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NRA Family Values

***The Extremism, Racism, Sexism, Legal Woes, and Gun Industry Ties
of the National Rifle Association's Board of Directors***

This study was authored by Josh Sugarmann and Kristen Rand of the Violence Policy Center with additional reporting by Rachel Burstein of *Mother Jones* magazine. An abridged version of this study appears as an accompanying piece to "Good Morning, Gun Lobby," the cover story of the July/August 1996 issue of *Mother Jones*.

The Violence Policy Center is a national non-profit educational foundation that conducts research on violence in America and works to develop violence-reduction policies and proposals. The Center examines the role of firearms in America, conducts research on firearms violence, and explores new ways to decrease firearm-related death and injury.

Past studies released by the Center include: March 1996's *Lawyers, Guns, and Money: The Impact of Tort Restrictions on Firearms Safety and Gun Control*; December 1995's *Firearms Production in America*; November 1995's *Concealed Carry: The Criminal's Companion*; December 1994's *Use the Schools: How Federal Tax Dollars are Spent to Market Guns to Kids and Female Persuasion: A Study of How the Firearms Industry Markets to Women and the Reality of Women and Guns*; February 1994's *Cease Fire: A Comprehensive Strategy to Reduce Firearms Violence*; and, December 1992's *More Gun Dealers Than Gas Stations: A Study of Federally Licensed Firearms Dealers in America*.

This study was funded by grants from The Aaron Diamond Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Public Welfare Foundation.

Introduction

At the April 19th "gala celebration" of its 125th anniversary held in Dallas,^a Texas this year, the National Rifle Association of America (NRA) unveiled a new theme in its latest attempt to make itself more palatable to mainstream America. NRA President Marion Hammer promised that this year's model of the organization was guided by "family values" that it practices "every day, not because they're fashionable, but because they're right." As its first woman president, the NRA has attempted to present Hammer to the news media as the very personification of this theme: she is not merely the organization's president, but its gun-toting matriarch.^b At the convention Hammer beamed with maternal pride as she introduced her 10-year-old grandson, recounting how he had already learned "how shooting teaches you good lessons about life...you pick your target, and aim and keep trying until you get it."

NRA "family values," as practiced by the organization's leadership, however, take on a meaning that would be unfamiliar to most Americans. Scrutiny of many of the members of the NRA's board of directors reveals a picture more akin to Norman Bates than Norman Rockwell. Some members of the NRA's board belong to militia organizations or express sympathy for the extremist fringe. Others can accurately be described as racist and sexist. Others have had brushes with the law. And still others make their living selling gun-related products, calling into question the ethics of the NRA when it claims to represent solely the interests of "gun consumers."

^a The NRA opened its annual meeting on the first anniversary of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. When faced with criticism of the timing of the event, NRA Institute for Legislative Action Executive Director Tanya Metaksa told *USA Today*, "We understand terrible things happened on April 19th, but you just can't pull the plug....You're talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars."

^b The NRA presidency is, however, a primarily ceremonial position. Historically, the office holder was granted scant attention by the organization outside of its official publications. All this changed with Hammer's ascension and a recognition by the NRA that it offered the organization a new vehicle in its attempts to reshape its public image.

Extremism

In her speech at this year's annual meeting, Marion Hammer promised that the NRA "were simply mainstream Americans, flesh and blood folks from all walks of life." Ample evidence exists, however, that in its search for gun activists the NRA has dabbled in numerous aspects of the extremist fringe. According to a March 1993 statement,¹ NRA representatives attended Wise Use^c meetings as part of a "coalition building" process of "working with groups that were concerned with other issues of concern to the NRA, and sharing a similar philosophy." The memo stated that the Wise Use movement's goals "were somewhat more extensive than originally thought" and that there was no connection between the Wise Use coalition and the NRA, although the NRA continued "to work with other groups pursuing the responsible and ethical management of our renewable resources." The NRA has been less discriminating with its contacts with America's militias. In the beginning of 1995 the NRA queried government agencies about the veracity of rumors circulating on the internet and being received at NRA headquarters that a coordinated raid by federal law enforcement on militias was about to occur. Stating that the "NRA neither encourages nor discourages participation in citizen militia organizations," the organization did however publicize the alleged date of the bogus raid prior to its rumored commencement. And soon after the Oklahoma bombing, ABC News *Nightline* reported that Tanya Metaksa, executive director of the NRA Institute for Legislative Action (the organization's lobbying arm) had met with members of the Michigan Militia. The NRA's militia sympathies, however, are not surprising.

In June 1995, NRA board member and First Vice President Neal Knox wrote in *Shotgun News*, "We have a First Amendment right to assemble—or not assemble—with whomever we wish. And unless the militia groups are criminals (and I've yet to see any evidence that they are) I'll not tolerate the *Washington Post* or ABC trying to tar me for 'quilt [sic] by association.'" Knox's fellow board member, rock musician Ted Nugent, echoes his views. As far as militias, Nugent says that he has "no problem with them."² In defending the Michigan Militia, Nugent told the *Chicago Sun Times*, "I shoot with these people. I have been to target practice with them. I find them professional, hard-working people."

NRA board member Leroy Pyle is a member of the Illinois Militia, a group he describes as "average Joes concerned about maintaining our nation's heritage." Pyle is a former San Jose, California police officer and at one time headed the

^c The "Wise Use" movement is a radical anti-environmental movement started by Alan Gottlieb (who is also the founder and head of the Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms and the Second Amendment Foundation) and Ron Arnold. Gottlieb and Arnold's Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise describes this loose coalition as a "grassroots effort to take the bureaucracy out of environmentalism and to provide an alternative view of man's place in the environment."

NRA-funded Law Enforcement Alliance of America until he was forced out in a power struggle for control of the organization. The militia invited Pyle to join after he made a name for himself as systems operator for the Paul Revere Network, a Chicago, Illinois-based computer bulletin board he started in 1992. A listing of the files available on the network reveals its users' interest in America's militia movement. Users can download copies of files addressing such topics as "Frequently Asked Questions About Militias" or copies of the *Resister*, an underground newsletter that according to *Time* magazine "espouses the extreme positions that proliferate among right-wing militias."^d Most recently, the bulletin board added a "militia conference." The Paul Revere Network also operates a web site.

Board member Wayne Stump is a former Arizona state senator who at one time served on the advisory board of English First, a radical anti-immigration group that has been accused of racism.^e Stump is also closely associated with extremist Jack McLamb,^f whom even Pyle describes as "a little far out." McLamb is a

^d Published by a clandestine group of Fort Bragg Special Forces troops, *The Resister* represents "basically the white Christian militia mentality" according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. In an article warning of "agents provocateur and informants," the publication advises, "Since early 1992 the FBI has been cultivating informers within the patriotic movement....One method to reduce the risk of compromise is to require each member of your militia or organization to swear or affirm an oath...."

^e One of English First's founders is Larry Pratt. According to the March 1990 issue of *Hispanic* magazine, Pratt warned in an English First direct-mail letter of an imminent time "when Hispanics, not English-speaking Americans, are in control of the country." Pratt is also executive director of Gun Owners of America, the NRA's smaller, harder-line competition. Pratt has been credited as being one of the key strategists behind the growth of the modern militia movement and until recently was a common fixture at militia-related events such as "Preparedness Expos." In a speech given at the Preparedness Expo '95 in Dallas, Texas, Pratt stated, "They keep asking me...the media calls me. Why is this militia movement springing up? I said have you been reading your own newspapers? Do you see what has been happening in this country? The American people see it. *They* know what the government is doing. *They* know the government is out of control. That's why there is a militia movement: because they have a God-given right to do what they're doing. They have a constitutional right to do what they're doing. And they've decided that maybe they ought not to be like those Jews in Germany and just wait to be led off to the slaughter. They're going to stay and do something about it." At the same conference, Pratt also appeared on a panel which included: Mark Koernke (Mark from Michigan), author of *America in Peril, Equipping for the New World Order* and *A Call to Arms*; former Green Beret Bo Gritz; and Jack McLamb. The panel topic was "Gun Control—Second Amendment Battle Lines Being Drawn." In February 1996, revelation of Pratt's militia links forced him to take a "leave of absence" from Republican Pat Buchanan's presidential campaign. Pratt had been a national co-chair.

^f In his 1996 book *A Force Upon the Plain*, author Kenneth Stern writes that in addition to founding the American Citizens and Lawmen Association (ACLA) in the 1980s, militia-advocate McLamb is "executive editor of the organization's *Aid and Abet Police Newsletter*. He also edited the 75-page *Operation Vampire Killer 2000: American Police Action Plan for Stopping World Government Rule*, a publication of Police Against the New World Order (PANWO). *Aid and Abet* described *Operation*

retired Phoenix, Arizona police officer whose American Citizens and Lawmen Association (ACLA) works to convince law enforcement officers stop enforcing the law and to align themselves with militias against the federal government.

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."³ In the speech Thomas asserts that BATF stands for "Burn All Toddlers First."

Self-described "hard-core" board member T.J. Johnston commands the Orange County Corps, which he founded in 1994. Because California law bans militias, Johnston characterizes his organization as a "group." Johnston told the *Nation* that the Corps has 1,000 armed members divided into 28 local units. In the *Nation* article, Johnston detailed how the Corps had 300 people grouped into a Ready Response Team, "armed and ready to meet any challenge at a moment's notice." In detailing the Corps' plans to combat possible civil unrest, Johnston warned, "We're not going to have any repeat of the 1992 L.A. riots. If the rioters come south we are going to set up armed roadblocks at the corner of Artesia Boulevard and Knott Avenue and hold the line right there." In 1995 *Rolling Stone* writer Leonard Zeskind detailed a conversation he had with Johnston on the issue of the NRA and militias: "I asked...T.J. Johnston...whether any NRA board

Vampire Killer 2000 as a 'step-by-step plan to re-educate our fellow law enforcement officers to the plans of the global elite such as Bush, Clinton and Perot.' Some claim that the 'Vampire' to be killed stands for police officers who follow the law." Stern writes that addressing the Seattle Preparedness Expo 1994, McLamb urged law enforcement personnel to not enforce laws and to join militias: "If you don't have one [a militia] here...or you want to start one of your own...get a hold of us....If you have militia material, send it. [We'll] keep it on file and help spread this wonderful, legal concept across this nation." According to The Center for Democratic Renewal's 1996 report *Militias: Exploding Into the Mainstream*, McLamb also "said in his keynote speech at the 1994 Seattle Preparedness Expo that interracial marriage was a 'violation of God's plan' and a ploy by the elitists to create a mono-colored servant class."

members are militiamen....'There are members of the board who take whatever measures necessary to defend themselves,' Johnston answered. 'If it involves joining a militia...' His voice trailed off. Is there room in the NRA for militia members, I wanted to know. 'There is a lot of space.' Johnston replied."⁴ In 1991 Johnston, as chairman of a California organization known as Gun Owners REACT, urged owners of banned assault weapons not to register their guns as required by the new state law. Johnston was quoted in the *New York Times* as stating, "It's better to be fighting for our right to keep and bear arms than fighting for our lives. By having 200 million armed Americans, the Government of the United States would never have the thought of becoming tyrannical."

Since 1975 NRA board member Robert K. Brown has published *Soldier of Fortune*, the "Journal of Professional Adventurers." The magazine's advertising includes ads for survival products, bounty hunting training, covert listening devices and other military surplus, militia and conspiracy materials, Nazi memorabilia, firearms and ammunition, and mail-order brides. *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."

Racism & Sexism

Labeling itself "this nation's oldest civil rights organization," the NRA's leadership promises that regardless of race or gender, all are welcome and respected. As Marion Hammer told 1996's NRA conventioners, "The media's been abuzz about the NRA having a woman president. Some folks thinks [sic] maybe that's out of character for us. I think it tells how little they know about the real NRA....They don't know that the NRA has proudly stood in the forefront of America's tradition of equal rights, civil liberties, and freedom, long before other organizations took up that noble cause." The attitudes and statements of several of the organization's board members, however, reveal a far different world view.

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,"⁵ and has suggested calling black South Africans from the Gauteng province "Orang-gautengs."⁶ 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."⁷ 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."⁸

In commenting on the Senate debate over the confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, Cooper offered his views on sexual harassment, "[W]e find ourselves most harassed by people who get the accent on the wrong syllable. The word is *harass*, not *harass*."⁹

Like his fellow board member Cooper, rock musician Ted Nugent laments a changing South Africa. In 1990 he 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."¹⁰ 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...."¹¹

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."¹² 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."¹³ 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?"¹⁴

Legal Woes

A major theme of the NRA is that the answer to firearms violence is crime control, not gun control. The organization constantly harps on the notion of protecting "law-abiding citizens" and doling out the harshest penalties possible to every and any law-breaker. The NRA also pays tremendous lip service to the concept of keeping guns out of the hands of criminals.

The organization's anti-crime enthusiasm seems to wane, however, when it comes to its own board. Moreover, one of the NRA's legislative priorities in 1995 was attempting to reinstate a program at the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms that had granted "relief" to convicted, often violent felons suffering from the "disability" of not being able to possess a firearm. The program was defunded by Congressional Democrats beginning in Fiscal Year 1993. The NRA's seemingly mystifying devotion to resuscitating ATF's \$4.3-million-a-year "relief from disability" program may be explained in part by personal experience.

Board member Manny Fernandez pleaded guilty in 1983 to criminal possession of a machine gun. The NRA's 1986 flagship bill, the Firearms Owners' Protection Act, benefited many gun criminals by making them eligible for the federal "relief from disability" program. Fernandez is also a founder of Californians Against Corruption (CAC). In 1994 CAC lobbied for a recall vote of California State Senator David Roberti, a longtime gun control advocate. The vote failed, but still cost taxpayers half a million dollars. Fernandez was ousted from CAC when he declared publicly that the recall effort had been the gun lobby's revenge for Roberti's sponsorship of a 1989 California law restricting assault weapons. The California Fair Political Practices Commission later found CAC guilty of 404 violations of campaign laws, including concealing contributions from the NRA and other gun groups and failing to file proper records. The commission fined CAC a record \$808,000.

Board member Donn DiBiasio, a Providence Rhode Island gun dealer and state lobbyist for the Rhode Island State Rifle and Revolver Association, faced murder charges after he shot and killed a would-be burglar in his gun store. The intruder was unarmed and DiBiasio shot him several times. A grand jury decided not to indict DiBiasio.

Board Member Robert Hodgdon's Hodgdon Powder Co., Inc. agreed with Olin Corp. to pay \$250,000 in damages to settle charges brought by the U.S. Department of Justice's Antitrust Division that the companies had conspired to rig bids to purchase surplus gun powder from the Department of Defense. The complaint alleged that Hodgdon had conspired to "suppress and restrict competition for surplus powder." The settlement resolved charges that the company had violated the Sherman Antitrust Act, the Federal False Claims Act, and

the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act.

Industry Links

The NRA is fond of describing itself as the representative of "gun consumers," and the organization bristles at the very suggestion that it more truly represents the gun industry. There are, however, legions of examples of the NRA choosing the interests of the industry over the safety and well-being of consumers. One recent, glaring example was the organization's support for federal legislation limiting the liability of firearm manufacturers for injuries caused by defective guns. The NRA joined a long list of big business interests, firearm manufacturer trade associations, and individual manufacturers pushing for severe limits on the rights of consumers injured by defectively designed or manufactured products—including firearms and ammunition. The stakes were very high for firearm consumers since—unlike virtually all other consumer products—no federal agency has the authority to regulate the safety of firearms and ammunition. The liability system is the only recourse available for gun consumers to hold manufacturers accountable and receive fair compensation when they are killed or injured by defective guns. The composition of the NRA's board may help explain its cozy relationship with the industry. It also may well have dictated the organization's position on a recent, hotly contested issue—inclusion of a provision in federal anti-terrorism legislation requiring the tagging of explosives with microscopic markers. The placement of such markers—commonly known as "taggants"—in explosives is designed to help law enforcement trace the source of bombings.

Three board members appear to have significant financial interests in preventing the tagging of certain gun powder known as "black powder." The NRA has repeatedly opposed the placing of "taggants" in this type of explosive. The organization argues that the markers could interfere with the stability of cartridges and shells made by shooters who produce their own ammunition, a practice commonly known as "handloading." Taggant proponents note that such markers provide law enforcement personnel with an invaluable investigative tool in determining the source of explosives. The three NRA board members run businesses that sell reloading equipment and/or supplies used by shooting enthusiasts who make their own handgun and rifle cartridges or shotgun shells.

Board member Robert Hodgdon (also cited in the previous section) is president of Hodgdon Powder Company and a charter member of the National Reloading Manufacturers Association. The company makes gun powder. Mr. Hodgdon has in the past maintained that tagging requirements would force an increase in prices that would lead to reduced sales. Hodgdon Powder also advertises in *American Rifleman* magazine.

Board member Steve Hornady is president of Hornady Manufacturing Company. Hornady manufactures a wide variety of reloading equipment as well as ammunition. Mr. Hornady's biography for the NRA board notes that he has served on the nominating committees of both the NRA and the National Shooting Sports Foundation, a trade association for the firearms industry. The Hornady Manufacturing Company placed a full-page advertisement in the March 1996 issue of *American Rifleman* magazine.

Board member Kenneth Oehler is founder and president of Oehler Research. His company manufactures chronographs—devices used by handloaders to measure the velocity of a bullet to ensure consistency within a batch of ammunition. Oehler brags that his company has provided a free NRA membership with each chronograph it has sold for the past two years.

The seeming intrusion of the financial interests of NRA officials into the group's policy-setting on explosives tagging is not new. In 1979 Neal Knox—who was then head of the NRA Institute for Legislative Action, and is currently an NRA board member and first vice president for the organization—led the organization's campaign against a bill that would have required explosives manufacturers to put taggants in their products. The rationale for opposing the bill was the same as that offered today—that taggants may destabilize home-loaded ammunition. In the 1980s it was uncovered that Knox, along with Robert Hodgdon, was a founder and stockholder in Pyrodex Corporation (which manufactured a black powder substitute). Mr. Knox was successful in having the taggant provision deleted from broader anti-terrorism legislation.

Endnotes

1. Downloaded from the NRA's computer bulletin board GUN-TALK.
2. *The Boston Herald*, June 26, 1995.
3. Downloaded from the NRA's computer bulletin board, GUN-TALK, members' conference, April 10, 1995.
4. Zeskind, Leonard, "Armed and Dangerous," *Rolling Stone*, November 2, 1995, p. 57.
5. Cooper, Jeff, "Jeff Cooper's Commentaries," Vol. 1, No. 11, December 1993, p. 1.
6. Cooper, Jeff, "Jeff Cooper's Commentaries," Vol. 3, No. 3, February 1995, p. 6.
7. Cooper, Jeff, quoting Paul Kirchner, "Jeff Cooper's Commentaries," Vol. 2, No. 16, December 1994, p. 5.
8. Cooper, Jeff, "Cooper's Corner," *Guns & Ammo*, April 1991, p. 104.
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10. *Detroit Free Press Magazine*, July 15, 1990.
11. *Detroit Free Press Magazine*, July 15, 1990.
12. *Detroit Free Press Magazine*, July 15, 1990.
13. *Westworld Newspaper*, July 27, 1994.
14. WRIF FM Radio, Detroit, Michigan, September 25, 1991.

