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THESIS

**THE SOVEREIGN CITIZEN MOVEMENT:
THE SHIFTING IDEOLOGICAL WINDS**

by

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March 2016

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**THE SOVEREIGN CITIZEN MOVEMENT:
THE SHIFTING IDEOLOGICAL WINDS**

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ABSTRACT

The FBI has identified the Sovereign Citizen Movement (SCM) as a significant threat to the domestic security of the United States. The movement's adherents are capable of significant acts of violence and creating civil unrest. They also embrace harassing tactics such as filing lawsuits, false liens, and restraining orders as a method to harass government and financial institutions. This is known as "paper terrorism."

The modern SCM has its roots in the Posse Comitatus movement and in racist philosophies such as the Christian Identity Movement. It was primarily a movement embraced by right-wing Caucasians. Over time, the SCM has morphed from a primarily racist platform to a more inclusive anti-government platform. The current SCM model is decentralized and largely leaderless, and its narrative is often driven by circumstances. Using social identity theory as a framework, what conclusions can be drawn regarding this change, and how can the government prepare for the emerging ideation of SCM?

If not handled appropriately, government reactions to economic and social crisis could validate the SCM narrative. Government entities must embrace training, transparency, and ethical decision making in an effort to nullify the SCM narrative.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| ADL | Anti-Defamation League |
| CORE | Congress of Racial Equality |
| FBI | Federal Bureau of Investigation |
| FOR | Fellowship of Reconciliation |
| IRS | Internal Revenue Service |
| KKK | Ku Klux Klan |
| NAACP | National Association of Colored People |
| NSA | National Security Agency |
| RTTAC | Regional Terrorism Threat Assessment Center |
| SCM | Sovereign Citizen Movement |
| SIT | social identity theory |
| SPLC | Southern Poverty Law Center |
| WWII | World War II |

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The FBI has identified the Sovereign Citizen Movement (SCM) as a persistent and emerging threat to the security of the United States.¹ This perception is shared by groups such as the Southern Poverty Law Center² and the Anti-Defamation League.³ These summations are based on acts of violence perpetrated by members of the SCM, both physical violence⁴ and administrative “violence” in the filing of frivolous lawsuits, liens and restraining orders,⁵ which is sometimes referred to as “paper terrorism.”⁶ Both actual violence and “paper terrorism,” composed of fraudulent schemes designed to tie up governmental resources, have been increasing over the past decade.⁷ Anti-government extremism is neither a fad nor an irritation. It is important for the United States to view the SCM as a significant domestic terrorism threat. The SCM followers believe that nearly all existing government in the United States is illegitimate, and SCM followers refuse to be subjugated by the “illegitimate” government.⁸ Furthermore, extremist SCM adherents resort to acts of violence in their struggle and view themselves “at war” with the government, and they believe an all-out confrontation with the government is not only

¹ “Sovereign Citizens: A Growing Threat to Law Enforcement,” *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, September 2011, <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/bulletins/september-2011/sovereign-citizens>.

² Southern Poverty Law Center, “Sovereign Citizen Movement,” 2013, splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement.

³ Anti-Defamation League, *The Lawless Ones: The Resurgence of the Sovereign Citizen Movement* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 2010), <http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/combating-hate/lawless-ones-sovereign-citizen-movement-2010.pdf>.

⁴ “Sovereign Citizens: A Growing Threat to Law Enforcement,” *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ David Fleishman, “Paper Terrorism: The Impact of the ‘Sovereign Citizen’ on Local Government,” *The Public Law Journal* (2004): 1–10, http://www.mflegal.net/files/paper_terrorism.pdf.

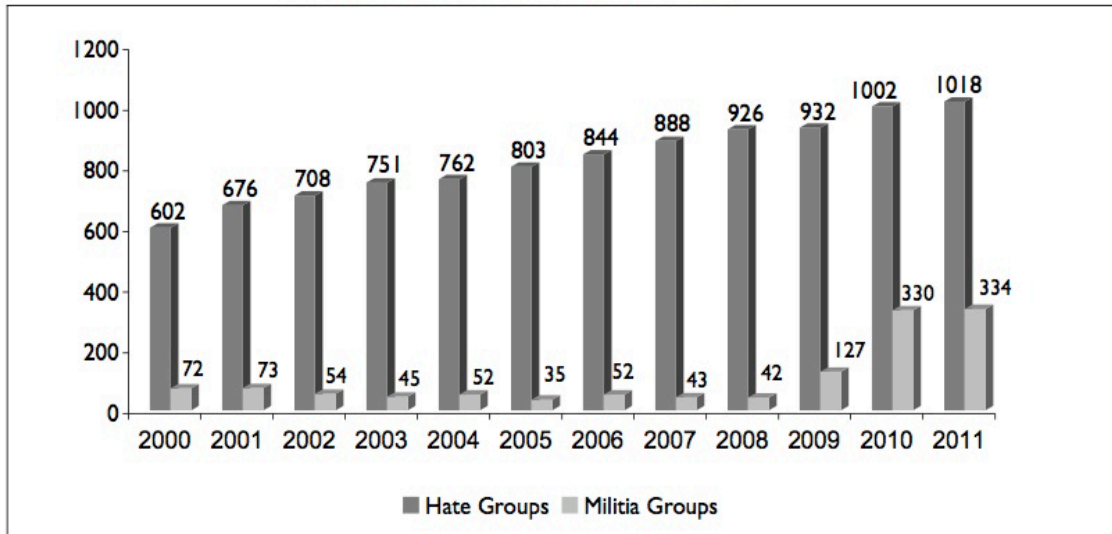
⁷ Eileen Sullivan, “FBI Focused on Sovereign Citizens,” *HS Today*, February 7, 2012, <http://www.hstoday.us/news-from-the-web/single-article/fbi-focused-on-sovereign-citizen-extremists/de29f3238e0bbc0cecbf847c0b78b7e7.html>.

⁸ Southern Poverty Law Center, “Sovereign Citizen Movement,” 2013, splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement.

inevitable but actually must occur to achieve their objectives.⁹ Recent years have marked an increase in numbers of individuals embracing the SCM ideology.¹⁰ The Southern Poverty Law Center conducted a study that reflects the increase in SCM groups over the past several years. The results, including militia and hate groups, are included in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Hate Groups and Militia Groups, 2000–2010

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center



Source: Mark Potok, *The Year in Hate and Extremism* (intelligence report no. 145), (Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2012).

There are SCM division and sub-groups throughout the United States.¹¹ These groups are loosely affiliated and generally come together for the purpose of socializing, discussing their ideology, for training, or to help each other with the paperwork central to their schemes.¹² Their current ideology is grounded in anti-government rather than “hate”

⁹ Joel Dyer, *Harvest of Rage: Why Oklahoma City is Just the Beginning* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Paul Murphy, “Sovereign Citizens Center of St. John Shooting Investigation,” *4WLL Eyewitness News*, August 22, 2012, <http://www.wvltv.com/news/Sovereign-Citizens--167108985.html>.

¹¹ J. J. MacNab, “Cop-killers Jerry and Joe Kane Were Members of a Rapidly Growing radical-right movement That May Now Be 300,000 Strong,” *Sovereign Citizen Kane*, Southern Poverty Law Center, August 1, 2010, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2010/sovereign-citizen-kane>.

¹² Jerome Bjelopera, *The Domestic Terrorist Threat: Background and Issues for Congress* (CRS Report No. R42536) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), 27–28.

ideology.¹³ However, this was not always the case and is important and potentially more difficult distinction from the group's historical legacy, which needs to be researched to delineate these distinctions and their impact to government.

The SCM in the United States can trace its origins back to the post-Civil War Posse Comitatus movement; however, the SCM really began to develop in the 1970s and into the 1980s with a resurgence of the Posse Comitatus movement. A serious recession and a farm crisis are often identified as a catalyst for the resurgence in the movement.¹⁴ The ideology of the SCM was, in many ways, crafted by early leaders, such as Gerald Smith, Richard Butler, and William Gale, of the broader anti-government and Identity theology movements.¹⁵ These individuals had links to the Christian Identity Movement, which consists of ideology steeped in racism and anti-Semitism.¹⁶ Men like William Gale embraced Christian Identity theology and used it, and its racially based theology, as a foundation for the underpinnings of the SCM.¹⁷ Many followers of the Christian Identity Movement and SCM were adherents of various pseudoscientific theories put forth by Lothrop Stoddard, who advocated the Aryan race was superior to people of African or Jewish descent based on evolutionary differences. Stoddard's theories outlined that the "pure race" was Aryan and the racial variations were manifestations of impurities and therefore inferior.¹⁸ Currently, although racist factions still exist,¹⁹ the SCM is embraced by many racial groups, including African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and Jewish people. In particular, black adherents to the SCM have increased significantly

13 Anti-Defamation League, "Sovereign Citizen Movement," 2010, Anti-Defamation League, http://archive.adl.org/learn/ext_us/SCM.asp?xpicked=4&item=sov.

14 Anti-Defamation League, *The Lawless Ones*.

15 Daniel Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door: The Militia Movement and the Radical Right* (New York: St Martins Press, 2002), 25–27.

16 Timothy Baysinger, "Right Wing Characteristics and Ideology," *Homeland Security Affairs* 2, no. 2 (2006), <https://www.hsaj.org/articles/166>.

17 Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door*, 23.

18 Ibid., 87.

19 Kathleen Blee, and Kimberly Creasap, "Conservative and Right Wing Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 269–286.

over the past 30 years and employ many of the same tactics as their Caucasian counterparts.²⁰

The SCM has been evaluated from a perspective of historical background, ideology, the construct of many of the groups and the current status of the movement. Additionally, there has been an examination of their strategies and tactics. There have been examinations of the SCM with a goal of establishing more effective tactics for the first responder. An area that requires examination is an examination of the catalysts that have driven change within the movement since the 1970s and 80s. Gaining an understanding of the factors that drove some of the significant modifications in doctrine, such as separation from racist ideology, could provide valuable insights into future trends within the SCM.

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

The Sovereign Citizen Movement (SCM) has gone through a metamorphosis over the past 30 years. For example, racist politics and theology, which asserted Aryan superiority once an important aspect of the movement, appears to have changed. When examining SCM, what are the issues of importance between the early manifestations of the Posse Comitatus and today's SCM and why did these changes occur? In analyzing this question, application of social identity theory (SIT) to the SCM at contrasting points of time provides a useful framework for comparison. Using a variation of grounded theory, allows us to look at key points and then view the differences based on the resulting categories. Grounded theory does not presuppose a hypothesis; however, lets a hypothesis develop based on examination of data.

²⁰ David Neiwart, *Sovereign Citizenship: Not Just for White Supremacists Anymore*, August 2010, <http://www.crooksandliars.com/david-neiwart/sovereign-citizenship-not-justwhite>.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

Widely disparate groups, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)²¹ and the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC),²² have identified the Sovereign Citizen Movement as both a persistent and emergent threat to the security of the United States. Extremist followers of this movement have acted out in a variety of ways ranging from refusal to follow regulatory laws, such as obtaining driver's licenses or insurance, to the filing of nuisance lawsuits and liens against personal property (sometimes referred to as paper terrorism²³) and to violent attacks on government and public safety officials.²⁴ There has been significant research conducted into the movement. Research for this literature review included open Internet sources, contemporary media sources, the Naval Postgraduate School library, and documents collected from the Sacramento Regional Terrorism Threat Assessment Center (RTTAC), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI documents provided extensive overview of the criminal activities and status of the SCM. It is also of note that some of the research was conducted by associations, such as the SPLC and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). Both the SPLC and ADL have a decidedly liberal-biased view of many of the related issues and this invariably colors their findings; however, that does not invalidate all of the research and analysis that they conduct.

As there was little information into the catalysts driving change with SCM, a review of related field literature was required. An expanded review and critical analysis of academic journals, such as *The Journal of Social Issues*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *The European Journal of Social Science*, provide some insight into the dynamics of group politics and philosophical shifts. Additionally, Dr. Suzanne Martin of the University of Nevada, Reno has done significant research on the subject of extremist groups that shift political ideology. Her doctoral dissertation, titled "From Parliamentarianism to

21 "Sovereign Citizens: A Growing Threat to Law Enforcement," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*.

22 Casey Sanchez, *Sovereign Citizen Movement Resurging* (report no. 133) (Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009).

23 Fleishman, "Paper Terrorism."

24 Sullivan, "FBI Focused on Sovereign Citizens."

Terrorism and Back Again,” was critically analyzed and produced insight into questions relevant to this thesis.²⁵

The following analysis is divided into five primary sub-categories that elucidate further gaps in the extant literature relative to the research question while exposing a firm base upon which to build a model for understanding the transition of the SCM to its current manifestation.

- The history and composition of the movement and current status and how that underpins and relates to the resurgence of SCM activity.
- The characteristics and ideology of SCM and its relationship to the other right-wing extremist movements as it relates to the thesis topic of transition.
- The strategies and tactics of SCM in the past and how they have developed under the current framework absent the previous racial component.
- The relative threat of SCM as it expands in the current non-racial manifestation.
- Motivations as framed against the social identity theory.

1. History, Composition, and Status

The conceptual origins of SCM extend back to the post-Civil War period of reconstruction and the Posse Comitatus movement, which regulated the use of federal troops in policing American citizens. Although the principles are over a hundred years old, the literature would indicate the current SCM truly originated during the 1960s and continued to develop in the 1970s through a revival of the Posse Comitatus movement whose followers adhered to the belief that there was no legitimate government above the county level. Some research indicates this “county level” legitimacy uniquely positions America’s elected sheriffs, who are constitutional officers, to be on the frontline in conflict with members of not only the SCM but many other right-wing extremist groups

²⁵ Nancy Susanne Martin, “From Parliamentarianism to Terrorism and Back Again” (dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2011).

such as militias.²⁶ Early manifestations include the loosely affiliated Posse Comitatus movement,²⁷ Freeman groups,²⁸ as well as other lesser known anti-tax and neo-constitutional movements, all of which share a common link to resisting federal government rule.²⁹ Militia groups, identity theory adherents and groups, neo-Nazi focus individuals and groups and others from the radical and extreme right share affinity for the base assumptions of the early movement—that is the federal government lacks the legitimacy to rule the citizens of the U.S.³⁰ Today’s SCM has an infamous history in right-wing extremism and violent movements.³¹

The early forerunners to SCM, such as Posse Comitatus and Freeman, focused on delegitimizing the federal authority through arcane and dubious explanations of how citizens have been misled into subjecting themselves unnecessarily to the federal authority—a practice that remains central to the modern SCM.³² Additionally, research conducted by the Southern Poverty Law Center indicates SCM does not recognize established law other than common law, and thus, adherents are not compelled to comply with most codified regulation.³³ During the 1970s and 80s, the SCM was grounded in anti-government and “hate” ideology. The available literature ties the origin and evolution of the SCM to the Posse Comitatus movement and its early ties to “hate” ideology, such as the Christian Identity Movement. Research, would also indicate there has been a resurgence of SCM throughout the 1990s and continuing to the present.³⁴ The

26 Gary Settle, “The Emerging Domestic Threat: What the Law Enforcement Community Must Know and Prepare for in Regards to the Sovereign Citizen Movement” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2012).

27 Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

28 Brent Smith, and Kelly Damphouse, *The American Terrorism Study: Patterns of Behavior, Investigation, and Prosecution of American Terrorists* (Rockville, MD: National Criminal Justice Reference Service, 2002), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/193420.pdf>, 13.

29 Bjelopera, *The Domestic Terrorist Threat*, 23–25.

30 David Brannan, “Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology: Repentant and Rebellious Christian Identity” (dissertation, University of Saint Andrews, 2007), 13.

31 Blee, and Creasap, “Conservative and Right Wing Movements.”

32 Bjelopera, *The Domestic Terrorist Threat*, 22.

33 Sanchez, *Sovereign Citizen Movement Resurging*.

34 Ibid.

current SCM ideology is more focused on anti-government rather than the racist Christian identity theory ideology, which was previously followed.³⁵ There is little in the literature that directly explains this shift.

2. Characteristics and Ideology

The literature identifies followers of SCM as “separatists” or self-proclaimed “freemen” and delineates some of their grievances. Additionally, there is significant research into the logic behind the SCM followers’ belief that only common law applies to them.³⁶ SCM adherents believe the government, particularly the federal system, is illegitimate. This is based on a number of pseudo-legal arguments built upon obscure common law citations and the twisting of constitutional law coupled with redefining historical events in order to fit the SCM assertions and philosophies.³⁷

One example of this would be what SCM adherents identify as the theory of redemption. This theory claims the U.S. went bankrupt in 1933, when it moved away from the gold standard to back up its paper currency. The U.S. needed collateral to trade with other countries and designated its “citizens as collateral to ensure the value of its money.”³⁸ The U.S. government then created secret accounts on behalf of each citizen (each identified as a strawman) to be used as collateral.³⁹ Sovereigns try to claim this collateral account to satisfy their various debts, including mortgage, bank loans, and taxes.⁴⁰ This also generated a belief that the Constitution “was suspended in 1933 by the War and Emergency Powers Act and the Sixteenth Amendment was not properly ratified nullifying the federal income tax system.”⁴¹

35 Anti-Defamation League, *The Lawless One* [2009] Sovereign Citizen Movement.

36 Tony Kail, and Jim Preston, “Domestic Terrorism and the Sovereign Citizen Movement,” *The Journal of Counterterrorism and Security International* 17, no. 4 (2011): 22.

37 Rob Finch, and Kory Flowers, “Sovereign Citizen: A Clear and Present Danger,” *Police: The Law Enforcement Magazine*, September 21, 2012, www.policemag.com/channel/patrol/articles/2012/09/sovereign-citizens-a-clear-and-present-danger.aspx.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Baysinger, “Right Wing Characteristics and Ideology.”

Another example of SCM manipulation of historical perspective centers on the ratification of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. Passed in 1868, the 14th Amendment, commonly identified as the Equal Protection clause, was intended to galvanize the country during post-Civil War reconstruction.⁴² SCM adherents believe that this amendment “tricked all citizens of the state republics into renouncing their citizenship and agreeing to become federal corporate citizens.”⁴³ When the state citizenship was renounced, the federal government was able to force people to obtain documents such as birth certificates, drivers’ licenses, vehicle registration cards, and Social Security cards. Because sovereigns believe this amendment to be illegal, they view it as an invalid contract and thus generally refuse to obtain such documents.⁴⁴

When a group senses it is under siege, securing individual rights dominate the discussion.⁴⁵ For instance, when journalists are challenged, the Constitutional right of freedom of speech becomes the central topic. From the perspective of the SCM adherents, all citizens are under siege and the Constitution has been trampled by the federal government. This leads the SCM adherents to have an exaggerated sense that their liberties are being infringed upon and to have a strong desire to protect individuals’ rights. An example of this behavior can manifest around the usage of a SCM adherent’s name. SCM adherents believe their name is private property and cannot be used without their permission. For instance, they will view something as routine as writing their name on a traffic citation as an infringement on their rights and challenge an official’s authority to request or use their name. Some adherents violently resist any attempt to submit to the request for identification.⁴⁶

The research also clearly outlines the origins of SCM were steeped in racial ideology with Christian Identity theology emergent as one of the primary theological

42 “Primary Documents In American History: 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution,” accessed February, 5, 2015, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/programs/bib/ourdocs/14thamendment.html>.

43 Finch, and Flowers, “Sovereign Citizen: A Clear and Present Danger.”

44 Ibid.

45 Fathali Moghaddam, *Multiculturalism and Intergroup Relations: Psychological Implications for Democracy in Global Context* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2008), 20,

46 Finch, and Flowers, “Sovereign Citizen: A Clear and Present Danger.”

drivers.⁴⁷ Identity theology adherents and groups utilizing this racialist theology to support their extremism contributed considerably to the white supremacist nature of the ideology during the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁸ Two important figures and groups must be discussed with reference to the racialist influence on SCM during this period.

One is the Aryan Nation, initially founded as the Church of Jesus Christ-Christian in southern California was headed by Pastor Richard Butler. Butler created and fostered an amalgamation of various extremist ideologies including primarily neo-Nazism mixed with identity theology.⁴⁹ While these two ideologies served to be the focus of Butler and his group's belief system, when he moved to Idaho, Aryan Nation became a clearinghouse of extremist ideas. Posse Comitatus and Freeman beliefs, which are base of modern SCM, were present though not the focus of Aryan Nation. Butler and Aryan Nation activism contributed to the spread of all anti-tax and anti-government ideologies on the extreme right at the time.

The second figure is Pastor Dan Gayman of the Church of Israel, Schell City Missouri. He was the most important systematic theologian for identity adherents during his time. Gayman had evolved from Mormon theology to what has been identified in the literature as Rebellious Seedline Identity theology.⁵⁰ At this point Gayman and Identity theology adherents in general were sympathetic to Posse Comitatus ideology, as previously suggested with relation to Butler and Aryan Nation.⁵¹

Gayman's Seedline theology asserts that Eve had sex with the devil and Adam on the same day.⁵² In this theology, the offspring of Adam and Eve produced an Aryan

47 Brannan, "Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology," 14.

48 Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door*, 23.

49 Michael Barkun, "Racist Apocalypse: Millennialism on the Far Right," *American Studies International* 31, no. 2 (1990): 121.

50 Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 123–125.

51 Jeffrey Kaplan, *Encyclopedia of White Power: A Sourcebook of the Radical Racist Right* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 121–122.

52 Kevin Borgeson, and Robin Valeri, *Terrorism in America* (Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett, 2009), 53–55.

Adamic man.⁵³ The offspring of Eve and the devil produced who Gayman and other racial identity followers suggest are modern day Jewish people.⁵⁴ Gayman continues his racialist understanding by asserting that all non-white people are part of the two-stage creation story found in Genesis 2:19 and are identified as beasts of the field.⁵⁵

During a conflict at the church, Gayman was struck with the butt of a shotgun by a Missouri highway patrolman and from that point, delineated a new way of understanding the group's relationship with the government. No longer "rebellious" towards government, Gayman articulated a theology of "repentant" identity theology that professed despite who comprised the government or what actions they took, identity believers had to be repentant before God and wait on a miraculous change.⁵⁶ This theological change as articulated by Gayman was important to the future change possibilities regarding race and the SCM.

Another individual who warrants mention is Wesley Smith, a former Ku Klux Klan firearms instructor, who was an early pioneer of the Christian identity theory. In 1946, he founded the Anglo-Saxon Christian Congregation, which later became the Church of Jesus Christ Christian. His message was clearly anti-Semitic with the central theme that all Jews must be destroyed.⁵⁷

This doctrinal understanding, based on a specific understanding of Genesis 3:15, is the most complete modern day Identity theology exposition of the seedline position and is specifically related to the racialist perspective of Freeman and Posse Comitatus followers of the 1970s and 80s.⁵⁸ With Gayman's reformulated understanding of authentic identity theology, many seedline adherents found a new possibility to avoid conflict with the authorities. At the same time, other Identity theology pastors were

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Brannan, "Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology," 244–247.

57 Abraham Cooper, *The New Lexicon of Hate*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Simon Wiesenthal Center, 1999).

58 Brannan, "Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology," 211–213.

asserting an identity faith absent the seedline doctrine. Evangelist Ted Weiland argued in his work, “Eve: Did She or Didn’t She” that Gayman’s seedline doctrine was unnecessary and wrong to indicate a covenantal relationship between whites and God, thus tearing down the central racist perspective commonly held by Identity theology adherents.⁵⁹

The Oklahoma City bombing shifted the perspective of many within the radical right. Timothy McVeigh, Terry Nichols, and Michael and Lori Fortier’s attack that killed 168 and wounded in excess of 500 people linked real action to anti-government rhetoric so common until that time. McVeigh shocked many on the extreme right and his violent act and the wave of law enforcement activity that followed forced many to alter their racist rhetoric. Additionally, legal strategies were employed to weaken the extreme right. An example occurred when, a few years later, the Southern Poverty Law Center supported a successful lawsuit against the Aryan Nation that eventually left the group bankrupt and without their Hayden Lake, Idaho stronghold.⁶⁰ In addition, in 2004, Butler died and with him died the northwest clearinghouse of racial and extreme right ideas.⁶¹

The yoking of extreme political views to religiosity can provide a powerful catalyst for violence, sacrifice, and war. Some of the most dramatic examples of religious traditions in history occurred on the battlefield.⁶² In all religions, including those of the Judean-Christian belief systems, violence is sometimes framed as a divine action. In addition, violence is frequently employed against confederated political entities as a divine tool of survival.⁶³ For those adherents of SCM who wish to leverage violence as an act of resistance to a repressive system, there are clear examples that can provide justification for their actions. The ability to redefine one’s actions as divine or godly makes it possible for individuals to morally disengage from the perception that one’s

⁵⁹ Ted Weiland, *Eve, Did She or Didn’t She? The Seedline Hypothesis under Scrutiny* (Mission to Israel Ministries, 2000).

⁶⁰ See *Keenan v. Aryan Nations* VC-99-441, Dist. Ct. of the First Jud. Dist., Idaho (2000).

⁶¹ Barkun, *Essay: The Christian Identity Movement*.

⁶² Mark Juergensmeyer, and Margo Kitts, *Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 217–218.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 30.

actions are evil.⁶⁴ Religiosity can allow individuals to establish a framework that optimizes outcomes and minimizes one's negative actions. If one's actions are supported by a deity, the actions will always be deemed as honorable when juxtaposed against the secular world.⁶⁵ Religiosity can redefine something terrible into something positive. Even the killing of other human beings, when done within a religious context, transforms the act into something positive by reframing the act as overcoming evil.⁶⁶ The fifth commandment of the Bible states "though shalt not kill;" however, this commandment is generally interpreted to apply only to the in-group, meaning those who form the follower's community. Violence and even genocide against other groups is not only condoned but even at times commanded.⁶⁷ According to Deuteronomy 20:16-18:

But in the cities of the people that the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perissites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded.

Religious doctrine can also provide a basis for changing how we think about outcomes by reframing evil and divine and thus devoid of negative connotation.⁶⁸ Finally, religion can provide a basis for belief that those individuals at the receiving end of adverse action are somehow the source of blame and therefore deserving of punishment.⁶⁹ Using ideology in this manner can allow individuals to use theological systems to drive situational parameters. Ideology can be used to justify abhorrent attacks on those who fall within an out-group and can also be used to influence behavior within the prescribed in-group. This kind of influence involves the authorization or institutionalized permission to behave in prescribed ways and also the authority to punish

⁶⁴ Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House Trade, 2008), 310–311.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Juergensmeyer, and Kitts, *Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence*, 217.

⁶⁷ Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations, Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 208.

⁶⁸ Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 310–311.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

behavior that is contrary to group goals.⁷⁰ The existence of leaders who prescribe to a specific religiosity or theological doctrine are a significant influence on group behavior; however, constantly modifying the theology can leave followers confused and unable to specify central beliefs.⁷¹ The result of numerous leaders exposing a myriad of theological views to followers can be the development of an umbrella of various doctrinal viewpoints that provide an overarching philosophy rather than a monolith system of beliefs.

Additionally, there has been research on specific stimuli on these groups and how it affects ideology and characteristics. For instance, one thesis from the Naval Postgraduate School in 2009 examined the impact of health care reform on far right extremists when viewed through the prism of the theory of collective behavior and how the lack of an effective leader has impacted the movement's mobilization. Additionally, this thesis concludes that further research is necessary to explore how counter radicalization techniques that are currently applied to Islamic extremists could be tailored to right-wing extremists.⁷² Decentralized leadership under the current SCM model is a central theme within the paper's research.⁷³

There were also some works of literature that examined why radical groups can shift philosophies and actively participate in government processes, such as elections,⁷⁴ however, they do not address the expansion of the organization's "in-group" to include those who were previously strenuously excluded. Furthermore, a review of the literature does not reveal how a decentralized and "leaderless" philosophy can shift significantly in such a way as to nearly abandon founding principles.

Understanding the evolution and implications of group dynamics is central in discerning organizational change. In addition to intergroup relations, the landscape in which a group evolves has implications on its development. Groups that develop in poor

⁷⁰ Ibid., 226.

⁷¹ Brannan, "Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology," 27.

⁷² Arnold Baldoza, "Assessing Domestic Right-Wing Extremism Using the Theory of Collective Behavior" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2009), http://www.hsdl.org/_view&did=696015.pdf.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Suzanne Martin, "Dilemmas of 'Going Legit': Why Should Violent Groups Engage in or Avoid Electoral Politics?" *Behavior Science of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 6, no. 2 (2014): 81–101.

resource nations tend to be more collective while those that develop in richer nations tend to be more individualistic.⁷⁵ Given this parameter, the ideological development of the SCM in America towards individual and even exaggerated sense of individual freedom is a predictable outcome.

3. Strategy and Tactics

Research in the area of strategy and tactics employed by members of SCM consistently indicates adherents of this movement run the gambit from white-collar scams, such as identity theft, mortgage fraud, and counterfeiting, to threatening judges and other public officials, to felonious assault and murder.⁷⁶ These findings were echoed by the Anti-Defamation League in its 2009 special report titled *The Lawless Ones: The Resurgence of the Sovereign Citizen Movement*.⁷⁷ There is additional focus in the report on the SCM's use of fraudulent loans and frivolous lawsuits against public officials and how this tactic, sometimes called "paper terrorism," can impact local government. The paper also outlines some of the SCM philosophies behind these tactics, such as the citizen contract theory, which interprets the 14th Amendment to be "optional" and thus subject to conditions and consent of the governed. Given this paradigm, the SCM believes most provisions of law are optional.⁷⁸

Another comprehensive study of SCM was conducted in the thesis titled "The Emerging Domestic Threat: What the Law Enforcement Community Must Know and Prepare for in Regards to the Sovereign Citizen Movement," focusing on its tactics and the knowledge that law enforcement officers should have from a perspective of threat awareness. This study concluded that SCM (and other right-wing extremist groups) was of significant concern as to warrant the establishment of a nationwide database to track

⁷⁵ Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations, Software of the Mind*, 238.

⁷⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Domestic Terrorism, the Sovereign Citizen Movement," April Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010, http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2010/april/sovereigncitizens_041310.

⁷⁷ Anti-Defamation League, *The Lawless Ones*.

⁷⁸ Fleishman, "Paper Terrorism."

contacts and develop intelligence.⁷⁹ The author concludes there is additional study needed in this area as to the individual motivations behind the actions SCM members take.

The literature indicates that each of the various SCM groups use similar techniques. As the SCM has no centralized leadership or national platform, these tactics are defined and implemented at the local or regional levels. Available research provides little understanding as to why these specific tactics are almost universally implemented without a central leadership directing outcomes.⁸⁰ Additionally, the same decentralized movement has significantly shifted from many of its original core philosophies. Unfortunately, there is little direct research into how tactics and philosophies of SCM have been able to shift without direct influence of a centralized and organized leadership.

4. The Overall Threat

Literature reveals the FBI considers the SCM adherents as extremists who are scattered across the United States and can be classified as domestic terrorists. These concerns are echoed by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which considers the “re-energized” Sovereign Citizen Movement a resilient and dangerous threat.⁸¹ The fact that SCM frequently is classified as anti-government and believe most laws do not apply to them creates a primer for conflict with government officials, particularly law enforcement. Some SCM adherents believe they are “at war with the United States and are willing to use deadly force against anyone who they perceive as impeding their sovereign rights.”⁸² The danger of SCM adherents was manifest on June 8, 2014 when Las Vegas police officers Alyn Beck and Igor Solodo were eating their lunch when they were ambushed by Jerad and Amanda Miller. The shooters, who later took their own lives, shouted “this is the beginning of a revolution” and fired upon the officers killing

⁷⁹ Settle, “The Emerging Domestic Threat.”

⁸⁰ MacNab, *Sovereign Citizen Cane*.

⁸¹ Sanchez, *Sovereign Citizen Movement Resurging*.

⁸² Finch, and Flowers, “Sovereign Citizen: A Clear and Present Danger.”

them.⁸³ According to police investigators, the Millers were adherents of the militia movement and white supremacists who viewed the government, and specifically police officers, as oppressors.⁸⁴ The killings were praised in some SCM circles, which called for additional killings of police and other government officials.⁸⁵

Research also indicates that most domestic terrorism, including the SCM, is “leaderless” and highly decentralized.⁸⁶ The literature supports this premise and decentralization makes the SCM flexible and difficult to infiltrate. Additionally, the potential for “lone wolves” to act out violently based on a personal philosophy is high. Though the Millers were adherents of SCM, they did not belong to a specific group or fall under anyone’s direction. Rather, they agreed with the philosophy and simply adopted it and acted on their own.⁸⁷

The research revealed the SCM and related movements have existed for decades and its members, such as Terry Nichols, who was convicted for his part in the Oklahoma City bombing, can be extremely dangerous. Additionally, studies indicate that although individual tactics may vary, many of the core beliefs remain consistent.⁸⁸ Other research supplies some SCM justifications for their actions that are largely comprised of a series of conspiracy theories to justify criminal behavior.

A review of source materials also revealed that although the militia movement may be better known by the general public, the Sovereign Citizen Movement is growing. The Sovereign Citizen Movement is actually larger than the militia movement, and

83 Nicole Hensley, “Las Vegas Police Officers Gunned down at Pizza Restaurant, One Civilian Killed,” *New York Daily News*, June 9, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/las-vegas-police-officers-killed-shooters-kill-article-1.1821923>.

84 Associated Press, “Las Vegas Couple Who Killed Three in Shooting Spree Were Heavily Armed, Wearing Adult Diapers,” *New York Daily News*, June 24, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/las-vegas-killers-wore-adult-diapers-shooting-spree-cops-article-1.1841816>.

85 Jason Sickles, “Online Rants, Antigovernment Radicals Fuel Fear of U.S. Cop Killings,” *Yahoo News*, June 14, 2014, news.yahoo.com/online-rants-rightwing-extremism-fuel-fears-for-us-cops-225012920.html.

86 Bjelopera, *The Domestic Terrorist Threat*.

87 Associated Press, “Las Vegas Couple Who Killed Three in Shooting Spree.”

88 “Sovereign Citizens: A Growing Threat to Law Enforcement,” *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*.

engages in a “much greater amount” of criminal activity.⁸⁹ Materials reviewed for this thesis did not reveal a consistent reason why the SCM is growing faster than the militia movement or why it is more predisposed to commit criminal acts. There is concurrence among the reviewed literature that there has been a steady increase in membership and activity of “hate and militia groups” since 2000.⁹⁰ There is some disagreement within the literature regarding the application of this information. The perspective on whether or not a militia is a “hate group” seems to vary based, not on the individual philosophies of the militia groups, but rather on the perception of the group conducting the research. Additionally, the research for this thesis did not specifically address the matter of minority groups participating in a movement that originally was replete with Aryan supremacy ideology or how such a transformation might occur.

5. Motivations as Framed within Social Identity Theory

Contemporary SCM adherents are vehemently antigovernment. Using social identity theory (SIT) as a framework, SCM followers can quickly determine their identity by answering the questions “what kind of person am I and to what kind of group do I belong?”⁹¹ The in-group is defined as those who share similar beliefs while the out-group is defined as those who support the current system such as politicians, judges, and peace officers. The out-group also may extend to those who accept the system and choose to be subjugated. Once in-groups and out-groups are defined, group behavior can be examined. Groups that operate in environments in which they feel oppressed or in which their survival is in question tend to exhibit similar traits or “markers.”⁹² These four markers include: patron-client relationship, the honor/shame paradigm, the challenge response cycle, and the issue of “limited good.”⁹³ Future chapters examine the SCM at different

89 Anti-Defamation League, *The Lawless One*.

90 Bjelopera, *The Domestic Terrorist Threat*.

91 Moghaddam, *Multiculturalism and Intergroup Relations*, 19.

92 David Brannan, Kristen Darken, and Anders Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward* (Williams, CA: Agile Press, 2014), 79.

93 *Ibid.*, 81.

points in time using these markers in an attempt to identify catalysts for change within the movement that can explain the shift away from racialist ideology.

D. CONCLUSION

The literature review of the SCM revealed the historical background for the movement, the construct of many of the groups and the current status of the movement. Additionally, research explored the tactics and overarching strategies employed by some of the extremists. The characteristics and ideology of the movement were explored and the relationship between the SCM and other right-wing extremist groups was outlined. Some of the groups' actions were explored using the framework of the theory of collective behavior. Finally, the overall threat of the SCM in-groups as well as that of the "lone wolf" actors was evaluated. The available literature provided a good understanding of the SCM origins, strategies and tactics, general characteristics and ideology, and the overall threat of the movement. Research is clear the SCM is highly decentralized and has no central leadership. A remaining question is why this decentralized movement would shift away from a racist ideology to a more "tolerant" extremism in a period of 25 years? The application of social identity theory (SIT) may provide a framework for understanding the SCM movements at specific points in time. By applying the SIT framework to the SCM movement along a temporal plane, we may understand how and why the ideology of the movement shifted. This could allow our government and public safety a better understanding of how SCM ideology shifts over time and thus lead to a more effective response to future challenges.

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II. METHODOLOGY

A. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This thesis examines how the SCM has changed over time, specifically from the 1970s to present day, and proposes a theory as to how and why the shift is occurring. The SCM of the 1970s and 80s frequently contained an element of racialist ideology, specifically that of Aryan supremacy. While some splinters of today's SCM still contain this element, many other racial and religious groups have embraced the movement.⁹⁴ Examination of this topic includes a point comparison between SCM at specific points in time. First, this thesis includes a case study examination of the SCM as it was in the 1970s and 80s that examines leadership, philosophy, theological impacts, and composition of SCM. To provide contrast, this thesis also includes a case study examination of SCM's current form. This includes examination of new leadership models, current philosophies, theological influences, and some of the demographic diversity of modern SCM adherents. Data between the two SCM periods was examined, compared, and contrasted to identify key catalysts that spurred philosophical change. This examination is significant in that understanding how the SCM shifted over time may provide a framework as to how other extremist groups could also morph over time.

In preparation, data was gathered from materials outlined in the literature review. The author conducted searches of the Naval Postgraduate School thesis database. Related theses were examined for germane points and relevant documents. Additionally, the bibliographies of the theses provided a useful resource to work from. Essays and reports were researched and gathered using open source Internet searches. This yielded information from sources as disparate as the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Anti-Defamation League, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), declassified law enforcement reports, and doctoral dissertations. Numerous books on the subject were also obtained and reviewed. Much of the available research was conducted by law enforcement groups such as the FBI or watchdog groups, such as the Anti-Defamation

⁹⁴ Anti-Defamation League, "Sovereign Citizen Movement-Extremism in America," 2010, archive.adl.org/learn/ext_us/scm.html.

League. As these groups often begin their analysis with either a conclusion or bias within the premise, significant care must be taken in analysis and inclusion in this thesis. In order to gain more insight into the topic of organizational change, the author also reviewed related fields of study including: psychology case studies, business models, cultural communication, intergroup relations, and religion. From this material SCM leadership, philosophies, theologies, and their respective impacts within the movement and its membership were examined and grouped according to their respective period and topical relevance.

Social identity theory (SIT) provides a common framework for examination and analysis. SCM was viewed at two distinctive times through the SIT prism. The respective SCM manifestations were examined from a positive distinctiveness, interpersonal-intergroup continuum, and the respective analytical markers associated with SIT. SIT provided a framework to examine SCM at relevant points in time, thus the movement and its behavior, could be better understood from a social, political, and religious context. Key catalysts, motivations, and impacts were analyzed and compared to identify anomalies that would account for the shift in racist philosophy between the 1970s and 80s SCM and the current SCM movement. Those potential change agents were compared against other organizational models to see if there were commonalities between SCM and known organizational change frameworks. Through analysis, similarities were identified and conclusions drawn about the factors leading to change within SCM.

B. BACKGROUND

Citizen rebellion to organized government is not unique to America or modern times. Although the SCM origins date back to American Civil War reconstruction, the modern incarnation has its ties to the 1950s and 1960s and the attempts at racial integration in America.⁹⁵ Resentment over the federal government forcing integration resonated with many right-wing extremist groups including Christian Identity followers, members of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), and adherents of SCM. President Eisenhower's decision to use federal troops to force integration in Little Rock, Arkansas served as a

⁹⁵ Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door*, 43.

lightning rod for these groups to mobilize.⁹⁶ Groups from the KKK to the SCM found this intrusion of the federal government into what they believed was a state, and ultimately local matter, intolerable.⁹⁷ That the matter involved racial equality provided a significant catalyst for right-wing extremist groups.

One of the foundational constructs of many sects of SCM was Christian Identity theology.⁹⁸ Christian Identity took its premise from British-Israelism's discredited theories and its adherents believe that white Europeans, not Jewish people, were the true children of God as referenced in the Bible.⁹⁹ Christian Identity began in the days immediately after WWII in southern California in Los Angeles—a city that was tolerant of fringe religious sects.¹⁰⁰ Los Angeles was also the center of operations for Gerald K. Swift, who was a powerful preacher who had a network of ultra conservative followers. He also had ties to two additional identity adherents and an ardent believer in the concepts of SCM and teachings of Wesley Swift and William Potter Gale.¹⁰¹ This movement is grounded in a mixture of pseudoscience and theology. One of the cornerstones is the belief that the Aryan race is superior to all other races, and, in fact, Jews were direct descendants of the devil, and other races are sub-human and to be considered as “beasts in the field,” which is a reference to a biblical passage in Genesis 1:24.¹⁰² It is worth noting that other groups, for instance some black ethnologists, also claim to be God's “chosen people,” who therefore are also of divine lineage.¹⁰³

According to the Christian identity doctrine, the Aryan race is the only pure race and the distinctions that make other races unique were used as evidence that other races were impure. Using racial differences can be a powerful delineator of who belongs to and

96 Ibid. 50.

97 Ibid. 51.

98 Barkun, *Essay: The Christian Identity Movement*.

99 Ibid.

100 Brannan, “Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology,” 14–16.

101 Barkun, *Essay: The Christian Identity Movement*.

102 Baysinger, “Right Wing Characteristics and Ideology.”

103 Ella Hughley, *The Truth about Black Biblical Hebrew-Israelites (Jews)* (Springfield Gardens, NY: Hughley Publication, 1982), 63.

what defines a common group, which is also known as the in-group versus those who do not belong, which is also known as the “out-group.” Being part of a small defined group can provide a sense of exclusiveness or specialness.¹⁰⁴ With this view, Christian Identity adherents could feel emboldened to subjugate other races, force relocation of undesirables, or even kill those who resisted; however, none of this could be accomplished as long as the government, particularly the federal government, would stand apart from these positions and even use force to ensure all men were created equal. This created friction with followers of Christian identity theory or the SCM. Men like Gerald L. K. Smith and Wesley Swift were leaders in the movement and were associated with the KKK.¹⁰⁵ They also resented the federal government’s intrusion into the civil rights debate and found themselves closely aligned with members of the SCM.

The significance of a theological plank in the origins of the SCM platform cannot be understated. Theological planks can be broad, overarching, and provide a framework for future doctrine. Theology, symbols, and beliefs are powerful reinforcers of culture and in-grouping that can be used to manipulate individuals.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, theological arguments are based on divine interpretation and therefore circumvent the law. Those in a leadership position are driven by hermeneutic principle and can manipulate these values to be absolute in nature. With the influx of God into the model, terrorist acts become driven by pious values. The measure of success is not based on an earthly matrix, and the political, social, or economic terms are less of significance. Success is based on theological terms and is uncompromising, not subject to normal societal constraints and absolute.¹⁰⁷ Absolute values can be used as a shortcut to justify violence and repressive acts.¹⁰⁸

When viewed through the SIT prism, religious in-group narratives are extremely effective. They reinforce in a cosmic manner who the out-group is and how their patron

104 Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*, 65.

105 Ibid.

106 Hofestede, *Cultures and Organizations; Software of the Mind*, 7.

107 Bruce Bognar et al., *Psychology of Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2007), 95.

108 Keshavan Nair, *A Higher Standard of Leadership* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Pub, 1997), 23.

client relationship is in relation to God. This provides confidence in the correctness of their position and solidifies the rigidity of the in-group. With an influential leader providing direction, supported by pseudo-theology, even good people can be lead astray. Most behavioral change is not the result of brainwashing or the hypnotic abilities of a Svengali. Rather, most changes are affected through systematic manipulation of the most normal aspects of life within a controlled setting.¹⁰⁹ This manipulation can be magnified in that in-group cohesion can be amplified in a religious setting.¹¹⁰ Religious doctrine allows people to reinforce who they are as individuals as well as reinforcing their in-group affiliation.¹¹¹ Once accomplished, leaders can use pseudo theology as a pretext for morality in defense of what would otherwise be an abhorrent action. With morality woven into identity, all acts can be justified if they are in support of an end goal.¹¹²

C. EARLY LANDSCAPE

It is important to understand the political, sociological and economic landscape in which the early SCM developed. The United States had just won World War II (WWII) and had emerged as the sole military and economic superpower in the world. Soldiers, sailors, and marines returned from the European and Pacific theaters and rejoined the workplace.¹¹³ Factories that had built tanks and munitions shifted to building automobiles and toasters. Even with millions of returning servicemen, the unemployment rate peaked at 3.9 percent.¹¹⁴ The economic hardships born out of the Great Depression followed by the sacrifices born during the war were replaced with unprecedented economic growth, opportunity, and an emerging American culture that was prepared to establish itself during this period of prosperity.

109 Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 259.

110 Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1990), 7–8.

111 Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*, 100–102.

112 Fathali Moghaddam, *From the Terrorists' Point of View: What They Experience and Why They Come to Destroy* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 84–85.

113 Cecil Bohanon, "Economic Recovery: Lessons from the Post World War II Period," George Mason University, September 10, 2012, <http://mercatus.org/publication/economic-recovery-lessons-post-world-war-ii-period>.

114 Ibid.

The war impacted immigration, and people fled a devastated Europe in droves. Those Jews who were able frequently chose to immigrate the U.S. to escape tyranny and persecution. They were welcomed by many and feared by some.¹¹⁵ The fight against fascism had also served to highlight many inconsistencies in the United States. The U.S. had served as the arsenal of democracy in freeing the oppressed people in Europe and Asia and yet had a firmly established practice of segregation of the races in many parts of the country, particularly the South. While progressive whites struggled with this contradiction in national values, minority groups, in particular blacks, began to press for change through some of the early black civil rights protesters. Even during the war, blacks had begun to protest discrimination as illustrated by a mass protest march in Washington, DC on June 18, 1941 to call out discriminatory practices in the defense industry. This march resulted in statutory changes when President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, which banned discrimination in defense industries that held government contracts.¹¹⁶ The Fair Employment Practices Committee was created as an oversight body to ensure compliance.

America's agricultural system following WWII was largely located in the Midwest and still largely a family enterprise. Corporate farms were not yet the reality they are today, and America's need to feed its military during the war translated directly to dollars. In 1940, nearly 40 percent, some \$29 million, of total government dollars spent on research went to agriculture.¹¹⁷ The technological expansion driven by WWII translated to American farmers as well. Advances in technology translated to increased efficiencies for farmers. Machinery, from tractors to plows and harvesters, caused an explosion in effectiveness. Additionally, not only did efficiencies in fuel consumption make operating those machines more economical, wartime chemical experimentation yielded advances. Ammonia refinement, used in explosives, was used to advance fertilizer. Other advances brought about better pesticides and herbicides increased crop

115 Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door*, 27–28.

116 Library of Congress, "The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom," September 2014, www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights.act.

117 Bill Ganzel, "Farming in the 1940s: Postwar Technology," Living History Farm, accessed January 9, 2016, www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/money_01.html.

yields while machinery cut labor costs by as much as 35 percent.¹¹⁸ Although, farming has always been a tough life, post WWII farmers were well positioned for success.

This period saw the expansion of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other groups like the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR).¹¹⁹ These groups championed non-violent strategies to challenge discriminatory practices. These groups saw successes throughout the 1940s and 50s, and some of the victories were won in the courts. For example, on July 16, 1944, nearly a decade before Rosa Parks, Irene Morgan refused to surrender her seat to a white passenger on a Greyhound bus bound from Virginia to Baltimore. She was arrested, tried, and convicted for a violation of a Virginia statute requiring her compliance. The NAACP appealed to the Supreme Court, and the conviction was overturned as unconstitutional as applied to interstate travel commerce.¹²⁰

There were other similar legal victories throughout this period. For instance, in the 1948, *Shelley v. Kraemer*, a black man (Shelley) purchased a house in a St. Louis neighborhood. There was a covenant clause prohibiting blacks from residing in the neighborhood. A white neighbor sought injunctive relief from the Missouri Supreme Court to block Shelley's occupancy. The NAACP appealed to the Supreme Court, which affirmed the right of individuals to draft restrictive covenants; however, it nullified the state courts' ability to enforce them under the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. There were challenges on the social front as well; however, as minorities garnered federal protection in the workplace and neighborhoods, society's tolerance began to grow. This tolerance expanded to the point at which the nation's pastime, baseball, was forever changed on April 15, 1947, when Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier and became the first black player in Major League Baseball.¹²¹

118 Ibid.

119 Library of Congress, "The Civil Rights Act of 1964."

120 Ibid.

121 "Jackie Robinson Biography," Bio, accessed January 11, 2016, <http://www.biography.com/people/jackie-robinson-9460813>.

During this time, the platforms for conveying news, information, and opinion were limited. In the 1940s, books, magazines, newspapers, newsreels, radio, and actual physical meetings were the primary method to share a message. As the 1950s and 1960s emerged, the addition of television provided an opportunity to receive information directly in one's living room; however, this required money and or commercial sponsors. For most organizations, television was not a viable option to spread a message. As recording equipment became cheaper and more portable, audio recordings became a cheap and viable alternative.

D. PIONEERS OF HATE

It is difficult to discuss the modern origins of the SCM without discussing the impact of William Gale. He was an early advocate of the SCM who was greatly influenced by Christian Identity “minister” Wesley Swift and founder of the Church of Jesus Christ Christian. He was also the founder and an ardent supporter of the Posse Comitatus (Latin for “power to the county”) movement with a deep-seated belief in local control, typically no higher than the county sheriff.¹²²

Adherents to the Posse Comitatus “reject any form of government above the county level.” They oppose federal or state income taxes, reject the existence of the Federal Reserve, and the supremacy of the federal judiciary above the county courts.¹²³ William Gale was the father of the modern Posse Comitatus movement and held its tenets close to him. The forced racial integration served as a vehicle for the confrontation with the federal government, and the notion of Posse Comitatus provides a rational framework to oppose the federal government and federal courts’ stance. When core beliefs are challenged, the group’s honor is at stake, and, as indicated by SIT, a response is necessary.¹²⁴ Gale used this conflict to his advantage. As early as 1957, William Gale, who was chair of the far right Constitution Party of California, saw this conflict as an opportunity to invigorate the party and attract followers to the cause. When addressing a

¹²² Peter Knight, *Conspiracy Theories in American History: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 591.

¹²³ Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 108.

¹²⁴ Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner’s Way Forward*, 92.

group of followers in December 1957, Gale said, “If something is not done, the power-mad Supreme Court can and will drive the people of this country over the cliff of constitutional government into the abyss of communism.”¹²⁵ In addition, Gale was able to use the issue of segregation as a catalyst to draw followers to the SCM. From the 1960s until his death in 1988, Gale remained a prominent voice in the SCM, linking racial hatred to the issue of separatism.

Other SCM leaders, such as Richard Butler and August Kries, held and espoused similar beliefs.¹²⁶ Dan Gayman of the Church of Israel was also tremendously influential in modern Christian Identity theology. Gayman’s theological standing has morphed over time from a “rebellious seed” theology to a “repentant” identity, which claims they are not a hate group at all.¹²⁷ Although a significant portion of SCM is based on flawed and discredited legal arguments, the early evolution also was based on a racial component based on religiosity.

Men like Butler, Gale, Gayman, and Kries served as the early theological voices that espoused separatism and racism. They were accepted within the circles of the extreme right and served as the pope and cardinals of the SCM’s theological backbone. They used religiosity as a powerful mechanism from the 1950s throughout the 1980s to manipulate followers.

According to SIT, one of the reasons people join groups is to enhance their social or personal identities. That is, they garner a sense of self-worth and esteem by belonging. According to SIT, people enhance their group standing image in two ways: “by enhancing their in-group identity or by bolstering their personal identity.”¹²⁸ These identity types are interdependent; enhancing one identity type can increase the other. Men like Butler, Gale, Gayman, and Kries were able to enhance personal identity using a theology that defined those who were of white European heritage as sanctified by God.

125 Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door*, 50.

126 Baysinger, “Right Wing Characteristics and Ideology.”

127 David Brannan, “The Evolution of the Church of Israel: Dangerous Mutations,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11, no. 3 (1999): 106–118.

128 Stella Ting-Toomey, *Communicating across Cultures* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 147–148.

Additionally, out-group members, such as Jews and blacks, could never be part of the in-group given their “sub human” status. This creates a great chasm that could not be bridged as long as the racist identity doctrine prevailed. It also created a sense of exclusiveness in belonging that was irrevocable as long as ethnicity served as the driving factor.

It is noteworthy that a frequent assumption is that Identity theology followers have a singular belief system and understanding, but is this assumption accurate? Although early leaders such as Gale and Smith espoused the early tenets of American identity theory, the movement continued to morph over the decades. In his work, *Radical Religion in America*, Jeffery Kaplan addressed the misperception that all radical right groups were following the same ideology. He concluded that although there are similarities between groups, there are also tremendous differences separating them.¹²⁹ In fact, some groups, such as the criminal and terrorist group, The Order, act out of sense of disenchantment with Identity theology when they committed acts of robbery and murder.¹³⁰ In short, although Identity theology can be a component of a group’s ideological makeup, it is merely a portion of what defines some of the groups and cannot explain all of a specific groups’ behaviors. Identity theology was present in the early offshoots of SCM; however, is clearly absent in many of the modern SCM branches. For example, the Moorish or the Hawaiian SCM movements. Some anti-hate groups, such as the Anti-Defamation League or the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), frequently group all radical right groups who have Identity theology underpinnings as singular in belief and purpose. Although this may be expedient, it is not accurate.¹³¹ There are no single monolithic groups or singular belief system.

Original SCM adherents, those from the 1950s to the late 1980s, were frequently Identity theology of Christian Identity followers. Research reveals that their beliefs were neither monolithic nor consistent. Although groups were certainly influenced by Gale, Butler, and Smith, individual groups formed under a leader who was not directed by a

129 Brannan, “Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology,” 17–18.

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid.

central or overarching leadership structure. In a decentralized structure, each group would be likely to develop its own culture with unique cultural symbols, its own values and beliefs, its own organizational rituals, and its own organizational heroes. This is consistent with any organizational development.¹³² This monotheistic belief links Identity theology adherents and thus many of the SCM theory to direct hatred and killing of Jewish, African-American, and Asian people.¹³³ In fact, not only is Identity theology not monolithic, it has continued to evolve as evidenced by Dan Gayman's revelation following being struck in the face by a state trooper's shotgun butt, which resulted in the repentant seed theory.

E. DAN GAYMAN

It is difficult to discuss Christian Identity theology or the SCM without referencing Pastor Dan Gayman. Gayman is the head pastor at the Church of Israel in Schell City, Missouri and is often cited as the premier theologian of the modern Christian Identity movement.¹³⁴ Although the church does not possess a defined structure as many churches have, the Church of Israel is theoretically divided into 12 distinct dioceses with Gayman heading the Diocese of Manasseh, which covers the United States.¹³⁵ Gayman is one of the few Identity theology adherents who attempts to coherently establish a systematic theology that is a framework for the belief system: seedline doctrine.¹³⁶

The essence of seedline doctrine is that white people are the actual offspring of the biblical Adam. According to Gayman, whites comprise one seedline and are identified as being originally pure. All non-white races were pre-Adamic and were created at the time of the rest of the animals and therefore occupy a sub-Caucasian position within God's creation. Gayman argues Jewish people are the offspring of Eve and a carnal relationship with Satan and are therefore, literally, the offspring of the

¹³² Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations, Software of the Mind*, 185–186.

¹³³ Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Brannan, "Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology," 192.

devil.¹³⁷ According to seedline doctrine, Eve's sexual relationship with Satan resulted in a second seedline; the Jewish people. It also maintains, the Jewish seedline is corrupt and, like the biblical Cain, are comprised of vagabonds forced to wander the earth, specializing in monopoly of money, finance, and trade.¹³⁸ The conflict between the two seeds will continue until the return of Jesus Christ. Gayman argues that those who deny his doctrine will pay dearly because they are affirming that the seed of Satan is the same as the Adamic seedline.¹³⁹ Gayman outlined many of his beliefs in a publication titled, *The Two Seeds of Genesis 3:15*, first published in 1977. For a number of years, Gayman advocated active, and even violent, resistance to Satan's seedline and the government supposedly infiltrated by this line. However, his philosophy shifted after being struck in the face by a Missouri peace officer's shotgun. Since that time, Gayman developed and advocates Repentant Seed doctrine.¹⁴⁰ This doctrine maintained the sanctification of whites though the seedline doctrine and simultaneously advocates a peaceful stance while awaiting Jesus Christ's return.

Dan Gayman, as the theological "head" of the Church of Israel, possesses all of the necessary decision making authority. There is no system of cardinals or council of deacons to speak of. He has the discretion to make theological changes to the doctrine, and he is the chief educator within the church. This allows him to shift organizational culture quickly. If an individual wants to shift a culture quickly, it is imperative to have or to seize control of the education system. This is one of the basic strategies implemented by revolutionaries.¹⁴¹ This structure places Gayman in a position to dominate the patron-client relationship. His ability to redefine challenging doctrine quickly allows him to reset the playing field on a whim. It also can create a measure of uncertainty for followers if the in-group gets redefined. Gayman's seedline doctrine

137 Jon Schamber, and Scott Stroud, *Mystical Anti-Semitism and the Christian Identity Movement* (Stockton, CA: University of the Pacific, Department of Communications, 2000).

138 Ibid.

139 Ibid.

140 Brannan, "Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology," 247.

141 Price Pritchett, and Ron Pound, *High-Velocity Culture Change* (Dallas, TX: Pritchett Pub Co., 1993), 41.

allowed him to theoretically maintain the same in-group-out-group dynamic while redefining the rules of engagement; however, by Gayman redefining the rules of engagement, the values of the in-group are shifted. Those adherents who placed a high value on violence, which is an emotional response, are left feeling a diminished sense of value over the new doctrine. In-group membership is more than cognitive. It has a strong emotional sense as well. The emotional sense is universal throughout the human experience.¹⁴² Gayman's redefining of the element of violent resistance to a more passive position had the end result of appearing inconsistent and, undoubtedly, alienating members of the in-group.

F. THE NEO-LANDSCAPE (1985–1995)

Although, race relations were not perfect, by the 1990s the turmoil of the Civil Rights movement was over. The courts, starting with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, had consistently supported desegregation, integration, and worked to correct the discriminatory policies of the past. Even with residual anger from decades of oppression, African Americans were part of the mainstream cultures. The color barrier in sports was greatly diminished. White kids flocked to purchase Michael Jordan jerseys and America's pastime was well integrated. Black singers, artists, writers, and actors became significant contributors to American culture. Popular shows of 90s included a black family in the *Cosby Show* and a Jewish comedian named Jerry Seinfeld.

The Midwest in the early 1990s was a significantly different picture than in the years immediately following WWII. By the 1980s, America's farm programs exceeded \$20 billion annually, and many voters found it outrageous that the government would actually pay farmers not to grow crops.¹⁴³ Over the years, the federal government has assembled a series of programs to support American farmers, including research grants, agricultural reform, and, most notably, price fixing through subsidies.¹⁴⁴ The intent of these programs was to provide an economic support system to farmers that smoothed out

142 Ting-Toomey, *Communicating across Cultures*, 148.

143 Chris Edwards, "Agricultural Subsidies," *Downsizing the Federal Government*, June 1, 2009, www.downsizinggovernment.org/agriculture/subsidies.

144 *Ibid.*

the ups and downs of farming economics. Throughout the 1980s and into the early 90s, as the move was towards a smaller government, many of these programs were dismantled leaving farmers, particularly the small family farm vulnerable. An economic recession between 1990 and 1992 damaged America's banking system and led to an increase in the federal budget deficit. Although the stock market and technological industries remained solvent, the federal deficit placed increased pressure to cut spending. This led to the erosion of the farmers' federal safety net and a banking crisis that resulted in higher interest rates and, ultimately, foreclosures. The impact on the Midwest was significant. Towns were boarded up, businesses closed, and commercial centers were decimated.¹⁴⁵

The ability to spread information has continued to expand since WWII Radio, newspapers, magazines, cassette tapes, and television were joined by the computer and the Internet. The advent of the World Wide Web provided a level of connectivity that had never before existed and radically transformed the way humans communicate, research, educate, and conduct business.¹⁴⁶

G. CONNECTORS, MAVENS, AND SALESMEN

Many of the racist perspectives of the early SCM movement were linked to Christian identity theory beliefs. These beliefs were widely varied and inconsistent in application in a belief system that lacked centralized leadership. The common belief that Christian Identity theology is monolithic is not dissimilar to the western understanding that all Islam is singular in belief and purpose. One does not need to look beyond the headlines emerging from the Middle East to recognize the fallacy in that premise. While there can be similarities between Identity theology adherents and violent Salafi jihadists, they are divided in social nuance and theory application.¹⁴⁷ This assumption has linked all identity theory and SCM followers to the actions of the most extreme factions. It is paramount to linking all of Christianity to the actions of extremists sects, such as David Koresh's Branch Davidians.

¹⁴⁵ Dyer, *Harvest of Rage*, 13–14.

¹⁴⁶ Shyamal Mitra, "Power and Impact of the Web," University of Texas, Austin, accessed February 16, 2016, www.cs.utexas.edu/users/mitra/honors/web2.html.

¹⁴⁷ Brannan, "Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology," 28–29.

Although the SCM was heavily influenced and initially even interwoven with Christian Identity theology adherents, the leadership and therefore philosophies of each group have taken on unique qualities. In SCM, there was no true central leadership, but there were a series of pioneering pundits who developed some of the beliefs central to Identity theology. The influences of men such as Swift, Gale, and Gayman were significant; however, they were not all defining. In fact, in some cases, such as that of Gayman, the belief system continued to evolve over time. Additionally, many of these continuously evolving tenants of Identity theology were difficult to articulate—going so far as to actually be confusing to some of the Identity theology leadership.¹⁴⁸ Much of this constantly evolving and somewhat murky philosophy was developed and had to be communicated using systems that pre-dated the seminal communication platform of the modern era: the World Wide Web. Absent an effective, wide-reaching communication platform, SCM and Identity theology struggled to find a broad audience and acceptance. For a message to become epidemic and explode, there are three critical components that are required: connectors, mavens, and salesmen.¹⁴⁹

Connectors are people who have a gift for bringing multiple people together.¹⁵⁰ They have the ability to transcend the in-group/out-group dynamic and reach individuals of all walks of life. For connectors to be effective, they cannot be so firmly entrenched within a single in-group as to not be accepted outside of that small circle. Connectors also know lots of people, and they do not limit their relationships to particular groups or classes. Their relationship pool extends to people from every walk of life. The impact of the connector is based not only on the number of people they know, but on the types of people they know. Having relationships with people outside of one's in-group allows the connector to create links throughout society. An illustration of this is demonstrated in the popular parlor pastime "six degrees of Kevin Bacon." The premise of the game is within six steps, one can connect any actor or actress to the actor Kevin Bacon based either on

148 Ibid.

149 Malcom Gladwell, *The Tipping Point, How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Bay Back Books, 2000), 59–61.

150 Ibid.

relationship or body of work.¹⁵¹ The connector has the ability to accomplish this connection within society. They deliberately seek out and cultivate relationships with people from outside their social circle, which allows them to connect various people, classes or cultures with just a few steps. For most of us, this is actually abnormal behavior. To extend communication beyond the perceived in-group would be counter intuitive for followers of Identity theology. It would be particularly abnormal from an individual from an extremist group that uses the in-group/out-group dynamic as a premise for the movement. The lack of ability to have connectors who can reach a broad audience is limiting and eliminates a key component for a movement to become widespread.

Mavens are another key component to causing a movement to become an epidemic. The word maven comes from the Yiddish and means one who accumulates knowledge.¹⁵² A maven is a subject matter expert who gathers data or information on a topic. In practice, mavens provide the data and information that the connectors can translate to masses. They are passionate researchers and can have tremendous influence on a movement. The challenge for many extremist groups, including Identity theology and SCM adherents, is the theological positions are frequently heavily based on emotion. Facts supporting their positions are difficult to find and frequently do not withstand rigorous research. And, as previously stated, the tenants of the movement are both amorphous and difficult to articulate, making the role of the maven difficult. SCM adherents are undoubtedly passionate about their movement and position; however, swaying new members (those who are currently part of the out-group) to become in-group members is a difficult task when articulable facts are lacking. Mavens are not persuaders; they are gatherers of facts.

Connectors are the social glue, and mavens are the collectors of data—but messages still need to be distributed. The distributors of any message are the salesmen. Salesmen have the “skills to persuade us when we are unconvinced of what we are hearing and they are critical to shifting a mere message to a movement.”¹⁵³ Salesmen are

151 Ibid.

152 Ibid.

153 Ibid.

the persuaders who convince others that they need something that they do not currently possess. Additionally, salesmen specialize in simplifying a message so the intended recipient feels compelled to accept the product or message. The ability to simplify a message in order to appeal to an intended audience is known as “the stickiness factor.”¹⁵⁴ The challenge for the salesmen of Identity theology is the theory is convoluted and complex. It is difficult to break down into a simple manageable concept and then transmit it to a group outside of an established in-group. The inability of the connectors to establish a broad cross section of society limits the audience to which the salesmen can pitch. This again is a limiting factor in expanding a message to an epidemic movement.

Given the difficulties of successful distribution of the Identity theology component of SCM, it is not remarkable that its racialist philosophies failed to resonate on a widespread basis. Even religions that are more mainstream struggle for acceptance in a world of increasing secularism. Modern society has increasingly embraced secularism, and many traditional religions struggle to remain relevant in an increasingly neo-liberal society.¹⁵⁵

Using SIT as a framework for exploration into the decline of the Identity theology plank in the SCM, we first must recognize that people affiliate with groups because belonging provides a sense positivity and worth. Frequently, leaders will employ a strategy of displacement of aggression to establish group cohesion.¹⁵⁶ This is accomplished through vilifying an out-group, which galvanizes the in-group. For this to be most effective, an understanding of how and why the out-group is to be the subject of aggression must be articulated. Given that SCM is not monolithic, there is no single voice driving the narrative. Furthermore, as in the case of Dan Gayman’s views, the rationale evolved over time. When the message for defining the out-group, in this case racial minorities, lacks consistency and substance, the patron-client relationship, that is the relationship between the patron (SCM leadership) and the client (adherents), in which the

154 “A Comprehensive Guide to the Tipping Point,” Wikispaces, accessed February 16, 2016, <https://malcomgladwelltippingpoint.wikispaces.com/the+stickiness+factor>.

155 Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 168–169.

156 Moghaddam, *Multiculturalism and Intergroup Relations*, 55–56.

client relies on the patron for introductions, status, protection, or materials,¹⁵⁷ becomes more tenuous. In the case of the Identity theology, this leaves its adherents in constant need of reinforcement or validation for their positions in the group. Leadership becomes ineffective when the message, principles, or values are murky, unsupported, contradictory, or continually evolving.¹⁵⁸ As the theological framers of the decentralized SCM died, were arrested, or evolved in their thinking, there was less of a driving force behind the theological underpinnings of the movement. The result was the Identity theology as a component of SCM began to diminish. Although the Identity theology component of SCM has faltered, the anti-government component of it remains intact.

H. ANTI-GOVERNMENT ROOTS

The SCM rejects the legitimacy of the federal government, and in fact, most SCM adherents reject all levels of government beyond the county level. Many of the SCM followers believe that the 14th Amendment “shifted the nation from its original common-law roots with states’ rights to a federal corporation that legally enslaved everyone.”¹⁵⁹ The SCM followers’ response to this belief is to ignore all regulatory laws, tax evasion, permit avoidance, and failure to obtain all types of government issued licenses. Additionally, they engage in paper terrorism by filing bogus lawsuits and false liens that are intended to harass those who have raised their ire.¹⁶⁰ This response, predictably, places the SCM follower in conflict with federal, state and local government entities, including law enforcement. This philosophy transcends racial divides. Blacks, whites, Hispanics, and native Hawaiians have all been attracted to this anti-government philosophy.

Early SCM adherents resented the interference of federal entities into matters that they deemed state or local issues—such as that of racial integration in the 1960s. Some of the NAACP’s early victories encouraged further challenges to the status quo. For

157 Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practioner’s Way Forward*, 55.

158 Nair, *A Higher Standard of Leadership*, 129.

159 Bjelopera, *The Domestic Terrorist Threat*, 28–29.

160 Ibid.

instance, its legal victories in the cases of Irene Morgan and *Shelley*, would not have occurred without the support of the federal government and the Supreme Court. In this period, the anti-government backlash, often in the form of violence, bombings, and murder,¹⁶¹ was often tied to the expansion of civil rights. This manifested most significantly in the 1960s as the civil rights movement garnered more support and gained legitimacy. As images of this violence streamed into America's living rooms, the backlash to this violence by Middle America was swift.

Though the SCM adherents of the 1980s and 1990s moved away from the racist tenets of the movement's earlier manifestation, they were still anti-federal government. As adherents of earlier version of SCM, they also generally did not recognize authority above the county level. In addition, followers of the earlier manifestation of SCM, had an inherent distrust in banks as they had been instrumental in foreclosures and repossessions. This manifested in a variety of offshoots of the SCM, including the Militia Movement, the Freeman Movement, and the SCM adherents with Identity theology overtones. Many of these followers were disaffected farmers or ranchers who could not adapt to a deepening recession and a lack of federal support. This failure generally resulted in one of two responses. The first is to blame oneself, which results in a tremendous sense of guilt associated with failure. The response to this is often self-destructive behaviors up to committing suicide. The other possible response is to blame the incompetence, immorality, or negligence on another for one's failure. The resulting response along this path is bitterness, a sense of betrayal, and anger.¹⁶² The Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995 was a manifestation of this anger.¹⁶³ As before, the response of Middle America was a certain and, like the strike of a shotgun butt to Dan Gayman's face, serve as a catalyst to redefine a movement.

161 Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door*, 74–75.

162 Dyer, *Harvest of Rage*, 34–35.

163 Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Terror Hits Home: The Oklahoma City Bombing," Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed January, 17, 2016, <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/history/famous-cases/oklahoma-city-bombing>.

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III. ANALYSIS

When examining the formative years of the SCM, it is useful to view the movement through the prism of social identity theory (SIT). SIT was first described and detailed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979. The theory has been refined through scholarship and practice over the years; however, three of the components that provide a framework for SCM:

1. Individuals strive to achieve or maintain positive social identity.
2. Positive social identity is based on favorable comparisons between in-groups and relevant out-groups: the in-group must be perceived as positively differentiated or distinct from relative out-groups.
3. When these comparisons yield unsatisfactory results, individuals will strive to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group and/or make their existing group positively distinct.¹⁶⁴

After reviewing these points, we must first determine how being a member of the early SCM provides a positive social identity to the member. This requires a closer examination of the in-group. This group is comprised of people who do not accept the presence of any government above the county level; believe that the government is illegitimate and therefore should be overthrown; believe the government has been corrupted by Jews with interests powerful enough to control the banks, media, and government; and minorities are sub-human and not deserving of the same rights as Aryans. Additionally, we must also examine the impact of the Christian Identity theology, which includes beliefs that Jesus Christ was actually an Aryan, the “lost tribes” of Israel were not Jews but Aryan, the Aryans are the “chosen people” of the Bible, and the United States is the “promised land.”¹⁶⁵

In examining the in-group, the desire to belong to a group that has a sense of worth is paramount. Those who are Identity theology adherents believe they are sanctified by God. Using the patron-client relationship as a working framework, this

¹⁶⁴ Brad Deardorf, *The Roots of Our Children's War: Identity and the War on Terrorism* (Williams, CA, Agile Press, 2013), 24.

¹⁶⁵ Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 109.

places God in the patron position and the followers in the role as client. From a cosmic theological standpoint, there is no greater authority than God. Under the direction of men like Wesley Smith, William Gale, and Dan Gayman, who serve in the capacity of connectors, mavens, and salesmen within the movement, this creates an opportunity to reinforce in-groups, react with hatred and even violence towards anyone who is opposition, and when necessary, modify the message. Specifically, under the direction of Dan Gayman, the seedline doctrine provides a rationale that separates white people from all other races and establishes them as God's chosen people. Those who do not adhere to the racist doctrines and are merely anti-government also feel sanctified. Their belief that the federal government is corrupt and illegitimate places them in a struggle against an evil, subjugating entity (i.e., the government). This places the SCM adherents on a plane with the founding fathers of the United States. They are the true "patriots" whose struggle against the government will ultimately uplift all of the Aryan citizens of America.

When one factors in the theological perspective of Christian Identity, the positive social identity, is greatly enhanced. The in-group is ordained by the Bible and by God as sanctified and predetermined to rule as members of the "lost tribes" to rule over the "promised land." The exclusion of other races makes belonging "special." This makes the in-group "compare favorably" to the out-group in that many of the out-group are considered to be sub-human. Clearly, SCM followers would be favorably distinct from this out-group. They also can view themselves as engaged in a "holy war" with the outcome impacting all of God's "chosen people"—the Aryan race. This is consistent with another social psychology framework known as the theory of intergroup relations. This theory indicates that members of a particular ethnic group will try and determine a positive differentiation with respect to other ethnic groups. This is most often accomplished through the use of stereotypes.¹⁶⁶ Given that people generally assign more credibility to negative information than positive information (known as attribution

¹⁶⁶ Henri Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 351.

theory),¹⁶⁷ negative stereotypes reinforce feelings of uncertainty and anxiety towards out-groups. This coupled with the negative correlation principle, which causes us to assign the negative actions of a single member of an out-group to the entire group, provides sufficient motivation to reinforce the sense of superiority of the in-group.¹⁶⁸ Anxiety towards nonwhites by whites can also be fostered through a sense of discrimination. As other racial groups migrated to the United States, there was an increase in government driven cultural awareness of minority groups. Many sociologists agree that “whites” are treated as a racial group and a baseline from which to evaluate other cultures without defining “white” culture. This implies that “whites” have no culture of their own.¹⁶⁹ Within SCM, this leads to increased hatred of minorities and validates the belief that the government is illegitimate and under the control of Jews. There are offshoots of the SCM, such as the Christian Patriots, that actually actively advocated for violence against minorities; specifically Jews. They took great steps to transform an abstract political ideology into a “religious imperative in which violence is not only accepted but divinely decreed.”¹⁷⁰ These perceptions remained a significant part of the SCM throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.

The spread of SCM in the 1970s and 80s was largely driven by individuals with a message that had a measure of appeal for a specific set of people. The spread of any social movement is dependent on the involvement of people and is dependent on three types of people: connectors, mavens, and salesmen. Connectors are people with social ties and are essential for the spread of any idea. Mavens are information specialists who enjoy helping others make informed decisions; they are teachers. Salesmen are people with charisma who enjoy getting others to act on their recommendations; they are the persuaders.¹⁷¹ As discussed in the previous chapter, for a social movement to become exceedingly popular, all three of these people types are required.

167 Ting-Toomey, *Communicating across Cultures*, 152.

168 Ibid., 153.

169 Monica McDermott, and Frank Sampson, “White Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 31 (August 2005): 245–261.

170 Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*.

171 Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*, 58–80.

In the years predating the World Wide Web, people's social connections were generally limited to those people who were near in proximity and from a similar demographic.¹⁷² People who live in Sacramento, California did not, as a rule associate with people from Pittsburg, Pennsylvania; however, human connectivity cannot be understated. In his landmark study, psychologist Stanley Milgram, conducted an experiment in which he used a chain letter to establish connectivity between 160 people in Omaha, Nebraska and a stockbroker who resided in Sharon, Massachusetts. He placed the name of the stockbroker in the letter and directed people to send copies of the letter to their social circle. The letter would continue to be forwarded to concentric social circles until it reached the target. The result was, on average, it took six letters. This is the foundation for the concept of "six degrees of separation."¹⁷³ The expansion of SCM is also subject to this concept. Beginning with a small number of vocal individuals, an appealing message expanded through various social circles until it resonated with a core group. What prevented the movement from becoming more widespread and epidemic was the negativity of the racial component. Those did not espouse to Identity theology did not advance the message to their social circle; thus, the bigotry inherent in Identity theology only expanded to those who were predisposed to its beliefs.

Today, the SCM remains at the forefront of domestic extremist groups. Adherents remain actively engaged in mortgage fraud, tax evasion, "paper terrorism" and even violence.¹⁷⁴ There is, however, a significant difference. Today's the SCM includes minorities. Although there are still factions of the SCM that embrace racism and hatred as a platform, the SCM is no longer exclusive. Today's SCM has a more sophisticated method of delivering their message. Using the Internet to get their message out, the current focus of the SCM is directed more towards personality types than a particular racial type. There are three primary types of individuals joining the SCM: those under

172 Ibid., 35.

173 Ibid.

174 Sullivan, "FBI Focused on Sovereign Citizens."

significant financial stress, those “who are angry at the government, and con artists or those who want something for nothing.”¹⁷⁵

The first group is people who are financially stressed. Stresses due to unemployment, bankruptcy, tax levies, and mortgage default make up a significant portion of the current SCM membership. The SCM adherents are successful in some part because they can offer distressed people a target for their woes (e.g., the bank, the Internal Revenue Service [IRS], the illegitimate government).

The second group is comprised of people who are angry at the government, especially concerning government regulation. Other people are frustrated by the perception that government controls all facets of their lives. The SCM offers tricks and tools to skirt regulation as well as retaliate against government officials. This is primarily done through false liens, restraining orders, and nuisance lawsuits.¹⁷⁶

The third group that may find the SCM appealing is con artists and people who want something for nothing. The SCM markets a number of theories that promise people quick riches or benefits that others are not entitled to. These schemes range from the ability to legally hide trusts to how to eliminate a mortgage.¹⁷⁷ Many of these SCM counselors require payment to receive their information.

A recent study of SCM demographics revealed that “since the 1990s, the number of non-white sovereign citizens has grown considerably.”¹⁷⁸ The basic anti-government ideology has remained, but the movement has adapted to today’s reality. As a result, there are now Asian and Hispanic sovereign citizens. Additionally, many members of the Hawaiian secessionist movement are also followers of the SCM;¹⁷⁹ however, it is the

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Chris Capsambelis, “Preparing for the Sovereign Citizen Encounter,” *Sheriff Magazine*, March 2013, www.ourdigitalmags.com/article/preparing+for+the+sovereign+citizen+encounter/1338316/0/article.html.

¹⁷⁷ Anti-Defamation League, *The Lawless Ones*.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

African American followers who have experienced the most pronounced growth over the past 15 years.¹⁸⁰

Using race to redefine and reinforce an in-group is not unique to white groups. The African American SCM followers, some of whom frequently identify themselves as “Moors” or “Moorish,” adhere to the traditional anti-government tenets of the movement; however, they have added additional “Afro-centric” pseudo-legal theories. They believe that a 1787 treaty between the United States and Morocco extends special rights and privileges to Moors who reside in the United States.¹⁸¹ The “Moorish” movement developed out of cities in the northeastern United States and southeast rural areas. The adherence to an African heritage is not based on racial hatred or superiority but is claimed in order to leverage their position in terms of their belief in the aforementioned treaty. Many African American SCM adherents also attach themselves to fringe religious groups. Churches like the Moorish Science Temple, the Nuwaubian Nation, and the Nation of Yahweh commonly attract black SCM followers.¹⁸²

An examination of American recession trends may provide some insight as to the resurgence of the SCM. The American economy has a tendency to undulate over time. Like an economic electrocardiogram, the economy goes through cycles of expansion and recession. Such a recession occurred in the early 1990s. After a lengthy peacetime expansion in the 1980s, inflation began to rise and the Federal Reserve responded by raising interest rates, and the result was a weakened economy.¹⁸³ This coupled with a sharp increase in oil prices and waning consumer confidence resulted in a brief recession. Figure 2 provides a visual image of this cycle.

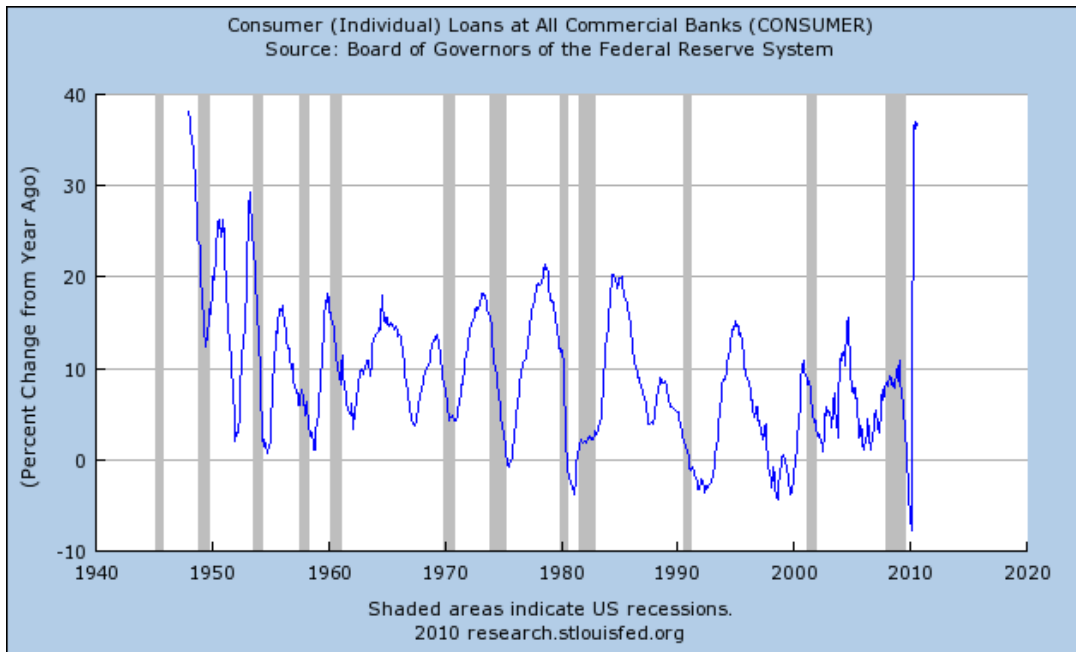
180 Ibid.

181 Ibid.

182 Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Moorish Science Temple of America,” FBI Records: The Vault, accessed January 15, 2016, <https://vault.fbi.gov/moorish%20science%20temple%20of%20america>.

183 Tufts, “The Financial Crisis and the Great Recession,” accessed February 16, 2016, http://www.ase.tufts.edu/gdae/Pubs/te/MAC/2e/MAC_2e_Chapter_15.pdf.

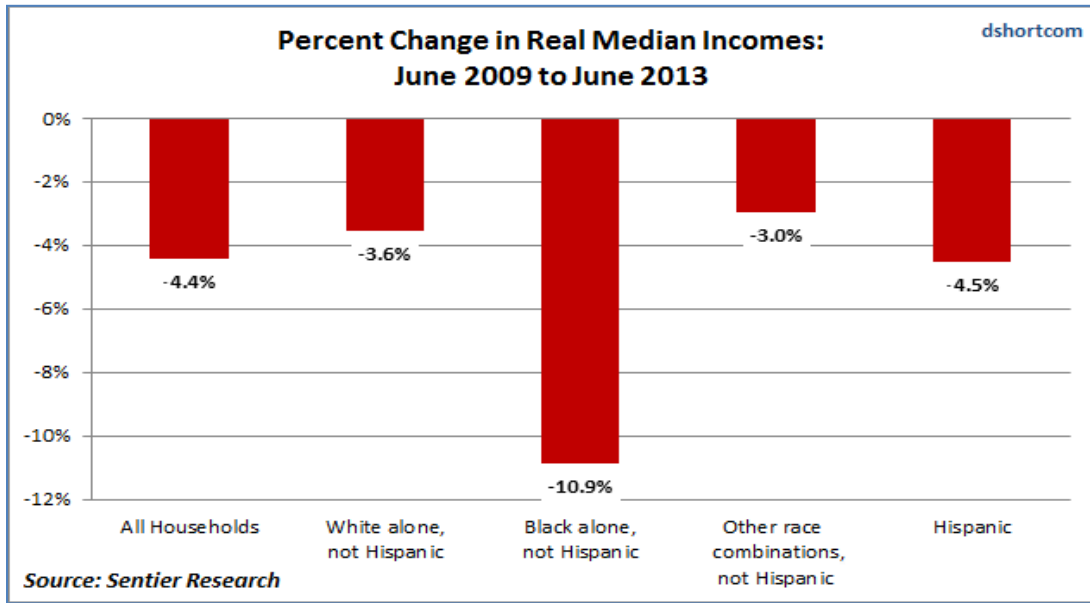
Figure 2. United States Economic Cycle



Source: "Consumer (Individual) Loans at All Commercial Banks," accessed January 4, 2016, <http://research.stlouisfed.org/fred2/series/consumer>.

Additionally, recessions impact different demographics disproportionately. Although all households are impacted, black and Hispanic households are generally hit harder than white households. This was most recently documented during the "great recession" that occurred between 2008 and 2014. Figure 3 reflects the disparate impacts.

Figure 3. Disparate Economic Impacts Based on Race



Source: Doug Short, “Household Incomes: The Sad Truth about the U.S. Economic Recovery Four Years Later,” *Business Insider*, August 22, 2013, <http://businessinsider.com/household-incomes-falling-since-recovery-began-2013-8>.

The “great recession” had the added impact of the housing and loan “bubble” burst. The super inflated housing values driven by speculators and subprime lending practices created a massive spike in home values. When the recession occurred, these values “corrected,” leaving people owing more for their homes than they were worth. This led to a crisis of foreclosures in the United States, and many people lost their homes to foreclosure.¹⁸⁴ When a recession and subsequent foreclosures impact certain elements of society, the outcomes can be more significant. This was particularly apparent in the case of American farmers.¹⁸⁵ In the case of the farmer, the term “farmer” does not designate a vocation but rather, designates an identity. Farming families have frequently farmed for generations. There is a sense of heritage and long communal ties to a single piece of land, and this sense of identity is the basis for a strong in-group. Other groups, such as corporate farms, banks, and mortgage companies backed by the U.S. government, are quickly identified as a threat to existence and identity of the family farmer and,

¹⁸⁴ Tufts, “The Financial Crisis and the Great Recession,” accessed February 16, 2016, http://www.ase.tufts.edu/gdae/Pubs/te/MAC/2e/MAC_2e_Chapter_15.pdf.

¹⁸⁵ Dyer, *Harvest of Rage*, 46.

therefore, are considered a dangerous out-group.¹⁸⁶ Within the in-group-out-group relationship, there is also a patron-client element. There is also a tension between the patron (government, banks, and mortgage companies) and the client (farmers). The farmers depend on the banks and government for the funding to continue to pursue their very existence and identity while the government depends on the farmers to provide the nation's food. This locks the two entities in a relationship.

There is a sociological theory known as equity theory. This theory outlines how people desire fairness and justice in a relationship and, when they perceive a lack of justice, they feel compelled to react.¹⁸⁷ This sense of justice is critical to the success of a relationship.¹⁸⁸ When the perception is that justice is lacking, groups feel compelled to act. Within SIT, this response framework is known as the challenge response cycle. This cycle is comprised of three components:¹⁸⁹

1. Challenge: some action or statement on the part of a group.
2. Perception: the perception of that action by the challenged group and by the public at large.
3. Response: the challenged group's reaction, immediately followed by an evaluation of that response by the public. Failure to respond is in itself a response that will be evaluated by the public.

When Middle American farmers were, by their own analysis, subjected to unfair suffering at the direction of the government supported banks, a response was deemed appropriate by the in-group. This would be an honor challenge. To fail to respond would mean to permit a loss of identity. Rather than accept this, many chose to challenge the validity of the out-group. If the out-group was invalid, then their claims would also be invalid. The most attractive component of the SCM was that which challenged the legitimacy of the U.S. government.

186 Ibid.

187 Moghaddam, *Multiculturalism and Intergroup Relations*, 111–113.

188 Ibid

189 Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*, 87–88.

In the case of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City, a small group, led by Terry Nichols and Timothy McVeigh, took an extreme reaction to the perceived lack of justice. The murder of 168 people, including minorities and children, was in response to the government's actions at Ruby Ridge and against the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas. However, the bombing was soundly condemned at the national level and reinforced for the in-group what an appropriate level of response should be. The bombing had the effect of empowering the government with morality as it set about investigating and prosecuting those responsible. The end result was the bombing actually divided the in-group. Those who were more moderate in nature pulled back from the more extreme factions and began to embrace more moderate methods of voicing their frustrations.¹⁹⁰ In many ways, the Oklahoma bombing was a seminal event and represented “a bridge too far” for the SCM. Although the economy would continue to flounder, the SCM recognized that the murder of children did not make people feel good or want to embrace their in-group. Many felt anti-government activities would challenge legitimacy without alienating the entire country.

The economic climate subsequent to the recession created a landscape in which the SCM could flourish. Recessions create a climate in which effected people are under tremendous financial stress. Unemployment, inflation, and sagging home values can cause frustration, anger, and desperation. The SCM provides a target for people through which people can focus their anger. Additionally, through pseudo-legal theories, the SCM can provide a measure of hope that the individual has some legal standing from which fight back. As certain minority communities, particularly black communities, are hit disproportionately hard during a recession, it is reasonable that they would turn to the SCM in growing numbers—and so they have. Minority communities can be defined by race or economic status. This creates another strong in-group. Like the farmers, those elements that are seen as oppressors of the in-group, such as U.S. government backed banks and mortgage companies, are by definition a dangerous out-group. The same assumptions of equity theory apply. The feeling that either the in-group has been unfairly dealt with or that members of the out-group have received an unfair advantage can feed

190 Dyer, *Harvest of Rage*, 249–250.

the sense of injustice. In the equity theory model, individuals measure their success through their analysis of inputs and outcomes in relation to other people. If one believes the value of their input, in this case to society, is disproportionately rewarded by outcomes, there can be a sense of injustice.¹⁹¹ This is a challenge to one's value in society and therefore to honor. An honor challenge warrants a response. Again the response is to challenge the legitimacy of the out-group. The out-group is defined as the government, banks, and mortgage companies that minimize the individual. The theme that continually takes precedence is that of government or their agents subverting the individual. Racial dynamics become less and less relevant.

There are more contemporary issues that could serve as a catalyst for SCM recruitment. The growth of federal spending under President George W. Bush, driven by the conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the continued spending under President Obama, driven by the continued war on terror and the \$800 billion stimulus package,¹⁹² foster a sense that the government is out of control to the SCM follower. From the perspective of the SCM, there have been recent extensions of federal power. For instance, the National Security Agency (NSA) domestic surveillance programs, documented overseas drone usage, and even the Affordable Health Care Act, when viewed through the eyes of a SCM adherent, could be perceived as broad overreaches by an illegitimate government. To the SCM adherent, this is a government that has treated the individual with disdain and a lack of justice. It has trampled the individual and empowered corporations to seize personal property and even their very identity. To some, these intrusions warrant a response.

The recent Bundy Ranch standoff certainly served as a catalyst for discussion, and in the case of the anti-government militia groups, direct intervention. Cliven Bundy claims he will obey the laws of the state of Nevada; however, he feels differently about the federal government. He states, "I will abide by all Nevada State laws but I don't

191 Moghaddam, *Multiculturalism and Intergroup Relations*, 111.

192 Henry Blodget, "The Truth about Who's Responsible for Government Spending," *Business Insider*, July 11, 2011.

recognize the United States government as even existing.”¹⁹³ There has been an ongoing dispute between Bundy, who does not recognize federal authority, and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) over unpaid grazing fees for the last 20 years. The dispute culminated in an armed standoff after the BLM started rounding up Bundy’s cattle to cover the unpaid fees. Bundy and his cattle have subsequently been released; however, his anti-government supporters remain steadfast and believe the conflict is far from over.¹⁹⁴ This conflict played out on cable news outlets in near real time. The images were of cowboys wearing cowboy hats riding horses and holding American flags turning back a disorganized federal response. The sentiment was distinctly anti-government as opposed to racial hatred.

Many extremist groups recognize the need to shift from violence to a political-based platform. There are examples of terrorist organizations that, at least outwardly, transition from terrorism to what is perceived to be a more political based entity. Hamas is an example of a group that recognized the need to embrace some political process. It has endorsed elections and realized the wisdom of taking appropriate political stances condemning violence. One recent example is the Hamas response to the terrorist attacks in Paris. Dr. Bassem Naim, head of the Council of International Relations for Hamas, condemned the attacks as “acts of aggression and barbarity” against the people of Paris.¹⁹⁵

Once a group recognizes the value of embracing political stances and platforms, adaptation over time occurs with regularity. This is a consistent characteristic of a political group.¹⁹⁶ As a terrorist group embraces a more political stance, there is often a shift between violence to nonviolence. Violence can serve a more tactical purpose while non-violence can be more strategic in nature. As groups lean into legitimacy, this shift

¹⁹³ Ian Millhiser, “Three Ways That Nevada Rancher and His Rightwing Militia Supporters Could End up Behind Bars,” Think Progress, April 14, 2014, <http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2014/04/14/3426222/militia-rancher-behind-bars/>.

¹⁹⁴ Max Strasser, “For Militiamen, the Fight for Cliven Bundy’s Ranch is far from Over,” *Newsweek*, April 2014.

¹⁹⁵ “Hamas, Islamic Jihad Condemn Paris Attacks,” November 14, 2015, *The Times of Israel*, www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-islamic-jihad-condemn-paris-attacks.

¹⁹⁶ Martin, “From Parliamentarianism to Terrorism and Back Again.”

tends to occur.¹⁹⁷ In the case of the SCM, this is observable. Early SCM tactics included an emphasis on racial hatred, isolation, and even violence as a tactic. These stances were embraced by early SCM leadership and SCM offshoots. Dan Gayman's philosophies successfully nudged the movement, at least in part, away from these tactics. His recognition of people of Aryan descent as God's chosen people is balanced against the recognition that all of God's creation is good. This leaves little room for acts of violence against other races.¹⁹⁸ As there is no denominational control of the doctrine within the SCM movement, individual chapters and persons are able to shift doctrine based on emergent understandings. Gayman's teachings resonated with many SCM adherents. The Oklahoma City bombing was certainly a seminal event for the United States and the SCM. The level of violence perpetrated against innocent American people was in stark contrast to Gayman's teachings. The horrible images of that day undoubtedly left many SCM followers looking for answers. The flexible, nondenominational framework of SCM allowed adherents to shift away from the violent and, in many cases, away from the racist underpinnings of SCM to a more anti-government stance.

The explosion of the World Wide Web and its impact on communications and society has been tremendous. Individuals now have access to vast amounts of information and an increased sense that the individual voice has merit. Social and political blogs are a clearinghouse for ideas and can be moderated and heavily influenced by an individual's participation. The Internet has resulted in a "me-centered society" with an increased focus on individual growth, participation, and a marked decline in community as defined by space, work, and family. Community is now more loosely constructed of those who share ideas or philosophies.¹⁹⁹ There is no need for corporate support, editorial input, or government approval to share concepts. The individual has the power to decide what topics will be explored and presented. This is defined as the individualism of society.²⁰⁰

197 Ibid.

198 Brannan, "Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology," 212.

199 Manuel Castells, "The Impact of the Internet on Society: A Global Perspective," *MIT Technology Review* (2014).

200 Ibid.

This shift from community to individuals who share philosophies provides a powerful framework for those who would challenge authority. Without governmental control of content, the free flow of information provides a potential catalyst for action. In the case of SCM, the Internet is particularly effective. The underlying emphasis of the individual forming positions outside of the influence of a defined governmental patron is one of the cornerstones of SCM. Governmental domination of society, from the civil rights movements with origins in the 1940s to the overregulation of farmers in the Midwest to the perceived over application of force against the Branch Davidians and Cliven Bundy have led to a sense of government overreach and control of the individual. Absent a firm community, where race or religion are significant definers of the in-group, ideas of government tyranny become the centric definer of the group. Absent strong leadership, the individual is able to take a more active role in outlining institutional positions. As SCM has no defined denominational oversight, the movement is subject to shifting. Additionally, SCM's racist positions lack a leader who can convincingly articulate the rationale for racial exclusion. When this happened, it shifted away from the position. Networked individualism provided a framework to shift the SCM from distinctly racist in nature to anti-government in nature.

Anti-government sentiment is not limited to those of Aryan descent. The sentiment extends to all races, religions, and affiliations. The power of the anti-government sentiment took precedence over the movement and therefore developed a broader appeal. The Internet does not increase isolation. It increases individual autonomy and participation. It provides a platform for like-minded individuals to form a community and exchange ideas. It is worthy to note that the race of the individual contributor is typically unknown and generally irrelevant. It also provides a sense of security and personal freedom. This provides an environment in which a group's dynamic can significantly shift over time. The individual contributor shifts to social actor within the constructs of the Internet.²⁰¹ This was the case with the SCM.

201 Ibid.

As the SCM shifts from its racist origins, the in-group was redefined. In the twenty-first century, racism is not tolerated to the degree that it was 60 years ago. For example, groups like the Ku Klux Klan, which enjoyed significant influence in the early to mid-twentieth century, have diminished in relevance. Groups that were legally discriminated against deep into the twentieth century are now celebrated by mainstream society. Using SIT as a framework, it is understandable that the shift away from racism would occur within SCM. As previously explained, people belong to a group to add a sense of value or worth to their existence. When society's values shift so significantly that belonging to an in-group now possess a negative stigma to it, the individual is left with few alternatives. He or she can leave the group or join in the narrative to redefine the group's values to make them more contemporary. The lack of centralized leadership, denominational oversight, emergence of new values, as outlined by men like Dan Gayman, and the explosion of the World Wide Web have all contributed to a shift of the SCM away from racist philosophies to an anti-government philosophy. This philosophy resonates with a broader spectrum of people, which ultimately hastened the shift.

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IV. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Sovereign Citizen Movement's American origins are based in the post-Civil War Posse Comitatus movement. Over the decades, the movement's racist platform endured and even flourished with the influence of men like Gerald L. K. Smith, Wesley Swift, and William Potter Gale. The influence of Dan Gayman was also instrumental in SCM ideology. This thesis explores and identifies how and why the SCM shifted from its early racist theology to its current more broad anti-government philosophical stance.

A. FINDINGS

The modern SCM originated decades ago and it continues to this day. The FBI recognizes the SCM as an emergent threat to the domestic security of the United States.²⁰² The SCM's origins are steeped in frustration over government's willingness to impose its will on the individual. In the early incarnations of the movement, much of this frustration was specifically directed at the federal government and was heightened by the implementation of civil rights legislation intended to broaden constitutional protections to all people.²⁰³ The impact of these actions on SCM was twofold. First, it solidified an ages old philosophical position known as Posse Comitatus, which argues there is no legitimate government above the county level.²⁰⁴ This places the nation's elected sheriffs, as the chief law enforcement officer of the county, in a position of leadership and supremacy in the eyes of the SCM adherent. Secondly, the implementation of civil rights legislation created a narrative within the movement that allowed for ideology, such as Christian Identity theology, to gather traction within the SCM and direct the narrative of the movement. The movement embraced separation of the races and believed non-Aryan people to be inferior. Violence was a method to ensure racial separation and Aryan supremacy.

²⁰² "Sovereign Citizens: A Growing Threat to Law Enforcement," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*.

²⁰³ Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door*.

²⁰⁴ Anti-Defamation League, *The Lawless One*.

Christian Identity theology served as a primary tenet of the SCM throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Early SCM leaders like Wesley Smith, Richard Butler and William Gale were able to mold Christian Identity theology and use it to motivate followers as well as identify them as the true Adamic race and therefore part of a very exclusive in-group. As Christian Identity theology has no defined denominational framework, these men were able to create an amalgamation of neo-Nazism, identity theology, and other extremist philosophies into an overarching theology that suited their extremist views. It also was a belief system that was difficult to support analytically and was subject to change and inconsistencies. In complex matters, it is typical for large groups of people to turn to a leader to interpret and clarify the message.²⁰⁵ In the case of SCM, these early leaders were critical in clarifying the complexities of Christian Identity theology. This placed them as the oracles of the movement. In the 1980s Dan Gayman, of the Church of Israel, emerged as one of the most significant theological leaders of the Christian Identity theology movement.²⁰⁶ His modification of existing racist doctrine to the “repentant” Identity theology was significant to the future of the movement relevant to the racist component.

Although there are still factions that embrace racist doctrine, the outlook of modern SCM adherents have broadened significantly. The racist platform is less significant within SCM. The movement has shifted to more of an anti-government philosophy as opposed to the expressed racist doctrine of the past. The movement now includes Native Americans, Hispanics, Hawaiians, Jews, and African Americans.²⁰⁷ Today’s tactics embrace an anti-government and provides a philosophy for those who feel political dissatisfaction or have been negatively impacted by the economy.²⁰⁸ Modern SCM adherents do not recognize the legitimacy of the federal government. In addition, they generally do not agree to pay income taxes, obey any regulatory laws, or yield to any government authority, and they file lawsuits and embrace in mortgage and

²⁰⁵ Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (Brooklyn, NY: IG Publishing, 1928), 30–31.

²⁰⁶ Brannan, “The Evolution of the Church of Israel,” 106–118.

²⁰⁷ Anti-Defamation League, *The Lawless One*.

²⁰⁸ Kail, and Preston, “Domestic Terrorism and the Sovereign Citizen Movement.”

fraudulent banking schemes.²⁰⁹ Many of them will use violence as a mechanism of resistance; however, the violence is not directed at minority groups. The violence is directed specifically at the government, its agents, or corporations perceived to be supported by the government.

B. CONCLUSIONS

The early manifestations of SCM were heavily influenced by the environment. During WWII, the U.S. military was segregated. As white males joined the service to combat the axis powers, women and minorities filled in at home supporting the war effort. They took many of the roles typically filled by white males. It was natural that these people would develop a sense of worth and contribution to society as they filled in those traditional roles. Additionally, WWII had a significant impact on immigration as people fled war-torn Europe and Asia in an effort to rebuild their lives. People from different cultures and religions, including millions of Jews, came to America to rebuild their lives. Much of the American economy shifted from an agricultural base to a more industrial base as modern American factories shifted from producing America's arsenal to items, such as automobiles and appliances that made American lives more comfortable. Many minorities began to press for better pay, better benefits, and, more significantly, a voice in a representative government. At the conclusion of the war, returning servicemen found, in some cases, they had been replaced. This created the initial tension that fed the SCM.

Continued expansion of civil rights, frequently at the direction of and through the use of political coupled with the real threat of military force, served to fuel the SCM.²¹⁰ The in-group was defined on two fronts: the SCM adherent versus the overreaching government and the Aryan people, who perceived they were being displaced by the minority groups who were usurping their standing in society. The ability of SCM to generate interest and adherents was supported by the convergence of these two fronts: government overreach coupled with displaced white males returning from the war.

²⁰⁹ "Sovereign Citizens: A Growing Threat to Law Enforcement," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*.

²¹⁰ Levitas, *The Terrorist Next Door*.

The ability to reach the potential audience was limited by technology. In the absence of the World Wide Web and even television, radio, handbills, word of mouth, and town hall style meetings served as the platform for the SCM message. Cities like Los Angeles, California were traditionally tolerant of fringe political and religious beliefs and were therefore a prime location for SCM and the Christian Identity theology to take root and germinate.²¹¹ In this environment, men like Gerald L. K. Swift were able to establish themselves as the connectors, mavens, and salesmen of the movement and solidify themselves as the movement's exclusive leadership. As the SCM platform was defined by men like Swift and Smith, the hermeneutic platform was somewhat muddled and difficult to articulate; however, the lack of an interactive medium meant challenges to assertions were nonexistent.

The hermeneutic narrative of Christian Identity theology was dependent upon and partially defined by the environment. Without the conflict of the emerging civil rights movement, fueled by the rage of extremist groups like the KKK, there would not be an appropriate environment for the message of Christian Identity theology to germinate. Conflict between races, when one race is perceived to have replaced another, is known as decolonization and is almost always marked by violence.²¹² During this type of in-group-out-group conflict, religion provides a powerful narrative and motivation to strike back against the perceived usurper.²¹³ Christian Identity theology provided the narrative to better define the SCM in-group and sanctify members from the out-group. Additionally, if the set of mores regulating behavior are provided through a theological framework, traditional laws, and regulations have little impact on behavior.

During this formative period of SCM, minorities in America continued to assert themselves. Groups such as the NAACP and the Jewish Anti-Defamation League grew in prominence and influence. Early legislation and executive orders, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802 banning discrimination in the defense industries,

²¹¹ Brannan, "Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology," 14–16.

²¹² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 1–3.

²¹³ Juergensmeyer, and Kitts, *Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence*, 96.

continued to expand under Presidents Truman and Eisenhower.²¹⁴ President Kennedy's use of federal troops to ensure school integration in the South and Lyndon Johnson's signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 were significant milestones during this period as well.²¹⁵ From the perspective of the SCM adherent, these government acts were capricious and overreaching. The government was using its power to secure rights for minorities and therefore potentially threatening the wellbeing and influence of whites. This served to solidify the in-group and sharply identify the out-group as those minorities and the government, which advocated and acted on their behalf. It also served as a catalyst to galvanize SCM with other extremist groups, such as the KKK under a common interest. The government's actions provided example and served to galvanize the SCM under a banner of anti-government philosophies with racialist underpinnings. The actions taken at the state and federal level took control of some of the issues that had traditionally been handled at the county level such as education and voter registration. This served to reinforce the tenants of Posse Comitatus in the eyes of the SCM adherents. To battle these intrusions, SCM adherents challenged the validity of government entities above the county level and linked them to the racialist Christian Identity theology philosophies that asserted a God given right to those of Aryan descent to reign at the top of creation as God's chosen people. This evolving and muddled blend of philosophies would remain as the centerpiece of SCM under men like William Gale and Richard Butler until a new voice reset the movement.

Dan Gayman emerged during the 1980s as a lead theologian for the SCM.²¹⁶ He was one of the few SCM leaders who could present Christian Identity theology in a coherent enough manner as to make some semblance of sense. Gayman's position was initially sympathetic to previous SCM leaders who supported racialist philosophies and even violence. During a conflict with government officials, Gayman was struck in the face with the butt of a Missouri peace officer's shotgun and he subsequently developed the Repentant Seed doctrine. Under this philosophy, whites remained sanctified from the

²¹⁴ Library of Congress, "The Civil Rights Act of 1964."

²¹⁵ "Civil Rights Act of 1964 Explained," Civil Laws, accessed February 16, 2016, civil.laws.com/civil-rights-actof-1964.

²¹⁶ Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America*.

other races as God's chosen people; however, there was a separation from the previous violence. Repentant Seed doctrine advocates maintaining a peaceful stance while awaiting the return of Jesus Christ.²¹⁷ This shift was significant. The new reality that the races could coexist while awaiting the messiah redefined the in-group. It was no longer necessary or even acceptable to engage in violent confrontation with the out-group. Additionally, Gayman had the ability to provide a coherent explanation of repentant identity theology. Previous Christian Identity theologians struggled to intelligently articulate the tenets of the religion. Gayman was able to provide a measure of clarity that supported his theological shift.

Gayman's ability to shift the doctrine was unhindered. Christian Identity theology is not a codified religion as such. It does not have a structured hierarchy with checks and balances. There is no pope in a leadership role, nor are there deacons, cardinals, or councils to confer with before implementing a change.²¹⁸ Gayman simply articulated a philosophical shift and implemented it. His position as one of the people who could articulate the hermeneutics of the theology lent him the credibility to implement a philosophical shift. This shift also served to significantly redefine the in-group of the movement. The sudden redefining of the in-group to a more tolerant racialist stance was undoubtedly uncomfortable for some followers of SCM and served as a catalyst to fracture the in-group between those who advocated violence against other races and those who would embrace Repentant Seed doctrine. Gayman's ability to serve as the connector, maven, and salesman of the message made him a man of tremendous influence who successfully nudged the movement to a more centralist stance.²¹⁹

The environment the SCM has operated in continued to shift as well. By the late 1980s and early 90s, the racial turmoil of the Civil Rights movement was largely past. Workplaces, churches, and educational institutions were integrated. In addition, sports and entertainment figures were more reflective of societies and racial lines were crossed. What once was a traumatic shift in society had now become the new normal. This process

217 Brannan, "Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology," 247–248.

218 Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America*.

219 Brannan, "Violence, Terrorism and the Role of Theology."

is known as desensitization.²²⁰ As people are immersed in a new reality, the shift is initially uncomfortable. As they remain in the new reality, they become desensitized to it, and it takes a more significant shift to bring about more discomfort.²²¹ There were continual and significant shifts in society between the 1940s and the 1980s particularly in the area of race relations and civil rights. As the progress stabilized and people adjusted to this new view of American society, they became desensitized to it and more accepting of the change. As a group, Americans have become less concerned with race than they had been in the past. The environment that had served as fertile grounds for the germination and expansion of Christian Identity theology shifted. Absent the overt expansion of civil rights and the displacement of white Americans, the impetus for conflict fueled by religious doctrine was greatly diminished. Racial conflict served as one of the primary definers of the in-group of early SCM adherents.²²² Without the existence of conflict striating the in-group from the out-group, there was an opportunity for the in-group to be redefined. The changes that continued to impact society were more economic in nature and that is what served to motivate the SCM throughout the 1990s.²²³

In the early 90s a significant recession damaged the American banking system and led to a larger federal recession. As the federal government adjusted to the recession, many of the farm subsidies that had supported the farmers in the heartland were greatly reduced or eliminated. Additionally, the banks raised their interest rates, placing additional burden on those with outstanding debts. This placed ranchers and farmers in a position of losing their farms. For American farmers, this meant not only losing their livelihood, but the loss of their very identity.²²⁴ The perception that their identity was being eliminated through policies enacted by the federal government served as a powerful reinforcement for the in-group as well as challenge that warranted a response. The racist conflict that previously defined the SCM was replaced by a conflict with the

²²⁰ Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 1995), 163.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America*.

²²³ Dyer, *Harvest of Rage*, 13–14.

²²⁴ Ibid.

government. The government was perceived as not only over regulatory and oppressive but as taking away individual's very identity. The conflict was no longer perceived as uniquely racial in nature. It was redefined as the government vs. the individual.

During this same period, the federal government had conflict with the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas as well the Weaver family in Ruby Ridge, Idaho—both resulting in numerous deaths. This further galvanized SCM adherents that the federal government was waging war on its citizens, which reinforced its illegitimacy. Anger about the federal government's actions had nothing to do with race relations. The anger stemmed from the belief that the Weavers and Branch Davidians were citizens exercising their rights and were “murdered” by the government for doing so. Again, this served as a powerful solidifier of the in-group; however, the in-group had shifted. Instead of being based on race, the in-group was now redefined to be those who were oppressed by the federal government or their agents. There is a certain mystique to a movement who resists government tyranny. It was easy to point to the founding fathers as examples of those who nobly resisted unwarranted government intrusion and abuse. Additionally, American culture has a history of celebrating those who victimize established institutions. America was founded on the disobedience and rejection of the established British monarchy. Culturally, many Americans identify with underdogs.²²⁵ During the 1930s at the height of the Depression, the American public was enthralled by newsreels of John Dillinger as he robbed two dozen banks in the Midwest.²²⁶ In the eyes of the SCM adherent, America was founded on a principle of disobedience to authority and their position was morally acceptable. This places the SCM adherents on a platform of “patriots” along the lines of Patrick Henry, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson. Because the SCM is decentralized and Christian Identity doctrine lacks denominational restriction or oversight, groups could form around the central tenet of illegitimate government oppression. The racist component could still exist in small circles; however, the overarching anti-government philosophy transcended all of the subgroups.

²²⁵ “Why Do We Root for the Underdog?” PsychCentral, December 24, 2007, <http://psychcentral.com/news/2007/12/24/why-do-we-root-for-the-underdog/1699.html>.

²²⁶ “John Dillinger Biography,” Biography, accessed November 5, 2015, www.biography.com/people/john-dillinger-9274804.

It was in this climate that, on April 19, 1995, the Oklahoma City bombing was carried out by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols.²²⁷ The reality that SCM adherents had wrought such destruction in America's heartland was a definitive moment in the SCM. Although the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building was certainly the target representing the federal government, the images of dead and injured children being pulled from the rubble dominated the media's narrative. Radical right-wing organizations, including the SCM, were framed as domestic terrorists whose criminal acts indiscriminately led to the deaths of innocent Americans. Using social identity theory as a framework, it is possible to provide some analysis of the SCM's reaction to this event.

People choose to belong to groups in order to obtain a positive social identity.²²⁸ This positive sense can even be garnered from joining fringe groups that thrive in conflict if there is a sense that the conflict can propel a greater good. In the case of SCM, the struggle against an illegitimate government has set up a challenge that warrants a response. This response could even be grounded in violence. The intended audience of this response is the rest of the American constituents who need a catalyst to shift their view of the government's legitimacy. In the case of Oklahoma City, McVeigh targeted a building filled with civilians, many of whom were children. The response to government overreach was disproportionate. Images of first responders carrying dead children from the rubble shocked the intended audience. The action was counterproductive. Instead of resulting in challenging the legitimacy of the government, people saw the perpetrators as criminals whom the government needed to bring to justice. The perpetrators were not viewed in the same light as the founding fathers of the Revolutionary War or celebrated as the counterculture John Dillinger. Instead, they were characterized as cowards and psychopaths.²²⁹

The bombing was universally condemned and had a toxic effect on many right-wing adherents, including those of the SCM. The act was so shocking that many

²²⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Terror Hits Home: The Oklahoma City Bombing."

²²⁸ Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*, 71.

²²⁹ David Johnston, "At Least 31 Are Dead, Scores Are Missing after Car Bomb Attack in Oklahoma City, Wrecks 9 Story Federal Building," *New York Times*, April 20, 1995, www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0419.html.

individuals retreated from the more extremist positions.²³⁰ When the actions are so extreme as to be viewed as repugnant, this becomes a catalyst for individuals to leave the group.²³¹ As the SCM lacks a centralized leadership, this could be accomplished by rebranding individual groups as less extreme. This leads to a degradation of the original in-group and a redefining of the premise for the conflict with the dominant out-group.²³² Often this is accomplished by redefining the out-group; however, when participation within the in-group is no longer desirable, the in-group can be redefined. Doing so redefines the nature of the conflict with the out-group and a predictable effect is to redefine targets and tactics associated with that out-group. One of the ways to do this is to separate from racist philosophies that have grown outdated and focus on a more civil response to government intrusion including tactics like paper terrorism. If violence is deemed necessary, appropriate measures must be taken to insure that the target is perceived as legitimate. In the eyes of many current SCM followers, targets include government officials such as police officers and judges. This reevaluation of in-group values was necessary to maintain the viability of the group. Individuals will not choose to remain with a group that does not provide a sense of positive self-worth.²³³ They remain dangerous; however, collateral damage is less acceptable. These strategies are not unique to any racial demographic. These anti-government tactics are embraced by individuals and groups of varied ethnicity.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

The SCM remains a viable extremist movement in the United States. Many of the groups have shifted away from the previously racist philosophies and embraced a broader anti-government platform. This has led to a broader appeal across racial lines. As previously identified, this shift occurred for a variety of reasons including the lack of centralized leadership or the death or incarceration of many of the early messengers of the movement, the influence of Dan Gayman in the hermeneutics of Christian Identity

²³⁰ Dyer, *Harvest of Rage*, 249–250.

²³¹ Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practicoer's Way Forward*, 71.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

theology, the lack of a centralized leadership or stewardship theology of the movement, the negative impact of the Oklahoma City bombing, and the expansion of a medium that enabled challenging of assertions, and the ability to spread a message beyond one's immediate circle of influence. The redefined in-group remains antigovernment, decentralized, flexible, and dangerous.

American police are one of the most visible armatures of government. Social media, coupled with the legitimate media, have increasingly challenged the legitimacy of police actions. Unfortunately, the public, and sometimes politicians, often lacks the patience to wait for an investigation into police action before forming an opinion as to what the outcome should be.²³⁴ When the investigative outcome is contrary to a preconceived notion, this leads to frustration and violence as recently demonstrated when the grand jury in Ferguson, Missouri failed to indict Officer Darren Wilson for the shooting death of Michael Brown.²³⁵ This led to rioting and protests throughout the nation. Similar incidents in New York, Baltimore, and Charleston have yielded similar results. This has led to gradual degradation in confidence in law enforcement and the rule of law throughout the nation.²³⁶ Government support of civil rights for minorities led to the strengthening of the SCM and the evolution of Christian Identity theology and now faltering support from minorities in the police could lead to a resurgence of the SCM narrative.

Additionally, the police have, in many cases been redefined as the out-group within their own communities. This has led to distrust and even dehumanizing of police. If the police, as the most visible component of the executive branch of government, are characterized as illegitimate and dehumanized within their communities, the environment for SCM to flourish is established. Those SCM adherents who seek to commit violence will seek legitimate targets that represent an illegitimate government. It is predictable

²³⁴ Jeffrey L. Johnson, "The Use of Force and the Hollywood Factor," *AELE Monthly Law Journal* (April 2007), www.aele.org/law/2007-04mlj501.pdf.

²³⁵ Eyder Peralta, and Krishnadev Calamor, "Ferguson Documents: How the Grand Jury Reached a Decision," *NPR*, November 25, 2014, www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/11/25/366507379/ferfusion-docs-how-the-grand-jury-reached-a-decision.

²³⁶ Jeffrey Jones, "In U.S., Confidence in Police Lowest in 22 Years," *Gallup Poll*, June 19, 2015, www.gallup.com/poll/183704/confidence-police-lowest-years.aspx.

that, in this environment, future attacks, like the one perpetrated by Amanda and Jerad Miller in which they murdered police officers Igor Soldo and Alyn Beck, will occur. An attack on police is an attack on the rule of law in society and therefore an attack on society itself.

Police must first train appropriately. Unfortunately, in economic downturns when police budgets are diminished, the training budget is often the first to be cut. Training must be redefined as an investment and not an allocation. Additionally, police must recognize that they are subject to in-grouping and strive to remain connected to their communities. Officers must engage in community outreach. They must get out of their patrol cars and remember that policing is an action done in concert with a community and not to a community. As SCM is decentralized, it will have varied participants and values based on the community in which they operate. Police effectiveness in addressing these threats increase when they are engaged within their community and understand which people comprise the extremists and why those individuals chose to embrace extremist views. Police, and for that matter all government, must become more transparent and learn to effectively use social media as a tool to deliver their message. There must be some acknowledgement that the public is impatient for information and, when there is a vacuum, someone will fill the void and their narrative will be based on speculation and preconceived notions. The old adage “never pass up an opportunity to say ‘no comment’” is insufficient in the Internet age. Police must respond with facts as quickly and concisely as possible post critical incident. If officers engage in misconduct or malfeasance, this must be handled appropriately by the department.²³⁷ There can be no “sweeping” bad behavior under the rug.²³⁸ Additionally, prosecutors and politicians should refrain from premature commentary. While it may be politically expedient to do so, it may be counterproductive as facts emerge that ultimately undermine the police and the rule of law. Finally, in cases when officers are killed, the assailants’ actions must be condemned without qualifying or partially excusing them, and their actions must be identified as

²³⁷ Talha Syed, “Not Victimless: Understanding the Harmful Effects of Police Corruption,” *Servamus*, 91, no.1 (1997), www.csvr.org.za/index.php/publications/1485-not-victimless-understanding-the-harmful-effects-of-police-corruption.html.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

repugnant. Extremists will cling to qualifying statements and use them to justify their actions.

At issue is the perception of government illegitimacy. To affirm legitimacy, government must act appropriately and, more significantly, establish a pattern of this appropriateness.²³⁹ It is imperative that government officials be transparent and communicative. Those who violate the public trust must be held accountable by those within the system. Failure to act lends credence to the narrative that the government is comprised of criminals and is therefore illegitimate. Restoring the confidence in government by the majority of Americans will work to marginalize the in-group of the SCM. Unfortunately, the reciprocal is also true. As government legitimacy wavers, the message of the SCM may resonate with more and more people until it reaches the status that it desires; their extremist views become more mainstream and they are viewed on par with Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Patrick Henry. The SCM threat is directly tied to the perception that the government lacks legitimacy. Grievances with government are as old as society itself; however, when the question shifts from the government's actions to the legitimacy of the government's existence, it is time for government officials to embrace ethics, transparency, and communications that support their constituents and, therefore, the government's very existence.

²³⁹ Jean D'Aspremont, "Legitimacy in the Age of Democracy," *International Law and Politics* 38 (2006): 877–917, <http://nyujilp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/38.4-dAspremont.pdf>.

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