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A Force upon the Plain: The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate. By Kenneth S. Stern. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. Appendix, sources, index. 303 pp. \$16.95 paper.

Nine days before the 19 April 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Kenneth Stern, an expert on hate groups for the American Jewish Committee (AJC), warned of just such an attack. In a Washington, D.C., press conference, Stern and other AJC professionals presented a six hundred page report entitled *Militias: A Growing Danger* warning of the “cauldron of disaffection, hate, conspiracy and violence brewing” around the country. They documented murders of federal workers and “anyone perceived as opposing the militia and therefore seen as doing ‘the work of the government.’” Moreover, they suggested that the anniversary of the fire at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, would be a prime opportunity for a militia-style assault. Stern was thus among the few Americans who never thought that Middle Eastern terrorists had parked a truck bomb outside the Murrah Building. Hard as it was to fathom, he suspected that home-grown Americans were most likely to blame.

A Force upon the Plain, originally published in 1996 by Simon & Schuster, and now with a new foreword by the author, tells us a great deal about the militia movements of the early and mid-1990s. Its strengths are its immediacy, its forceful, serious, no-sweet-talking tone, and most of all its detail. Rather than the vague account of militia activity often provided in the media, Stern supplies concrete

information: where major cells of militia activity are located, who the best-known leaders are, what their ideology—from the New World Order and black helicopters to anti-Semitism and other virulent hatreds—entails. For example, he draws clear connections between the incident at Ruby Ridge and the growth of the militia movement in the middle 1990s. Likewise, in the brief concluding chapters on the Oklahoma City bombing, he ties the ideologies of McVeigh and Nichols to those he has already examined.

For a detailed source on contemporary militia movements, none is better than Stern's important book. Because he does not tell us

how, where, or why extremist radicalism originated historically in the United States, or what kind of cultural, social, economic, or political circumstances fueled its fire, we still must wonder why Americans would attack others in the name of patriotism. But neither American history nor American cultural politics is his concern. Stern was among the first writers to get the threat of the militia movement right. For that he should be praised. More importantly, for that he should have been heard.

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