

FROM THE GUN WAR TO THE CULTURE WAR

How the NRA Has Become
the Pillar of the Right

Introduction

In order to understand modern American politics, it is critical to have an understanding of the pivotal role played by the National Rifle Association of America (NRA). The organization has carved out a role for itself that goes far beyond the politics of guns.

The NRA has insinuated itself into the right wing, with great assistance from the organization's president, Charlton Heston, whose rhetoric goes beyond guns to the very heart of the hard-core conservative agenda. It would seem easy to avoid the NRA by sidestepping the gun issue—a strategy even some supporters of gun control have pursued. But to ignore the NRA is to deny its central role in the political right. At the same time, to overlook the NRA is to disregard the ways in which the organization's extreme views can be used against it and the candidates it supports.

This report documents how the NRA has expanded from its pro-gun roots into a defender of the conservative values which Heston describes as a "cultural war." In doing so, the NRA has become the dominant lobby for both the right-wing of the conservative movement and, therefore, the Republican party.

"From My Cold, Dead Hands"

In May 2000, six months before the presidential elections, the National Rifle Association held its 129th annual meeting of members. The highlight of the event, as always in recent years, was an appearance by NRA President Charlton Heston. Following speeches by other NRA leaders, Heston rose from the dais, strode to the podium, and at the end of his speech repeated the pro-gun ritual that had come to define his appearances before his fellow members. Like a king being handed his scepter, Heston was presented with a musket. Holding the rifle over his head, he intoned into the microphone in a deep, rumbling voice that recalled and yet surpassed his movie role as Moses: "I want to say those words again for everyone within the sound of my voice to hear and to heed, and especially for you, Mr. Gore: 'From my cold, dead hands!'"¹ The crowd, predictably, rose to its feet and roared its approval.

For an organization whose activist core required a charismatic leader—a relationship first defined and cemented by NRA Executive Vice President Harlon Carter^a—Heston personified the pro-gun views that drove the faithful into electoral

^a In a battle for control that came to be known in NRA lore as The Cincinnati Revolt, Carter, a former border patrol agent who as a youth had been convicted of firearms murder—his conviction was later reversed upon appeal—led a faction of members known as the New Guard against the ensconced leadership, the Old Guard. The New Guard felt that battling gun control should be the centerpiece of NRA activities and criticized the Old Guard for being too concerned

battle. For gun-control activists, inspired by the Million Mom March held only a week earlier in Washington, DC, Heston's performance represented the uncompromising, extremist views of an organization whose time, perhaps, had finally come to an end. For political observers, the meeting offered a window into a changing NRA, one that was quickly moving to cement its position as the political foot soldiers of the conservative movement and the Republican party. As *The New York Times'* James Dao reported following the Heston speech:

Beyond today's speeches attacking Mr. Gore, there is ample evidence that the NRA has been strengthening its ties to the Republican Party. Campaign finance records show that the group has contributed more than \$1 million to the Republican National Committee and Republican Congressional candidates this year, but only \$111,000 to Democrats. Moreover, the two members of Congress on the NRA's board of directors, Representative Bob Barr of Georgia and Senator Larry E. Craig of Idaho, are Republicans. And today, the organization announced that Grover G. Norquist, the president of the antitax group Americans for Tax Reform and an influential figure in the Republican Party's conservative wing, had been elected to its board. Mr. Norquist's group, through its mailings and independent advertising campaigns, has been effective in helping Republican candidates in recent years. Mr. Norquist and NRA officials said they have not made any plans to marry their efforts this fall, but both left open the possibility. "There is just nothing like the NRA, certainly there is no similar counterpart on the left," Mr. Norquist said in an interview.²

Joining Norquist³ on the NRA Board in May 2000 was fellow conservative leader, David Keene,⁴ president of the American Conservative Union.⁵ If Norquist and Keene's addition to the NRA's leadership, coupled with Heston's own conservative political activism, represented a courtship that continued throughout the presidential campaign, the marriage was consummated nine months later at the 28th annual meeting of the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), "the nation's oldest and largest annual gathering of conservative grassroots activists"⁶ which "serves to bring dedicated and talented Americans into the conservative movement and to train and motivate them for political action."⁷ The 2001 CPAC was chaired by NRA Board Member Keene. The CPAC Presidential Dinner featured Vice President Dick Cheney, NRA President Charlton Heston, NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre, as well as Congressman and NRA Board Member Bob Barr (R-GA).

with hunting and recreational gun use. In a membership coup at the organization's annual meeting in Cincinnati in 1977, Carter's forces ousted the Old Guard leadership and he was installed as the new head of the organization. Under Carter's reign the NRA became the "gun lobby" that we know today.

LaPierre, who emceed the dinner, introduced the Vice President. Representative Barr introduced the other keynote speaker, Charlton Heston. In Washington, where who you know matters, the marriage between the NRA and the Republican party was now very public.

Writing about the CPAC for the *Weekly Standard*, conservative commentator Fred Barnes described the close relationship between issue conservatives and the newly minted Bush White House. Barnes' analysis showcased the integral role the NRA now played not only in the Republican party, but also in the Bush Administration:

When he arrived, [Presidential advisor Karl] Rove told his hosts he would "sneak out" after his speech. Instead, he stayed to hear other speakers and then lingered for 20 minutes to chat with CPAC attendees. The Rove episode shows how attentive the Bush White House is to conservatives, especially "movement" conservatives. "You don't neglect your base," Rove explains. "This is a natural extension of what we did during the campaign." Nope, it's more than that. Guided by Rove, Bush doesn't treat conservatives as "just another interest group...like Native Americans or Samoans," says David Keene, president of the American Conservative Union. "They're a junior partner." And this consideration for conservatives marks "a change from his father's rule, which was pretty much to ignore conservatives," says Chuck Cunningham of the National Rifle Association. Just how attentive is the White House? Very. A Bush aide, either the White House political director or the head of the office of public liaison, attends Washington's two weekly meetings for conservative activists—run by Grover Norquist and Paul Weyrich respectively. Last week, Bush economic coordinator Larry Lindsey spoke at Norquist's gathering. Rove himself stays in almost hourly contact with conservatives. When a conservative lobbyist e-mailed him one evening about missile defense, Rove answered early the next morning, though the lobbyist wasn't a major player on defense issues. On inauguration weekend, the NRA fretted over a rumor that former Arizona senator Dennis DeConcini would be named drug czar. So an NRA official e-mailed Rove, who responded immediately with the sarcastic suggestion the White House would name Sarah Brady, a leading gun controller, to head the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. DeConcini, a Democrat, didn't get the job.⁸

The New Grassroots

The fealty paid to the National Rifle Association by the Bush Administration was the result of a growing awareness that the NRA was the only true grassroots organization able to effectively counter increasingly organized efforts by traditional

Democratic constituencies. Writing in a February 2001 issue of *Roll Call*, political analyst Stuart Rothenberg observed:

Some conservatives will disagree, but there is no doubt in my mind, or the minds of many others I asked, that over the past few cycles liberal constituency groups have not only been more active but also significantly more effective than their counterparts on the right. That's true whether you are talking about grassroots organizing, GOTV [get out the vote] efforts or media campaigns. Consider the powerhouses on the left: organized labor (particularly the AFL-CIO), the environmental community (the Sierra Club and League of Conservation Voters), women's/pro-choice groups (including EMILY's List, Planned Parenthood and the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League) and African-American organizations. By comparison, the list of groups on the right that are equally effective is a bit shorter: the National Rifle Association and National Right to Life. There are plenty of other right-of-center groups that are active, either in raising money for television and radio ads or in turning out voters; but none of them comes close to being as effective as their left-leaning counterparts. Business groups have tried to match liberal groups on TV in recent years, but they haven't over the past three cycles. And the Christian Coalition, as a political force, is a shell of what it once was. The right has its share of talking heads, but most of them are generals without soldiers. Except for the NRA and NRTL, "everyone else on the right basically has a fax machine and attends press conferences," observed one veteran Republican political operative who knows the conservative movement intimately. "They want to become spokesmen, but they don't have any organization."⁹

The NRA gained this newfound reputation by, for the first time, giving up any pretense of bi-partisanship in terms of its financial largesse. *The Los Angeles Times* was the first to report that this change resulted not only in a further shift away from Democratic candidates, but in direct contributions to Republican party committees:

Fearing that Americans' gun rights hinge on the November elections, the National Rifle Assn. has donated more than \$550,000 to Republican Party committees, putting it for the first time among the GOP's top five givers of unregulated 'soft money.' Traditionally, the NRA's political strategy has emphasized weighing in on individual congressional candidates who will stand strong against gun control. But with the House of Representatives up for grabs this year as well as the White House—and the momentum behind gun control measures gaining strength in the wake of last year's Columbine High School shootings—the huge gun lobby has shifted some of its formidable financial weight to the organizations working to elect Republicans nationwide.¹⁰

Following the election, this political strategy was hailed in the pro-gun press. As *American Handgunner* magazine approvingly observed:

The 2000 presidential election was also significant for the NRA because it marked the first national election in which the NRA finally dispensed with any pretense of neutrality between the Democrats and the Republicans. Previously, the NRA had backed candidates from either party who had a strong pro-gun record. This time the NRA opened its coffers primarily to the Republican Party.

NRA spent \$25 million during the fall campaign, including \$17 million through ILA [Institute for Legislative Action], and \$1.5 million directly to the Republican Party. Such largesse was not missed by Republican organizers who now regard the NRA as the single most powerful vote-getter for the party.¹¹

Facing the New Reality

Proof of the arrival of the NRA as the new ground troops in Republican politics was clearly illustrated in the 2000 elections. During the 2000 campaign, the NRA attempted to use the gun issue to attack head-on Democrats' own grassroots forces: organized labor.

Recognizing the unprecedented get-out-the-vote effort by the AFL-CIO during the 2000 elections to elect a Democratic president and Congress, the NRA moved quickly—and in an unprecedented fashion—to woo the rank and file away from their unions and into the Bush camp on the gun issue. This was despite the strong anti-union positions and history of both the Republican party and Bush himself. In defending its decision to step outside its traditional political role, and oppose an organization that was not directly involved in the gun debate, the NRA offered the following rationale to its members in a fact sheet published on the organization's web page:

The National Rifle Association of America is a single-issue organization that represents firearms owners and works to defend and protect their rights as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. In its 125-year history as the nation's oldest civil rights organization, the NRA has never adopted any policy or practice regarding unions, organized labor, labor management or labor relations issues of any kind.

On the other hand, the American Federation of Labor & Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) have continually stepped outside the purview of labor relations and adopted decidedly anti-gun positions that infringe upon the rights

of law-abiding firearms owners.

The fact sheet then proceeded to list all the gun control measures supported by the nation's largest union. In its battle for the loyalty of union members, the NRA promised that—contrary to their union leaders' assertions—both political parties fought for their interests, and that the only true difference was each party's position on guns. As an article titled "Are Democrats Sticking It To Union Members?" published in the October 2000 issue of the NRA magazine *America's 1st Freedom* stated:

Of late, America's great labor unions have earned the respect of both major political parties. There is no longer much meaningful difference between Democrats and Republicans when it comes to policies that affect union workers.¹²

This interpretation was designed to convince pro-gun union members that, in spite of everything their unions were telling them, their economic interests were not at risk in the upcoming election, but their gun rights were. The article contained NRA themes regarding presidential candidate Al Gore that were common fare during the campaign:

Gore has said that he wants to register your guns and license you to own them. Throughout history, when a government has owned information about firearms and firearms owners, they've confiscated the firearms.¹³

At the same time, the NRA offered a strong endorsement for candidate George W. Bush, "The essential Bush message is, 'Keep your job. Keep your guns. Keep your money. Give me your vote. In return, I'll see to it that you and your children remain free.'¹⁴ The NRA message was repeated in direct mail and television infomercials.

This analysis from "the nation's oldest civil rights organization," as the NRA likes to call itself, bore little reality to what union activists knew about the NRA's leadership. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, NRA President Charlton Heston was one of the leaders of the anti-union "right to work" movement, campaigning for various referenda designed to limit the rights of union workers.¹⁵ Heston also appeared in television ads in 1994 opposing pro-union striker replacement legislation facing a filibuster in the U.S. Senate.¹⁶ As a testament to Heston's leadership role in the anti-union movement, the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation named its special employee-rights award the "Charlton Heston Freedom Award."¹⁷

The AFL-CIO fought back, countering the NRA's attacks with a pamphlet that it distributed to hundreds of thousands of union members. The pamphlet warned: "Al Gore doesn't want to take away your gun, but George W. Bush wants to take away your union," and urged, "Defend unions. Defeat Bush."¹⁸ Post-election analysis showed that, despite the outcome of the presidential election, the union effort paid off. As the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reported:

Organized labor also claimed victory over the NRA, which targeted union members in states such as Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin and West Virginia. Traditionally, the bulk of union members vote for Democratic candidates but many also support gun rights. The NRA blitzed union members with ads bearing the slogan, "Al Gore wants to take away your guns." Heston visited 16 cities in battleground states over seven days in an effort to persuade voters to cast ballots based solely on candidates' positions on gun rights. Union officials countered with mailings highlighting Bush's hostility to organized labor.

"In the guns vs. unions fight, we won overwhelmingly," said Steve Rosenthal, political director of the AFL-CIO. "There was no struggle over these members. From the reports we've heard, this election wasn't about the NRA. It was about issues like health care and Social Security." A poll done immediately after the election for the AFL-CIO showed that union members who voted for Bush did so for two main reasons—moral concerns and taxes. Guns ranked third.¹⁹

Today's NRA and Why it Should Matter to Progressives

In its May 28, 2001, issue, *Fortune* magazine named the "heavily Republican" National Rifle Association the top lobbying organization in the United States.²⁰ In awarding the NRA the coveted top slot—surpassing such lobbying powerhouses as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB), and Association of Trial Lawyers of America (ATLA)—the magazine cited the organization's success in the 2000 elections. Stated *Fortune*:

Although city slickers might be aghast at the ascendancy of the NRA, this is a highly focused, well-financed organization. Despite high-profile school shootings and unrelenting pressure from gun-control advocates, the NRA has held gun-control legislation at bay. How? By electing its supporters to Congress and, last year, to the White House. In particular, the NRA was pivotal in defeating Al Gore in Arkansas, Tennessee, and West Virginia—all states that usually vote Democratic. If Gore had won just one of them, he would now be President.

Nothing inspires zealotry like a threat, and few people feel more threatened than gun owners, more and more of whom are finding comfort in the NRA. It has 4.3 million members, up one million since last year, and two million since 1998. Its budget increased from \$180 million to \$200 million last year, including \$35 million for political campaigns. The money supports a state-of-the-art lobbying machine with its own national newscast, one million precinct-level political organizers, and an in-house telemarketing department. The

NRA's pre-election rallies in 25 cities last year drew 5,000 to 9,000 people each—often more than Gore drew.²¹

The NRA's ascension was striking not only for its rebuttal of the early conventional wisdom regarding how the gun issue would play out in the elections following the Columbine massacre, but also as a measure of how the fortunes of the NRA had reversed themselves. Unfortunately, gun control advocates did not respond to the importance of the elections with the same intensity and focus as the gun lobby.

Six years earlier the NRA was widely viewed as an extremist organization wildly out of step not just with the American public, but with mainstream gun owners. This was the direct result of the NRA's reaction to the outcome of the 1992 elections and its resultant outreach to the fringe of American gun owners.

The election of President Bill Clinton in 1992, coupled with the tragedies at Waco and Ruby Ridge, saw a first-time courting by the NRA of the fringe of American gun culture. This well-armed mix of militia members, conspiracy theorists, and bona fide gun nuts shared common traits that were of utmost importance to the NRA: they loved guns, hated gun control, distrusted the government, and were politically active. To cater to these potential new members and grassroots activists, the new NRA enemy was not gun control advocates, or even the news media, but the federal government. The NRA's *American Rifleman* magazine warned, "The Final War has Begun." FBI agents were compared to goose-stepping Nazis while the federal government was dismissed as "royalty." A now-infamous direct-mail letter issued a month before the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City labeled federal agents "jack-booted government thugs," and warned, "In Clinton's administration, if you have a badge, you have the government's go-ahead to harass, intimidate, even murder law-abiding citizens." By adopting the language of the militia movement, the NRA not only spread the movement's message, but validated it. Former NRA member McVeigh launched the first attack in this "war," when he set his truck bomb off on the second anniversary of the 1993 Waco assault. Public perception of the NRA as an extremist organization took hold. This unfavorable perception grew with the revelation of a meeting between the NRA's chief lobbyist at the time—Tanya Metaksa—and the Michigan Militia, the militia links of the NRA's own board members, the refusal of other NRA leaders to turn their backs on those who threatened to take up arms against the government, and the high-profile resignation of former president and NRA Life Member George H. W. Bush.

Faced with public scorn after the Oklahoma City bombing, NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre made half-hearted apologies to the news media and tried to convince the public that the organization didn't support a *literal* war. This did little to mollify the NRA's critics, and membership losses of up to 700,000 were reported in the press.²²

While battling criticism from the outside, the NRA leadership itself was locked in a fight for control of the organization between LaPierre and his supporters and board member Neal Knox, the perennial hard-line conscience of the pro-gun movement who could trace his NRA lineage to the days of Harlon Carter. Knox, LaPierre warned in a carefully placed article in *The New York Times*, wanted to turn the organization into a militia-type “fringe” group akin to “the John Birch Society.”²³

At the 1997 annual meeting in Seattle, LaPierre sealed his control over the organization with the first-time election of Charlton Heston to the board. Heston warned the assembled crowd of members that he would serve on the NRA’s board only if the “Winning Team” headed by LaPierre was retained to lead the organization. Knox not only lost any influence he had within the organization, he was assigned the blame for the NRA’s extremist shift in the years prior to the Oklahoma bombing. The next year the board elected Heston president of the NRA.

A Different Kind of “War”

Since then, Heston has remained NRA president and regularly serves as the public face of the organization. But what has become clear since the ascension of Heston is that the NRA has simply traded in one brand of extremism for another, more subtle, one.

The NRA’s “final war” of the early 1990s against the federal government is now Heston’s much broader “cultural war.” According to Heston’s description of this “war,” gun owners are just one more beleaguered minority among other stalwarts of the Right—including Pentecostal Christians, pro-lifers, right-to-work advocates, Promise Keepers, and school-voucher supporters—ready to be sacrificed to an onslaught “against the traditional American freedom of beliefs and ideas.”²⁴

The same year that Heston was elected to the NRA’s board and hailed as proof of the organization’s return to the mainstream, he delivered a speech to the Free Congress Foundation at its 20th Anniversary Gala. At the dinner Heston stated:

I remember when European Jews feared to admit their faith. The Nazis forced them to wear six-pointed yellow stars sewn on their chests as identity badges... So—what color star will they pin on our coats?

Most Americans would find Heston’s trivialization of the fate of Holocaust victims offensive. But to the NRA’s membership of beleaguered white males, it rang true. In the speech, Heston warned:

Why is “Hispanic pride” or “black pride” a good thing, while “white pride” conjures up shaved heads and white hoods?...I’ll tell you why: cultural

warfare.

Mainstream America is depending on you—counting on you—to draw your sword and fight for them. These people have precious little time or resources to battle misguided Cinderella attitudes, the fringe propaganda of the homosexual coalition, the feminists who preach that it's a divine duty for women to hate men, blacks who raise a militant fist with one hand while they seek preference with the other....

Americans should not have to go to war every morning for their values. They already go to war for their families. They fight to hold down a job, raise responsible kids, make their payments, keep gas in the car, put food on the table and clothes on their backs, and still save a little for their final days in dignity. They prefer the America they built—where you could pray without feeling naive, love without being kinky, sing without profanity, be white without feeling guilty, own a gun without shame, and raise your hand without apology. They are the critical masses who find themselves under siege....^b

Among those who condemned Heston's inflammatory remarks were: Julian Bond,²⁵ board chair of the NAACP; Eleanor Smeal,²⁶ president of the Feminist Majority Foundation; Nancy McDonald,²⁷ president of Parents, Families, & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG); and, Joan M. Garry,²⁸ executive director of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD).

Heston's outlook has come to dominate the NRA. His attacks on those who do not share his view of America are echoed by his fellow board members in their statements and views. [See Appendix One]

In contrast with the rhetoric from 1995, today's gun-owners are warned by the NRA that they are under siege from not only the government, but an alignment of sinister forces that sounds distressingly familiar to the much-feared New World Order of the militia movement: the "New Cultural Order." Writing in the March 1999 issue of the NRA's *American Guardian* magazine, Heston warned:

Under the "new cultural order" of thinking, common men simply aren't trusted to exercise what we used to consider common freedoms. The new political and cultural hierarchy believe they are somehow more in touch with the

^b Not surprisingly, Heston's comments—which have become a staple of his stump speeches—have drawn praise from racist and reactionary organizations. In posting excerpts from the Heston speech on his web site, former Klansman David Duke wrote: "I was astounded to read these courageous remarks....I am thankful to hear a man with such high esteem say essentially the same things for which I have been reviled by the liberal media." Excerpts from the speech have also been posted on the web site of the British National Party (the slogan of which is "fighting anti-white racism") and the racist Stormfront.org web site (which promotes "White Pride World Wide").

cosmos, and therefore anointed to direct our lives, much like a puppetmaster pulls the strings to put his dolls into action.²⁹

In the same issue, NRA Executive Vice President LaPierre warned that the NRA's role in the election of 2000 was not just to protect gun rights, but the very core of conservative values:

Every political weather vane is pointing toward an end-of-century crisis for freedom that will be embodied in ballots cast for, or against, gun rights. All sources indicate that the smoldering gun issue will soon spark a head-on collision between cultural forces seeking to overrun and destroy our Constitutional rights....I am convinced that gun control will provide the pivot point for this clash between forces for freedom and a big-government movement that seeks to diminish our personal liberties....There are many politicians willing to sacrifice the Second Amendment as the first step in the homogenization of American culture.

Most striking from the words of Heston and LaPierre is the unstated acknowledgment that the battle over gun control in America can no longer be fought over just guns. For most American gun owners, guns are merely a part of their lives, not their whole lives. They own their weapons to hunt, target shoot, or offer themselves perceived piece of mind, not to fight a war—cultural or otherwise. To rally the faithful and reach out to non-gun owning conservative activists, the NRA has transformed the battle over guns into a firewall between the enemies cited in Heston's more encompassing "cultural war" and the self-appointed guardians of mainstream America.

In pursuing this agenda, the NRA has become a pillar of both the conservative movement and the Republican party. Heston has also established himself as a central figure in the conservative world. In addition to his starring role at the CPAC meeting in February 2001, Heston was a keynote speaker in 1997, 1998, and 1999. In recent years, he has become a requisite speaker at key conservative events. In addressing the Christian Coalition on September 19, 1998, he invoked his standard rhetoric:

Heaven help the god-fearing, law-abiding, caucasian, middle-class, protestant, or even worse, evangelical Christian...Midwest or Southern, or even worse, rural...apparently straight, or even worse, admitted heterosexual...gun-owning, or even worse, NRA-card-carrying...average working stiff, or worst of all, male working stiff...because not only don't you count, you're a downright obstacle to social progress. And frankly mister, you need to wake up, wise up and learn a little something about your new America.³⁰

The ascendancy of the NRA as the leader of the right wing coincided with the rapid decline of the Christian Coalition. The same *Fortune* magazine article that ranked the NRA as number one in lobbying made the following observation about the Christian Coalition:

A former highflier has been laid low; the Christian Coalition, No. 7 in 1997 and No. 35 in 1999, fell to No. 65 this year. It has never recovered from the departure of its charismatic director Ralph Reed.³¹

The collapse of the Christian Coalition provided an opportunity, and a need, in the conservative movement for a new leader, one able to herd the grassroots on an emotional, almost visceral, level, with the ability to play hardball politics. This was a role that Charlton Heston and the NRA gladly accepted.

Conclusion: Not Someone Else's Fight

Combining money and grassroots, the NRA has become a pillar of the right wing and the Republican party. This is a political reality that cannot be ignored by the progressive community. Because the NRA now plays such an important role in the conservative movement, it is incumbent upon the progressive community to understand the gun lobby and to know how to deal with it. Supporters of gun control—and the entire progressive community—must understand that the battle with the NRA is about much more than a pro-gun agenda. The NRA has become the defender of the right-wing agenda. As evidenced in this report, today's NRA is a cornerstone of the hard-core conservative movement.

The radical views of the NRA, however, represent a potential liability. The organization's rhetoric of intolerance is matched only by the vehemence of its leadership. The extent to which NRA board members will carry their battle was expressed at a meeting of gun activists in California in February 2000. At the meeting, NRA board member Manny Fernandez spoke of his confidence that the organization would prevail in its goals. "We have the people, and in the end," he said to thunderous applause and laughter, "we have the guns."³²

To fully understand today's NRA and the full extent of its reach, is to understand its political importance beyond the gun issue. More importantly, it offers a guide on how to defeat the organization and, by extension, its conservative, right-wing allies. The NRA can be defeated. Its own words and extremism, beyond solely the gun issue, may well be the best tool in that effort.

Appendix One

They're the NRA: Statements by Members of the NRA's Board of Directors and Affiliate Organizations

Rep. Bob Barr (R-GA), NRA Board Member

In 1998, Rep. Bob Barr (R-GA) gave the keynote address at the semi-annual meeting of the Council of Conservative Citizens (C of CC), an ultra-conservative, white supremacist organization. The C of CC has warned that interracial marriage "amounts to white genocide" and that Jews have "turned spite into welfare billions."³³ Before his keynote at the meeting, Barr sat through a youth panel, during which "the racial views of some of the members were made explicit."³⁴ He was also photographed with the C of CC's president. A picture of Barr embracing a C of CC national director appeared in the organization's official newspaper, the *Citizens Informer*. According to Gordon Lee Baum, the C of CC's chief executive, Barr "knew what we were all about before he spoke to us. We don't invite people and let them walk into the dark on us."³⁵

Many of the C of CC's current members have ties to openly racist, white supremacist organizations including the Ku Klux Klan, the National Association for the Advancement of White People, and the White Citizens Councils. Mark Cerr, head of the C of CC's National Capital branch, told the *Washington Post*, "I would separate the races by having non-Europeans sent back to the Third World." The United States, he stated, "was founded by my people, British people, not by Asians or Indians or Negroes, and we are going to take it back."³⁶ The group's web site and newspaper are also dominated by racist material. For example, C of CC web columnist H. Millard wrote:

Take 10 bottles of milk to represent all humans on earth. Nine of them will be chocolate and only one white. Now mix all those bottles together and you have gotten rid of that troublesome bottle of white milk. There too is the way to get rid of the world of whites. Convince them to mix their few genes with the genes of the many. Genocide via the bedroom chamber is as long lasting as genocide via war.³⁷

Even David Keene, head of the American Conservative Union, and Barr's fellow NRA board member, barred the C of CC from the annual Conservative Political Action Conference "because they are racists."³⁸

Robert K. Brown, NRA Board Member

Since 1975 NRA board member Robert K. Brown has published *Soldier of Fortune*, the "Journal of Professional Adventurers." *Soldier of Fortune* at one time carried classified ads for mercenaries for hire. It discontinued the practice in 1986 as the result of two murders linked to the ads. In 1988, two lawsuits were filed by the families of the murder victims who alleged that the killers had been hired through ads in the magazine. In both cases juries ordered the magazine to pay multimillion dollar settlements, but in one case the ruling was overturned on appeal. In 1993, the magazine settled with the second family, rather than contest the jury's \$4.3 million settlement. The April 1995 issue of the magazine featured a laudatory cover story on the Michigan militia. Under a photo of camouflage-clad men brandishing their rifles in the air, the article noted, "Michigan militia membership has skyrocketed in light of a parade of gun control legislation passed by the Clinton Administration."

Jeff Cooper, NRA Board Member

Subject of a laudatory profile in the NRA's flagship publication, the *American Rifleman*, board member Jeff Cooper authors the monthly column "Cooper's Corner" for *Guns & Ammo* magazine and also writes the newsletter "Jeff Cooper's Commentaries." Cooper regularly refers to Japanese as "Nips,"³⁹ has suggested calling black South Africans from the Gauteng province "Orang-gautengs,"⁴⁰ has referred to the Vietnamese people as "slant-eyed little fiends in Hanoi,"⁴¹ and labeled the Saudis "ragheads."⁴² Cooper's racist views are not limited to just foreign nations. In 1994, he wrote, "Los Angeles and Ho Chi Min City have declared themselves sister cities. It makes sense—they are both Third World metropolises formerly occupied by Americans."⁴³ And commenting on the murder rate in Los Angeles, Cooper noted in 1991 that "the consensus is that no more than five to ten people in a hundred who die by gunfire in Los Angeles are any loss to society. These people fight small wars amongst themselves. It would seem a valid social service to keep them well-supplied with ammunition."⁴⁴ Offering his opinion on the history of American slavery, Cooper suggests that since slavery has been the "normal condition of mankind for most of history," it is only inevitable to either "kill [the slaves] outright or put them to work." He continues on the subject by asserting, "If you pen them up you have to feed them, and you have enough trouble feeding yourself. Despite this a large number of semi-literate types in the States seem to think of slavery as a unique invention of the southern states over a period of a few generations."⁴⁵

Grover Norquist, NRA Board Member

Conservative activist Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform, was a vocal supporter of California's Proposition 209, a ballot measure that eliminated the state's affirmative action policy. Labeling affirmative action "government racism" that is "particularly offensive to Jews and Asian-Americans," Norquist urged that Republicans should fight for measures like Prop 209 "without compromise."⁴⁶ Contrary to Norquist's view of affirmative action as a "racist" policy, organizations that opposed Prop 209 included the NAACP, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Human Rights Campaign, Lawyers for Human Rights, the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce, the National Lawyers Guild, the Rainbow Coalition, and the YWCA. Asian and Jewish organizations that opposed Prop 209 included: Jewish Women International, the Japanese American Bar Association, the Filipino American Bar Association, and the Japanese American Citizens League.⁴⁷ In 1997, Norquist helped found the American Civil Rights Institute, an organization dedicated to repealing affirmative action nationwide.⁴⁸

Ted Nugent, NRA Board Member

Lamenting a changing South Africa, in 1990 rock musician and NRA board member Ted Nugent told the *Detroit Free Press* magazine that "apartheid isn't that cut and dry. All men are not created equal. The preponderance of South Africa is a different breed of man. I mean that with no disrespect. I say that with great respect. I love them because I'm one of them. They are still people of the earth, but they are different. They still put bones in their noses, they still walk around naked, they wipe their butts with their hands....These are different people. You give 'em toothpaste, they f---ing eat it...I hope they don't become civilized. They're way ahead of the game."⁴⁹ In the same interview Nugent expounded on his racial views, "I use the word n---r a lot because I hang around with a lot of n---rs, and they use the word n---r, and I tend to use words that communicate...."⁵⁰

When faced with criticism over such comments, Nugent promises, "I don't mean to offend. I'm a fun guy, not a sexist or a racist."⁵¹ Yet in a July 1994 interview in *Westworld Newspaper*, Nugent called Hillary Clinton a "toxic c--t," adding, "This bitch is nothing but a two-bit whore for Fidel Castro."⁵² Nugent also offers advice for men whose wives and girlfriends discourage their hunting: "I met a couple guys in line yesterday who go, 'Write something to my girlfriend, she won't let me go hunting.' I wrote her something and I said, 'Drop dead, bitch.' What good is she, trade her in, get a Dalmatian. Who needs the wench?"⁵³

Labeling himself "Rosa Parks with a guitar and a middle finger," Nugent has adopted defense of the confederate flag as a personal cause. Attacking the NAACP following its call for an economic boycott of South Carolina until it removed the

confederate flag from its Statehouse, Nugent promised, "Those politically correct motherf---ers can take the flag down but I am going to wear it forever."⁵⁴

And in a July 2000 *Washington Post* article reviewing a Kiss concert for which Nugent was one of the opening acts, reporter Dave McKenna noted Nugent's "bizarrely hateful set in which he cursed non-English speakers, Jesse Jackson, gays and just about every member of the Clinton administration. He came out for his encore wearing a Confederate flag shirt...."⁵⁵

Harry Thomas, NRA Board Member

Board member Harry Thomas is a former Cincinnati police officer who, in a transcript of a speech posted in the members' conference of the NRA's now-defunct GUN-TALK computer bulletin board, warned: "Waco. `Waco' is a word which, among American patriots, engenders the same anguished feelings of outrage as the word `Alamo'....The time has come for us to openly discuss something that up to this time we have mainly whispered about. The purpose of the 2nd Amendment is to threaten the government....I sincerely hope that a political solution to this problem is still possible, and I will continue to work on the NRA board of directors to try to find that solution. But if that solution cannot be found, I say this to the megalomaniacs in Washington: Pass your gun laws. I will not beg the government for a license to continue to be a handgun owner. I will not submit to being fingerprinted, or photographed, or interrogated like a criminal for claiming my birthright as a free American....And Miss Reno, I have this to say to you: If you send your jackbooted, baby burning bushwhackers to confiscate my guns, pack them a lunch, it will be a damned long day. The Branch Davidians were amateurs. I'm a professional."⁵⁶ In the speech Thomas asserts that BATF stands for "Burn All Toddlers First."

California Pistol and Rifle Association, NRA Affiliate Organization

In an unsigned article that appeared in the November newsletter of the California Rifle and Pistol Association, which is an official NRA affiliate, the writer sarcastically suggested that a new law banning assault weapons in the state be renamed "The Homeboy Control Act of '99." *The Los Angeles Times* reported that the article, published in the organization's monthly newsletter *The Firing Line*, stated that "law-abiding Anglo gun owners" anticipated that the law would be renamed by its supporters "to properly credit and recognize all Hispanic and black gangbangers (dead, alive and imprisoned) who made the passage of this legislation possible." The article also stated that police, prison guards, and prison builders "express their thanks to the Homeboys (and Homegirls) who have made full employment possible." The

article concluded, "Even though gun homicides have dropped dramatically during the past few years, Hispanic and black gangbangers can still be counted on to produce the overwhelming majority of gun homicides, which will provide politicians with the excuse that there's a 'gun problem' in California. Viva La Raza." A spokesman for the author of the bill, State Senator Don Perata (D-Alameda) labeled the article "pretty blatantly racist."⁵⁷

Endnotes

1. Charlton Heston, *The Courage to be Free*, Saudade Press, (2000), p. 286.
2. James Dao, "N.R.A. Leaders Cast Gore as Archenemy," *The New York Times*," 21 May 2000, Section 1, p. 28.
3. According to the web site of Americans for Tax Reform, "Mr. Norquist is president of Americans for Tax Reform (ATR), a coalition of taxpayer groups, individuals and businesses opposed to higher taxes at both the federal, state and local levels. In the past, Mr. Norquist has served as: economist and chief speech-writer, U.S. Chamber of Commerce (1983-1984); campaign staff on the 1988, 1992, 1996 Republican Platform Committees; executive Director of the National Taxpayers' Union; [and] executive Director of the College Republicans. In the words of former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, Grover Norquist is "the person who I regard as the most innovative, creative, courageous and entrepreneurial leader of the anti-tax efforts and of conservative grassroots activism in America...He has truly made a difference and truly changed American history.'" According to its web site, "ATR opposes all tax increases as a matter of principle. We believe in a system in which taxes are simpler, fairer, flatter, more visible, and lower than they are today. The government's power to control one's life derives from its power to tax. We believe that power should be minimized. ATR serves as a national clearinghouse for the grassroots taxpayers' movement by working with approximately 800 state and county level groups." (<http://www.atr.org/missionstatement/index.htm> and <http://www.atr.org/staff/ggnbio.htm>)
4. According to the web site of the American Conservative Union, "David A. Keene is Chairman of the American Conservative Union, the Nation's oldest and largest grassroots conservative organization. He also serves as a Lobbyist with The Carmen Group, a governmental affairs and legislative relations firm based in Washington, DC. Mr. Keene's political experience is extensive. He has been involved in presidential politics since 1968. He worked in the White House during the Nixon Administration as political assistant to Vice President Spiro Agnew....As Southern Regional Coordinator for Ronald Reagan in 1976 and National Political Director for George Bush in 1980, Mr. Keene won recognition for his skill as a political organizer and strategist. Additionally, Mr. Keene was a senior political consultant to Republican presidential candidate Robert Dole in 1988 and was an informal advisor during the 1996 campaign." (<http://www.conservative.org/keenebio.htm>)
5. According to its web site, "The American Conservative Union is the nation's oldest conservative lobbying organization. ACU's purpose is to effectively communicate and advance the goals and principles of conservatism through one multi-issue, umbrella organization. The Statement of Principles makes clear ACU's support of capitalism, belief in the doctrine of original intent of the framers of the Constitution, confidence in traditional moral values, and commitment to a strong national defense. Over the years, ACU has been on the cutting edge of major public policy battles. Among ACU's significant efforts, past and present, are fighting to keep OSHA off the back of small businesses, opposing the Panama Canal giveaway, opposing the SALT treaties, supporting aid to freedom fighters in Marxist countries, promoting the confirmation of conservative Justices to the Supreme Court, battling against higher taxes, and advocating the need for near-term deployment of strategic defenses." (www.conservative.org/about.htm)

6. A press release announcing the appearance of Lynne Cheney at the CPAC, "Lynne Cheney to Deliver Closing Address for CPAC 2002," stated, "CPAC 2002 marks the 29th Anniversary of the nation's oldest and largest annual gathering of conservative grassroots activists, kicking-off the year for the Conservative Movement." (www.cpac.org/cpaccontents/press/press012402.shtml)
7. According to its web site, "Since 1974, the ACU has hosted the annual Conservative Political Action Conference. Thousands of conservative activists and leaders from around the nation meet for three days to discuss current issues and policies, and set the agenda for the future. Open to the general public, CPAC always offers a distinguished cast of participants. Among them have been Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush, Vice President Dan Quayle, Senate GOP leader Bob Dole, House Speaker Newt Gingrich, numerous other Senators and Representatives, Cabinet officers, media correspondents, international celebrities and other key political figures. CPAC serves to bring dedicated and talented Americans into the conservative movement and to train and motivate them for political action." (<http://www.conservative.org/about.htm>)
8. Fred Barnes, "Conservatives George W. Bush; But will the romance last?" *The Weekly Standard*, March 2001, p. 13.
9. Stuart Rothenberg, "Recent Republican Successes Mask What's Wrong With the Right," *Roll Call*, 15 February, 2001.
10. Elizabeth Shogren, "Campaign 2000: NRA Steps Up GOP Donations in Strategy Shift," *The Los Angeles Times*, 5 April, 2000, p.1.
11. "A New NRA," *American Handgunner*, July/August 2001, p. 104.
12. "Are Democrats Sticking it to Union Members?," *America's 1st Freedom*, October 2000, p. 47.
13. "Are Democrats Sticking it to Union Members?," *America's 1st Freedom*, October 2000, p. 47.
14. "Are Democrats Sticking it to Union Members?," *America's 1st Freedom*, October 2000, p. 49.
15. David Lamb, "Other Emotional Issues on Ballots Nationwide," *The Los Angeles Times*, 5 November, 1986, p. 1.
16. "Group Plans Last Minute Ads Knocking Striker Bill," *National Journal's Congress Daily*, 8 July, 1994.
17. "Orr Presented with National Right to Work Foundation's Charlton Heston Freedom Award," National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, May 20, 1994.
18. Jill Lawrence, "NRA woos unionists in push for GOP," *USA Today*, October 29, 2000.
19. Karen MacPherson, "NRA's Election Spending Has Mixed Results, `[Pennsylvania] certainly wasn't a total loss for the NRA, but it also wasn't a total victory either,'" *Pittsburgh Post-*

Gazette, 10 November, 2000, p. A-13.

20. Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, "Washington Power 25: Fat and Happy in D.C.," *Fortune*, May 28, 2001.
21. Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, "Washington Power 25: Fat and Happy in D.C.," *Fortune*, May 28, 2001.
22. Richard Keil, "Three Top NRA Officials Fired in Shakeup at Gun Lobby," *Associated Press*, 9 May, 1996.
23. Katharine Q. Seelye, "Gun Lobby in Bitter Power Struggle," *The New York Times*, 30 January, 1997, p. B6.
24. Speech by National Rifle Association First Vice President Charlton Heston Delivered at the Free Congress Foundation's 20th Anniversary Gala, December 7, 1997. (www.vpc.org/nrainfo/speech.html)
25. Stated Bond, "Charlton Heston's civil rights credentials are seriously sullied by his bigoted and homophobic remarks and his attacks on racial minorities. The endorsement by white supremacist David Duke further threatens to erode the considerable respect many Americans felt toward Heston for his years-ago commitment to human rights. That Charlton Heston seems to have been consumed by another—an angry man contemptuous of America's diversity and scornful of the tolerance which has made our nation great. The NAACP condemns such expressions of hatred and calls on Mr. Heston to repudiate the support of extremists and those who call for 'war' against peaceful citizens. (<http://www.vpc.org/nrainfo/statements.html>)
26. Stated Smeal, "I am shocked by Charlton Heston's intemperate remarks delivered before the Free Congress Foundation. Heston in one speech manages to display deep-seated bigotry and hostility while attacking feminists, African Americans, Hispanics, gay men, and lesbians. No wonder David Duke praised this speech. Heston's comments on feminists, who he characterizes as persons 'who preach that it is a divine duty for women to hate men,' not only malign feminists but show his profound ignorance of a movement that has made in the 20th Century vast political, social, and economic gains for women." (www.vpc.org/nrainfo/statements.html)
27. Stated McDonald, "Like so many parents nationwide, I hope Charlton Heston will join the rapidly growing numbers of Americans who see how critical it is for all of us, especially our children, to be able to live in a safe world. I, and tens of thousands of other moms, dads, grandparents and family members of gays and lesbians, look forward to the time when Mr. Heston comes to understand how words like his foster an angry environment that all too often results in discrimination, gay-bashing and youth suicide. It's plain and simple: every single U.S. citizen deserves to live in a world free of violence, in a world full of tolerance."
28. Stated Garry, "We find portions of Mr. Heston's very carefully-worded remarks to be both offensive and misleading. Mr. Heston's sentiments concerning lesbians and gay men—no matter how carefully veiled—are nonetheless transparent. Such disparaging remarks serve as fuel for those who fear difference and promote intolerance. Equally abhorrent are Mr. Heston's offensive remarks regarding African Americans and feminists. Finally, Mr.

Heston's analogy recalling the Gestapo is shameful. GLAAD hopes that public figures use every opportunity possible to dismantle the still sturdy walls of prejudice. GLAAD will continue to work in concert with our colleagues—men, women, black, white, straight and gay—to ensure civil rights for us all.”

29. Charlton Heston, “President’s Column,” *American Guardian*, March 1999, p. 8.
30. Charlton Heston, *The Courage to be Free*, Saudade Press, (2000), p. 198-9.
31. Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, “Washington Power 25: Fat and Happy in D.C.,” *Fortune*, May 28, 2001.
32. John Mintz, “In Bush, NRA sees White House Access,” *The Washington Post*, 4 May, 2000, p. 1.
33. Frank Rich, “Scandals Sans Bimbos Need Not Apply,” *The New York Times*, 26 December, 1998, A27.
34. Thomas B. Edsall, “Barr Rejects Racial Views of Group He Visited; He Says He Had No Idea of Stands,” *The Washington Post*, 12 December, 1998, A4.
35. Thomas B. Edsall, “Barr Rejects Racial Views of Group He Visited; He Says He Had No Idea of Stands,” *The Washington Post*, 12 December, 1998, A4.
36. Thomas B. Edsall, “Barr Spoke to White Supremacy Group,” *The Washington Post*, 11 December 1998, A23 and “Barr Rejects Racial Views of Group He Visited; He Says He Had No Idea of Stands,” *The Washington Post*, 12 December, 1998, A4.
37. Thomas B. Edsall, “Barr Spoke to White Supremacy Group,” *The Washington Post*, 11 December, 1998, A23.
38. Thomas B. Edsall, “Lott Renounces White ‘Racist’ Group He Praised in 1992,” *The Washington Post*, 16 December, 1998, A2.
39. Jeff Cooper, “Jeff Cooper's Commentaries,” Vol. 1, No. 11, December 1993, p. 1 as cited in *NRA Family Values: The Extremism, Racism, Sexism, Legal Woes, and Gun Industry Ties of the National Rifle Association’s Board of Directors*, (June 1996), Violence Policy Center.
40. Jeff Cooper, “Jeff Cooper's Commentaries,” Vol. 3, No. 3, February 1995, p. 6 as cited in *NRA Family Values: The Extremism, Racism, Sexism, Legal Woes, and Gun Industry Ties of the National Rifle Association’s Board of Directors*, (June 1996), Violence Policy Center.
41. Jeff Cooper, “Jeff Cooper’s Commentaries,” Vol. 2, No. 9, July 26, 1994.
42. Jeff Cooper, “Jeff Cooper’s Commentaries,” Vol. 3, No. 2, January 31, 1995.
43. Jeff Cooper, quoting Paul Kirchner, “Jeff Cooper's Commentaries,” Vol. 2, No. 16, December 1994, p. 5 as cited in *NRA Family Values: The Extremism, Racism, Sexism, Legal Woes, and Gun Industry Ties of the National Rifle Association’s Board of Directors*, (June 1996), Violence Policy Center.

44. Jeff Cooper, "Cooper's Corner," *Guns & Ammo*, April 1991, p. 104 as cited in *NRA Family Values: The Extremism, Racism, Sexism, Legal Woes, and Gun Industry Ties of the National Rifle Association's Board of Directors*, (June 1996), Violence Policy Center.
45. Jeff Cooper, "Jeff Cooper's Commentaries," Vol. 8, No. 7, July 2000.
46. Grover G. Norquist, "Color TV," *The American Spectator*, May 1995.
47. *Organizations Against Proposition 209*. (www.ajdj.com/noccri/sponsors.html)
48. B. Drummond Ayres, Jr., "Foes of Affirmative Action Form A National Group," *The New York Times*, 16 January, 1997, A16.
49. *Detroit Free Press Magazine*, July 15, 1990 as cited in *NRA Family Values: The Extremism, Racism, Sexism, Legal Woes, and Gun Industry Ties of the National Rifle Association's Board of Directors*, (June 1996), Violence Policy Center.
50. *Detroit Free Press Magazine*, July 15, 1990 as cited in *NRA Family Values: The Extremism, Racism, Sexism, Legal Woes, and Gun Industry Ties of the National Rifle Association's Board of Directors*, (June 1996), Violence Policy Center.
51. *Detroit Free Press Magazine*, July 15, 1990 as cited in *NRA Family Values: The Extremism, Racism, Sexism, Legal Woes, and Gun Industry Ties of the National Rifle Association's Board of Directors*, (June 1996), Violence Policy Center.
52. *Westworld Newspaper*, July 27, 1994 as cited in *NRA Family Values: The Extremism, Racism, Sexism, Legal Woes, and Gun Industry Ties of the National Rifle Association's Board of Directors*, (June 1996), Violence Policy Center.
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55. Dave McKenna, "The Death of Kiss? Promises, Promises," *The Washington Post*, 3 July, 2000, p. C1.
56. Downloaded from the NRA's computer bulletin board, GUN-TALK, members' conference, April 10, 1995.
57. Dan Morain, "Pro-Gun Group's Newsletter is Denounced as Racist; Politics: Article suggests law banning assault guns be renamed 'The Homeboy Control Act.' Newsletter touts lawmaker appearance," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 November, 1999, Part A, p. 22.