

Spring 2022

## From Pacifism to Pipe Bombs: A History of the Extremist Anti-Abortion Movement in the United States

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## **THESIS SUMMARY**

This paper traces the history of the extremist wing of the anti-abortion movement, both the violent and non-violent branches, from its origins in the 1970s. The movement began with local, leftwing Catholic groups conducting “sit-ins,” then turned into a massive crusade of fundamentalist conservatives under Randall Terry’s group Operation Rescue. I also examine the movement’s descent into violence in the 1980s and 1990s and the federal government’s response to this threat, namely the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act in 1994, and how it has shaped both the pacifist and violent branches of the movement in the years since. The history of this movement carries important lessons about civil disobedience and violence, the societal and governmental response to these actions, and the intersection of religion and politics in America.

## **I. Introduction**

Humans throughout history have been driven to extreme, even violent lengths in defense of their values. One of the most fundamental values, common to nearly all societies across history, is the value of human life and its preservation. When this value is perceived, whether correctly or incorrectly, to be violated, i.e., human life is under some kind of violent threat, it strikes at the heart of one's moral framework. In the case of abortion, anti-abortion activists believe that human life is being violated and destroyed on a massive scale every day. While there is a major anti-abortion movement that operates within the political mainstream, the belief that abortion is murder can lead anti-abortion activists to participate in the extreme wing of the movement, even going so far as to condone or participate in illegal and violent activities.

How do these individuals react to what they believe is mass murder? What types of extreme behaviors do they engage in in defense of their values? How do they justify these behaviors? What happens when those behaviors are no longer available to them? In this paper, I will examine these questions, tracing the history of what can be called the extremist or direct action wing of the American anti-abortion movement.

## **II. Abortion History in America**

In early America, around the turn of the 19th century, laws and customs surrounding abortion were descended from British common law, which defined the presence of fetal movement, also known as the quickening, as the point after which abortion became impermissible. Quickening generally occurred around the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy, and in those days was one of the only ways to confirm a pregnancy. This distinction gave early American women leeway to attempt to end their pregnancies up until about halfway through

gestation. After quickening had taken place, procuring an abortion would have been looked down upon, but likely not treated as a serious crime or prosecuted. Books on home remedies were widely available, using euphemisms to recommend various “treatments” for early pregnancies.

Between 1820 and 1840, a few states began to mention abortion in criminal laws and statutes. The first time abortion appeared in American law was a brief mention in an 1821 Connecticut law, prohibiting anyone from causing a miscarriage after quickening with “deadly poison or other noxious and destructive substance” (Jacobson, 2019, p. 80). The wording was aimed primarily at physicians who assisted in abortions, with no mention of punishment for the woman involved. In the next two decades, a few other states would pass similar laws. Many established physicians supported these laws, for both moral and practical considerations. They were beginning to move away from the quickening distinction, seeing it as just another step in the process of gestation, not a defining boundary. Practically, they wanted to standardize the medical profession and exclude the many alternative, folk, and rural doctors that were entering the field; one way to do so was to pass laws regulating these local doctors from performing abortions.

It is important to note that all of these early abortion regulations were part of larger criminal laws and statutes, indicating that there was no popular anti-abortion movement. These regulations were seen as a niche issue for physicians and lawyers, not something the general public cared about.

By the 1840s, abortion had entered the public consciousness, and it became more common over the next few decades. Previously, abortions had often been performed on illegitimate or illicit pregnancies, but around the middle of the 19th century they began to be

obtained by middle and upper class women as a form of birth control. Subsequently, abortion became commercialized, with some abortion providers having large national practices and shipping abortifacient pills by mail. However, with abortion becoming more visible in society, the first public anti-abortion sentiment also appeared. In 1869, Dr. Anne Densmore, a physician and educator, gave a lecture to a professional women's club on the "crime of abortion," which was later reprinted in Susan B. Anthony's *The Revolution* magazine (Feminists for Life, n.d.). Several women in the audience fainted at her argument that abortion was murder, indicating the novelty of this idea. Around the same time, homeopathic doctor Edwin M. Hale wrote a tract railing against the "Great Crime of the Nineteenth Century." In it, he described the various ways in which abortion was a crime against nature, a crime against the state, a crime against morality, and so forth, even going further in his proposed restrictions on abortion than many mainstream anti-abortion activists do today.

These changes represented slowly shifting public opinion on abortion - that as it became more visible, anti-abortion beliefs are expressed for the first time. Throughout the late 1860s and 1870s, at least 40 anti-abortion laws and statutes were passed in several states (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 9). These changes were largely due to the doctors' campaign in support of these regulations and of doing away with the older quickening standard, and were increasingly strict in banning all types of abortions at any stage, with severe penalties for the woman. By 1900, 49 states had passed anti-abortion laws, most of which would remain on the books until well through the 20th century. The Great Depression created a greater demand for abortion, and with it prosecution of abortions increased throughout the mid 20th-century (Jefferis, 2011, p. 8).

The push to reform abortion regulations began in the 1950s and 1960s, directed mainly by Planned Parenthood. At their annual meeting in 1942, Alan Guttmacher, chief of Obstetrics at

Baltimore's Sinai Hospital, argued that the nation's abortion laws needed to be reformed to permit abortion if the woman's health would be at risk. In 1955, Planned Parenthood sponsored a conference to discuss the issue of abortion, but they had limited data on the topic due to most abortions being performed illegally. Nevertheless, many speakers showed evidence for the idea that the strict abortion regulations were being ignored in dangerous and illegal ways, thus making the argument that reform was needed. The conference ended with a recommendation for the possibility of reform and that the American Law Institute (ALI) should write model reform legislation that could be used by the states. This legislation later became known as the ALI plan, allowing abortion in cases of rape, incest, deformities, or if two doctors agreed it was necessary for the woman's health. It would provide the basis for reforms throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, along with a news story that helped change public opinion.

In 1962, Phoenix mother of four and local television star Sherri Finkbine discovered that the pills she had been taking during her pregnancy contained thalidomide, resulting in a high chance of fetal deformities. Her doctor recommended abortion, but when a local news article ran about the tragic story, he became nervous that they could be prosecuted and the hospital canceled her appointment. Finkbine requested a court order on the basis that a severely deformed child would be a burden to her family, but Arizona did not allow abortion in the case of fetal abnormalities, and so an Arizona Supreme Court judge dismissed the case. The case gained instant publicity and Finkbine and her husband received death threats, eventually forcing them to travel to Sweden to obtain the abortion she wanted. A Gallup poll showed that 52% of Americans believed she had done the right thing, with 32% believing it was wrong (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 14). This case brought abortion restrictions into the public spotlight and provided a sympathetic story to support reform.

The first state to pass a reform law was Colorado, on April 25, 1967, followed by North Carolina. When the American Medical Association backed the reform campaign a few months later, several states followed suit over the next two years, passing ALI-style laws.<sup>1</sup> These states became magnets for women seeking abortions in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

As these reform campaigns translated into laws, they had little opposition at first, but soon the Catholic Church began to step in. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the policy-making body for the American Roman Catholic Church, created the first local anti-abortion groups in an attempt to contain the growing movement for reform. These groups later came together in 1972 as the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), still one of the most influential mainstream anti-abortion organizations. It is worth noting that other religious groups did not share the Catholic Church's opposition to abortion; many Protestant ministers and groups supported the push for reform.<sup>2</sup>

Texas was one of the states that did not pass any reform laws, and abortion remained illegal. When a woman named Norma McCorvey found herself pregnant for the third time at age twenty-one, she sought an abortion but was told they were illegal in Texas, and she would have to travel out-of-state for one. Her story caught the attention of young lawyers Sarah Weddington and Linda Coffee, who were looking for a plaintiff for a class-action lawsuit to challenge the constitutionality of Texas's ban. In March 1970, they filed a lawsuit against Henry Wade, the Dallas County district attorney, naming McCorvey as "Jane Roe." In June, a federal court declared the law unconstitutional, but did not order the district attorney to cease enforcement of the law, and Wade said he would continue prosecution of doctors who performed abortions.

Weddington and Coffee appealed the case to the Supreme Court, and it was argued in December

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<sup>1</sup> One of these states was California, where ironically, governor and future "pro-life hero" Ronald Reagan signed the reform into law.

<sup>2</sup> There were at this time early sit-ins that went virtually unnoticed; these will be discussed later.



1971. Weddington's argument was simple: the Texas law violated a constitutional right to privacy and to choice, relying on the Ninth and Fourteenth Amendments. There were only seven justices seated when the case was argued due to the retirements of two others that had not yet been replaced, and so in May 1972, Justice Harry Blackmun, who had been assigned to write the Court's opinion, proposed that the case be reargued. He continued to work on research for the opinion over the summer, and the case was reargued in October 1972 with nine justices seated.

On January 22, 1973, the "fastest social revolution in American history" (Lader, n.d.) took place: a 7-2 decision in favor of Jane Roe, holding that women had the fundamental right to choose whether to continue a pregnancy. However, the Court also noted that the state had interests in protecting health and fetal life, therefore coming up with a trimester framework to balance the two. In the first trimester, states may not restrict abortion; in the second, they may regulate it; in the third, they may ban it, except to preserve the woman's health.

The reaction to Roe was instant. Most states still had abortion bans or abortion restrictions, which were instantly overturned. Hospitals around the country began receiving calls from women that afternoon asking where and when they could obtain an abortion. While abortion-rights activists celebrated, those who opposed it were shocked, dismayed, and infuriated by the ruling. As one anti-abortion woman said, "we felt as though the bottom had been pulled out from under us." (Luker, 1984, p. 141). The ruling in Roe was seen as an appalling discontinuity with what they had believed was an accepted universal idea: that abortion was unacceptable. This sudden, far-reaching ruling would later provide the basis for anti-abortion arguments that America pre-Roe was moral and good, while post-Roe America was immoral and depraved. This distinction motivates anti-abortion activists to return to the pre-Roe status quo.

### **III. Social Movements**

The anti-abortion movement is above all else the story of a social movement -- the largest social protest movement in the last 50 years, one of the rare conservative social movements, and one that has also, up until present day, been largely unsuccessful. This paper will aim to describe the trajectory of the extremist, direct-action wing of this social movement.

A social movement is a loose network of individuals or groups, engaging collectively in political or cultural conflicts based on their shared beliefs. The anti-abortion movement is a values-driven social movement, meaning it operates off of participants' deeply-held moral beliefs. An individual who feels strongly about the immorality of abortion doesn't have to be a sophisticated public policy expert to feel the way they do, and to want to engage in direct action to stop it. When an issue is seen as an unconscionable, intolerable moral affront to people's personal convictions, the movement is ripe for direct action, whether legal or illegal, to erupt.

The radical wing of the anti-abortion movement, what can also be referred to as the direct action or protest wing, doesn't easily fit into models attempting to explain sociopolitical behavior, specifically political violence and harassment. However, what is clear is that anti-abortion protest, harassment, and violence is an intentional and rational strategy to attempt to achieve their political ends (Doan, 2007, p. 5). Most of those engaging in this behavior have thought through the cost benefit analysis, and come to the conclusion that within their moral and cultural framework, this is a valid and even necessary way of disrupting the system. Political harassment is a way of drawing attention to a message, and a way of increasing the costs to the political system of maintaining the status quo, thus nudging the system towards the desired change. Unlike some other social movements, anti-abortion political harassment is directed

towards non-government actors (patients, doctors, nurses, etc.), with less resources with which to defend themselves (Doan, 2007, p. 48).

Another issue facing the anti-abortion movement at large is the problem of factionalism and subsequent disillusionment. Once a social movement gets off the ground, its continued existence requires centralized, formal organizations; this leads to the movement becoming more bureaucratic and moderate. This formalization, although necessary, inevitably changes the goals of the movement to focus on mainstream, short-term political compromises, a process known as “goal displacement” (Tarrow, 1996). Attempting to provide legitimacy, formal organizations begin to see direct action and protest as no longer appropriate. This can be seen in the anti-abortion movement with organizations like the NRLC that would notably break with more radical leaders and groups they wanted to distance themselves from. This leads to the more radical organizations competing with the formal mainstream organizations for members, legitimacy, and resources. In the anti-abortion movement, there are peaceful direct-action groups competing with mainstream groups, and then extremist pro-violence groups competing with the direct-action groups. Eventually, the more radical factions of a movement splinter from the movement as a whole, creating disunity and disorganization.

The strategy of organizational diversification lets a social movement use a variety of goals and tactics, allowing tension to be released between those who disagree. In the anti-abortion movement, local direct action groups helped reduce the frustration and tension caused by goal displacement. When these groups disintegrated in the early 1990s, there was a rise in extremist networks and outbursts of violence.

#### **IV. Early Movement**

A common image of anti-abortion activists is one of older conservative fundamentalist Protestants. This image of the “typical” abortion protestor has persisted since the 1980s. However, before fundamentalist Christians entered into the war on abortion, the idea of anti-abortion protest and direct action were largely created by young, generally left-leaning Catholics. This early movement was shaped by the 1960s Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam war, and the Catholic charismatic renewal. This section will explore that history of the early anti-abortion movement, throughout the 1970s, but first it is necessary to explore the ideological and cultural context of this movement, and how it was merged into the single idea of the consistent life ethic.

In 1964, a white couple named Claude and Jeanne Nolen sat down at a segregated Austin, Texas restaurant with two local black activists. They were stared at and harassed, but were intent on joining the local NAACP activists to challenge segregation. In 1989, twenty-five years later, they were arrested again for activism, this time charged with trespassing for joining a direct-action group called Operation Rescue in an abortion clinic blockade. To them, this represented a continuation of their long-standing commitment to social activism against oppressive systems. The story of the Nolens’ transition from racial justice activism to anti-abortion activism is representative of many of the early anti-abortion protestors (Hughes, 2006).

For young baby boomers, the 1960s represented a fundamental change in how they thought about the world. The Civil Rights movement in the mid-1960s introduced many young people to real-life activism, even if they were not involved themselves. It provided a model for peaceful civil disobedience that was successful in changing laws and minds; the evil of

segregation only yielded when mass, very public, civil disobedience protests were staged, and the activists moved beyond simple rhetoric and legislation. This would become a major influence on the fledgling anti-abortion movement, and many of its leaders looked to lessons from the civil rights movement to build their own civil disobedience movement.

As the situation in Vietnam worsened, many of those who had grown up watching the Civil Rights movement felt this issue even more personally, knowing friends or family who were drafted and/or killed in the war. Distressed by the use of napalm and agent orange against civilians, college students began staging protests across the country throughout the late 1960s, sometimes chanting “Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?” (The Economist, 2013). In the case of a few anti-war protestors, these protests for peace, specifically protesting violence against innocent children, translated into later anti-abortion activism.

For freshman Harvard student John O’Keefe, the war was personal. Just a few months earlier, in February 1968, his beloved older brother Roy had been killed in action in the Tet offensive. Disoriented and grieving, he began to question the war, but did not get involved in Harvard’s dynamic anti-war groups, finding them too harsh and incoherent in their beliefs. When he was introduced to a budding Catholic movement in Ann Arbor, Michigan, he found this newfound group ecstatic with religious fervor and he was quickly pulled in. The group was the beginning of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, a new Catholic movement emphasizing the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and charismatic gifts. Many of O’Keefe’s new friends combined this religious fervor with the teachings of Thomas Merton, a Catholic philosopher and monk who emphasized social activism. For the first time in the American Catholic Church’s history, a left-wing Catholic peace movement was developing, composed of young, enthusiastic activists.

In 1969, O’Keefe left Harvard and applied for conscientious objector status, striving to put his recently discovered passion for social activism to work in real-life, but not knowing where or how he could do so. He had never previously paid attention to abortion, besides believing it immoral as a Catholic, but in 1972 he met a woman who had had an abortion and spoke extensively to him about it. In his mind, this woman was scarred by what she had done, and he equated her to the Vietnamese soldier who had killed his brother: both were victims of violent systems who felt like they had no choice but to kill. After *Roe* was decided, and more local anti-abortion groups sprang up, O’Keefe still could not find anyone or any group with which he could combine his beliefs into direct action. Taking influence from the Civil Rights movement, he believed civil disobedience was the right way to oppose abortion, but he didn’t feel ready to lead a still non-existent movement. Unbeknownst to him, there was a fledgling direct action anti-abortion movement, led by two young activists named Chuck Fager and Burke Balch.

Chuck Fager, a young employee of the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) first gained experience with social protest in Selma in 1965, learning firsthand about civil disobedience and nonviolence. He went on to claim conscientious objector status against being drafted in Vietnam, and by the time *Roe* was decided in January 1973, he had added to his positions that abortion was “less of a mark of liberation than a barometer of oppression” (Hughes, 2006, p. 5). He summarized his positions in an article that caught the attention of a local student group, the National Youth Prolife Coalition (NYPLC), loosely affiliated with the NRLC. NYPLC consisted mostly of young, Catholic activists who saw their position against abortion as consistent with their anti-war, anti-racism beliefs.

Fager was asked to speak at NYPLC, and he did in summer 1974, explaining how the lessons of the Civil Rights movement and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. could be translated to the anti-abortion movement. His speech inspired NYPLC's leader, Tom Mooney, and his wife, Chris, to plan a sit-in for summer 1975. Williams College student Burke Balch was in charge of researching how to do civil disobedience, as there was little precedent for anti-abortion protests like these. The group developed a detailed logistical plan, notably allowing only women to participate in the sit-in itself; men were allowed to picket and support outside. The target was the Sigma Reproductive Health Services clinic in Rockville, Maryland. Six women participated on August 2, 1975, and were arrested after refusing to leave for several hours. Despite the arrests, the incident did not receive the media attention the group had hoped for.

The 1975 Rockville sit-in is typically defined as the first anti-abortion sit-in, but there were actually two in 1970, before *Roe*. In January 1970, a few University of Dallas students led by Michael Schwartz staged a sit-in at the Dallas Planned Parenthood, protesting the fact that the clinic was helping women fly to other states to receive abortions. It went completely unnoticed, except at *Triumph*, a small Catholic magazine run by Brent Bozell, at which a University of Dallas professor told Bozell about the sit-in. In June, Schwartz joined Bozell at a rally of about 250 people outside the George Washington University Hospital, in Washington, D.C. The city had become a magnet for women seeking abortions after it had passed a reform law that January. After the protest, Bozell and a few others snuck into a side entrance of the hospital and attempted a sit-in, but the police had had enough of anti-war demonstrators, and they were quickly arrested. These were the first arrests of the anti-abortion movement, five years before Balch's sit-in in Rockville. Even the term used for these events, "sit-in" is a reference back to its influence from the Civil Rights movement.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This term would later be changed as the movement transformed entirely.

When Burke Balch and John O’Keefe met at a bioethics conference in 1976, the 1975 sit-in group was news to O’Keefe, who felt almost as if someone had beaten him to what he had thought was an original idea. Nevertheless, it was a major breakthrough for him to find people he agreed fully with, and it inspired him to organize his own sit-ins in D.C. and Connecticut.

As those involved in the 1975 sit-in faded away from the movement, and O’Keefe organized small sit-ins, he emerged as the de facto leader of the direct action movement. He joined Pro-Lifers for Survival, a group founded by Judi Loesch, who had been alongside Cesar Chavez’s farmworker movement in California, along with several other left-aligned movements. Loesch brought experience with the Catholic Worker model, a school of thought founded by Dorothy Day that emphasized pacifism, worker rights, mutual aid, and an early form of intersectional feminism. This subculture would become both more radical and more explicitly Catholic over time. Many of these causes would later be condensed into a belief system called the “consistent ethic” or “consistent life ethic,” centered around the belief that all life is sacred and should be protected<sup>4</sup>; this idea was publicized in 1983 by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin.

In 1977, O’Keefe founded the Pro-Life Non-Violent Action Project (PNAP), beginning to dedicate all his energy to the anti-abortion movement. He had a small, loyal group that would participate in sit-ins in D.C. and Connecticut, but still gained no attention; this changed in 1978 when he published *A Peaceful Presence*, a pamphlet describing how anti-abortion activists could use nonviolence to display their opposition to abortion, making many references to Martin Luther King Jr.’s writings and the Civil Rights movement. The pamphlet circulated widely in the niche anti-abortion community, and gained O’Keefe a small following with which he organized sit-ins in 6 cities, resulting in 36 arrests. O’Keefe’s work had the biggest impact in St. Louis,

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<sup>4</sup> Today, this idea is often extended by adherents to include a wide range of positions including anti-racism, COVID protections, and veganism.



Missouri, which would later become a proving ground for more militant and larger groups into the 1980s.

After *Roe*, most abortion clinics had encountered people picketing outside, and their presence was generally brushed off, but O'Keefe's sit-in groups were quickly changing that dynamic. With no precedent for anti-abortion civil disobedience, they had to define the boundaries of their activity: would they lock arms, or grab onto things to prevent being dragged away? O'Keefe's personal stance was that they should just go limp, making it difficult for the police to arrest them while emphasizing their pacifist beliefs. With the turns the movement would take over the next two decades, he would later regret that he did not take more of a stand against the use of physical force or resistance.

In 1977, O'Keefe's group was arrested in sit-ins, but this time they wanted a trial to push the boundaries of the legal system. Their attorney, John Brandt, used the "necessity defense" to defend them on trespassing charges -- basically asserting that, according to their beliefs, their actions were necessary to stop a greater threat, that of murder. Shockingly, the necessity defense was accepted and they were acquitted. Again, his group was arrested, and again, they successfully used the necessity defense. These were the first and only times it was accepted in the U.S. judicial system, though many tried to use it in the years following. After these two major court victories, the ACLU stepped in, convincing a federal judge to issue an injunction preventing the group from entering clinics. This was a huge blow to O'Keefe's group, which never recovered and lost momentum quickly.

At the same time that O'Keefe's group was stagnating, other radical activists, like Joseph Scheidler, were experimenting with more aggressive forms of activism, which O'Keefe secretly

began to sympathize with. Before getting into the spread of civil disobedience and violence, the theological and political threads running through this story must be understood.

## **V. Theology and Political Rhetoric**

Being a value-driven movement that is composed of and driven primarily by religious groups, the theological background of their rhetoric is of paramount importance. In analyzing how these groups approach their activism, there are five key points that are frequently used in their ideology and actions.

First is the idea that contemporary America is morally depraved. This idea goes back to 1973, based off the idea that *Roe v. Wade* was a sudden break with an idealistic, family-focused, moral America. To anti-abortion activists and conservatives in general, *Roe* was the most egregious example of liberalization, secularization, and changing social norms that are the antithesis of everything they believe. This point is bolstered by frequent comparisons made by anti-abortion activists to the Holocaust, emphasizing the idea that modern America, in their widespread acceptance of abortion, is an evil, murderous, immoral nation.

Second is bloodguiltiness, the idea that all are responsible for violence and evil done among them, and that therefore all must repent to God for the “bloodguilt” of contemporary America. The idea that standing by and personally disagreeing is not enough, and is in fact still guilt in the eyes of God, is a powerful force against inaction.

Third, the concept of holy war is instrumental in keeping “believers” in the movement active (Steiner, 2006). In the anti-abortion movement, believers think they are fighting a holy war against abortion and those who support it, a war that is sanctioned and even mandated by God. This idea of a war is created by the fact that activists face what they see as persecution and

the threat of physical violence by opposing activists as well as police, which they see as the state machine that they are opposing.

Fourth, activists rely heavily on identification with the unborn, believing they “must be aligned with them completely and totally” (Steiner, 2006). When arrested, activists sometimes identify as “Baby Jane Doe,” giving up their legal identity and prolonging the legal process to emphasize their connection with the unborn. This principle originates both from leftist activism (the idea of solidarity with oppressed peoples and groups) and with religious beliefs, specifically Matthew 25:40.

Identifying with the unborn, and the associated physical and legal difficulties, are seen as nothing compared to what the unborn victims of abortion go through, and suffering through these difficulties is a way of showing solidarity, leading to the last point: that the connection between love and suffering is deeply embedded in the anti-abortion movement. Suffering in jail or through police brutality for one’s activism is seen as a way to endure suffering for a holy cause. Jail especially is portrayed as an opportunity to become holier and show Christ’s love to other inmates. This romanticization of suffering and jail makes it easy for activists to embrace their suffering as a way to further their connection with God, with others, and with the unborn.

However, this rhetoric did not develop out of nowhere; it needed an active, dynamic, politically engaged religious base. For many years, this base did not exist. As described above, the anti-abortion movement was initially comprised mostly of radical Catholics. Protestant fundamentalists were largely withdrawn from politics and social issues. Since the Scopes trial over evolution in 1925, they had retreated from the world, believing that the rapture would occur, a golden age would begin, and therefore there was no need to get involved in a secular society.

From the late 1960s through the early 1980s, there was a revival of conservative, evangelical Christian denominations that some scholars call the Fourth Great Awakening. Groups like Southern Baptists grew rapidly and gained much more political and social influence. Theologian and pastor Francis Schaeffer was largely responsible for introducing many of the ideas that spread throughout this awakening, specifically the idea that evangelical Christians must be activists in an increasingly secular society; the greatest issue Schaeffer believed Christians should focus on was that of abortion (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 121).

These ideas would later be popularized in the late 1970s and early 1980s by pastor and televangelist Jerry Falwell. He co-founded the Moral Majority, a political lobbying group that mobilized conservative evangelicals to support Ronald Reagan and other conservative politicians and policies. Falwell's emphasis on abortion pushed a new wave of conservative evangelicals into the anti-abortion movement, often at odds with the Catholics that had led the movement throughout most of the 1970s. When the Moral Majority successfully helped elect Ronald Reagan, anti-abortion activists had very high expectations, hoping he would make abortion a major policy issue. Though the abortion issue had been a major point among conservative evangelicals in the election, Reagan's administration did not plan to make it a priority. They very quickly realized they could get away with doing little to nothing on the abortion issue, causing deep frustration among conservative evangelicals who had supported him on the basis of his supposed opposition to abortion. These groups, newly involved in politics, along with their frustration over Reagan's lack of action, would find an outlet in the growing direct action wing of the movement.

## **VI. Civil Disobedience and the Rise of “Rescue”**

John O’Keefe’s groups were still drawing small crowds in the early 1980s, when two major events would shake O’Keefe and the small movement’s ideological foundations and signal the changes to come. First, in 1982, a mysterious organization called the “Army of God” would burst onto the scene, and second, in 1984, O’Keefe would suffer a violent betrayal by one of his closest allies.

In August 1982, Illinois physician and abortion provider Hector Zevallos and his wife Rosalie were kidnapped from their home in suburban Edwardsville, Illinois. Their kidnappers were three men: Don Benny Anderson, Matthew Moore, and Wayne Moore, who called themselves members of the “Army of God.” They demanded that Zevallos agree to stop performing abortions, and they wanted President Reagan to denounce abortion as well. After eight days, the couple was released unharmed, and the three men were arrested soon afterwards. Though the bizarre incident had little effect on abortion access, or anti-abortion strategy (kidnapping has never before or since been used as a tactic), the incident introduced the idea of using more forceful methods to stop abortions. The kidnappers were also the first to introduce the name “Army of God,” which would become a major element of the fringe movement and will be discussed later (Jefferis, 2011). However, their introduction of violence deeply shook O’Keefe, causing him to secretly doubt the effectiveness of pacifism. Realizing that the kidnappers had been successful in stopping abortions at Zevallos’s clinic for some period of time, he wrote a confidential letter to Joe Scheidler, a Midwest-based activist who was experimenting with more aggressive forms of action. In the letter, O’Keefe stated that non-violence, while an “urgent necessity,” was no longer a dealbreaker for him, and that “his [Anderson’s] response was courageous, and in a bloody war courage is a higher value than

ideological purity” (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 75-76). O’Keefe also promised to stop criticizing Scheidler’s tactics, believing they had more in common than different. This letter, from the most radical pacifist in the movement, so shocked Scheidler that he kept it until his death.<sup>5</sup>

O’Keefe, still desperate to grow his D.C.-based movement, did not question the commitment of new recruits to nonviolence. When a young Lutheran pastor named Michael Bray joined, he kept his belief in the justification of violence a secret. O’Keefe’s PNAP organization was planning a major rally in May 1984 at a new clinic in Gaithersburg, Maryland, and Bray encouraged him to hold it as soon as possible. 140 people attended, with one arrest.<sup>6</sup> Another sit-in was planned for that November, but the target was switched at the last minute to a clinic in Wheaton, Maryland. 46 people were arrested, one of the biggest events of the movement up until that point. Unbeknownst to O’Keefe, Bray and his friends Thomas Spinks and Kenneth Shields were planning to plant a bomb at the clinic two days later. They also planted bombs at a clinic in Rockville. These bombings, in November 1984, were part of a string of 10 bombings from January 1984 to January 1985, planned by Michael Bray and executed by Spinks and Shields. None of the bombings had any casualties, but many of them caused damage to their targets and surrounding buildings.

Despite clear evidence to the contrary, O’Keefe believed Bray, Shields, and Spinks were innocent; when it became clear during the course of the investigation that they were not, he was devastated. While he sympathized with Bray’s motivation for the bombings, giving a statement to the press that the bombings were “just, but not prudent,” he knew his campaign would never recover from this association, and he was correct.

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<sup>5</sup> Scheidler died last January at age 93; O’Keefe wrote an emotional Facebook post eulogizing his “brother.”

<sup>6</sup> The arrest was Joan Andrews Bell.

Bray was sentenced to ten years, but agreed to a plea bargain and served four. He was one of the first “prisoners of conscience” of the movement, and would later emerge as a major force in the pro-violence wing, to be discussed later. As journalists James Risen and Judy Thomas put it, “if O’Keefe is the father of rescue, then Bray is the father of violence” (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 78).

Back in the Midwest, anti-abortion activity was growing, led by men like Sam Lee and Joe Scheidler. Sam Lee was a Catholic student inspired by O’Keefe’s pacifist beliefs, and he was leading a small but stable sit-in group in St. Louis, Missouri. Ironically, it would later become a proving ground for a new generation of militant activists. Scheidler was interested, and invited Lee to come to Chicago to train him and fellow activists there about the new sit-in tactic, as he thought it sounded effective. Ironically, he would end up becoming more infamous and more influential than Sam Lee’s group ever did.

Scheidler blended O’Keefe’s civil disobedience and devout Catholicism with Michael Bray’s extremism, to set the stage for a new type of “sidewalk counseling” incorporating shock tactics and harassment. He was a cartoonish, towering figure, always carrying a bullhorn and wearing his trademark three-piece black suits and hat, and he often terrified abortion clinic workers and patients. Throughout the early 1980s, he remained the most visible, most stereotypical, and most hated anti-abortion activist.

Scheidler loved attention, often pulling off outrageous stunts to stir up press attention. He was the director of the Right to Life Committee (RLC) in Illinois for three years, but was ousted for his radicalism, forming a new group he called the Pro-Life Action League. He refused to cave to mainstream pressures to limit activism to “accepted” forms, stating “I am not interested in brownie points” (New York Times, 2021). His ability to manipulate the media and create

dramatic soundbites propelled him to infamy. In one such incident, a few press crews were packing up from covering a lackluster anti-abortion rally. Disappointed with the day and wanting to create one last spectacle, Scheidler went over to a playground and pushed the empty swings, yelling out to the cameras that they symbolized “lives of the children who will not be born.” One former coworker of Scheidler’s summed up his shtick: “Make it memorable. Be outrageous” (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 104). In a meeting with President Reagan as the director of RLC Illinois, he brazenly asked him to meet with the family of Don Benny Anderson, the man who had kidnapped Dr. Zevallos and his wife (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 102).<sup>7</sup> When, in 1985, he was called to testify in Washington, D.C. at a congressional hearing about anti-abortion violence, he stayed at Michael Bray’s house -- the same Michael Bray who was about to serve four years for bombing clinics (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 114). Despite this, Scheidler never participated in violence himself.

Using his growing national contacts in the anti-abortion field, Scheidler created the first national anti-abortion activist organization, the Pro-Life Action Network (PLAN). PLAN held its first conference in May 1984 in Florida, but Scheidler found himself disappointed at the mainstream beliefs of the group. In late-night meetings, the more seasoned activists decided they would endorse the use of civil disobedience at clinics.

Meanwhile, in St. Louis, Sam Lee’s small sit-in group had continued and was drawing larger numbers of evangelical Protestants. By early 1980, up to 130 protesters were attending, with many getting arrested reliably. The group was catching the attention of the city’s Catholic leader, Archbishop John May. Worried about the threat of legal action and the negative attention the protests might cast on the Catholic Church, May made multiple public statements denouncing Lee’s group.

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<sup>7</sup> Unsurprisingly, his request was declined, and this was the last time he was invited to the White House.



In the coming weeks, the group shrank down quickly. Eventually, a man named John Ryan was the only person left protesting outside the Bridgeton, Missouri clinic, and soon, he was getting arrested nearly every day. Ryan's protesting bordered on an obsession for him, or something like an addiction. After months of this, a local newspaper finally did a story on his persistence, and this gained him some attention and supporters. Sam Lee reached out to him, along with a group of those willing to test the legal system. Since Lee's group had been at its height, most clinics had obtained court injunctions stopping protesters, but Ryan and Lee had found a group willing to risk arrest or jail. In September 1982, a group of four staged a sit-in, and in December, they were sentenced to several months in jail each. This marked a turning point in the movement: sit-ins were no longer a casual, weekend activity.

However, it was a victory for Ryan, who had up until that point been going it alone: "I figured even if we had two people, that was double what I was doing" (Risen and Thomas, 1998, 164). In February 1984, there was a larger sit-in that succeeded in actually closing the clinic for the day. Ryan was finally making a difference, and gaining a lot of attention in the anti-abortion community along the way. Scheidler, the biggest figure in the movement at the time, took Ryan under his wing. He was planning a new PLAN conference, this time more focused on the activist wing of the movement, and wanted national anti-abortion activists there. This conference, held in April of 1985 in Wisconsin, was a quietly monumental event for the fringe side of the movement. It allowed activists to agree together that a national campaign of civil disobedience was needed, although no one yet seemed to know how to pull it off. Notably, it was also where the 1960s-inspired term "sit-in" was changed to "rescue." Going forward, anti-abortion activists would always use this term as the movement became massively larger.

Ryan and Scheidler were developing a committed group of activists, including a woman named Joan Andrews Bell. She was a deeply devout Catholic who had been nearly anywhere that there had been anti-abortion activity: with John O’Keefe in Washington, a new Catholic group in Philadelphia, testing the St. Louis injunctions with Lee and Ryan in 1982, and now returning to St. Louis for Ryan’s growing protests, which were now drawing dozens of people each time. While the unceasing pace of protests and arrests reduced his numbers somewhat, there were always those like Andrews Bell who were willing to get arrested anytime, anywhere. The rhetorical level of the protests escalated, and Ryan encouraged activists to grab onto tables, doors, and furniture to prevent police from arresting them. Andrews Bell was always at the center of aggressive action, being inspired by the “plowshare” tradition of anti-war activists who damaged military equipment in protest; in her case, Andrews Bell targeted medical equipment.

As the protests continued and became more aggressive, the police, judicial system, and abortion-rights groups became more frustrated with the situation. Lee was not happy with what his movement had turned into, but he knew he could not compete with Ryan’s charisma and natural leadership. Finally, in 1985, the St. Louis Catholic archdiocese broke all connection with John Ryan, and more moderate abortion activists had to decide whether to do the same. However, Ryan’s fame and popularity within the movement was only increasing. His group, the Pro-Life Direct Action League, had grown so much that he was able to turn it into a full-time job. In April 1986, he hosted PLAN’s second convention in St. Louis, attended by all the major leaders of the direct action movement. The group participated in a rescue that ended with 107 arrests, including a young evangelical activist named Randall Terry, soon to become the most prominent and influential leader the movement had seen.

Ryan's personal life was falling apart, rocked by a public divorce and charges of adultery. He was pushed out of his own organization, and would not be welcome at any future conferences. This left a power void in the national anti-abortion movement, one that would be filled by Randall Terry. All that was needed was an opportunity to join the disparate local movements together in a national campaign, and Terry would find that opportunity in Joan Andrews Bell.

Andrews Bell had grown up feverishly Catholic, and after *Roe*, she says she “knew right away I had to go and bust up the equipment” (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 190), exactly what she did. She and her sister began praying outside of abortion clinics and offering help to pregnant teenagers, but Andrews Bell felt her efforts were not going far enough. When Sam Lee's St. Louis group gained traction in 1980, Andrews Bell was in the center of it. Protesting became her full-time job, and she moved on to O'Keefe's Washington group, slowly tying together different local organizations through her participation. Along with other unnamed members of sit-in groups, she participated in vandalizing abortion clinics, then beginning to use superglue to glue locks and butyric acid<sup>8</sup> to shut down clinics. Michael McMonagle's group in Philadelphia was beginning to get more militant, even more so than John Ryan's group, and Andrews Bell supported them when they were charged with racketeering to put the clinic out of business, the first time that the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act was used against the anti-abortion movement.

Eventually, Andrews Bell got in contact with John Burt, a former Ku Klux Klan member, drug addict, and born-again Christian from Pensacola. He had been picketing outside the Ladies Center clinic in Pensacola since 1983, mobilizing local Assembly of God church members to join in. On Christmas 1984, all three clinics in Pensacola were bombed on the same night. This

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<sup>8</sup> Sometimes referred to as “liquid rescue” (Bader and Baird-Windle, 2001).

incident will be discussed more in depth later, but it brought national attention to Pensacola as a center of anti-abortion activity. By the time Andrews Bell arrived in Pensacola in 1986, the Ladies Center was the only abortion clinic left.

On March 26, Andrews Bell and Burt planned to participate in a sit-in, but the police and counterdemonstrators had beaten them there. Andrews and Burt, along with two other young women, pushed their way into the clinic and destroyed equipment, including a suction machine used for later-term abortions. They were arrested, but Andrews Bell did not want to take a plea; she was convinced that resisting the system would be necessary to make her point and generate attention for the movement, as she put it: “total noncooperation. Going limp where you have to be carried to your cell - total disobedience. ...what jail would want you?” (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 204). Up until this point, women had usually faced little to no consequences for their actions in the anti-abortion movement, but this time the courts had run out of patience. After her conviction in July, and her refusal of a probation deal, she was sentenced to five years in prison. Sentences of this length had previously only been given to bombers like Michael Bray or kidnappers like Don Anderson.

Andrews Bell quickly became a phenomenon in the fundamentalist community. Most evangelicals hadn’t had any idea that sit-ins or rescues were even a thing, but after Andrews Bell’s story was all over Christian media, they came out in huge numbers to support her and call for her release. She soon gained the nickname of “Saint Joan.” Ironically, one of the most devout Catholics the movement had ever seen, even mistaken for a nun by televangelist Pat Robertson, would be the figure to mobilize the fundamentalists.

On Thanksgiving weekend, anti-abortion activists from around the country gathered in Pensacola to call for Andrews Bell’s release. Randall Terry was there, but he had another motive:

to unite the anti-abortion movement into one organization. At a restaurant in Pensacola, he gave a rousing speech outlining the necessity for a new wave of the movement, a unified national campaign. Notably, Scheidler was not there; he was having doubts about the growing radicalism of the movement, and slowly phasing himself out as a result. At another speech a few days later, Terry went even further, calling for activists to follow Andrews Bell's example and invade abortion clinics. Scheidler was worried, and he called Terry asking him to tone down his rhetoric. Terry agreed, and from that point, his campaign focused on peaceful "rescues" instead of invading clinics or destroying equipment.

A former used-car salesman with a dramatic story of his conversion to Christianity, Randall Terry would finally be the person that rose to prominence as the leader of the direct-action movement. Growing up in Rochester, New York, Terry became a street preacher who hopped between churches and Bible colleges, trying to find one he fit in with. At the same time, he could no longer ignore the pull that abortion was having on him, and in 1984 he began sidewalk counseling in Binghamton, New York. Along with his wife Cindy, they were out at the clinic every day, doing everything they could to try to convince women to leave their appointments. As he gained more support, he became eager to get in contact with national leaders who were testing out more radical tactics. Joe Scheidler took him under his wing as an emerging activist, and invited him to the April 1986 PLAN convention. However, their religious differences always caused a distance between them, and Scheidler could not understand the biblical, fundamentalist vision of good and evil that Terry presented. His protege would soon eclipse him, and Scheidler never attained the level of national prominence that Terry would. Like Scheidler, most involved up until that point had been Catholics, but Terry was the first national activist that brought fire-and-brimstone-style rhetoric to the movement.. Terry relied heavily on

scripture, knowing that unlike Catholics, fundamentalist Protestants based their entire belief systems in the Bible, and he knew it inside and out. When he referenced certain Bible verses or phrases in his speeches, that spoke clearly to a fundamentalist audience who immediately connected with him. He understood the language and beliefs of evangelicals, being one himself, and he was loud and unapologetic about it; his message would be the one to finally bring evangelical Protestants out into the streets en masse against abortion.

## **VII. Operation Rescue**

Randall Terry would name his group “Operation Rescue.” He defined rescue as being when one or more people go to a clinic and either go in the waiting room, offering alternatives to women, or sit around the front of the clinic to block access to the doors. He made the key choice to not allow Andrews Bell-style clinic invasions, but he did borrow some inspiration from her, including the tactics of going limp and not cooperating in jail. The idea of going limp specifically would later be a good visual when Operation Rescue appeared in the news, portraying them as the ultimate pacifist group.

Terry knew that, in order for his movement to succeed where others had not, he would have to sell evangelical churches on rescues as a way of atoning for America’s “bloodguiltiness.” His bible passage of choice was Proverbs 24:11, “Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter.” He also wanted the movement to be an extension of church authority, needing its approval, instead of being in opposition to it. Still, few evangelical pastors were interested in signing on. “I thought he was a psycho,” said one evangelical minister who would later rise to a national position in the organization (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 261).

In August 1987, Scheidler's organization PLAN was holding a regional director meeting. This meeting was hijacked by Terry, who used it to gather followers and make plans for launching Operation Rescue. In November, he planned to hold Operation Rescue's first field test, in Philadelphia. At the last minute, he changed the location to Cherry Hill, New Jersey, hoping to throw off police and counterprotestors. 400 demonstrators showed up, making it by far the largest sit-in or rescue the movement had ever seen. By 4 p.m., the police had negotiated with Terry to get the "rescuers" to leave, but they had succeeded in shutting down the clinic for several hours. While abortion appointments scheduled for that day still took place in the evening, the Cherry Hill rescue had totally changed the national landscape of the movement. It was the kind of success that O'Keefe, Ryan, and Scheidler had only dreamed of. In addition, Terry had successfully kept the day peaceful, convincing evangelical pastors to give his idea a chance.

After this first victory in November 1987, Terry set his sights on a larger target: New York City. In a planning meeting for this campaign, Terry laid out his plan for hundreds of arrests -- civil disobedience on a massive scale. His former mentor, Joe Scheidler, was shocked at what he was hearing: all "arrest, arrest, arrest" (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 118). Scheidler believed Terry was not adequately preparing his supporters for the risks and costs of arrests. In a blowup fight, Scheidler left the meeting, and Terry told him not to come to the rescue. While Scheidler did eventually join some Operation Rescue events, he would never be close to Terry again. Meanwhile, Terry found recruiting to be surprisingly easy, thanks to the publicity about Joan Andrews Bell and the successful Cherry Hill rescue, but then there were the logistical issues of staging a protest in Manhattan. The New York Police Department was desperate to know which clinics Terry was planning on targeting ahead of time, so they could place officers there to stop the sit-in before it started. Additionally, abortion rights groups were finally waking up to the

growing specter of large-scale rescues, and they were taking it seriously, obtaining a court order to stop demonstrators from blocking clinic entrances. The higher legal stakes did not stop Terry, and he planned for a rescue on May 2nd 1988, with over 600 people signed up and willing to risk arrest, a mixture of Catholics and Protestants. The police wanted to avoid physical confrontation at all costs, thereby handing Terry an easy victory. By 1 p.m., a total of 503 people were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct. The next day, May 3rd, 422 people were arrested at a clinic in Queens. Again, the police made avoiding confrontation a higher priority than clearing access to the clinic, frustrating abortion-rights activists. After one day off, Terry organized a third rescue in Long Island, where another 400 people were arrested. National Organization for Women and NARAL began mobilizing their supporters, with a turnout of about 100, and it took many officers to keep the opposing groups apart. Finally, on May 6th, Terry staged the last rescue of the New York campaign at the clinic they had blockaded on Monday. The police, quickly losing patience with the protestors, cleared them away in only two hours with 320 arrests.

In total, the week-long New York campaign had reached over 1600 arrests. Operation Rescue was gaining national attention, including donations and thousands of people on its mailing list. Terry was doing national television interviews; in one such interview, one of the hosts asked if Operation Rescue would be at the Democratic National Committee convention in Atlanta in July. Terry impulsively said yes.

As expected, things were chaotic. A preliminary meeting between Operation Rescue's Michael Hirsh and the Atlanta Police Department didn't go well, and this would set the tone for the Atlanta campaign. The sergeant in charge was convinced that Operation Rescue was a dangerous group, and he promised local clinics that he would not let them be shut down. This meant that for the first time, Operation Rescue was encountering a police force that was not



willing to go easy on them; the clash that followed would come to be known as the “Siege of Atlanta.”

At the first rescue, on July 19, nearly 200 supporters showed up, changing their target at a last minute due to a police roadblock intended to stop them. Before 9 a.m., over 100 had been arrested and the clinic was open for the day. Borrowing the tactic of noncooperation from Joan Andrews Bell, Terry encouraged his supporters not to bring any identification and only give their names only as “Baby Doe.” The protestors were housed in one large dormitory, segregated from other prisoners. This first experience in jail was a transformative one for many of the arrestees, as they led all-day prayer sessions and gave each other nicknames full of inside jokes. A few of the Key Road prisoners would later become prominent in the more violent wing of the movement known as the Army of God, including Shelley Shannon, James Kopp, and Jayne Bray, Michael Bray’s wife.<sup>9</sup>

Although the convention was over, Terry was convinced that Operation Rescue should make their Atlanta campaign a bigger event. By mid-August, he had attracted several busloads of new activists for more rescues.<sup>10</sup> Some invaded clinics, slowly pushing the boundaries of acceptable rescue activities. By the end of August, there had been over 700 arrests. Police were regularly clearing protestors away within minutes, and abortion-rights groups were realizing it was time for a national response against this new wave of opposition. National Organization for Women (NOW) added Terry and Operation Rescue to their existing RICO case against Scheidler.

Those in the Key Road prison were still refusing to give their names, but after the city refused to cut them a deal, they began caving by September. Though they did not have much

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<sup>9</sup> The Army of God “manual” contains dozens of references and codenames to this time, making it almost certain that the author was one of those in the Key Road jail dormitory in 1988.

<sup>10</sup> In part, this was due to the sense that President George H.W. Bush was not as committed to the pro-life cause as Ronald Reagan, thus generating frustration in the anti-abortion community.

choice, it was seen as a failure: “they started coming out of jail after saying they wouldn’t” (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 279). Then, a second blow, this one more devastating. The former Southern Baptist Convention President Charles Stanley, the most influential pastor in the South, decided to not only not endorse Operation Rescue’s activities, but denounced them. He said that Christians should engage in civil disobedience only when sin is compelled or forced; with abortion, women are free moral agents (New York Times, 1988).. This was a critical turning point for the movement, and dozens of other religious leaders did the same.

Although it looked to some like Operation Rescue had lost its momentum, its leaders knew that they were coming back to Atlanta in October. This time, the tactics were different. First, they would no longer withhold identification, realizing that supporters languishing in jail was counterproductive. Second, they were more emboldened in clashing with police. For their part, the police and legal system felt the same. They obtained court injunctions against clinic blockades, activated the Atlanta Police Department’s special operations time, which would use “pain compliance” to get protestors to follow police orders, and filed conspiracy charges against Terry. This would be the sequel to the events of the summer, and this time the stakes were higher all around.

Just like they had in Philadelphia and New York City, Operation Rescue ignored the court injunctions. As police tried to physically stop them, rescuers began crawling towards the doors, presenting a ridiculous scene: as an officer would stop one, another one would crawl past him. This was called the “Atlanta Crawl,” invented by Joe Foreman. This tactic infuriated the police, who took the opportunity to use pain compliance, even kicking protestors in frustration. All of the chaos was recorded by television crews, putting the police in a bad light.<sup>11</sup> It also instantly

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<sup>11</sup> This incident, and anti-abortion clashes with the police in general, overlap interestingly with anti-police leftism. Direct action activists have often experienced police brutality intimately and are not pro-police like many cultural conservatives.

gave the protestors martyr status among the national pro-life movement. After receiving backlash for their treatment of protestors, the police backed off, and the rest of the “siege” was relatively anti-climactic. In total, Operation Rescue had 1,200 arrests over three months in Atlanta. As Terry himself put it: “the nation has seen rescues in their living rooms” (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 285). Several rescues and blockades popped up around the rest of the country. Fundraising for Operation Rescue surged, raising almost half a million dollars in 1988 (according to Randall Terry’s personal income tax returns), and its leaders began planning how to transform this momentum into a permanent organization.

Operation Rescue moved on to different cities - New York City, again, and Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, things started to take a turn for the worse. California abortion-rights activists were not afraid to be confrontational, and the police had already decided they would use whatever tactics necessary to shut down rescues right away, with the police chief calling them “willful children” (Ford and McGraw, 1989). At least one protestors’ arm was broken by police, but the media did not give the police brutality the same attention that they had in Atlanta. Abortion-rights activists viewed it as a victory: “Operation Rescue is on notice” (Ford and McGraw, 1989). At the same time, Terry was facing conspiracy charges, alleging that he had conspired to shut down the clinics he targeted.

But first, the issue of abortion was again headed to the Supreme Court. A lawyer for Sam Lee’s sit-in group from the late 1970s and early 1980s realized that, if Missouri passed a law stating that life begins at conception, then necessity defenses would have to be accepted without any opposition. After legal battles, the law was passed with some changes. It was soon challenged by doctors and healthcare workers, and the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case. The case, *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, would be an effective way for George H.W.

Bush's Justice Department to win over pro-lifers, without angering pro-choicers too much. Some thought the upcoming ruling would be a decisive say on *Roe*, but the Court was too divided, ending up writing a confusing ruling in 1989 upholding *Roe*, but making gestures to those who wanted to overturn it as well. No side was happy with the ruling, but Terry was happy to exploit it for media attention. He was by this time dominating press coverage as the leading spokesperson for the anti-abortion movement, and the aftermath of the *Webster* ruling proved this.

While Operation Rescue was at its peak in 1989, raising over a million dollars, with 24 full-time staff, inside the organization, and around them, things were shifting. The few women allowed into Operation Rescue's inner circle, like Juli Loesch, John O'Keefe's old ally, felt that Terry was "quite deliberately subordinating women" in the movement, and indeed, his cult of personality and narcissistic tendencies were taking over. He was not aware of how an increasingly negative public image was affecting things, and he began to isolate many of his closest friends and advisors who told him otherwise. Average rescuers were finding it hard to keep up with the rapid pace of campaigns and arrests, and by 1990 the only people left regularly participating in rescues were hardcore "professional rescuers." Terry was becoming more authoritarian, but he realized that in order for the movement to survive, Operation Rescue had to decentralize in some way.

There were also huge legal threats and bills mounting. Jerry Falwell, who had turned public support towards Operation Rescue, began to distance himself because of all the lawsuits and the increasing militancy and radicalism. The lawsuits piling up gave Operation Rescue a negative image in the eyes of the public and presented them with financial issues. Although their

membership rosters by 1989 included over 35,000 people, their donations were not enough to cover legal bills as the costs for rescuing mounted.

Terry himself was still facing trespass charges from the Atlanta campaign, and after he was convicted and fined, he faced a dilemma between political pragmatism and ideology. He had avoided jail, but wanted to refuse to pay the fine to make an ideological point. With the support of most of his advisors and aides, Terry went to jail for six months, hoping it would be the anti-abortion equivalent to Martin Luther King Jr.'s time in jail and that it would redraw attention to the movement. In his absence, he appointed Joe Foreman, his chief aide, to run the organization. This was a fatal miscalculation, as he and Terry were vastly different people with different goals. Terry was planning for Operation Rescue to become more of a permanent political lobbying force, but Foreman believed this was only a distraction for hard-core rescue, and Operation Rescue never moved into the mainstream political arena.

For Terry, six months in jail was a very long time. Losing his sanity a little bit, he wanted out, and was hoping that someone could anonymously pay his fine and he wouldn't have to face the public embarrassment of skipping out on his martyrdom. This stunned his aides, who saw it as his willingness to sell out to the system. Foreman told him that under no circumstances would he participate in this secret plan to get him out of jail anonymously to save his reputation. He and other top advisors felt like they had a responsibility to make him live up to his word, telling him he had no choice but to stay. Terry became suspicious that Foreman wanted to keep him in jail so that he could stay in power, and those suspicions were confirmed when Foreman sent out a letter to Operation Rescue's supporters under Terry's name, saying that he would stay in jail as a martyr. Terry was totally betrayed, and was desperately trying to find a way out of jail without caving and paying the fine publicly. He felt like he was being held hostage: Operation Rescue

supporters had no idea what was really going on, while Foreman and his allies wouldn't help him get out of jail as they took power. After an anonymous supporter paid his fine, Terry got out of jail and confronted his former friends about the "insurrection" that had taken place. Terry was destroyed mentally, emotionally, and physically, making it impossible for Operation Rescue to rebuild from this point. The top leaders, including Terry, decided in March 1990 to turn over what was left of the organization to Keith Tucci, who had remained loyal to Terry, and Operation Rescue would be renamed Operation Rescue National. Tucci inherited a mess, and Operation Rescue had fallen apart overnight. Many of the local groups that had participated in rescues went their own way, and for some, it was liberating to not be attached to a national organization. However, Operation Rescue had also acted as a pressure valve for anti-abortion sentiment, and the descent of the movement into violence in the 1990s can be directly traced back to the breakup of the organization.

Keith Tucci, now leader of Operation Rescue National, wanted to make one last stand before accepting that Operation Rescue was dead. Many former leaders and supporters of Operation Rescue were hoping that it would reunite Tucci and Terry to save the movement, and Terry may have held this hope too: "Our God is the God of second chances" (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 317), he wrote. Tucci planned on a major campaign in Wichita, Kansas, in the summer of 1991. It would be called the "Summer of Mercy." Inside the movement, rumor had it that Operation Rescue had an open invitation from Wichita mayor Bob Knight, and that the city and police department would go easy on them, which for the most part would turn out to be true.

The new Wichita campaign would focus on Dr. George Tiller, who was known for being one of the few doctors nationally that performed late-term abortions, making it one of the first campaigns to focus specifically on late-term abortions, in an attempt to reenergize supporters and

gain new ones. Tiller had been a target for anti-abortion activists for a long time for his boldness and unapologetic nature, one time screaming at Randall Terry, “Too bad your mother’s abortion failed!” However, Tiller agreed to a request from police to close down the clinic during the first week of protests, hoping that waiting out the storm would avoid confrontation and chaos. This was a fatal mistake -- Operation Rescue exploited this, seeing that they were having a direct impact in closing clinics. This brought new energy, and hundreds of thousands of dollars in fundraising. There was nothing to picket or get arrested for, but there were rallies with building excitement about keeping the clinic closed. The activists involved wanted to keep the electric atmosphere going as long as they could: if they could close the clinic for a week, why not a year? They planned to stay indefinitely, drawing anger from Tiller and the police. On July 22nd, the clinics were going to reopen, and, of course, they were blockaded by hundreds of protestors. The police used aggressive tactics to clear two clinics in the city, attempting to keep them open at all costs. This began infighting in the city administration, the police department, and the courts about what to do with the protestors. The mayor decided police should ease up, but when Tiller’s attorney got a district judge to issue a restraining order, the judge ordered federal marshals to keep the clinic entrance open. This was the first time federal law enforcement had to intervene in anti-abortion activity. The police and judge took Operation Rescue’s word that they would not violate the order, but with the protests starting to receive national attention, it was unsurprising that they did.

By the fourth week of protests, 66 more protestors had been arrested, and the judge was furious. Both Terry and Tucci left Wichita on August 7th, but the next day Joe Foreman arrived and picked up where they had left off. Clinic blockades began again on the 9th, this time including children sitting down in front of a car that was attempting to enter the parking lot. On

August 20th, a few dozen activists scaled the fence into a clinic parking lot. These incidents convinced authorities that “patience and tolerance” were no longer going to work, and it was the final straw for Judge Kelly, who fined and put all of Operation Rescue’s major leaders in jail.

The “Summer of Mercy” ended on August 25th with a rally drawing 25,000 people. Though the campaign had ended, they could overall claim victory. They had been successful in shutting down clinics and drawing attention to their movement for several weeks. However, they were unable to turn this brief success into Operation Rescue’s return. In April 1992, a regional subset of Operation Rescue hosted the “Spring of Life” in Buffalo, New York, totaling 194 arrests, but the campaign failed to live up to the hype of previous Operation Rescue events (Manegold, 1992). A few other unsuccessful campaigns sprang up around the country, but they were still unable to win over religious and political leaders. As Terry put it, “The window of opportunity was closed” (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 335). However, Operation Rescue’s legacy lived on. They were responsible for, in just three years, “the incorporation of confrontational social protest as an accepted strategy of the general pro-life movement” (Steiner, 2006). Their activities led to the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act in the mid-1990s, serving a final blow to their civil disobedience tactics. Most importantly, Operation Rescue’s legacy lived on in the violence that sprang up in its absence.

### **VIII. Turn to Violence**

Up until this point I have focused on one side of the direct action anti-abortion movement - the side that believes in civil disobedience. This side has a clear history with specific organizations. The other side, those who believe in the use of violence up to and including murder, is far murkier and more complex. There are no official organizations, no uniform beliefs,



but there are loose networks of individuals who influence each other to commit these acts. What causes someone to belong to this branch of the movement, instead of the civil disobedience branch? It is vital to examine the differences between civil disobedience and violence and the sociological reasons for turning to each.

Classical civil disobedience is acting to violate the specific unjust law you are protesting. In the case of abortion, this isn't exactly possible, as no law compels abortion, but activists engage in a version of civil disobedience where they violate the law to attempt to prevent abortions from happening. Violence, on the other hand, is seeking to destroy property or people and, often, evade punishment, something that is not seen with civil disobedience. In civil disobedience, the punishment is an intrinsic component of the action. In the minds of these activists, being sent to jail as a martyr that brings attention to your cause is, practically speaking, more important than the few abortions you may have been able to stop by participating in a sit-in, and most civil disobedience leaders in the anti-abortion movement recognize this fact. In the case of Joan Andrews Bell pulling out wires on a suction machine, the machine may have been replaced within days or weeks, but her incarceration mobilized thousands of new activists. With violence, the goal is more singular and clear: preventing abortions at all costs, and, in some cases, evading the law in order to continue the violence.

Why would someone engage in violence, knowing that if and when they are caught they face a severe sentence? Although some scholars (Blanchard, 1993) say that deep religious views are the cause of violence, others, like Maxwell and Jelen in their article *Commandos for Christ: Narratives of Male Pro-Life Activists*, say that this can not possibly be the sole explanation: so many Americans are deeply religious, and many view abortion as wrong, yet so few choose to engage in violence. In their study of those anti-abortion activists that engage in or support

violence, they found no pathological basis, as abortion-rights activists often claim; economic frustrations, psychological issues, etc. (Maxwell and Jelen, 1995). Others see violence as a way of increasing the political system's costs to maintain the current policy (Doan, 2007). Violence sympathizers believe that if anti-abortion violence is regular, costing lives and money, the political and legal system may be forced to change their position on abortion. It is also a way of creating sustained fear among its targets: abortion providers, healthcare workers, and women seeking abortions. If abortion facility workers fear for their lives regularly, that may be enough of a push to convince some to stop providing abortions.

Does violence work? It can when both the tactics used and the objectives of the violence are viewed as legitimate (Gurr, 1989). In the abortion issue, this is not the case. Among those who support abortion-rights, the slight majority of the country, neither the tactics or objectives are viewed as legitimate. Among those who are against abortion, the slight minority of the country, the objectives of stopping abortions may be viewed as legitimate, but the vast majority of those find the tactics (bombings, murders) distasteful and illegitimate.

By definition, the state has a monopoly on violence. Citizens do not have the right to use violence for any means, no matter how strong their beliefs are. In court, the issue of abortion and the issue of violence are unrelated; you can not use your belief that abortion is wrong as a justification for committing murder. However, as human beings, people view these incidents through their value systems. If they firmly believe that abortion is wrong, that it is murder equivalent to any other murder, and that abortion facilities are mass murder mills, then by carrying that ideology to its most extreme point, they arrive at the idea that both the tactics and the objectives of anti-abortion violence are legitimate.

However, these individual beliefs alone do not necessarily push someone to violence; the political and social context around them must play a part too, creating frustration and desperation. When the cause seems to be moving forward, dynamic, and hopeful, as it did in the mid-to-late-1980s, that offers a relief valve for someone with this ideology. Operation Rescue was at its peak, the Supreme Court had given a nod to ending *Roe* in its ruling in *Webster*, and America had a president who said he was firmly anti-abortion. In the early 1990s, all that changed. Operation Rescue had fallen apart, the ruling in *Casey* in 1992 had ended hopes of reversing *Roe*, and America had a president who supported abortion rights. The 1980s had also created a loose network of the most radical activists in the movement through organizations like PLAN and Operation Rescue, and people like John Burt. These factors all together created three key things: a sense of desperation, a belief that violence was a legitimate tactic, and a loose network of individuals who shared the first two points in common.

### **VIII. Army of God**

When anti-abortion violence occurs, the perpetrators and supporters are often labeled mentally ill, lunatics, angry misogynists, or whatever else. When society accepts these explanations for violence, however, we do our understanding of this issue a disservice. Those who support the use of violence have a shared set of beliefs, which they see as consistent, rational, and obvious conclusions. These beliefs are openly shared in interviews, manifestos, manuals, and endless other writings produced by individuals in this wing of the movement.

Those few individuals who believe in the use of violence (it is estimated to be only a few hundred people in the United States who fall into this category) often call it “defensive action,” “determined rescue,” or “ultimate determined rescue.” First, it is important to state what should

already be obvious: believers in defensive action believe that embryos and fetuses are human life, fully equivalent to any born human. They also believe, as do most people, that the preservation of life takes priority over virtually anything else. To understand the mindset of those who commit violence in the name of this cause, it is necessary to go step-by-step through several aspects of their beliefs. Two works, *A Time to Kill* by Michael Bray (the man convicted of several bombings in the 1980s) and *Mix My Blood* by Paul Hill (the man convicted of murdering an abortion provider and escort in 1994) lay out the main beliefs of this group, to be examined below.

The first underlying principle, necessary to understand how these individuals think about their beliefs, is the idea of “defense.” While, to average people, bombings and murders may seem to be offensive actions - violence coming out of the blue to affect people who had nothing to do with the perpetrator - to believers, these acts are merely defensive, defending innocent life that is under threat of attack. The second underlying principle is the total authority of scripture, and its precedence over human law. Many fundamentalists believe that there is a supreme Moral Law that, when it conflicts with human-made laws, must take precedence, and believers must follow the Bible above all else. Believers interpret the Bible, and Jesus’s message, as a forceful preservation of justice and mercy. Biblically, death is said to be a suitable punishment for murder, so believers see this as a suitable justification for its application in modern society.

Preceding from those two underlying principles, believers in “defensive action” first begin with the idea that not all force is bad. While in contemporary society, almost all violence/force is seen as wrong, they reject this idea and move beyond the idea that force is wrong, instead claiming that it is amoral. They point to biblical examples of force being used for good and Jesus being supportive of force, including in Luke 22:36, when Jesus tells his followers

to “sell his robe and buy a sword.” In their view, there is a clear distinction between moral and immoral force, and the Bible supports this distinction. They say scripture clearly allows killing in some situations, when it is necessary for defense. Again, as described above, they see defending embryos and fetuses as a form of defense that is justified under biblical law. Immoral force, in the most extreme case, would be murder, the killing of an innocent person. Given that the Hebrew word used in the bible for murder, *ratsach*, is different from other words used for killings that are justified, they see this as defining the difference between murder and justified killing in biblical law. *Ratsach* is only used for illegitimate killings, not those that are “legitimate” in justice or in war; when the 6th commandment forbids killing, it forbids *ratsach*. In their view, killing a murderer is not murder, and is acceptable. Thus they come to the idea that there are some biblically acceptable forms of legitimate killing.

Generally, even if mainstream society accepts that there are specific situations where killing is necessary - killing a terrorist, for example - most people believe that these situations must have clear justifications and explanation, and even then they still may be morally questionable. Believers in “defensive action” turn this idea around on its head, proclaiming that they do not have to justify using force; rather, those not using it must justify its absence. This framework creates a new standard of right and wrong, where there is a duty to take action, and those not taking action are committing a sin. This springs from the belief that if something is a duty under God’s law, this duty cannot be removed by any government, must be upheld totally, and believers must conform all other standards of morality to fit this duty. This belief also ties in to the Christian debate of faith versus works: as convicted murderer Paul Hill put it: “faith that abortion is murder is dead unless it is put to work by upholding the duty to resist murder” (Hill, 2003). A common and straightforward criticism of these beliefs is that Christianity is a pacifist

religion, but believers reject that idea and point to biblical examples of “defensive action” and support of the use of force, including Genesis 9:6 -- *“Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed.”* This verse is key in the support of defensive action among fundamentalist Christians, as they see it as a defense of killing those who are performing abortions.

Another important piece of the “defensive action” beliefs is the sense of urgency around using violence, and the idea that it is necessary to prevent imminent harm from taking place. Given that these individuals believe they are defending the lives of those about to be killed, they believe that the imminent threat of harm (the abortions taking place) justifies the use of force. Those who have participated in violence say they felt a clear sense of urgency, believing that the targets of their violence were about to participate in dozens of murders. Cathy Ramey, who has written pamphlets in support of the use of violence, puts it like this:

*“All three abortionists (David Gunn, George Tiller, and John Britton) are known murderers in the biblical sense, and all three were scheduled to kill again and again. They had advertised heavily, committed finances to enable their killing through use of facilities and staff, and they were known for killing habitually. The actions of the shooters, I argue, amounted to nothing more than providing a defense for innocent peoples “the Unborn” who were going to be killed by an unjust aggressor.”* (Ramey, 1995)

She goes on to say that “imminent” refers to the certainty that the targets would continue to perform abortions, rather than a specific timeframe. Her conclusion is that the use of force is therefore justified as the immediate necessary action to save someone from imminent harm. She also emphasizes that those who use violence are preventing actions, not punishing their targets for those actions. As Ramey says, *“A defensive action is one aimed at preventing a wrong which is going to be committed rather than punishing for a wrong already done”* (Ramey, 1995). In the

first case of the killing of an abortion provider in 1993 (to be discussed later), he was scheduled to perform 12 abortions that day, and his murderer was apparently attempting to prevent this from taking place.

While so far we have examined the moral and theological arguments concerning the use of force, those who support it also believe it has practical advantages, doing a sort of cost-benefit analysis on the best way to stop abortions from taking place. One believer explained what he saw as the five practical advantages of using force (Jefferis, 2011):

1. *It combines protest with successful rescue.*
2. *It is the most effective for the urgent goal.*
3. *It expresses the highest regard for the safety of the baby.*
4. *The most effective and most certain means of rescue is the best one.*
5. *The covert use of force is the best as it allows a shortage of people to exert a greater number of actions.*

Especially as legal punishments increased for peaceful “rescues,” many saw the use of force as a more effective method for stopping abortions: if you would receive a year in jail just for blocking the doors to a clinic, violence has a better risk-benefit ratio.

While some supporters of “defensive action” see their views as common sense, others acknowledge that the use of violence may be “distasteful” and should not be taken lightly, or that it may not be the best method for practical reasons. The 1996 Olympic bomber Eric Rudolph stated in his memoir: “Admittedly there are solid reasons why armed resistance to abortion, or any other evil for that matter, may be counterproductive. But political expediency is not the subject of discussion here” (Rudolph, 2018). As explained above, others see their beliefs as obvious conclusions that no possible argument could be made against. This differs from Operation Rescue, which often focuses on “conversion stories” and trying to get people to “wake up” to their beliefs, which they understand may seem radical, but supporters of violence believe

that there is no possible way to come to any conclusion but their own. Scott Roeder, who killed an abortion provider in 2009, stated that “obviously I did not do anything wrong”; Paul Hill, who killed an abortion provider in 1994, said that the prosecution in his trial was taking on the “impossible task” of proving that what he did was wrong.

There have also been efforts made to translate these moral and theological justifications for violence into legal ones, specifically what is known as the necessity defense. As described earlier, the necessity defense is a legal argument that the action the person took was necessary to avoid harm to themselves or others; i.e., that they acted out of necessity. While this defense has been presented several times in both violent and non-violent contexts, few courts, and none in situations of violence, have accepted that the actions the defendants are charged with were necessary to stop the “imminent harm” of abortions.” A law student named Michael Hirsh wrote a thesis attempting to defend the killing of Dr. David Gunn, and attempted unsuccessfully to use it in Hill’s legal defense.

Lastly, similar to the mainstream anti-abortion movement, individuals who support violence often rely on comparing abortion to the Holocaust and to American slavery. However, while mainstream figures make these comparisons to shock people and grab attention, those who believe in violence are serious about the comparison, making the argument that the use of force would have been and was justified in both of those cases, therefore it is also justified in the case of abortion. A strong influence for many in this branch of the movement is John Brown, whose violent raid to free slaves is an inspiration for the force with which they believe they should act to stop abortions. Paul Hill, convicted of killing an abortion provider and his escort, even titled his memoir written from death row “Mix My Blood with the Blood of the Unborn,” a reference to Brown’s speech before his execution by hanging.



The belief system described above is central to the mysterious organization known as the “Army of God.” This organization has no structure, no conventions, no membership cards, but all who claim to belong to it are tied together only by the above ideology. While not all who participate in violence invoke the name “Army of God,” even those who do not use this name almost always have ties to others in the Army of God network, or have been influenced in some way by Army of God beliefs.

Now that I have examined the belief system of those who participate in and support violence, it is time to turn to the real-life incidents that result from this belief system. There is a blurry line as to where violence begins, but here I will include arsons, bombings, shootings, and anything else that is intended to scare its targets or endanger their lives.

The first arsons began in 1976, and the first bombings occurred in 1978, with 4 incidents of bombings or attempted bombings in Ohio, Vermont, and Iowa, each causing minimal or no damage. Things changed in 1982, when, as described previously, three men kidnapped an abortion provider and his wife, holding them hostage for a week until the doctor told them he would stop providing abortions. The men had also previously committed two arsons and a bombing in other states. They claimed to be from the Army of God, the first time this name was used in association with violence. It is still unknown how the men were connected to other possible Army of God members, or what exactly the Army of God referred to at this point, but it brought the name into the news cycle and caught the attention of law enforcement.<sup>12</sup>

There were 25 bombing or arsons committed between 1977 and 1983, but violence picked up in the mid-1980s. 1984 was a major year for the non-violent branch of the movement: John Ryan and Joe Scheidler were gaining steam in the Midwest, John O’Keefe was organizing

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<sup>12</sup> In the news Don Benny Anderson (the leader of the three) was referred to as the leader of the Army of God. The Army of God doesn’t have a leader, and if they did it wouldn’t be Anderson, who for all intents and purposes was just using the name. In my opinion, this reflects the lack of understanding at the time of the AOG network.

his biggest sit-in ever, and Michael Bray, Kenneth Shields, and Thomas Spinks bombed clinics throughout the mid-Atlantic. In a few of their bombings, the men left “AOG” markings at the scene, or called in to newspapers claiming responsibility on behalf of the Army of God. Taking place in the nation’s capital, the bombings attracted much press attention to the surge of anti-abortion violence and the mysterious “Army of God”.

At the same time, another group of radicals were organizing their own bombing campaign. In Pensacola, Florida, four young people: Jimmy and Kathy Simmons, Matt Goldsby, and Kaye Wiggins planned to bomb the Ladies Center abortion clinic. On June 25, they did so, and were able to get away without being caught. The clinic reopened in August at a new location due to the damage it had suffered in the June bombing, but the foursome, calling their plan the “Gideon Project,” after a biblical story, decided they would bomb all three of Pensacola’s abortion clinics on Christmas, calling it a “birthday present for Jesus.” They were deeply religious, and felt that God was calling them to commit the bombings, and that not being caught in June was a sign they should go bigger. All three bombs exploded, causing confusion and chaos among Pensacola law enforcement. The clinics suffered varying degrees of damage, but damages were estimated at \$700,000 to \$900,000. One important note is that the bombers had gotten close with John Burt, a local picketer and activist. According to interviews with Goldsby’s former roommate, Burt had radicalized them and possibly encouraged the bombings: “he meets John Burt and within a few months he turns into a terrorist... And Matt’s not the only one. The pattern always seems to be the same. I know of at least six people now... who have come to meet John Burt and within weeks or months turn into a terrorist for Jesus” (Reiter, 2000).

The Gideon Project bombers, Matt Goldsby and Jimmy Simmons, got 10 years each, and Kaye Wiggins and Kathy Simmons got 5 years each, attempting to claim they did not know what

Goldsby and Simmons were planning. Coming just a few weeks after the bombings led by Michael Bray, the bombings received a lot of press attention. John Burt used the trial to gain publicity, making inflammatory statements to the eagerly waiting press. The Gideon bombers did not use the title Army of God, but they were associated with men like John Burt, who in turn were associated with those who referred to themselves as Army of God members.

This incident, and the bombings committed by Bray's trio, were part of a process of radicalization during the 1980s. 1984 was a high point of non-lethal violence; the NAF recorded 30 incidents of bombing and arson. In 1985 and 1986 combined, there were only 23 incidents of violence. The increasing violence can be explained by disparate theories: some scholars say anti-abortion activists were frustrated by Reagan's lack of action on abortion, while others say that those who engaged in violence were convinced that Reagan was secretly on their side. Reagan was slow to condemn the violence, but a few weeks after both the mid-Atlantic and Pensacola bombings, pressure mounted on Reagan to speak out more strongly against anti-abortion violence and he condemned it in the "strongest possible terms" (Marcus and Pianin, 1985). His administration also struggled with defining anti-abortion violence as terrorism, with FBI Director William Webster saying he did not define it as terrorism because it was not against the government and it was not perpetrated by a definable group (Donovan, 1985). Instead, the smaller and less powerful Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms investigated most bombings and arsons throughout the 1980s.

The late 1980s saw a decrease in violence, with no bombings in 1987 or 1988 and only two in 1989 (Jefferis, 2011, p. 28). Dallas Blanchard argues that there is a correlation between the political climate of the time and the intensity of the violence: once Reagan condemned the violence in early 1985, violence decreased. As Operation Rescue and other local direct action

groups rose in prominence, violence decreased; when the legal penalties for these non-violent protests became harsher, people resorted to violence. As John Burt put it, “People are just going to find other ways of dealing with it” (Booth, 1993). In May 1988, a man named John Brockhoeft, who was visiting Burt, was arrested leaving Burt’s house, his car packed with explosives. He was convicted of planning to bomb the Ladies Center, as well as committing other previously unsolved bombings and arsons in Ohio. Burt was sentenced to two years of house arrest, though he denied knowing Brockhoeft’s plans (Reiter, 2000). This was thus the second incident of Burt being connected to violence.

Meanwhile, as Operation Rescue grew, many of those who supported violence participated. When hundreds of protestors were arrested and sent to a detention facility during the Atlanta protests in 1988, this was an opportunity for them to bond, as well as discuss ideology. Many of those who would later be associated with Army of God were in that detention facility dorm in 1988, and the Army of God manual uses many nicknames and inside jokes from this period. While there is no official record of what life was actually like inside that dormitory, and what kinds of conversations took place, many scholars believe that the manual must have been written by someone who was there.

This manual is sometimes the only link between Army of God members, since pre-Internet it was sent around by mail. The manual still exists on the Army of God website, where it is now said to be in its third edition. The webpage states that the manual has an anonymous author and has been in circulation for decades: *“I first became aware of the Army of God Manual in the early 80's, when I was given a copy by another anti-abortionist. Apparently, it had been circulated among anti-abortionists through out the country; unknown to the government, pro-aborts or the media. Just how long it had been in circulation prior to my*

*receiving a copy, I do not know*” (Army of God website). In terms of the content of the manual, the vast majority of it (chapters 4,5,6) is not available, said on the website to be removed due to such content becoming illegal after 9/11. The website also includes a disclaimer that the parts that are available are published only as a historical document, not encouraging anyone to commit a specific action. However, what is known is that it contained instructions and tips for committing bombings, arsons, and possibly murders against abortion facilities.

If the Army of God manual was indeed in circulation since the early 1980s or even earlier, as the anonymous author of it claims, then that means that the Army of God must have been existing underground and unknown for at least a decade. The anonymous author is another mystery, but some clues can be found by examining the “Acknowledgements and Thanks” section in Chapter 2. As stated above, given the references to Operation Rescue’s detention in Atlanta in 1988, this section must have been written afterwards. There are many nicknames and codenames -- “Lobster Jim,” “Baby Huey,” “The Mad Scientist”; most of these are undecipherable to anyone who is not in the group, but a few of them are notable. “*J.C.O’K.* - the most tender hearted man I know” clearly refers to John O’Keefe, “*Joanie the Wondergirl*- for showing no condemnation toward such a one as I” likely referring to Joan Andrews Bell, “*Atomic Dog*” referring to James Kopp, who would later shoot an abortion provider. The few nicknames that can be decoded provide enough information to give some clues about the author’s identity (he refers to himself as the “Mad Gluer”). John O’Keefe was one of the earliest people in the movement, and was most active in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Joan Andrews Bell is not as surprising, since she was at every major event and was a link in the network of pro-life activists. James Kopp is an interesting addition: he was in jail in Atlanta in 1988, furthering the theory that the author was there, and he did not rise to prominence until he shot

and killed Barnett Slepian in 1998. If the author of the manual is a single individual, it must be someone who was involved in the movement since its early days and was involved until at least circa 1990. However, it may be more likely that this section of acknowledgements is a compilation from several contributors to this manual over the decades.

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, then, there was some type of underground network of the most radical individuals in the movement, who were encouraging each other to commit increasingly violent acts. The most fringe wing of the movement was finally brought to light, however, in 1993, when Michael Griffin fatally shot Dr. David Gunn. This was a pivotal moment in the history of the anti-abortion movement that changed its history forever.

David Gunn was the doctor at both of Pensacola's abortion clinics, traveling back and forth between there and Alabama as what's known as a "circuit rider" (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 342). He had been the target of wanted-style posters, as well as repeated harassment from John Burt and other activists. On March 10, 1993, a man named Michael Griffin shot Gunn three times in the back as he got out of his car at Pensacola Women's Medical Services, killing him.<sup>13</sup> This incident brought the extremist wing of the anti-abortion movement into the light, "end[ing] all hope that the movement could regain credibility of influence through nonviolent civil disobedience" (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 344).

The movement's response to Gunn's murder was startling: even nonviolent groups like Operation Rescue offered only lukewarm statements condemning the violence. Keith Tucci, now the leader of Operation Rescue, thought the last resort to save the group would be to totally condemn violence, but others disagreed and the movement split into several regional groups with varying names (Operation Save America, Operation Rescue West, etc.). The fringe wing of the

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<sup>13</sup> Griffin hadn't previously been prominent in Pensacola's long anti-abortion history, but he had met John Burt the previous year, who had shown him anti-abortion videos that launched Griffin into an obsession with abortion. This was the third incident of Burt possibly encouraging people to commit violence.

movement was now dominated by men like Michael Bray and John Burt, totally replacing its pacifist origins. Abortion-rights groups and members of Congress called on new attorney general Janet Reno to look into the shooting, but the FBI said that, under current law, they did not have the power to open an investigation.

The incident was also an opportunity for more radical activists to get press attention. Paul Hill, another local Pensacola activist, jumped at the opportunity and was soon positioning himself in national television interviews as the spokesman for the pro-violence wing of the movement, saying that Gunn's murder was "as good as Doctor Mengele being killed" (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 345). Many of these interviews pushed Hill further and further, asking him why he had not done the same himself if he believed in the justification of murder so strongly. These interviews would become eerie in light of what Hill would do just a year later. Meanwhile, many of those on the non-violent side of the movement were shocked at Hill's brazen promotion of "defensive action," while others became more radicalized and leaned more towards the pro-violence side. Hill began writing a paper in support of this idea, creating a petition for those who supported defensive action, signed by about 30 activists.

In Oregon, a woman named Shelley Shannon, inspired by Griffin's actions, was quietly becoming radicalized. She had been in jail in the Atlanta campaign in 1988, attended the Summer of Mercy in Wichita in 1991, and had been corresponding with other Army of God-associated people since. She had committed various arsons and vandalisms around the country, once writing a manual for the Army of God titled "Join the Army or How to Destroy a Killing Center if You're Just an Old Grandma Who Can't Even Get the Fire Started in Her Fireplace" (Jefferis, 2011, p. 68), writing under the nickname "Shaggy West," but when Griffin killed Dr. Gunn, it flipped a switch for her and she began believing in the idea of justifiable

homicide. She saw Michael Griffin as a hero and wrote him more than 25 letters in the months after the killing (Bower, 1996). In a document in early 1993, she wrote “I’ve met several more who feel u.d.r. [ultimate determined rescue] is the way to go, including two who have convinced me that God is calling them to that” (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 354). At the end of July, she flew to Ashland, Kentucky to visit John Brockhoeft in prison. Upon returning to Oregon, she began preparing for what she saw as her next mission from God. On August 19, 1993, five months after Gunn’s murder, Shannon traveled to Wichita and shot Dr. Tiller<sup>14</sup> six times in the arms. Tiller’s injuries were not serious, and he returned to work quickly, but the event was more notable for what authorities investigated after the shooting. When they dug up Shannon’s backyard, they found books and manuals about making bombs, versions of Army of God manuals, and correspondence between her and others in the Army.<sup>15</sup> This incident finally motivated federal law enforcement to investigate the possibility of a national conspiracy to commit anti-abortion violence.

## **IX. Terrorism and the Federal Response**

Now that I have examined the origins of violence in the anti-abortion movement, the next piece is the dilemma of defining terrorism. Can the actions taken by Army of God members - bombings, arsons, murder, attempted murder - be considered terrorism? Most academics see it as terror, and generally the victims would agree with them. Many abortion-rights groups, specifically clinic workers and doctors, have attempted to get the harassment, threats, and violence that targets them recognized as terrorism. Many of those who perpetrate these actions actually see it the same way, evoking the Osama Bin Laden quote: “Not all terrorism is cursed;

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<sup>14</sup> The same Dr. Tiller that was targeted two years earlier in the “Summer of Mercy.”

<sup>15</sup> Under interrogation, Shannon confessed that she had helped to write the Army of God manual, but there is little other evidence of this. The “Mad Gluer” (the author) is clearly a different person from Shannon.



some terrorism is blessed.”<sup>16</sup> If then, the scholars, victims, and perpetrators of this issue all agree that it is terrorism, why did the federal government lag so far behind? The FBI specifically has long been unwilling to see it as terrorism for multiple reasons. Their decision is partially a practical political one: admitting to hundreds of incidents of domestic terrorism over the last few decades puts them in a bad light. Perhaps the biggest reason is that the violence cannot be attributed to a specific group, as it can with other forms of terrorism; the Army of God does not have enough structure to constitute an official group, and they cannot prosecute an idea without infringing on free speech. Without defining a group or ideology as terrorism, investigating and prosecuting them is very difficult. This tension was at the core of the federal government’s response to anti-abortion activity throughout the late 1980s and 1990s.

Traditionally, terrorism was thought of as hierarchical, with leaders at the top influencing followers to commit terrorist acts. This type of structure had consistent lines between members that made it easy to map out the structure, and thus to prosecute the group. However, in recent decades, terrorism has moved to a cell-based model instead of a hierarchical model (Jefferis, 2011). The most well-known example of a cell strategy is the 9/11 hijackers group, where all of the attackers were separated into small cells, thus making the terrorist network less easily detected. In this type of structure, many or most of the members do not know the identities of others outside their cell, avoiding infiltration and prosecution by law enforcement. This type of cell-based model is often referred to as leaderless resistance, where members never report to one single leader, instead being tied together by their ideology, not by a hierarchical organization. Leaderless resistance requires individuals to take it upon themselves to commit acts, instead of being directed to do so by a leader. This concept was first described in the 1960s. by Colonel

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<sup>16</sup> This is part of a remarkable and sometimes bizarre self-awareness shown by AOG members.

Louis Amoss, a United States intelligence officer working to subvert Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. It was later expanded upon by Louis Beam, a white nationalist, in the 1990s.<sup>17</sup>

Leaderless resistance and the cell-based model makes defining the Army of God a very difficult task. Jennifer Jefferis, author of a book on the Army of God, says that there are only about two dozen people that can be defined as past or current members, and Donald Spitz himself, who runs the Army of God website and is a central figure in the group, says that he believes there are only about 200 to 300 people who share Army of God beliefs (Schabner, 2004). Investigating this group has therefore been a difficult task for law enforcement; in 1994, Bill Clinton commissioned a jury to investigate them, but it was disbanded 2 years later after not being able to find any concrete structure to investigate. The Army of God has thus been able to successfully leverage the idea of leaderless resistance to achieve a difficult balance: remaining underground while still being successful in communicating among themselves and in committing acts of violence.

These dilemmas: whether to define the Army of God as terrorism, and if so how to prosecute them, deeply frustrated the federal government and the new Clinton administration, who wanted to make legislation against anti-abortion violence a priority after the bombings and protests of the past decade. In January 1993, two months before the first shooting, Representatives Chuck Schumer and Connie Morella introduced the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act. When Michael Griffin fatally shot David Gunn in March, Senator Edward Kennedy introduced a new version of the bill in the Senate. Similar bills had been introduced before, but the two shootings in 1993 pushed Congress towards creating harsher penalties for anti-abortion violence.

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<sup>17</sup> The Army of God publishes an essay on leaderless resistance by Louis Beam on their website, showing a remarkable degree of self-awareness, as well as their links to white nationalism.

The new bill, known as FACE, was aimed at setting specific limits about what anti-abortion activists could do to reduce disruptions at clinics and prevent violence. It outlined specific protest acts that would be illegal, prohibiting the use of force or the threat of force/physical obstruction to “injure, intimidate, or interfere.” FACE therefore made classic “rescuing”, damaging equipment, and threatening or using violence a federal crime. Under FACE, there were two types of actions that could be taken against perpetrators. Criminal cases could only be brought by the Department of Justice, with the possibility of fines up to 10,000 and 6 months in jail for a first offense, and 25,000 fine and 18 months for further offenses. For violence, the fines could be 100,000 and 1 year in jail for a first offense, and 250,000 and 3 years in jail for further offenses. Civil cases can be brought by anyone, opening up the opportunity for clinics and clinic staff to bring activists to court under FACE. In civil cases, the courts can grant injunctions or damages as relief. Both criminal and civil cases would be the basis of several lawsuits in the future, and most importantly, FACE paved the way to establish anti-abortion civil disobedience and violence as being terrorism.

The FACE act was signed into law by President Clinton on May 26, 1994. It would totally change the landscape of anti-abortion activism, dramatically raising the stakes for a wide spectrum of activity ranging from classic Operation Rescue protests to assassinations. Just a few months earlier, in January 1994, the Supreme Court ruled that anti-abortion protestors who attempted to shut down a clinic could be sued under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act. This decision reinstated a lawsuit brought by the National Organization of Women against Randall Terry and Joe Scheidler, charging that they conspired nationally to close clinics (Biskupic, 1994).

The Supreme Court decision in January and the signing of the FACE act in May dealt the last blow to Operation Rescue-style protests by making such activity a federal crime, and subject to racketeering charges and penalties from abortion-rights groups. Some activists worried that the end of rescue would push the radical fringes of the movement towards violence by eliminating the last outlet for anti-abortion sentiment, and this fear would later take shape throughout the 1990s as more peaceful forms of protest died out and more violent forms took hold.

## **X. Post-FACE**

Under Reagan and Bush, the Department of Justice had resisted the idea of investigating anti-abortion violence, but Clinton's administration changed that, creating a task force to focus on the Army of God and its affiliates. Several anti-abortion activists were subpoenaed to testify, and the FBI zeroed in on John Burt and John Brockhoeft in particular, seeing them as vital links to Army of God-affiliated individuals around the country. Meanwhile, in April 1994, Joe Scheidler and the new leaders of Operation Rescue groups met in Chicago to attempt to bring the movement back together. In reality, it was long gone; those who supported violence were firm and extreme in their positions, with no room left for the pacifist side of the movement. Two activists, Joe Foreman and Andrew Burnett, realized that they needed a new group after the downfall of Operation Rescue, so they created the American Coalition of Life Activists (ACLA). ACLA's goal was to target abortion doctors with harassment and threats, and half of their directors signed a "justifiable homicide" declaration written by Paul Hill. This document was crucial in defining who stood where on the issue of violence in 1994, but no online records of it

survive today, so it is difficult to know exactly who signed this pledge.<sup>18</sup> ACLA circulated wanted posters for abortion providers, publicizing their addresses and daily routines.<sup>19</sup>

Back in Pensacola, the clinics had to find a new doctor after the assassination of Dr. Gunn. While the administrators of the Ladies Center at first attempted to hide their new doctor's identity, soon it was revealed that it was Dr. John Britton. Worrying for his safety, local couple James and June Barrett volunteered to escort him to work. In June, just two weeks after the signing of FACE into law, Paul Hill decided to test the boundaries at the Ladies Center by yelling outside. The clinic administrator wanted him arrested under FACE, but FBI agents refused, instead having Pensacola police arrest him for violating noise ordinances. On July 29, 1994, Hill arrived at the Ladies Center early in the morning and waited for Dr. Britton and the Barretts to arrive. When they did, he raised a shotgun and killed Dr. Britton and Jim Barrett. June Barrett survived but was wounded. This double murder attracted huge national attention, and it further split the anti-abortion movement. Most activists condemned it, and the pacifist side were increasingly frightened at the descent into violence, but a few said they supported Hill and his actions. In October 1994, Hill became the first case to be tried with FACE in federal court. He represented himself, attempting to use the necessity defense and explain his justification of "defensive action." He was convicted of two counts of first-degree premeditated murder, one count of attempted first-degree murder, and sentenced to death.<sup>20</sup>

President Clinton condemned the murders as domestic terrorism, and Attorney General Janet Reno became more aggressive in investigating and prosecuting anti-abortion violence. She made investigating the Army of God a priority and began the use of federal marshals to protect

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<sup>18</sup> Some sources say Joan Andrews Bell signed it, but this is (in my opinion) dubious given her publicly pacifist stance and prior beliefs.

<sup>19</sup> Planned Parenthood and other groups filed a class-action lawsuit against ACLA for this reason, attempting to link them to the eruption of murders of providers throughout the 1990s.

<sup>20</sup> He was finally executed in September 2003.

clinics when needed. Army of God members continued to be subpoenaed to testify to the grand jury, but they could not find evidence of a conspiracy. The investigation was looking for a conspiracy -- organizational ties -- but as described above, the Army of God is held together by ideological ties, and members rarely communicate. Additionally, the new FACE law did not offer much support to the investigation, since it only allowed prosecution and civil cases after the fact; it did not provide justification for investigating people or groups that had not yet committed any crimes.

However, Army of God members continued to commit violence, including two more murders before the end of 1994. On December 30, 1994, 22-year-old John Salvi III shot four people in the waiting room of a Planned Parenthood in Massachusetts, killing one receptionist. He then drove to another clinic in the same area and did the same, killing another receptionist and wounding two more people. The next day, he drove hundreds of miles to Norfolk, Virginia, where he shot at a clinic and was quickly arrested. The strange logistics of his shooting spree are notable: why drive so far and bypass so many other clinics to target this specific clinic in Virginia? The clinic he shot at had been a target for Army of God members before, including Michael Bray and Donald Spitz, some of the most prominent and most influential members. When Salvi was arrested, he had Spitz's unlisted phone number in his possession (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 368). Spitz denied knowing Salvi, but the evidence clearly pointed towards Spitz having strong influence on Salvi.

In all, 1994 was a major year for the violent wing of the movement. As Shelley Shannon herself put it from prison:

*“For the ARMY OF GOD, 1994 was a pretty great year. Paul Hill performed a termination procedure on an abortionist and his accomplice, and may be put to death for his*

*obedience to God, a most honorable way for a Christian to die... The year ended with a big bang thanks to John Salvi III. I have to admire his determination...*” (Risen and Thomas, 1998, p. 368).

The Department of Justice’s conspiracy investigation continued through 1995, but they were unable to produce any indictments due to the lack of evidence of a national conspiracy. Meanwhile, the Army of God was growing larger and more transparent. In 1996, Michael Bray, the man convicted of bombing clinics in the mid-Atlantic in the 1980s and the author of a major Army of God work, *A Time to Kill*, began sponsoring the “White Rose Banquet.” Bray also ran the Capitol Area Christian News, which kept supporters updated on the Army of God and anti-abortion violence. The White Rose Banquet was an event held in a hotel outside of Washington, D.C., attended by all the major Army of God members and supporters. The goal of the event is to support those who have committed anti-abortion violence, and speeches or writings are often read by those who are serving time in prison for their actions. One White Rose Banquet included the auctioning off of a scarf knitted by Shelley Shannon in prison. This event is a major opportunity for Army of God affiliates to meet each other and discuss their ideology, allowing them to form relationships with others around the country. Its existence also defies the idea of leaderless resistance in some way: in leaderless resistance, members rarely communicate, but the Army of God sponsors a whole event for members to meet each other in person. This exemplifies the difficulty of categorizing the Army of God.

Since the 1990s, the Army of God has also had an official website, maintained by Donald Spitz, the man who was close friends with Paul Hill and often portrays himself as the spokesman for the Army of God. The Army of God website is full of Bible verses and pictures of what are claimed to be aborted fetuses; it also contains writings, messages, and stories of people who have

committed anti-abortion violence. These people are listed under various pages as “Heroes of the Faith” or “Prisoners of Christ.” Spitz says he knows many of the people on these lists, but welcomes suggestions from people in his network who may know someone “deserving.” The website also includes the infamous Army of God manual, as well as two defensive action statements, the first of which was created by Paul Hill after the murder of Dr. Gunn. The second statement was created after Hill shot Dr. Britton and Jim Barrett. These statements are signed by about 20 of the most prominent Army of God activists.

The 1990s would end with more violence. At the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, a bomb went off, killing one person. In 1997, a clinic in the Atlanta suburbs was bombed, later that year, a lesbian bar, and then the next year, a clinic in Birmingham, killing a security guard and seriously wounding a nurse. The bombings would set off a five-year manhunt for Eric Robert Rudolph in the mountains of Western North Carolina. Rudolph was eventually caught in 2003, and pled guilty to the bombings, stating that he felt bombing the abortion clinics was a “moral duty” (Dewan, 2005). President Clinton denounced Rudolph’s action as terrorism. After these bombings and the shootings of the earlier 1990s, ideology became as important as actions in defining what was considered terrorism.

On October 23, 1998, another murder took place. Dr. Barnett Slepian, a New York doctor who provided abortions, was shot through the window of his home and died two hours later. Kopp, like Rudolph, went on the run and was arrested in France in 2001. In previous years, three doctors had been wounded in a similar manner; it is believed that Kopp was also responsible for these shootings. Afterwards, Attorney General Janet Reno dispatched U.S. marshals and BATF agents to protect Slepian’s clinic and his memorial service. She also established a new interagency task force: the National Task Force on Violence against Health Care Providers. This



task force would assist local law enforcement in investigating and prosecuting anti-abortion violence. Bush's administration continued this strong condemnation, with the new Attorney General John Ashcroft dispatching marshals to protect Dr. Tiller in 2001. In total, between 1993 and 2001, 7 people were killed in anti-abortion violence: three doctors, two receptionists, one security guard, and one clinic escort. However, violence was by the early 2000s declining: anti-abortion violence did not become a priority for the new administration, and prosecutions under FACE decreased.

The 2000s were thus a quiet period for the anti-abortion movement until May 2009, when Dr. Tiller was shot at point-blank range in his church by a man named Scott Roeder. Roeder suffered from mental illness, but had also been a close follower of Army of God publications, and had visited Shelley Shannon, the would-be assassin of Dr. Tiller in 1993, in prison. Roeder and Shannon had reportedly grown close as his marriage fell apart, and it seems likely that he felt a sense of mentorship from her; the coincidence of them shooting the same doctor seems too unlikely to be explained otherwise. He was sentenced to life in prison, and like most other perpetrators of anti-abortion violence, stood by his principles of "defensive action." The story brought anti-abortion violence back into the spotlight, with all major anti-abortion organizations condemning the murder. Notably, Randall Terry condemned Dr. Tiller rather than Scott Roeder, drawing anger from his former group Operation Rescue, which by this point had become more of a mainstream political organization.

The movement was then relatively quiet again until 2015, when the Center for Medical Progress released heavily edited videos claiming to show Planned Parenthood employees discussing selling aborted fetal parts for profit. The video produced a corresponding spike in anti-abortion sentiment, including violence; in 2014, there was only one death threat towards

abortion providers, in 2015, there were ninety-four. A few months after the scandal, a man named Robert Lewis Dear entered a Planned Parenthood in Colorado and began shooting in the waiting room. As police arrived, he began a shootout with them and shot several officers. In total, three people, including a police officer, were killed, and nine others were wounded. Dear, much like Roeder, had struggled with mental illness, but had also idolized the Army of God and those who committed anti-abortion violence. While being arrested, Dear reportedly said “no more baby parts,” clarifying that he was motivated at least in part by the Planned Parenthood undercover video scandal earlier that year (Coffman, 2015). Dear was charged with first-degree murder, but was deemed incompetent to stand trial. In December 2019, he was charged with 65 counts of violating FACE (McMillan, 2019), but was again deemed incompetent to stand trial in September 2021 (Candelaria, 2021).

Attackers like Roeder and Dear represent a change in the profile of anti-abortion violence. In the 1990s, attackers generally knew each other through networks like the Army of God. They were able to discuss their beliefs intelligently, with Rudolph, Hill, and Bray all writing long texts on their beliefs and their experiences committing violence, combining elements of theology, political science, and history in these writings. These writings then influenced others, and one can see a thread running, for example, from Bray to Hill to Rudolph to Kopp. Roeder and Dear, on the other hand, both struggled with mental illness, have produced no coherent manifestos, and have seemingly not influenced others to commit violent acts.

In terms of the non-violent side of the movement, FACE and the downfall of Operation Rescue generally killed off “rescue” as a movement by 1994. The outburst of violence had also destroyed the reputation of the movement, and split the pacifist branch into those who condemned violence and those who did not, marking an irreparable split in the movement.

However, in recent years, there has been a very small return to rescue among anti-abortion activists. In 2017, John Ryan, the pre-Operation Rescue rescue leader in St. Louis, reached out to Monica Miller, a prolific activist in 1980s and 1990s rescue circles, asking if there was any way that they could restart the rescue movement. Miller decided to adopt the rose, a longtime symbol of the anti-abortion cause for its associations with love, mourning, and childbirth, as the symbol of this new national rescue movement(Liss-Schultz, 2018). In a “Red Rose Rescue,” participants enter a clinic, offering patients roses and attempting to convince them not to go through with their abortion. When police arrive, rescuers go limp in an act of civil disobedience that they say represents their solidarity with the unborn (Red Rose Rescue, n.d.). Red Rose Rescue is therefore closely modeled after traditional rescues, but with a more defined plan of action, as the legal risks are much higher today. “Rescuers” must be prepared to spend money on exorbitant lawyers fees, and still run the risk of serving long jail sentences. The Red Rose Rescue movement has therefore remained small, with no more than a dozen or half a dozen people, usually the same activists, participating in each rescue. Fascinatingly, these rescues have drawn anti-abortion leaders from the earliest days of the movement, including Joan Andrews Bell, who has been arrested multiple times participating in Red Rose Rescues (Red Rose Rescue, 2020).

There has also been a small, but notable return to the more diverse origins of the movement. As discussed earlier, the first activists were Catholics, often with leftist beliefs encompassing anti-war and anti-racism advocacy. New groups in the past few years have reignited this tradition, hoping to make space for anti-abortion activists who do not agree with the conservative and fundamentalist direction the movement took. One such organization is the Progressive Anti-Abortion Uprising, also known as PAAU. PAAU views abortion as being part of an oppressive system created by capitalism and white supremacy. They maintain close ties

with groups like Red Rose Rescue, but they have also began participating in rescues on their own, which they call Pink Rose Rescues. Several PAAU members have been arrested as recently as March 2022 for participating in these events (PAAU, 2022). In their own words, “Red Rose Rescue and Pink Rose Rescue work alongside each other to challenge the status quo, delegitimize child killing, and save lives!” (PAAU, 2022). While Red Rose Rescue and Pink Rose Rescue do represent some return to the movement’s origins, these groups have been given little press and little to no scholarly attention. However, they believe that, despite the increased legal and financial costs, they will be able to bring rescue back to its former height, or at least draw attention to the diversity that exists within the anti-abortion movement.

In recent years, meanwhile, the Army of God has mostly faded out of the public eye. The White Rose banquet seems to have ended in the early 2000s, as did the publication of Bray’s Capitol Area Christian News. The Army of God website is still maintained, but it seems as though little new content is being uploaded, remaining mostly the same since the site was created in the 1990s. While anti-abortion violence having drastically decreased since the 1980s and 1990s, spokesmen like Michael Bray and Donald Spitz are no longer being asked to do mainstream interviews.

It can be concluded that, while FACE did not entirely kill off either the pacifist or violent branches of the movement, it severely upped the costs for participating in both types of actions and thus drastically decreased both violent and non-violent anti-abortion activity.

## **XI. Conclusion**

In this paper, I have traced the development of this social movement from its origins in the 1970s to present day, examining the movement from its beginnings as small Catholic

“sit-ins” to a massive movement of fundamentalist conservatives in the 1980s. I have also examined the origins and causes of anti-abortion violence, culminating several murders throughout the 1990s. Lastly, I examined the federal government’s response to both civil disobedience and violence, specifically the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act of 1994, and how it has shaped the extremist anti-abortion movement since.

This story carries important historical lessons about how religion, politics, and social protest intersected in modern America to produce a movement that was and is complex, defying many traditional categories. This movement counted both devout Catholics and Protestants, and even atheists, among its ranks; it had both far-left and far-right-wing members; it had both those who took pacifism to its extreme, as well as those who took violence to its extreme. It was also a movement that, although hugely successful in some ways, failed to capture its momentum to produce any lasting change. While there are anti-abortion political victories on the horizon, the extremist wing, both the non-violent and violent sides, reached its political and social peak several decades ago.

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