side -- that they represented the "Real America." At the 9-12 rally Matt Kibbe, one of the march organizers, told the crowd that ABC News was reporting that 1 million to 1.5 million people were in attendance, something ABC denied, saying

"ABCNews.com reported an approximate figure of 60,000 to 70,000 protesters." Then Armev led the crowd in a chant of "Freedom works! Freedom works!" Unknown to most of the Tea Partiers, they were intoning the name of a corporate-funded Beltway advocacy group, not the battle cry of Mel Gibson William Wallace in *Braveheart*.

Contrary to its image as a grassroots movement mobilized to stifle the machinations of Washington elites, the Tea Party movement was the creation of a constellation of industry-funded conservative groups with close Republican ties. The movement's leading puppet-master was Dick Armev, who directed resources and talking points to the Tea Party "Patriots" from his Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group, FreedomWorks. Among the corporate clients of Armev's lobbying firm, which he was forced to leave as a result of his involvement in the Tea Parties, was the pharmaceutical giant Bristol Myers Squibb, a company with a clear interest in defeating health care reform. (Armev's other "real American" clients included the Marxist terror cult, People's Mojahedin of Iran, which received funding and assistance from Saddam Hussein in order to launch terrorist strikes throughout the 1990's against Iranian civilian targets.) Armev collected a consulting fee of \$250,000 directly from FreedomWorks and \$300,000 from allied astroturf front groups. FreedomWorks paid out much of its money to an assortment of Republican political consultants.

If Armev was the Tea Party king,

Sarah Palin was eager to be crowned the Tea Party queen. Just days after Obama's inauguration, Palin abruptly quit her job as Alaskan governor to vie for the honor. Palin's motives for quitting became clear when she inked a lucrative deal to write her political memoir *Going Rogue*, signed on as a regular contributor to Fox News, and received \$1 million an episode for a reality show on cable television, "Sarah Palin's Alaska." Palin's book tour, which sent her through Middle America in a luxuriously outfitted bus, resembled both a presidential campaign and a traveling carnival.

Whether or not Palin intends to run for president, her growing media presence has magnified her influence within the Republican Party. Yet the ever-expanding Palin phenomenon was greeted with hostility by Republican politicians desperately seeking to expand the party's base after the drubbing in 2008. Former McCain campaign manager Steve Schmidt warned that Palin's nomination in 2012 would be "catastrophic" for the GOP. His doomsday prediction was backed by an October Gallup poll revealing her as one of the most polarizing and unpopular political figures in the country with a disapproval rating of over 50 percent. Unfortunately for Schmidt and other party pragmatists, those who approve of Palin represent the heartbeat of the Republican Party, its most fervent activists, and cannot be dissuaded from following her, even if she is leading the party off a cliff.

A November 2009 special

congressional election in New York's heavily Republican 23rd district was the first major test of Palin's power. Along with a parade of nationally recognized conservatives, Palin endorsed Doug Hoffman, an unknown far-right third-party candidate closely allied with the Tea Party, helping to force a popular moderate Republican politician, Dede Scozzafava, from the race. In the end, Palin's ideological purge in upstate New York led to an improbable Democratic victory, the first in that district in more than 100 years. After the disaster Palin and her allies claimed victory, insisting they had at least hastened the purge of ideologically impure Republicans from the party. She went on to endorse Rand Paul, the son of right-wing libertarian Rep. Ron Paul and a candidate in Kentucky's GOP senatorial primary, while Dick Cheney went out of his way to endorse Rand's regular Republican opponent, Trey Grayson, the Kentucky secretary of state.

Following the Tea Party script of avoiding social issues like abortion and gay marriage in order to obscure the large presence of the Christian Right within the movement's ranks, the self-described "hardcore prolifer" Palin recast herself as a libertarian concerned primarily with issues of "economic freedom." She claimed the Democratic "cap and trade" plan to limit carbon emissions would harm the livelihood of blue-collar workers, and she assailed health care reform as a Trojan Horse for "socialism" (though she admitted her family "used to hustle over the border" to take advantage of

Canada's single-payer health care system). But no Palin attack had as much effect as the one she blasted out on her Facebook page claiming the Obama health care plan included a provision for "death panels" that would recommend euthanasia for severely ill patients like her Down syndrome-afflicted son, Trig. With the click of a button, Palin transformed the tone of the health care debate from rancorous to poisonous.

The source of Palin's "death panels" smear was a practiced propagandist, former New York Lieutenant Governor Betsy McCaughey. When President Bill Clinton introduced health care reform during his first term, McCaughey falsely claimed in an article published in the *New Republic* and widely circulated by Republicans, that the plan would force consumers to drop their private plans and buy into the government's program (the article would go on to win a National Magazine Award and then be retracted years later by the *New Republic's* editors). Now she was back in the spotlight, pushing a rumor that would be voted by the non-partisan fact-checking Web site Politifact.com as "the lie of 2009." McCaughey's latest innuendo was boosted by the cult of political crank Lyndon LaRouche, which mobilized to push the rumor into the mainstream.

In June 2009, one of LaRouche's top lieutenants publicly confronted Ezekiel Emanuel, the National Institute of Health's chief bioethicist and brother of White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, accusing him of

seeking to reintroduce Hitler's T-4 program to kill the handicapped through health care reform.

"President Obama has put in place a reform apparatus reviving the euthanasia of Hitler Germany in 1939, that began the genocide there," LaRouche staffer Anton Chaitkin charged. Soon, LaRouche's followers were on street corners around the country with posters depicting Obama with a Hitler moustache. At a town hall forum on health care reform hosted by Democratic Rep. Barney Frank, a LaRouche follower waved one of the Obama-as-Hitler posters and demanded, "Why do you continue to support a Nazi policy, as Obama has expressly supported this policy?"

Two months later, after Palin whispered the rumor on Facebook, prominent conservatives from former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich to ranking Senate Finance Committee member Charles Grassley parroted her claims before audiences of indignant Tea Partiers. Not to be outdone, Glenn Beck devoted an extended rant on his show to the reality of death panels. Echoing the LaRouche cultists, Beck accused Ezekiel Emanuel of "the devaluing of human life, putting a price on each individual." He thundered, "The death panel is not a firing squad. Rationing is inevitable and they know it!"

The death panel rumor served a variety of functions, all useful to the movement, but not necessarily to the Republican Party. Most importantly, the rumor resonated both with hard-core libertarians who resented the very existence

of the federal government and Christian Right activists who viewed the legalization of abortion as a slippery slope to government-sponsored euthanasia. The hysteria it engendered helped repair the rift exposed by the Terri Schiavo charade in 2005, when the evangelical conservative James Dobson publicly clashed with Armev, the libertarian leader, over the right of the government to interfere in a private family matter of life and death.

The slurring of Obama as a sort of sleeper agent crypto-Muslim helped bring the neoconservatives back into the fray. The new neocon generation was led by Dick Cheney's daughter, Liz, who founded an anti-Obama advocacy group, Keep America Safe, by leveraging donations from pro-Israel sources. Asked by CNN's Larry King about the Birther movement that was challenging Obama's status as an American citizen, Liz Cheney remarked, "One of the reasons you see people so concerned about this is people are uncomfortable with having for the first time ever, I think, a president who seems so reluctant to defend the nation overseas." With the libertarians, Christian Right, and the neo-cons seated around the same table, united in resentment of the alien president, the conservative movement was whole again.

The experiments in "Terror Management Theory" of Sheldon Solomon, professor of psychology at Skidmore College, Jeff Greenberg, professor of psychologist at the University of Arizona, and Tom Pyszczynski, professor of psychology at the

University of Colorado, have demonstrated the connection between fear of death and intensification of conservative attitudes. The findings help explain the effectiveness of the death panel rumor and insinuations by conservative figures that Obama was not truly American and somehow sympathetic to Islamic terrorists. Indeed, these seemingly irrational smears were guided by tactical reasoning, calculated to agitate voters with constant reminders of their own mortality. Whether or not Independents responded, the rhetoric of death kept the Tea Party crowd in a persistent state of panic and rage, ensuring a standing army ready to fan out to rallies and town halls at the first sign of liberal malfeasance.

Obama's first year in office was marked by more than raucous protests; there were several disturbing murders committed by far-right extremists. In April 2009, a 22-year-old neo-Nazi wannabe named Richard Poplawski mowed down a SWAT team of Pittsburgh cops, killing three. Poplawski's best friend told reporters the young killer "grew angry recently over fears Obama would outlaw guns." Later it was discovered that Poplawski had posted a video clip to a neo-Nazi Web site portraying Fox's Glenn Beck contemplating the existence of concentration camps. (After a characteristically thorough investigation, Beck conceded they were not real.) On another occasion, the killer posted a video promoting Tea Party rallies. A month after the Pittsburgh bloodbath, Scott Roeder, a supporter of the militant anti-abortion group Operation Rescue,

shot Dr. George Tiller to death while he prayed at his church in Wichita, Kansas. Tiller was declared fair game by the anti-abortion movement because of his role as Kansas's only late-term abortion provider. During at least 28 episodes of Bill O'Reilly's "O'Reilly Factor," O'Reilly had referred to Tiller as "Tiller the baby killer," a criminal guilty of "Nazi stuff." "I wouldn't want to be [Tiller] if there is a Judgment Day," O'Reilly proclaimed.

In August 2009, a middle-aged professional named George Sodini walked into a health club in suburban Pittsburgh and gunned down three women. The mainstream press explained Sodini's motives away by homing in on passages in his online diaries describing his loneliness, inability to convince women to have sex with him, and descent into chronic masturbation. Nearly every major media outlet omitted or ignored a long deranged entry in which Sodini projected his sexual frustration onto Obama, whom he seemed to view as a symbol of black male virility and predation.

The day after Obama's election victory, Sodini wrote: "Good luck to Obama! He will be successful. The liberal media LOVES him. Amerika has chosen The Black Man. Good! In light of this I got ideas outside of Obama's plans for the economy and such. Here it is: Every black man should get a young white girl ... Kinda a reverse indentured servitude thing. Every daddy know when he sends his little girl to college, she be ... real good. I saw it. 'Not my little girl', daddy says! (Yeah right!!) Black dudes have thier

[sic] choice of best white??
[ellipses in original]."

In another posting to an anti-Clinton forum in 1994, during the height of the Republicans' Whitewater investigation, Sodini revealed that he had purchased a bumper sticker reading, "Stop Socialism, Impeach Clinton," from a National Review ad. A year later, Sodini ranted on an anti-government militia site, "I am convinced that more drastic action is required to bring the country back to the Constitutional order that it was 200 years ago. I don't think any group of political leaders will achieve this for us." Whether or not Sodini's murder spree was motivated by his political passions, he was pathologically death-driven and fixated on the phantasmagoria of right-wing imagery. In his final diary entry, Sodini proclaimed, "Death lives!"

More than any other media figure of the Obama era, Glenn Beck encouraged the campaign of racial demonization and conspiracy that consumed the Tea Party "Patriots." During a broadcast of "Fox and Friends," Beck opined that Obama "has exposed himself over and over and over again as a guy who has a deep-seated hatred for white people, or the white culture." As evidence, Beck pointed to White House green-jobs czar Van Jones, an African American former community organizer who was eventually forced to resign as a direct result of Beck's crusade. From there, Beck targeted another black Obama adviser, Valerie Jarrett, highlighting her ties to ACORN while upholding her and Jones as evidence of Obama's

"socialist" agenda. In another broadcast, Beck played an audio clip of unidentified African Americans referring to "Obama money" as they collected welfare checks in Detroit. Then he showed footage of members of a Kansas City-based youth group practicing a step show, a traditional African-American group dance apparently unfamiliar enough to Beck and his transfixed audience that he felt at liberty to claim the footage as evidence that "Obama's SS" was being trained across inner-city America.

In September 2009, Beck relentlessly targeted ACORN, the Right's new favorite hobgoblin, admitting that he intended to use the poor people's advocacy group to distract his viewers from the health care debate. "Trust me," Beck said, "Everybody now says they're going to be talking about health care. I don't think so." (His statement was reminiscent of Rush Limbaugh's scandal-mongering remark during the early Clinton administration: "Whitewater is about health care.") Beck promptly cued up a series of hidden camera videos shot by conservative youth activists James O'Keefe and Hannah Giles inside ACORN field offices. In the videos, O'Keefe baited African-American staffers into making statements explaining that Giles, who claimed she was a prostitute, could obtain low-income housing. O'Keefe edited in images of himself clad in an outlandish pimp costume to create the impression that he was dressed that way during the meetings with ACORN; however, Giles later admitted her partner had lied

about wearing his costume to further incriminate ACORN. In the end, ACORN was exonerated of all criminal wrongdoing while in a separate incident O'Keefe was arrested and charged with a federal crime after he and several conservative pals disguised themselves as telephone repairmen and attempted to wiretap phone lines in the office of Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana. Like Ryan Sorba, O'Keefe and his posse were movement cadres paid and directed by well-funded conservative outfits; O'Keefe had been trained by the Leadership Institute, the right-wing youth group that nurtured leading lights like Jack Abramoff, Karl Rove, Ralph Reed, and Jeff Gannon.

While O'Keefe and his buddies plea-bargained with prosecutors, Beck basked in his formula for success. His show earned the highest ratings at Fox News, topping network franchises like O'Reilly and Sean Hannity. In the process, Beck's opinions became firmly implanted in the nervous systems of Tea Party activists. "Glenn Beck has taught us everything we know," a demonstrator at the 9-12 rally told me. "He's opened our eyes to so much."

But unlike the right-wing radio warhorses who helped usher in Newt Gingrich's Republican counter-revolution of 1994, Beck was not an authentic product of the movement. When Rush Limbaugh first began dominating the AM airwaves, Beck was mired in the world of mid-level commercial radio, delivering corny yarns about lesbians and celebrity trash in hopes of

becoming the next Howard Stern. By night, as he has tirelessly recounted, he medicated his anxiety with cocaine and alcohol, destroying his first marriage in the process. "We remember Glenn from the womanizing, the drinking, the drugs. Everybody who knew him at the time saw what a complete mess he was," a shock jock from Tampa, Florida, who called himself Bubba the Love Sponge remarked to me during a broadcast of his nationally syndicated show.

Like Dusty Rhodes, the pseudo-populist demagogue of Elia Kazan's 1957 film, *A Face in the Crowd*, Beck was a self-destructive drifter who might have been crumpled up with a bottle of Mad Dog 20/20 in an alleyway or been locked away in a prison cell had fame not found him first. Beck was only able to stabilize his life when he made his escape from freedom, marrying a conservative Mormon, converting to her religion, and transmuting his urge to abuse drugs into conservative radio diatribes. When Beck first broke into television on CNN's Headline News Channel, he struggled to articulate a coherent political worldview. If he distinguished himself from other big-time conservative hosts in any way, he did so through strained and often snide attempts at humor, remnants of his failed radio career. Nevertheless, with help from his liberal agent, Matthew Hiltzik, Beck snagged a primetime slot at Fox News in early 2009. Around this same time, Beck began promoting the work of an arcane Mormon conspiracy-peddler named W. Cleon Skousen, whom he

described as his political lodestar. Suddenly, Beck had something more to offer than irritable mental gestures.

Thanks to Beck's designation of Skousen's pseudohistorical tract *The 5000 Year Leap* as "required reading" on the Web site of his 9-12 Project, and his promotion of the book on his show, the previously obscure Skousen became the Hidden Imam of the Tea Party movement. By the summer of 2009, Skousen's *Leap* was among the top 10 books on Amazon.com and a fixture on literature tables at Tea Party gatherings. It went from selling a puny couple of thousand copies in 2007 to selling over 200,000 copies in 2009. Just why the book generated such an instant appeal is difficult to understand. It is little more than a slapdash of quotes from the Founding Fathers, often taken out of context and deliberately oversimplified, to explain why America is the greatest nation in history. In the process, Skousen claims that church and state separation is un-American, that "coercive taxation" is communist, and that marriage is the underpinning of a free society. Benjamin Franklin, who wrote at length on the merits of "amours" with "old women," and who famously solicited prostitutes and fathered a son of out of wedlock, was the ultimate authority Skousen quoted on the importance of marriage.

Though Skousen claims the Founders as the world's foremost source of eternal wisdom, he buttressed his points with fringe sources like the conspiracist Norman Dodd's screeds about the

Illuminati. According to Skousen, Dodd claimed that "powerful influences congregating in the United States" like the Rockefellers and the Rothschilds had forced the United States into World War I. Skousen published Dodd's manifestoes in his obscure journal *Freemen's Digest*, which he founded for the express purpose of propagating conspiracies.

Skousen's paranoid politics were an outgrowth of his participation in extreme anti-communist groups during the 1950s. He boasted of a close friendship with then-FBI director J. Edgar Hoover and said he provided him with research on communist plots, claims disputed by FBI historians. (During a recent interview, Skousen's son, Paul, told me that contrary to rumors of Hoover's cross-dressing and homosexual dalliances, he would set the top cop up on blind dates with live women.) Skousen was fired from his job as Salt Lake City's police chief for, in the words of the city's conservative Mormon mayor, "conduct[ing] his office as chief of police in exactly the same manner in which the communists operate their government." From there, Skousen sailed off to the far shores of the Right-peddling conspiracy tracts like *The Naked Communist*, and earning condemnation from his beloved FBI, which accused him in an internal memo of "promoting [his] own anti-communism for obvious financial purposes."

Skousen's vocal support for the far-right John Birch Society's claim that communists controlled President Dwight Eisenhower

cost him the support of the corporate backers who had paid for his Red-bashing lecture tours. He went off the radar for several years, returning during the late 1960s to accuse the Jewish Rothschild family of secretly bankrolling everyone from Ho Chi Minh to the civil rights movement. By the late 1970s, even the Church of Latter Day Saints distanced itself from Skousen and his conspiracy theories. His work fell through the margins and might have disappeared entirely had Beck not revived it, turning *The 5000 Year Leap* into the bible of the Tea Party movement. Journalist Alexander Zaitchik observed in his authoritative profile of Skousen on Salon.com that Skousen's renewed influence through Beck and the Tea Party "suggests that the modern base of the Republican Party is headed to a very strange place."

Besides influencing Beck, Skousen's teachings inspired one of the Tea Party movement's most visible grassroots celebrities, retired Sheriff Richard Mack. I met Mack in February at a far-right rally just outside of Montgomery, Alabama. On a makeshift stage towed into the middle of a rodeo arena by a pickup truck, Mack recalled with reverence his mentorship by Skousen, who he said taught him everything he needed to know about the Constitution. Mack urged his spellbound audience to stockpile ammo and store food. "If you control the food supply," Mack warned, "you control the people. And that's the first step to slavery."

Already a hero to conservatives

for successfully suing the Clinton administration over the provision in the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act requiring law enforcement to conduct criminal background checks of gun purchasers, Mack reemerged in the Obama era as the archetypal local lawman who vowed to resist the tyrannical federal government. Along with a few dozen former and active military and law enforcement personnel, Mack helped form a self-styled Tea Party militia called the Oathkeepers. Galvanized by their fear of creeping socialism, the Oathkeepers solemnly swore to refuse tyrannical federal orders such as cooperating with foreign troops and forcing Americans into concentration camps. Because the group's members trained for combat, the vow came with suggestion of armed resistance.

Besides Mack, the Oathkeepers attracted a coterie of militia movement retreads into its ranks. The most well-established figure was Mike Vanderboegh, a longtime militia fanatic who published a booklet in the mid-1990s entitled *Strategy and Tactics for a Militia Civil War*, calling for sniper attacks on "war criminals, secret policemen, rats." With Obama in office, Vanderboegh churned out anti-government screeds on right-wing blogs with renewed passion and supported his efforts by cashing in the \$1,300 in federal disability compensation he received each month.

For all the energy the far right exerted in its campaign to strangle Obama's agenda, it was a Democrat who posed the greatest

threat to the passage of health care reform. Representative Bart Stupak of Michigan had been in office since 1993, placing him among the senior leadership of the so-called centrist Blue Dog Democrats. When health care reform was introduced in Congress, Stupak became the leader of an informal caucus of anti-abortion Democrats, making him the de facto swing vote on the House version of the bill. By extension, Stupak was the point man in the campaign to ensure that the bill would not allow federal funding for abortion for low-income women.

But after close consultation with leaders of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Stupak went a step further. He introduced a draconian amendment to block women from paying for abortions from even their own private insurance plans. The amendment, which passed the House but was shut down in the Senate, became a key sticking point in health care negotiations. "He's a big hero now in the pro-life community," former Bush Catholic issues adviser Deal Hudson told me in November 2009. "Thanks to him, this is the first time I can remember the pro-life Democrats having any power."

To the chagrin of the Republicans, Stupak entertained offers of compromise from the Democratic leadership. According to Hudson, the Catholic Bishops were keen to see health care reform pass, but only if the bill contained a clear provision forbidding patients from spending federal money on abortion. Finally, in March, after pressure from House Majority

Leader Nancy Pelosi, Obama agreed to sign an executive order forbidding the federal funding of abortion. Stupak had been mollified. Now he and his anti-abortion caucus pledged to deliver the swing votes the Democrats needed to pass the bill. As soon as reports seeped out declaring the imminent passage of health care reform, major right-wing blogs like RedState.org churned out virulent denunciations of Stupak, calling him a traitor and sellout. The blog comment sections filled up with dozens of diatribes referring to Stupak in language previously reserved for Dr. George Tiller: "Bart the Baby-Killer."

On March 20, thousands of Tea Party activists surrounded the Capitol's Longworth Building in expectation of Obama's pep talk to the House Democrats and the health care vote. Democratic Representative John Lewis, a hero of the civil rights movement, and Representative Barney Frank, the first openly gay member of Congress, passed through the crowd on their way inside the Capitol. "Nigger!" a demonstrator barked at Lewis. Another called Frank a "faggot," eliciting laughter and cheers from nearby protesters. Meanwhile, as another African-American Democrat, Representative Emanuel Cleaver, ascended the Capitol steps, a protester who had been screaming at Lewis and Frank spat on his face.

With the demonstration carried on into the night, cries of "Kill the bill!" drifted into calls for violence. "I would gladly stand with any of you men here and take these fascists down," a man

in camouflage battle dress uniform proclaimed in front of an amateur videographer, pointing toward the Capitol. "You haven't heard the last of me!"

The next day, Republican members of Congress emerged from the Longworth Building to salute the Tea Partiers. The demonstrators cheered wildly for their proxies on the inside. Finally, after hours of impassioned speeches on the House floor, the bill passed. But the drama was hardly over.

Republican Representative Joe Pitts, an anti-abortion Catholic who co-authored Stupak's original amendment, demanded a motion to bring it back to the floor for a vote, a transparent exercise in grandstanding that was certain to fail. In response, Stupak rushed to the podium with a stinging rebuke to Pitts and the Republicans. "The motion to commit does not support life," Stupak declared. "It is the Democrats who have stood up...." Heckling from the Republican side interrupted his statement. As Stupak looked around the House chamber, Rep. Randy Neugebauer, a right-wing Republican from Texas who openly supported the Birther movement, began shouting at him from the backbench, "Baby killer!" Other Republicans joined in, parroting base insults.

While the Republicans sank their heads in defeat, some more militant devotees of the Tea Party movement called for a right-wing Kristallnacht. "If you wish to send a message that Pelosi and her party cannot fail to hear, break their windows,"

Vanderboegh of the Oathkeepers wrote on a far-right blog hours after the bill passed. "Break them NOW. Break them and run to break again." Within three days, windows and doors at Democratic Party headquarters in New York, Kansas and Arizona had been shattered.

Meanwhile, at least 10 Democratic members of Congress reported receiving death threats. Images of nooses were faxed to the offices of Stupak and James Clyburn, an African-American congressman from South Carolina. Representative Anthony Weiner, an especially vocal proponent of health care reform, received a menacing letter filled with white powder. The brother of Representative Tom Perriello, another health care supporter, had his home gas line deliberately sabotaged after a local Tea Party organizer posted his address online (he had meant to post the congressman's) and encouraged activists to "drop by" to express their anger about Perriello's recent vote. In Tucson, Arizona, the windows of Democratic Representative Gabrielle Giffords' office were shattered by shots from a pellet gun. And a brick was thrown through the window of Representative Louise Slaughter's office in New York as her voicemail filled with threats of impending sniper attacks.

After the passage of the health care bill, the Tea Party floated into a gray zone between authoritarianism and anarchy. Crusading to restore a holy social order, they promoted disorder. Claiming to protect democracy, they smashed windows of elected representatives. Warning of death

panels, they called in death threats. With the atmosphere of violence thickening, Palin took to her Twitter account to issue a battle cry: "Don't Retreat, Instead--RELOAD!" Thus concluded the first phase of the Obama era that was to usher in a peaceable kingdom of bipartisanship.

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