



Rural Radicals: Righteous Rage in the American Grain

Catherine McNicol Stock

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When terrorists blew up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, a shocked nation could scarcely imagine the perpetrators were home-grown. If they were, Catherine McNicol Stock explains, they participated in a long tradition of rural extremism. The arrest of Timothy McVeigh, the alleged perpetrator, gave terrorism a face and it turned out to be the white-skinned, blue-eyed, clean-shaven face of a small-town boy who served in the Gulf War. Networks of militiamen, conspiracists, survivalists, and white supremacists suddenly visible to media attention had been there all along, Stock suggests. They are heirs to a tradition as old as the country itself, characteristically angry and frequently violent, rendering patriotism as intolerance.

As early as 1676, rural Virginians took up arms to protest what they considered economic and political injustices, and the fierce protective responses did not stop with the Revolution. Stock examines recurring themes in rural radical movements, including anti-federalism, white supremacy, populism, and vigilantism. These themes suggest to her some of the seemingly contradictory responses implicit in rural discontent. The politically conservative fear of outside power and authority in the form of government, corporations, international institutions, experts, and the media is juxtaposed with the potentially democratic desire to protect and revive community, culture, and the cooperative tradition. Stock believes we need to understand both the historic roots and the diverse manifestations of rural radicalism in order to make some sense of the action that tore a hole in this country's heartland in the spring of 1995.

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