

America's Militant Malcontents

- Aviva Sternfeld

There are people at war with America who are not international terrorists. They live in the United States, but believe the United States government is not a legitimate authority—and they have been known to act on their beliefs. They openly defy the law and arm themselves in the event the federal government goes after them. These are the militiamen, and there as many as 300,000 such extremists in America. Read the dramatic stories of these people, their constant confrontations with the federal authorities and the sometimes catastrophic results.



The United States of America occupies some 3,794,083 square miles of land. Throughout this vast land mass federal, state and local laws are enforced. In other words, the US government rules over every inch of this territory—with the exception of 47 acres in Trinidad, Texas. No federal official, law enforcement officer or policeman dares step foot there.

This land belongs to John Joe Gray, one of the 300,000 or so “Americans” who refuse to recognize the US government. These people do not respect any form of government authority, do not obey the law and are technically in a state of war with the United States.

Late in 1999, Gray was in a car that was stopped by two Texas State Troopers near Palestine, Texas. As the police emerged from their squad car, they noticed Gray return a loaded pistol to his shoulder holster. They demanded that he present his permit to carry such a weapon, but Gray did not have one. The troopers then ordered Gray and the car’s driver out of the car. The driver obeyed, but Gray did not. He declared that he was not subservient to anyone and refused to budge from his seat.

One of the troopers forced Gray out of the car and a struggle developed, in the course of which Gray attempted to seize the other trooper’s gun; Gray also bit him. The two troopers physically restrained Gray while they handcuffed him and then led him to jail. When the two officers searched the car, they found extensive anti-government material inside. This included propaganda pamphlets and military-style assault weapons.

Two weeks later Gray appeared before a court for his bail hearing. Henderson County DA Doug Lowe argued that Gray was dangerous because of his connections to anti-government militias and that he should not be released on bail. Lowe told the judge that police had found, in the car with Gray, diagrams of plans for bombing an interstate highway bridge in Texas as well as instructions for carrying out terror attacks. He also informed the judge that the jail in which



John Joe Gray has renounced the rule of American law.

Gray was being held had received numerous threatening calls. Anonymous callers warned the prison authorities that there would be serious consequences if Gray were not released.

Gray denied harboring any resentment against the government. He promised the judge that if he were released on bail, he would appear for his trial as scheduled. Judge Jim Parsons was convinced by Gray’s statements and allowed him out on relatively low bail. He added one proviso: Gray and his family were not permitted to have any weapons on his 47-acre complex.

“If the police should have to go to arrest him at the complex, I don’t want them to be confronted by an arsenal of weapons,” Parsons told his court.

Gray posted bail and went home. For a while he lay low, but after two weeks he sent the sheriff a dusty notepaper on which he wrote, “If your deputies come onto my property, they should bring extra body bags. We will fight back.”

Gray showed right away that he meant business. He fortified the wall around his property, which is 50 miles southeast of Dallas. Together with 15 others, including his wife, six children and several grandchildren, Gray armed himself and insisted that he would protect his liberty at all costs. The group took turns patrolling the property so

that they could alarm the rest of the family if the authorities showed up.

Meanwhile, a grand jury indicted Gray on two criminal charges of attacking a policeman and grabbing a policeman’s weapon. When the date of Gray’s trial arrived, the defendant’s seat was empty. John Joe Gray failed to appear for his trial as promised.

Following established procedures for such circumstances, deputy sheriffs were dispatched to Gray’s home to arrest the man who had jumped bail. When they arrived and found the family armed and prepared to stop them, they backed down from a confrontation. They remained outside of the fence and kept a close watch on what was going on inside.

The story of the man who had barricaded himself from “government agents” and threatened to kill them rather than submit to arrest was soon widely publicized. Messages were sent out calling on “all patriots” to come to Trinidad. They were needed to aid the beleaguered “patriot” who was being terrorized by the tyrannical government men. Dozens of likeminded individuals from across America arrived in eastern Texas in a display of solidarity with Gray. They took up positions at the entrance to Gray’s sprawling ranch and prepared to fight off any attempt by the authorities to arrest their newly crowned hero.

Of course, reporters were soon gathered there to cover the story. Gray spoke to them saying, “We are afraid of no one. We believe in an eye for an eye and a bullet for a bullet.”

In August 2000 three armed men left Gray’s property under the cover of the pre-dawn darkness. They went to a nearby farm where they destroyed a security camera and video apparatus that the authorities had installed on a horse trailer. When they were done, they returned quietly to Gray’s ranch.

A number of Christian civil rights groups whom the Gray family respected tried to intervene. They asked him to surrender to the police and promised they would provide him with top attorneys for his defense, free of charge. But Gray refused to heed their advice.

Militant anti-government people across the country were worked into a frenzy by radio broadcasts from militiamen who severely criticized the government. That summer, radical radio host Alex Jones warned his thousands of listeners that he had clear evidence that federal agents were preparing to attack the Gray residence. Reporters from all over the US converged on Trinidad to cover the anticipated confrontation.

But it never took pace.

Longest Siege in US History

Twelve years passed and the dozens of militants have long since returned home. John Gray was left behind with just a handful of admirers. He remains at large, behind the barbed wire fence that surrounds his ranchland. He continues to challenge the local and federal authorities to dare enter his property and face what he has waiting for them.



The entrance to Gray's property.



Signs on Gray's 47-acre ranch, typical of his anti-government attitude.