

dressed the problem of nonaccountable government. If he had followed this course, it is doubtful, however, that Norton would have published his book. And there are occasions when publicizing half a case is better than nothing at all.

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## The Eye of the Beholder

by Philip Jenkins

**A Force Upon the Plain:  
The American Militia Movement  
and the Politics of Hate**

by Kenneth S. Stern  
New York: Simon and Schuster,  
303 pp., \$24.00



**A** *Force Upon the Plain* is the most comprehensive of the outpouring of books inspired by the Oklahoma City bombing, based as it is upon an elaborately researched examination of the radical paramilitary right. However, Kenneth Stern is by no means a newcomer cashing in on post-Oklahoma jitters. As a long-established researcher for the American Jewish Committee, he can legitimately claim to have issued a public forewarning that something very bad was likely to happen on April 19, 1995, the second anniversary of Waco. As will be known to anyone who has ever delved into the more bizarre reaches of the political fringe, the best resources are generally to be found in the archives of Jewish groups like the AJC and the Anti-Defamation League, and it is not surprising that Stern's book is so amply documented. It is at its best when describing the neo-Nazi loons inspired by William Pierce's book *The Turner Diaries* (though even Stern seems not to know the almost equally influential text *Hunter*, also by Pierce, which portrays terrorist activism by lone "berserkers"). As such, Stern's book is likely to become a standard reference work, and to this extent it can be recommended.

Even so, there is much that is trou-

bling about Stern's approach, and the underlying ideological assumptions of the enterprise. For example, the biographical note asserts that the author is "an expert on hate and hate groups." Expert, certainly, but what exactly is "hate," beyond a generic psychological phenomenon? Presumably a communist practices hate when he excoriates class injustice, just as a radical environmentalist mobilizes hate against the corporations and agencies which despoil the environment. The Nation of Islam both practices and preaches hate of the worst kind when its whole political theology is based on hastening the day when white devils will no longer pollute the earth they have corrupted and enslaved. In some sense, hate is integral to the rhetoric of any militant or extremist movement, yet today the term is only applied selectively to the politics of the radical right.

Stern evinces little concern for definition, hate being an easily recognizable thing. In the context of this book, the term applies to a remarkably wide range of groups, mostly united by their extreme suspicion of the purported benevolence of government; in addition to overt Nazis, it includes "White Supremacists," though most of these are interested less in dominating rival races than in achieving the largest degree of geographical separation. "White Nationalist," while more accurate, is presumably unacceptable for not being sufficiently pejorative: it is too objective by half. The "hate" category also comprehends Identity Christians, marked by a theory of racial separation and bizarre biological views; in fact, they are near clones of the Nation of Islam, though the latter are conspicuous here by their virtual absence.

A great many people qualify for inclusion in this book for expressing skepticism of the federal battle honors of Waco and Ruby Ridge; for their concern regarding the surrender of American sovereignty to supranational entities like the United Nations; for their unhappiness with federal land management policies; or for holding views about taxation and representation similar to those expressed forcefully at Lexington on April 19, 1775. And "hate" emphatically includes the ideas of any group militantly opposed to any further extension of gun control. After all, "some minimal regulation of guns makes sense to the majority of Americans," and the quite sweeping

laws already in place fall far short of the "quite minimal" standards desired by Stern. If you have doubts about the logic or constitutionality of this position, then you are already well on the road to "hate." For Stern, no acceptable legal or moral justification permits an individual or group to conclude that in American law and tradition, the right of self-government is based upon the personal liberties of an armed people.

White supremacists, gun-control opponents, survivalists, theorists of religious or racial apocalypse, conspiracy advocates, radical-right critics of government, even some UFO believers: for Stern, all these groups are thrown together with Nazi extremists like those of the Order, and of isolated militants like those who carried out the attack in Oklahoma City. All are "Patriots," racists, and anti-Semites, and thereby part of the "politics of hate." If "hate" is so abominable, and so richly deserving of exclusion from public debate, then we are left with a remarkably narrow spectrum of appropriate political expression. In fact, it runs the whole gamut of ideology, from A to about H.

Even if we accept Stern's expansive definition of "hate," there is little justification for thinking it unprecedented in its contemporary manifestation, and still less for concluding that we are witnessing an "epidemic of hate." Militia and vigilante activity in modern America is sparse compared to that in the 19th century, which embroiled many cities and states in something like civil war (in fairness, Stern takes some account of this bloody heritage). In the present century, paramilitary upsurges have tended to occur in the two or three nervous years following the displacement of a conservative Republican administration by a liberal Democratic President, as witness the shirt groups and Bund activity of the mid-1930's, the Birchers and Minutemen of the 1960's, and, today, fatigued men in the woods of Michigan and Oregon.

In stark contrast, contemporary race relations are radically different from what they have been in the past, and active racial hatred today is at an absolute historical low. This might seem a curious statement given the "surging epidemic" of hate crime evidenced by official statistics over the last decade. But these figures indicate only altered sensibilities, while the mere fact of collection demonstrates a state of mind quite un-

thinkable a few decades ago. If shouting a racial epithet denoted a "hate crime," how many million such crimes occurred in 1930, compared to the few hundred precisely recorded by today's bureaucrats? The clearest evidence of such a racial sea-change came last year, with the absurd outcome of the O.J. Simpson case. While local authorities were gearing up for a black uprising in the event of conviction, nobody suggested that white protesters might riot in the streets, or attempt to impose lynch law. Could such racial quiescence reasonably have been anticipated in any decade of American history prior to the 1970's? Black and white, post-civil rights generations have thoroughly internalized the ideologies of that movement, and it is disingenuous to suggest otherwise.

In other forms of bigotry also, we live in a golden age of tolerance. Stern can certainly find plenty of asinine and unpleasant remarks about Jews from his subjects, and similar ideas have polluted radical-right conspiracy theory. Consciously or otherwise, the concept of the "New World Order" does indeed have roots in the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and Nazi militants do declare war upon the Zionist Occupation Government, ZOG. But owing to the overwhelming power of the holocaust in American culture and rhetoric, and the ensuing idealization of the state of Israel, active anti-Semitism is virtually absent from contemporary politics, at least anywhere remotely near the mainstream. This is the first era in which a career can be irretrievably destroyed by an overt racist remark, or even by what is interpreted, however tendentiously, as a "coded" remark about some ethnic group. (Exceptions are allowed for Arabs or Serbs, on whom permanent open season has been declared.)

Though the Oklahoma City bombing showed that rightist paramilitaries could indeed pose a deadly terrorist threat on American soil, it is far from obvious that the event has any connection with the broader radical and antigovernment views held by millions of peaceful citizens. *A Force Upon the Plain* is useful for what it reveals about hard-core terrorists, but its extravagant account of the "politics of hate" should be read with skepticism.

*Philip Jenkins is the author of Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Social Crisis (Oxford).*

## It's All Too Beautiful

by Thomas Fleming

### The King of Babylon Shall Not Come Against You

by George Garrett  
New York: Harcourt Brace;  
336 pp., \$24.00



Lock up your daughters, draw the blinds, and check your house for bugs and hidden cameras. George Garrett has put on his cap and bells again, and every page of his new book constitutes a thought crime against the stupid hypocrisies on which the current American regime is built. Part mystery novel, part social satire, *The King of Babylon* is more like *Tristram Shandy* than it is like the postmodern fictions that are set in a nowhere populated by nobodies. It is also that rarest of rare books: an American novel that actually takes a close look at America.

To get at his theme—the America of the 90's that was forged in the late 1960's—Garrett sends his hero (an investigative reporter) back to his hometown in Florida to research two bizarre murders and an apparent suicide that took place on the same day as the assassination of Martin Luther King. The town has changed almost beyond recognition, and the leader of the social and professional elite is a black attorney who inherited the estate of his rich white patron. (Is this old-fashioned paternalism or a symbol of affirmative action?)

Of course, Paradise Springs was no Eden in the 60's: the Episcopalian priest was a drunkard and a womanizer; the intellectual professor, Moe Katz, is a sometimes brilliant fraud (some things have changed: Anglicans rarely chase women any more, and professors are never brilliant). The rising generation in general gives us a hint of the future in store for us: the priest's beautiful daughter—an amoral thrill-seeker who links up with a serial killer; Alpha Weatherby—a young religious fanatic who embezzles from the bank and ends up dead; her best friend Darlene, the town slut who later becomes a phony palmist but a genuine psychic; Alpha's little brother Penrose (the future real estate magnate and New South business dynamo) is a vindictive

little snot who would have leaped at the chance to join either the Mafia or the Gestapo.

Garrett's fans will recognize the deliberate echoes of his earlier work: the sideshow midget preacher is almost a parody in miniature of the crooked evangelist of *Do, Lord, Remember Me*, while the investigative reporter—even by his name, Billy Tone—is obviously a cleaned-up version of John Towne, Garrett's Mr. Hyde alter ego, the author of most of *Poison Pen*. Like Towne, Tone has written pornography and made a stab at scriptwriting, and also like Towne he (and George Garrett) is obsessed with the two-dimensional falseness of American life in the age of television, advertising, and—above all—celebrity.

As one of Garrett's warmest admirers, I wondered, at various points of the book, if the author had made a mistake: Is it possible to sustain interest in a mystery plot, when so much of the book is devoted to satire? Technically, the trick is managed adroitly: the investigative reporter records a series of frank confessional statements that lay bare the vulgarities and dishonesty that we are generally not allowed to talk about. About halfway through I began to lose sight of the story, as one social freak after another gives his version, not just of the events of a quarter century ago, but of what's wrong with American life. It was just at this point that the reins are picked up again and the story gallops to a conclusion that is both surprising and (with the benefit of hindsight) inevitable. In tightness of conception (if not of composition), *The King of Babylon* invites comparison with Sophocles' *Oedipus*, and like the *Oedipus*, it is a tale of guilt

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### On the Coming Multiplication of Individuals Who Send Explosives by Mail

by Richard Moore

They won't be madmen,  
mankind haters,  
just Unabomber imitators;  
so let us brace ourselves—and bless  
our popular, untrammelled press,  
likely to cause this gory mess.