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America's Private Militias - Part I

Lead: The bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in the Spring of 1995 continues an old but seldom noticed tradition in American life - the Private Militia.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Through the years, the United States has enjoyed remarkable social and political stability. Except for the Civil War during which the great questions of slavery and federalism were settled through the shedding of blood, issues of conflict have been, for

the most part, resolved politically. That said, it is important to remember there is also a thread of violent activism operating outside the law that has wound its way through the history of America. Some of these movements are remembered fondly as having advanced the cause of freedom and independence. Dumping tea in Boston Harbor or standing across the picket lines at Lexington and Concord were not legal acts but in hindsight are seen as being among the opening phases of the American fight for liberty. Shays' Rebellion and the Whiskey Rebellion were evidence of frontier resentment against the growing power of the infant federal system.

However, there has been a darker side to this tradition of private resistance to government authority. Operating outside the law, vigilante groups and private militias have resorted to violence, terror and intimidation when frustrated by social change or when ordinary political activity seemed to lead nowhere. These groups have been on the left or right of the political spectrum. Partisan raiders on both sides made the territory of Kansas a bloody hell before the Civil War. In this century, extreme anarchists blew up the entrance to the home of the U.S. Attorney General in the 1920s. The Weathermen and other leftist groups conducted a widespread bombing campaign in opposition to the Vietnam War, but it has been right

wing extremists from the Ku Klux Klan to today's Minutemen that are a part of strongest tradition of resorting to terror in opposition to what these groups perceive as threats to liberty or their members way of life. Next time: The Christian Front.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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Resources

Jenkins, Philip. "Home-Grown Terror," *American Heritage* 46 (5, September, 1995) 38-47.