

**The Lawless Ones:
The Resurgence of the Sovereign Citizen Movement**



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Key Findings

- **Significant Growth.** The sovereign citizen movement is an extreme anti-government movement whose members believe the government has no authority over them. Although its sister movement, the militia movement, has garnered more publicity, the sovereign citizen movement is also growing, is larger than the militia movement, and engages in a much greater amount of criminal activity.
- **Potential for Violence.** Sovereign citizen criminal activity includes violent acts, exemplified recently by the brutal murder of two West Memphis police officers at the hands of a father and son pair of sovereign citizens in May 2010. Spontaneous sovereign citizen violence, especially during traffic stops and visits to residences, poses a significant risk to law enforcement officers and public officials.
- **Harassing Liens a Major Problem.** More widespread than violence is a set of tactics known as “paper terrorism,” in which sovereign citizens use legal filings to harass, intimidate, and retaliate against public officials, law enforcement officers, and others. Most common is the filing of bogus liens on the property of perceived enemies. Though a number of laws were passed in the 1990s to deal with this problem, sovereign citizens remain undeterred and continue to file such harassing liens in large numbers.
- **Exploiting the Mortgage/Foreclosure Crisis.** Self-appointed “gurus” in the sovereign citizen movement have actively been exploiting the foreclosure crisis, crisscrossing the country promoting schemes and scams to desperate homeowners, while falsely claiming that such schemes can save people’s homes. Other sovereign citizens are even brazenly seizing homes left empty because of foreclosures and claiming the homes for their own.
- **Infecting Prisons.** As a result of imprisoned sovereign citizens continuing to recruit and teach their ideology while behind bars, a growing number of federal and state prisoners are becoming sovereign citizens or using the “paper terrorism” tactics of the movement to retaliate against judges, prosecutors and others involved in their case. Prison officials seem to have had little luck in stemming the growth of this movement in prisons.
- **Growing “Moorish” Movement.** Though the sovereign citizen movement is still largely white (and contains some white supremacist members), in recent years a growing African-American offshoot of the sovereign citizen movement, often called the “Moorish” movement, has been gaining strength, teaching sovereign citizen ideas and tactics to a new pool of potential recruits.

The Lawless Ones: The Resurgence of the Sovereign Citizen Movement

I. Introduction

In the summer of 2010, Americans have witnessed a wave of anti-government sentiment sweeping the country. In the mainstream, this has manifested itself in ways ranging from the spread of anti-incumbent electoral trends to the growth of anti-government movements such as the Tea Party movement.

On the fringes of American society, the growth of anti-government sentiment has helped spawn the proliferation of extreme anti-government conspiracy theories and the resurgence of anti-government extremist groups and movements, most noticeably the militia movement, which has grown from 50 groups or so in 2008 to nearly 200 in 2010.

However, there is another anti-government extremist movement that has also grown considerably in size and activity, though this growth—and, indeed, even the existence of the movement—has largely escaped public attention. This is the anti-government “sovereign citizen” movement, which has exhibited a marked increase in activity in the past several years. The sovereign citizen movement is actually larger than its cousin militia movement, and has also engaged in more violent or confrontational incidents in recent years than militia groups have, yet it has attracted at best a fraction of the attention.

Part of the reason for this lack of attention is that the ideology of the movement is complicated, its tactics and activities are unusual, and adherents of the movement typically do not form organized groups that can draw more attention. Usually, the movement operates “under the radar” of public attention; even when attention is drawn to the activities, often criminal, of adherents, the media often does not understand their connection to an organized movement.

Occasionally the sovereign citizen movement does come to public attention, usually through a shocking act such as standoff or shootout. In 1996 and 1997, well publicized armed standoffs between the government and two sovereign citizen groups, the Montana Freemen and the Republic of Texas, drew attention to the movement for a while.

In 2010, another such shocking act occurred. On May 20, 2010, a 45-year-old sovereign citizen with Ohio and Florida connections, Jerry Kane, was driving along I-40 in eastern Arkansas when he was pulled over by West Memphis, Arkansas, police officers running a drug interdiction operation. Kane, travelling with his 16-year-old son, Joseph, a dedicated disciple of his father’s extreme theories, exited the mini-van and began talking to, then arguing with, the officers. Joseph Kane then jumped out of the mini-van with an AK-47, opening fire on the unsuspecting officers almost

immediately, hitting one officer 11 times and the other 14 times, killing them both. Ninety minutes later, after authorities located the Kane's vehicle, a second shootout occurred, in which the Crittenden County sheriff and his chief deputy were both wounded, and the Kanes were killed.

The tragic ambush was merely the latest violent incident involving the anti-government sovereign citizen movement. In April 2010, anti-abortion extremist Scott Roeder was sentenced to 50 years in prison without parole for the May 2009 murder of a physician in Wichita, Kansas. Roeder's anti-abortion extremism was well-known; less well known was the fact that he was also a long-time sovereign citizen. In April 2009, a Wisconsin sovereign citizen, Robert Bayliss, received a 48-year sentence for a two-day standoff at his property in 2008 during which he repeatedly shot at and used incendiary devices against police.

In addition to their acts of violence, many sovereign citizens have engaged in a variety of scams and frauds, some of them raking in millions of dollars, while countless more sovereign citizens have engaged in acts of harassment, retaliation, and intimidation against public officials, law enforcement officers, and private citizens.

The resurgence of this extreme anti-government movement has already been causing significant problems across the country. If the movement's growth is allowed to continue unchecked, further acts of violence are inevitable, putting government officials, law enforcement officers, and private citizens all at risk. An even larger number of people will fall victim to sovereign citizen acts of harassment and intimidation, as well as frauds and scams.

II. Sovereign Citizen Ideology

The sovereign citizen movement began in the early 1970s with a single group, the Posse Comitatus, but its ideology did not really mature until the 1980s, when a serious recession and simultaneous farm crisis created a ready pool of potential recruits. The Posse expanded and a number of other, similar groups formed around the country. By the end of the decade, the Posse had died away but the movement it helped create lived on. During the mid to late 1990s, the sovereign citizen movement received another burst of energy, forming scores of vigilante “common law courts.”

As it evolved, the sovereign citizen movement developed an ideology centered on a massive conspiracy theory. Though different sovereign theorists all have their own varying versions of this conspiracy, including exactly when it started and how it manifested itself, the theories all share the belief that many years ago an insidious conspiracy infiltrated the U.S. government and subverted it, slowly replacing parts of the original, legitimate government (often referred to by sovereigns as the “de jure” government) with an illegitimate, tyrannical government (the “de facto” government).

As a result, sovereign citizens believe that today there are really *two* governments: the “illegitimate” government that everyone else thinks is genuine and the original government that existed before the conspiracy allegedly infiltrated it. They claim allegiance to the original government and disdain the “illegitimate” one. To them the original government was a utopian minimalist government which never interfered with the citizenry; in their fantasy history of the United States, they believe that people followed “God’s laws” rather than “man’s laws.”

Sovereign citizens (adherents may also refer to themselves by such terms as “constitutionalists,” “freemen,” and “state citizens”) make many efforts to separate themselves from the “illegitimate” government. Some will even renounce their U.S. citizenship (by which they intend only to renounce any ties with the “illegitimate” government, not the country itself). Very common is for sovereign citizens to use punctuation in their name—such as commas, colons, and semi-colons—to separate their first and middle names (their “Christian appellation”) from their last name, which many think is their “government-given” name. Thus Michigan militia leader Mark Koernke, when he also became a sovereign citizen, began writing his name as “Mark Gregory,, Koernke.”

Sovereign citizens believe that the “illegitimate government,” largely through the 14th Amendment, enslaved all Americans by creating a special class of citizenship, “citizens of the United States,” members of which would have no rights—only whatever privileges the government deigned to grant them. The government tricked Americans into becoming “citizens of the United States” by offering them privileges, such as driver’s licenses and Social Security, which were actually hidden contracts with the government through which Americans unknowingly gave away their sovereignty.

Sovereign citizens believe that Americans can tear up these so-called contracts, regain their sovereignty and become immune to the “illegitimate” government, which they claim has no jurisdiction over them.

As a result, sovereign citizens eschew taxes, Social Security, and almost all licenses, registrations and permits. Many sovereign citizens even believe that using zip codes is a contract with the “illegitimate” government and thus will use special forms of address that they think allows them to avoid a contract while still getting their mail delivered. Representative examples taken from actual sovereign citizen documents include (names, street names and numbers have been changed):

John Doe
c/o 110 West 15th Street, #20-P
Austin, Texas Republic
Postal Zone 78705/tdc

John Doe
c/o 1379 S. Lipton Avenue #140
Tucson, Arizona state
Postal Zone 85719/tdc

John Doe
c/o 12000 N. Peachtree Road
Grants Pass, Oregon near Postal Zone 97527

Jane Doe
Postal Zone Exempt Non Domestic
c/o: 2300 Everett Rd., T.D.C.
Kapa’a, Kaua’I, Haai’I, (u.S.A.)
near (96746) C. F.

John Doe
2nd Judicial District
4389 W. Ave. #123
Lancaster, California Republic

Jane Doe, Sui Juris
Non-Resident, Non-Domestic Delivery
c/o HC 24, Box 142
Witt Springs, Arkansas Republic
United States of America

The result of sovereign citizen ideology is that its adherents believe the government (including police and the judicial system) has no jurisdiction over them. They can rationalize disobeying or ignoring virtually any law, major or minor. To give a typical example, in April 2010 in Brush, Colorado, after several traffic and other violations, David Hemby told the Brush City Council that he wasn’t subject to city ordinances because he was a “sovereign citizen.” Sovereigns also are attracted to setting up their own parallel governmental institutions (such as their own courts or grand juries or even law enforcement agencies) in opposition to those of the “illegitimate” government.

III. Organization of the Sovereign Citizen Movement

The sovereign citizen movement is unusual in that, unlike many other extreme movements, it is not generally oriented around *groups*. Though sovereign citizen groups do form, and sometimes certain types of sovereign citizen groups even become popular for a time, the default structure of the sovereign citizen movement is that of a large mass of individuals or loosely aligned and informal/ad hoc groups, led by a number of sovereign citizen “gurus,” who provide leadership and inspiration as well as new sovereign citizen ideas and tactics.

The Sovereign Citizen Guru

Gurus may refer to themselves by a variety of terms (such as “constitutional scholar,” “private attorney general,” etc.; the list is endless), often claiming to be some sort of legal or constitutional expert (though there are few if any actual attorneys in the movement, as the movement believes they are illegitimate). Though some may have other jobs, many are full-time gurus, making a living by selling materials and holding seminars. Some will offer their services as “legal consultants,” while others will also engage in scams and frauds. Some do all of these things simultaneously. When sovereign citizen groups do form, they will sometimes be teams of sovereign citizen gurus working together, such as TeamLaw of Colorado, a collection of several sovereign citizen presenters.

The most common guru activity is the seminar, often held in hotel meeting rooms and sometimes attended by hundreds of people, from long-time sovereign citizens to potential recruits. For example, “America Can Be Free” seminars, offered by gurus Tim Turner and Billy Ray Hall, usually with the help of local sovereign citizens, offer people the chance to “free yourself from the debt prison,” for the admittance price of \$405 and one pre-1964 Silver Dollar (sovereign citizens believe that only gold and silver constitute “constitutional” money, so this is a symbolic gesture). They held a “4-Day Super Advanced Enforcement Seminar” in Seattle, Washington, from May 20-23, 2010, then followed it up with another seminar on May 29-30 near Boise, Idaho, which they advertised would actually be held in a conference room of the Meridian, Idaho, Police Department. Similar seminars are regularly held in most areas of the country by various sovereign citizen gurus.

Since the 1980s, some sovereign citizens have even started their own “law schools.” One of the first to emerge was the “Barrister’s Inn School of Common Law” out of Boise, Idaho. It no longer exists, but one of its leaders still runs the eponymous George Gordon School of Law out of Isabella, Missouri. Other sovereign citizen “law schools” operating today include the Texas-based “Freedom School” and the Minnesota-based “Erwin Rommel School of Common Law.”

There are scores of sovereign citizen gurus across the United States. Some, such as Richard James McDonald of California (or “Sir Richard James, McDonald,” as he often refers to himself) and

David Wynn Miller of Wisconsin (or “PLENIPOTENTIARY-JUDGE: David-Wynn: Miller”), have been prominent gurus for decades. Others, such as Jerry Kane, the man involved in the West Memphis shootings, are newer to the scene.

Among a few of the other more prominent gurus active today are Winston Shrou, Sam Davis, Sam Kennedy, Tim Turner, Jean Keating, and Jack Smith; they may hold seminars around the country. New gurus constantly emerge. One individual, Robert Kelly of Oregon, has long occupied a special role in the movement, as the publisher of the *Americans Bulletin*, a bimonthly newspaper that acts as the “New York Times” of the sovereign citizen movement. Many new sovereign citizen theories first see print there.

The most influential sovereign citizen gurus are the ones who contribute new lore to the sovereign citizen canon, coming up with new pseudo-legal and pseudo-historical theories. Most sovereign gurus, though, repackage and repeat already existing sovereign citizen theories, or create variations of them. When Roger Elvick, an elder statesman in the sovereign citizen movement, came up with a package of new theories in 1999 that he called “redemption,” within only months a number of gurus were holding “redemption” seminars around the country, a practice that continues to this day. One such disciple, Winston Shrou of Oregon, has now become a “master” of his own, and a variety of lesser gurus now offer seminars based on his ideas (Kane was one such).

Some gurus, though, have theories so arcane that few others could ever easily repeat them. Perhaps the best example is David Wynn Miller, who has actually created (and uses) a completely alternative grammar for the English language, which he claims allows him to master the judicial system. Or, as Miller puts it on his Web site, “FOR THIS PLENIPOTENTIARY-JUDGE: David-Wynn: Miller's-KNOWLEDGE OF THESE CORRECT-SENTENCE-STRUCTURES-COMMUNICATION-SYNTAX-LANGUAGE=(C.-S.-S.-C.-S.-L.) IS WITH THE CLAIMS BY THE QUANTUM-LANGUAGE-SYNTAX-NOW-TIME-FACTS.”

Sovereign Citizen Groups

In addition to gurus and their followers, sovereign citizen groups do emerge from time to time. Often they are informal groups of sovereign citizens in a particular geographic area, who meet together to share ideas or sometimes host a travelling guru. Sometimes they may give themselves names, such as a “constitutional study group” (not to be confused with similarly named groups started by Tea Party-type activists).

Occasionally sovereigns may form other types of groups. One of the more common types is a group that duplicates, resembles, or emulates a governmental entity. In the 1980s, for example, a Utah sovereign citizen named Walt Mann started the “township” movement, urging people to form their own independent “townships.” In the 1990s, vigilante “common law courts” became

extremely popular in the sovereign citizen movement, with over a hundred forming. A few common law courts still exist today, such as the “Sovereign People’s Court for the United States” in Nevada, which has had over 100 people attend some of its meetings in recent years.

In the 2000s, no one such type of group has predominated. Some sovereign citizens, most notably a group called Guardians of a Free Republic, have tried to create their own “grand jury” system (a sovereign citizen tactic dating back to the 1980s), arguing that such entities can nullify any law or judicial ruling.

One recent innovation is an emphasis by a few gurus, notably James Thomas McBride of Ohio, on a so-called “Three Notary Panel.” This is an expansion of an older sovereign notion that notary publics actually have extensive powers, of which most people are entirely unaware, using the “Notary Protest Process.” Three notaries can form a special panel, or a sovereign citizen may select three notaries to form such a panel to help him or her, and when the panel convenes, it may subpoena people, authorize bogus liens, rule laws unconstitutional, and more. As a result, in some places, sovereign citizens are attempting to become notaries, to avail themselves of this “power.” As with so many other recent sovereign citizen tactics, its advocates often suggest these notary panels can be used to fight mortgage foreclosure.

Sovereign Citizens on the Internet

As is true for most types of extremist movements, the sovereign citizen movement has come to rely heavily on the Internet for propaganda, recruitment, and funds. The Internet is particularly important to sovereign citizen gurus, as it gives them an inexpensive and reliable way to introduce people to their pseudo-legal theories and to promote their seminars and products (such as instructional manuals, form templates, and DVDs). It also is useful for sovereign citizen con artists to reach gullible victims. As a result, an increasing number of sovereign citizen gurus create their own Web sites.

From the perspective of rank-and-file or prospective sovereign citizens, the Internet is full of discussion forums and other venues where sovereign citizens can exchange information about strategies, their own experiences, their favorite mentors, and more. In the past few years, a number of sovereign citizens have aggressively exploited the new social media, utilizing social networking Web sites such as Myspace and Facebook to connect and recruit, and video hosting services like YouTube to market various gurus and their theories. Sovereign citizen videos in particular are becoming increasingly common on-line; many gurus will even put up videos of a sample seminar, or portion of it, to market themselves and their theories.

In addition to these more or less standard ways for extremists to exploit the Internet, sovereign citizens have used the Internet in less common ways as well. For example, they have taken

advantage of the recent emergence of document hosting sites (essentially like YouTube but for PDF files) to upload thousands of documents, especially templates and examples of various sovereign citizen paperwork. It is easy in 2010 to find downloadable templates that allow people to declare themselves sovereign citizens, file bogus liens on perceived enemies, or engage in other harassing or intimidating letters and filings.

They have also turned to the Internet to try to help solve a perennial problem that sovereign citizens face: county and state officials refusing to accept and file their bogus documents. Although unfortunately some county recorder offices and secretary of state offices continue to accept all sovereign citizen filings, no matter what problems they may cause (sometimes out of ignorance, sometimes because of state law, but often out of a fear of being sued), a growing number of governmental recording/filing agencies now refuse to accept such pseudo-legal documents, thus stymieing the harassing or other intentions of the sovereign citizens trying to file them.

As a result, several on-line entities have emerged to accept sovereign citizen filings as “third party recording entities.” The National Republic Registry, for example, out of Mansfield, Texas, bills itself as “YOUR Solution to Hassle Free Public Recording.” GetNotice is a similar site operating from Fort Collins, Colorado; so too is America’s Public Record, based in Scottsdale, Arizona.

IV. Composition and Makeup of the Sovereign Citizen Movement

The loose and unorganized nature of the sovereign citizen movement makes its size difficult to gauge, but it is clear that its membership is at least in the tens of thousands. The composition of its membership is somewhat easier to determine.

Personality Types

Though an individual may get involved in the sovereign citizen movement for any number of reasons, three types of people turn up again and again when one examines its membership:

- **People who are financially stressed.** Whether the stress is due to unemployment, bankruptcy, creditors, spousal or child support, tax problems or something else, the desperation that comes with financial troubles can be a powerful motivator. Though many different extremist movements have tried to take advantage of economic troubles over the years to recruit new adherents, the sovereign citizen movement has an advantage in that it can not only offer people targets to blame for their woes (the banks, the illegitimate government, etc.), but it can also seem to offer relief in the form of a variety of pseudo-legal “solutions” that offer almost magical ways to get out of foreclosure, debt, or other financial troubles.
- **People who are angry at government, especially government regulation.** Some people develop intense antipathy toward government rules and regulations, from property codes to tax laws. Every unsuccessful encounter with the government simply makes them angrier. Consequently, when they encounter the sovereign citizen movement, with its alleged ways to get around laws and regulations, as well as tools of retaliation against government officials, they find the movement very attractive.
- **Con artists and people who want “something for nothing.”** The sovereign citizen movement is full of theories that promise people quick riches or other seemingly magical benefits, from being able to eliminate a mortgage to be able to hide one’s income in a series of trusts and make it immune to government scrutiny. As a result, the movement appeals powerfully to people who are always seeking a quick buck or something for nothing. It also appeals to con artists and confidence men and women who can use the movement’s theories to create schemes to attract money from the greedy or the innocent alike.

Demographics

Demographically, most sovereign citizens tend to be middle-aged or older. Many of the leaders of the movement are in their 60s and 70s. This has sometimes caused law enforcement officers to underestimate a sovereign's potential for violence, as there are fewer elderly violent offenders in general, but unfortunately there have been many armed confrontations between police and older sovereign citizens. The majority of sovereign citizens are male, but there is a sizable female minority, and even some female sovereign citizen gurus.

In its early decades, the sovereign citizen movement was overwhelmingly white. Indeed, a number of its founders and pioneers were explicit white supremacists. Today, there are still white supremacists in the movement, typically followers of Christian Identity, a racist and anti-Semitic religious sect whose anti-government beliefs are often compatible with movements such as the militia, tax protest and sovereign citizen movements. A few sovereign theories have both racist and non-racist versions.

However, since the 1990s, the number of non-white sovereign citizens has grown considerably. The basic ideology of the movement is inherently anti-government, rather than white supremacist; moreover, it is infinitely adaptable to different circumstances. As a result, there are Asian sovereign citizens, Hispanic sovereign citizens, and so forth. Many members of the native Hawaiian secessionist movement are sovereign citizens.

It is among African-Americans, though, that the sovereign citizen movement has really seen growth over the past 15 years or so, so much so that an entire sub-movement of African-American sovereign citizens, who often describe themselves as "Moors," "Moorish," or "Moorish," has developed. The Moorish movement arose in the 1990s in northeastern cities and southeastern rural areas, which still tend to be its areas of strength. Adherents subscribe to all of the popular traditional sovereign citizen theories, but have added additional, Afro-centric pseudo-legal theories, such as the notion that a 1787 treaty between the United States and Morocco gives "Moors" in the United States special privileges and immunities. Ironically, most Moorish movement members have no idea that their ideology is descended from an extreme right-wing belief system created in part by white supremacists (though Moors frequently will cooperate with white sovereign citizens).

The tactics that Moorish movement adherents engage in are essentially identical to those practiced by other sovereign citizens. A few recent examples illustrate this:

- **Detroit, Michigan, March 2010:** A Detroit resident, Andre Frank Hardy, led police on an extensive chase rather than pull over for a traffic stop for expired plates (Hardy also allegedly had six outstanding warrants and a suspended license). Taken into custody, Hardy told

police that, as a member of the Moorish Nation, the U.S. government had no authority over him.

- **Newport News, Virginia, March 2010:** A Newport News, Virginia, sovereign, Amun Asaru Heh-El, was brought to court to face four counts of driving without a license. Heh-El allegedly told the judge that he was not under the authority of the United States, and subsequently left the courtroom during a recess before the trial began (coincidentally, that afternoon the judge had to deal with a white sovereign citizen couple over a different issue).
- **Darien, Georgia, March 2010:** A south Georgia man, Michael David Palmer, after being arrested for robbing a bank in Darien, filed documents declaring himself a “living soul of peace...as a non-Fourteenth Amendment citizen” and a “sovereign Black-a-moor.”
- **Pasquotank, North Carolina, May 2009:** An inmate at the Pasquotank Correctional Institution, Damon Owens-Bey, filed a document declaring that authorities possessed no jurisdiction over him to restrain or confine him as a “recognized Sovereign of Moorish descent.”

A number of African-American sovereign citizens are also involved with fringe religious groups of different types. The most common such group is the Moorish Science Temple, which has its own unusual theories about “Moorish” history that makes it fairly compatible with Afro-centric sovereign citizen ideas. A growing number of Moorish Science Temple adherents are becoming involved with Moorish sovereign citizen theories (the Temple itself pre-dates the Moorish movement by many decades). The Georgia-based “Nuwaubian Nation” is another fringe religion with a number of sovereign citizen members. From time to time, adherents of the Nation of Islam become sovereign citizens as well. One African American sovereign citizen in Tennessee claimed in March 2010 that he was a follower of Yahweh ben Yahweh, leader of the Nation of Yahweh, a black separatist religious sect.

This trend is not, however, limited to African-American sovereign citizens. Some white sovereign citizens also belong to fringe religious groups. In recent years, for example, some members of the polygamist Fundamentalist Church of Latter Day Saints, a controversial and radical offshoot of the Mormon church, have sported sovereign citizen license plates.

Prisoners as Sovereign Citizens

Since the 1990s, hundreds, possibly thousands, of sovereign citizens have been sent to county jails or state or federal prisons. Though imprisoned, many of them have seen no need to curtail their sovereign citizen activities. Some sovereign citizens have continued their paper terrorism tactics

from behind bars, while a number of them have also been teaching the ideology of the sovereign citizen movement to other prisoners.

As a result, over the last ten years, a wave of prison-based sovereign citizen activity has swept the country, much of it generated by “traditional” criminals such as drug dealers or thieves, some of whom have actually become sovereign citizens themselves, with others simply trying some sovereign citizen tactics because they have been told they would work. In the mid to late 2000s, for example, as uncovered by an in-depth investigation by the *Washington Monthly*, a number of inner city Baltimore drug dealers have used sovereign citizen arguments during their trials. One public defender described it as “an infection that was invading our client population of pre-trial detainees.”

Some recent examples include:

- **Marion, Illinois, April 2010:** Daniel Petersen, one of the leaders of the Montana Freeman, who engaged in an 81-day standoff with the federal government in 1996, was sentenced to 7 ½ years in prison for filing bogus liens against three federal judges. Petersen was still in federal prison at the time he filed the liens, serving out the 15 year prison sentence handed to him by U.S. District Judge John Coughenour, one of the victims of Petersen’s liens. Petersen’s full scheme reveals the ingenuity and energy of sovereign citizens. He not only filed liens against the federal judges, but also issued bounties for their arrests. Then he created a phony company and recruited other inmates to invest in it, promising them large sums of money after he collected the money (\$100 trillion, plus interest, he told them) that the government allegedly owed him.
- **Queens, New York, March 2009:** A Queens County court declared “null and void” a series of bogus liens placed on Queens prosecutors who had been involved in the case of Ronald Thompson, a convicted murderer serving a 20 years to life sentence at Sing Sing. Declaring that the prosecutors had violated his “copyright” by using his name without his permission, he claimed they owed him more than \$1 million.
- **Miami, Florida, May 2009:** Miami resident Marlon T. Moore was arrested for filing tax forms that claimed a total return of \$14 trillion. Moore had recently been released from federal prison after serving a six-year sentence on money laundering charges. According to a former fellow prisoner, Moore and another inmate, Willie Cameron, had become sovereign citizens while in a federal prison near Orlando. Cameron also allegedly filed a fraudulent return, but only for \$53,000 or so; he was also arrested.
- **Terre Haute, Indiana, April 2008:** Russell Dean Landers, another imprisoned member of the Montana Freeman, was sentenced to an additional 15 years in prison; Landers was one of three federal inmates who had demanded millions of dollars from prison officials for using their “copyrighted” names without their permission. They were convicted of conspiracy and mailing threatening communications with the intent to extort.

Law Enforcement

Amazing as it may seem, especially given that police are among the most common targets of sovereign citizens, sometimes even current or former law enforcement officers can get lured into the sovereign citizen movement. Though this is rare, in the past few years there have unfortunately been several such incidents, including:

- **Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 2010:** Former Minneapolis police officer Douglas Earl Leiter received a 10 year sentence for his role as the leader of a sovereign citizen/tax protest group called Common Law Venue, which taught people how to use bogus trusts to evade taxes.
- **Las Vegas, Nevada, March 2010:** Jan Lindsey, a retired FBI agent from Henderson, Nevada, pleaded guilty to a felony count of tax evasion for evading \$109,000 in personal income taxes. Lindsey was one of four sovereign citizens and tax protesters arrested by the FBI in May 2009 following a three-year investigation into money laundering, tax evasion, and illegal weapons.
- **Westlake Hills, Texas, November 2009:** A former Travis County sheriff, Raymond Frank, was ordered by the FCC to stop running a pirate radio station from his home in Westlake Hills. Frank had claimed that, because he was a citizen of the “Republic of Texas,” the FCC and the United States government had no jurisdiction over him. He was fined \$10,000.
- **Orlando, Florida, June 2008:** A federal air marshal, Marcus Rogozinski, was convicted in Orlando for trying to defraud a branch of Bank of America with a bogus \$10.9 million fictitious financial instrument that claimed the payee was the “Treasury/UCC Contract Trust.”

Exporting Sovereign Citizenship

The sovereign citizen movement originated in the United States and for many years was present nowhere else. In the mid to late 1990s, however, the sovereign citizen movement and its cousin tax protest movement began to appear in Canada, primarily the western provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. It was both imported into Canada by Canadians who had become exposed to sovereign citizen theories and exported to Canada by American sovereign citizen gurus who saw Canada as an easy way to expand their seminar audiences. David Wynn Miller was one

such American guru who held seminars in Canada, at least until Canadian authorities banned him from the country. As a result, the movement now has a reasonably secure base in Canada.

More recently, sovereign citizen activists have been trying the same thing with regard to Australia and New Zealand. Despite the great distances, sovereign citizen guru Winston Shroul has held seminars in Perth, Brisbane, and Adelaide in the past couple of years. David Wynn Miller has also held seminars in Australia—and has been banned from the country in the past, though despite this he apparently scheduled a major multi-city tour of Australia for the summer of 2010. Sovereigns now have at least a foothold in Australia and New Zealand.

In all likelihood, American sovereign citizens will attempt to export their movement to all English-speaking countries. In early 2010, Winston Shroul visited London; Great Britain may be the next export target.

V. Sovereign Citizen Tactics: Paper Terrorism

The array of tactics that sovereign citizens utilize is diverse and ever-changing. Some sovereign citizen tactics date all the way back to the 1970s, while others are brand-new. Sovereign citizen gurus probably read more statutes and codes than most attorneys or legal scholars, but they do so for entirely different reasons and in very different ways. They look for passages they can misuse, recast, take out of context, or exploit. Any phrase or definition can become fodder for a new pseudo-legal argument.

The most common sovereign citizen tactics fall into the realm of what has come to be termed “paper terrorism.” Paper terrorism involves the use of bogus legal documents and filings, or the misuse of legitimate ones, to intimidate, harass, threaten, or retaliate against public officials, law enforcement officers, or private citizens. Acts of paper terrorism can range from simple and straightforward acts, such as frivolous lawsuits, to more complex strategies, such as filing fraudulent IRS forms alleging that the victim has been paid large sums of money, in order to “sic” the IRS on him or her.

Bogus Liens

Among the oldest paper terrorism tactics is the use of bogus or nuisance liens filed on the property of victims (often law enforcement officers or public officials). This has the effect of clouding the title of homes or other property belonging to the victim, who must hire an attorney to clear the title, at considerable expense in time and money. Despite dozens of laws passed in different states in the 1990s and 2000s to deal with the problem, it still is a very effective tactic, and commonly used by sovereign citizens.

Some of the many recent incidents include:

- **Las Vegas, Nevada, and Orange County, California, July 2010:** A federal grand jury in Las Vegas indicted Orange County resident Thanh Viet Jeremy Cao for filing false liens against federal employees and obstructing the administration of the internal revenue laws. Cao allegedly filed 22 bogus liens in Nevada against a variety of Securities and Exchange Commission employees, Justice Department officials, Secret Service and IRS agents, and four federal judges.
- **Grand Rapids, Michigan, July 2010:** A federal court sentenced long-time sovereign citizen Larry William Wilcox of Imlay City to 63 months in prison, and three years of supervised release, following convictions on mail fraud and false lien filing charges for

having filed bogus UCC liens against almost 60 people, mostly government officials and law enforcement officers. He was also ordered to pay a \$25,000 fine. This was one of the first prosecutions of a recently passed federal law on bogus liens.

- **Grand Forks, North Dakota, June 2010:** Sovereign citizens Michael Howard Reed and Gregory Allen Davis were charged with filing false liens against a federal judge and a federal prosecutor in North Dakota in 2009; Reed was also charged with two counts of trying to influence or obstruct justice. Reed and Davis were members of a sovereign citizen group that poses as a legitimate Native American tribe (see Little Shell Pembina band section). Reed had been convicted in January of being a fugitive in possession of a firearm and sentenced to 18 months in prison on that conviction.
- **Brooksville, Florida, May 2010:** A Hernando County judge enjoined a Brooksville sovereign citizen, Edgard Negron, from filing bogus liens. Negron had allegedly filed \$322 billion worth of bogus liens against various officials.
- **Ulster County, New York, April 2010:** Local officials in Ulster County and the towns of Lloyd, Rosendale, and Ulster filed a civil racketeering complaint in federal court against seven individuals for “harassing, defrauding and attempting to extort” government officials after the alleged ringleader of the group, Richard Enrique Ulloa, received tickets during a traffic stop in Rosendale. After this incident, Ulloa and his followers allegedly filed a series of maritime liens and UCC filings with amounts that totaled nearly \$3 billion. Ulloa was also allegedly angry at a foreclosure proceeding against his property. In June, federal agents arrested Ulloa and another man, Ed George Parenteau, charging them with mail fraud. A third man charged, Jeffrey Charles Burfeindt, was a fugitive.
- **Nampa, Idaho, February 2010:** Fred Covey was convicted for having filed bogus UCC liens against two IRS employees, claiming that they owed him more than \$166 million; he had also filed similar liens against the Secretary of the Treasury and against Idaho State Tax Commission employees.
- **Colebrookdale Township, Pennsylvania, July 2008:** The Pennsylvania Department of State ruled fraudulent a \$450 million lien placed by sovereign citizen Ira Huntington of Colebrookdale Township against a local official and her husband.
- **Sanford, Florida, 2008:** Sovereign citizens Joel and Donna Brinkle allegedly filed liens on the property of four local officials, in addition to previous liens filed against people ranging from a tow truck company to former president Bill Clinton.
- **Dane County, Wisconsin, February 2008:** Sovereign citizen Bryan D. Hoel was sentenced to a year in jail after being convicted for criminal slander. Hoel had filed a \$600,000 bogus lien against a state revenue department investigator who was investigating a

state tax case against Hoel. Hoel claimed that his name was trademarked and that the investigator “violated” the trademark by using his name without his permission. Wisconsin has the oldest bogus lien law in the country, as public officials had been repeatedly victimized in the past by members of the Posse Comitatus.

Other Harassing Attempts

In addition to bogus liens, sovereign citizens have developed a large repertoire of tactics to intimidate, threaten, and retaliate against people, ranging from involuntary bankruptcy filings to a wide variety of threats and extortions to bogus criminal complaints. Some recent examples of these tactics include:

- **Springfield, South Dakota, December 2009:** Ted Alvin Klautt, a former South Dakota state legislator who had been convicted in 2007 for rape (of his teenage daughters) and witness tampering, sent notices from state prison to a variety of news organizations, claiming that his name was copyrighted and anybody who used his name without his consent would be charged \$500,000. This is a common sovereign citizen claim that originated in the early 2000s.
- **Lawrence, Kansas, June 2007:** Two Kansas sovereign citizens, Laura West and the so-called “J. M. Sovereign: Godsent,” were stopped by a Kansas Highway Patrol trooper near Lawrence. According to Godsent, they gave the trooper a card labeled “Sovereign Civilian Police Observation Task Force,” which said that by the trooper accepting the card, he was “accepting a contract” to pay a \$15,000 fee in gold each time he asked them a question. People associated with this “Task Force” have been involved in a number of traffic stops around the country, and, in one case in Missouri, even uploaded a video of a traffic stop, with captions, as a “self-defense” training video.

VI. Sovereign Citizen Tactics: Counterfeit Documents and Entities

Sovereign citizens are some of the most brazen counterfeiters around. They create fake license plates, drivers' licenses, vehicle registrations, insurance cards, identification cards, and passports. Even more ambitiously, sovereign citizens have created fictitious financial instruments, such as "sight drafts" and "bills of exchange;" fictitious countries, colonies, and even Native American tribes; fictitious law enforcement agencies and more. They are constantly engaged in ways to create spurious forms of documentation and authority to help them avoid the reach of the actual government.

Fictitious Documents and Identification

One sovereign citizen fad that has been sweeping the country in recent years is the notion of "diplomatic immunity," in which sovereigns declare themselves "diplomats" and their homes as "embassies." Once they have done so, they will create or procure their own "Diplomatic Agent" identity cards and attempt to use them in various circumstances, such as traffic stops.

Some recent examples include:

- **Charlotte County, Florida, June 2010:** A motorcycle-riding sovereign citizen, John McComb, was pulled over by a Charlotte County sheriff's deputy. Instead of his license and registration, he allegedly gave the deputy a letter of Diplomatic Immunity and a bogus "registration" document from the fictitious sovereign citizen Indian tribe dubbed the Little Shell Band of North America (see below).
- **Delaware County, Indiana, March 2010:** Indiana sovereign citizen Brad Henry petitioned Delaware County officials to release him from annual property taxes because his house was an "embassy." The county did not agree.
- **Kansas City, Missouri, February 2010:** Three sovereign citizens (David Robinson of Kansas, Daniel Denham of Missouri, and Larry Goodyke of Nevada) were sentenced to 5-6 years each in federal prison for participating in a conspiracy to use (as well as sell) fraudulent diplomatic credentials. A fourth defendant, Blake Bestol of Wyoming, pleaded guilty and received a sentence of probation. Goodyke also marketed similar license plates, complete with the seal of the Department of State. In September 2007, Robinson tried to use his diplomatic identification card during a traffic stop in Missouri.

- **Whitefish, Montana, February 2009:** After being pulled over by police near Whitefish, sovereign citizen Robert Blair Young refused to provide a driver's license but instead handed over a 25-page identification document. Later, Young demanded payment from the city because his name was copyrighted and the city had used it without permission; he also made a number of other demands, including a request for a W-9 form for the police chief (who had performed the stop). Some sovereign citizens use information on W-9 forms to file harassing documents with the IRS.
- **Port St. Lucie, Florida, December 2008:** During a traffic stop for a bogus license plate, sovereign citizen Steven Morrow allegedly claimed to be a diplomat, displayed a badge of some sort, and claimed the officer had no jurisdiction over him. Searching his car, police found a variety of license plates and identification cards.
- **New Orleans, Louisiana, May 2008:** Dentist Louis Genard received a 30-month jail sentence on tax-related charges. Among Genard's strategies to avoid paying taxes was to declare himself an "Ambassador of Heaven" who had diplomatic immunity from the jurisdiction of the federal government.

Fictitious Financial Instruments

Because most sovereign citizens claim that paper money is unconstitutional, with gold and silver the only lawful forms of currency, they find it easy to rationalize creating their own forms of paper money, claiming they are at least as legitimate as Federal Reserve Notes. Sovereign citizens have engaged in this tactic since the early 1980s and it is still common today. Some recent incidents include:

- **St. Louis, Missouri, December 2009:** Authorities in the St. Louis, Missouri, area reported seeing a flurry of fictitious financial instruments, including "bond promissory notes" and "private offset bonds." The bogus documents were used to pay car loans, mortgages, credit card companies and more. One sovereign citizen, Kennedy M. Russell of O'Fallon, Illinois, allegedly tried to file a bond promissory note to remove a federal tax lien on someone else, claiming that it should be presented to the Federal Reserve Bank for payment (he later pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor financial violation charge).
- **Ash Fork, Arizona, 2010:** The so-called "Shadow Mountain Bank," based in Ash Fork, created a Web site (as of summer 2010 the site is still in existence) to market "bond promissory notes," noting scornfully that "the idiots out there would have you believe that a BPN is not a proper form of payment." For merely \$2,500, the proprietors will also allegedly teach people how to "become [their] own banker."

- **Nampa, Idaho, 2009:** Sovereign citizen and tax protester Fred Covey sent fictitious financial instruments to the IRS, demanding they be used to pay his federal tax debt and that his account be set to zero. He was convicted in early 2010 for interfering with internal revenue laws for this and for filing bogus liens.
- **Parma, Ohio, November 2008:** Sovereign citizen Jeanne Harrington was convicted of defrauding the IRS with \$10 million of bogus trust instruments. At the time, Harrington was already serving a prison sentence for having used fictitious financial instruments to purchase two trucks worth \$90,000. Her husband, Karl Herrington, had been sentenced to six months in jail in 2007 for filing a bogus IRS 1099 form to harass a local judge.
- **Cheyenne, Wyoming, May 2008:** Firearms dealer and sovereign citizen Michael John Smith received a 36-month federal sentence on tax and fraud charges. Smith used various fictitious financial instruments, including a “bill of exchange,” to attempt to pay tax liabilities he owed to the federal government and state of Wyoming. He also filed a variety of bogus liens and other harassing documents against government officials.
- **Fort Wayne, Indiana, April 2008:** Sovereign citizen Jonathan Dilley was arrested (and later convicted) for using fictitious “private bonds” and “promissory notes” to pay off nearly \$800,000 in debts. He received a four-year sentence.
- **Sunland, California, October 2007:** Sovereign citizen and tax protester Barton Buhtz of Sunland was convicted in a federal trial of conspiracy and passing “bills of exchange” to the amount of \$3.8 million. He and others used the fake checks to pay local and federal taxes and to purchase vehicles, property, and other items.

Fictitious Law Enforcement Entities

Some of the most troubling counterfeit entities that sovereign citizens establish are fictitious law enforcement agencies. Sovereign citizens have declared themselves members of the Constitution Rangers, Republic of Texas Rangers, u. S. [sic] marshals, Civil Rights Task Force, and more. Sovereigns who purport to represent such agencies often have identification cards, badges, and sometimes even accoutrements such as police raid jackets. Using these props, sovereign citizens have attempted to get past courtroom security, to extricate themselves from encounters with police, and even to intimidate or “interrogate” others.

Among recent examples of such items are the following:

- **Eureka, Montana, June 2010:** U.S. customs officials in Montana ordered a Canadian sovereign citizen living in the United States to leave the country after he pleaded guilty to

charges of domestic abuse. The man, Donald Roy Fehr, was also part of a sovereign citizen group that dubbed itself the “County Rangers,” and Fehr had allegedly made threatening telephone calls to a local justice of the peace and had begun to show up at local government meetings wearing a uniform sporting a badge, and carrying a pistol.

- **Kerrville, Texas, May 2010:** Local prosecutors charged two sovereign citizens, father and son, for impersonating police officers. Both persons, Charles Tiller III and Charles Tiller IV, are members of the so-called Republic of Texas, a large sovereign citizen group based in that state. Charles Tiller III was charged with a felony count of impersonating a public servant after he had allegedly identified himself as a constable while trying to order a badge. His son, Charles Tiller IV, was charged with falsely identifying himself as a peace officer for allegedly putting a sign on his vehicle identifying it with a star and the phrase “Bexar County Sheriff’s Department.” Kerrville has historically been a hotspot in Texas for the sovereign citizen movement.

Fictitious Nations, Quasi-Nations and Tribes

Members of the sovereign citizen movement, in order to escape the jurisdiction of a government they believe is illegal, frequently try to create their own fictitious governmental or quasi-governmental entities, largely in an attempt to avoid authority. For example, in the 1990s, a group of sovereign citizens invented a fictitious British colony, the “British West Indies,” and manufactured and sold realistic looking license plates that purported to come from this colony.

In the 21st century, such tactics have not abated. Notable examples include:

- **Little Shell Pembina Band of North America.** Perhaps the most “successful” such attempt was the creation in 2003 of a fictitious Native American tribe dubbed the Little Shell Pembina Band of North America, which quickly spread across the United States. In 2010, some of its original members have dropped out, but the concept itself has remained very popular, and Little Shell related incidents regularly pop up, many of them involving frauds or scams of various kinds (see frauds and scams section). “Little Shell” adherents now use several different variations of the original name of the group, but they are unrelated to the similarly-named Montana-based Little Shell Tribe, which is not a sovereign citizen group.
- **Sovran Nations Embassies of Mother Earth** (also known as Sovran Unity Nations). Sovran is a group that started up recently in Montreal in Canada, but has now spread to a number of places in Canada and the United States, with contact points in California, Arkansas, Montana, and Hawaii. One of their Montana contact points is in the tiny town of Roundup, famous in 1995-1996 for being one of two towns housing the Montana Freemen.

- **United Nations of Turtle Island (UNOTI).** UNOTI is based primarily in east Tennessee, western North Carolina, and northern Georgia. UNOTI has been creating bogus license plates, driver's licenses and similar documents since around 2003.
- **Wampanoag Nation, Tribe of Grayhead, Wolf Band.** This small group emerged in the 2000s in eastern Utah (unrelated to the legitimate Mashpee Wampanoag Nation in Massachusetts), issuing driver's licenses and filing lawsuits against a variety of public officials and law enforcement officers, including a \$250 million lien against a Uintah County prosecutor. In May 2008, a federal judge ordered a \$63,000 civil judgment against four of its organizers, ordering them to stop their "complete sham."
- **Washitaw Nation/Empire.** This sovereign citizen group emerged in Louisiana and Texas in the mid-1990s and was most popular during that decade. It is one of several sovereign citizen groups that are essentially Moorish in nature but also claim "native" status. Washitaw members claim they are descendants of the ancient mound-builders of the Mississippi Valley. Members have created license plates, diplomatic identification cards and similar fictitious sovereign citizen documents. In April 2010, a Washitaw member in Greensboro, North Carolina, Tornello Fontaine Pierce El-Bey, sued the city for \$7 million, claiming that a police officer had violated his rights during a March 2010 traffic stop. When stopped, El-Bey told the officer he was not a U.S. citizen and tried to present a diplomatic identification card instead of a drivers' license. El-Bey also claimed a copyright violation for his name appearing on the ticket the officer issued.

VII. Sovereign Citizen Tactics: Frauds and Scams

For decades, the sovereign citizen movement has been home to hundreds of con artists and tricksters who use the language and pseudo-legal theories of the movement to beguile people into giving them their money. It is not uncommon for successful sovereign con artists to get more than a million dollars out of their schemes; several of the largest sovereign-involved scams have raked in over a hundred million dollars.

Among the most common type of sovereign scams are pyramid schemes, other investment schemes, bogus trust scams, real estate fraud, and various types of tax frauds. However, sovereign citizens have engaged in more esoteric scams as well, ranging from immigration fraud to malpractice insurance fraud. Some sovereign scam artists will target anybody, while others actually primarily target adherents of the sovereign citizen movement themselves, in a form of affinity fraud.

Any sort of debt can also potentially be fodder for a sovereign citizen scheme: student loans, car loans, credit card debts, etc. In March 2010, for example, eight operators (from Oregon, Washington, New York and Florida) of a sovereign citizen and tax protest group called Pinnacle Quest International were convicted of tax fraud, wire fraud and money laundering charges. Among their various enterprises was Financial Solutions, operated by Arthur Merino of Renton, Washington, which charged victims thousands of dollars to “eliminate” their credit card debt. Many victims were forced into bankruptcy after discovering the scheme did not work.

Mortgage/Foreclosure Schemes

Of the many sovereign schemes active today, some of the most troubling are schemes purporting to allow victims to save their homes or property from foreclosure. They are especially troubling because they target desperate property owners and can potentially take their last dime and at the same time insure that they will lose their property. None of their schemes actually have the ability to save property from foreclosure.

Such schemes date back to the serious recession and farm crisis of the early to mid 1980s, and regularly reappear. From 2003-2006 a major wave of sovereign citizen mortgage scams swept the United States, with more than a half dozen major groups (some operating as multi-level marketing schemes so that they had hundreds of “associates”) offering what they dubbed “mortgage elimination.” Victims would pay thousands of dollars to have their mortgages “eliminated” within four to six months, only the “elimination” would never actually occur. Although consumer alerts from a variety of federal and state sources helped to stem this tide of scams, only a relatively few

perpetrators were ever prosecuted. One group that was investigated and successfully prosecuted was the California-based Dorean Group, whose leaders, Kurt Johnson and Dale Scott Heineman, were convicted of 35 counts of mail fraud in 2008 and sentenced to 25 and nearly 22 years in prison, respectively.

Since the foreclosure crisis broke in 2008, a new wave of mortgage-related sovereign citizen schemes has appeared, as sovereign citizen gurus around the country have leapt to take advantage of a large pool of people newly worried about saving their homes from seizure. Many, perhaps most, sovereign citizen gurus have rushed to add mortgage-related material to their seminars. “Our plan is really simple,” explains the Web site of one such entity, the Debt Free Sovereign Trust, operating in Washington state and British Columbia. “To eliminate your debts, we simply assume your debts....All debts arising from privately created money or ‘digitally created’ money can be eliminated.” The cost? Only \$1,000 for “expenses.”

A mortgage scheme in Hawaii charged considerably more. In late 2008, the FBI began investigating a mortgage elimination ring that charged victims between \$2,500 and \$10,000 to attend seminar and meetings where people were given special \$1 million “Royal Hawaiian Treasury Bonds” that they could allegedly use to pay off their mortgages (a sovereign citizen tactic dating back to the 1980s), though they would have to make payments to the mortgage elimination ring for a while. Of course, the bonds turned out to be worthless.

Many gurus do not themselves offer to eliminate people’s mortgages or save their homes, but rather market schemes or instructions as to how people can do it on their own. The gurus make less money, taking in seminar and materials fees and sometimes perhaps acting as “consultants,” but probably believe they face less risk of criminal prosecution.

Some sovereign citizens have been taking advantage of the foreclosure crisis in a very different way: by appropriating for themselves homes in foreclosure. Some recent sovereign citizen “squatting” incidents include:

- **DeKalb County, Georgia, July 2010:** Following an investigation by DeKalb police and the FBI, eight people were indicted for allegedly engaging in a sovereign citizen squatting ring taking empty homes across North Georgia. The suspects allegedly would file fraudulent paperwork on homes in foreclosure to claim ownership, then would post bogus deeds in the windows of the homes. In one instance, a \$13 million shopping center in the Buckhead section of Atlanta was even claimed in this fashion.
- **Missoula, Montana, 2009-2010:** An area realtor discovered that a foreclosed home he was trying to sell was occupied. The new occupant, a sovereign citizen named Brent Arthur Wilson, had allegedly filed documents with the county recorder claiming that God had transferred title of the property to Wilson. Wilson had apparently done the same to several other properties as well. Arrested in 2010 for felony theft and other

charges, he mystified court personnel in pre-trial hearings in May 2010 by using a common sovereign citizen tactic: trying to distinguish between himself and an allegedly separate entity that can be recognized because the words “Brent Arthur Wilson” are spelled all in capital letters.

- **Lolo, Montana, April 2010:** A woman named Jackiya D. Ford was arrested on felony burglary charges for allegedly moving into an empty house, changing the locks, and filing sovereign citizen paperwork claiming ownership of the house (as well as all land in a 20-mile radius). At her arraignment, she refused to enter a plea because she did not recognize the state of Montana.
- **Memphis, Tennessee, March 2010:** Memphis police had to evict a sovereign squatter named Michael Cobbs, who had allegedly moved into an empty property, changed the locks, and posted deeds in the window. Cobbs explained that “man-made” laws don’t apply to him, because he is a sovereign and exempt from federal, state, and local laws. He also threatened to retake control of the property once the police left.
- **Long Island, New York, July 2009:** A Long Island jury convicted sovereign citizen Paul Salamone on fraud, burglary and other charges for a scheme in which Salamone fixed up foreclosed upon homes and rented them out.
- **Chula Vista, California, 2008:** A Chula Vista woman bought a house, only to discover that two sovereign citizens, Maurice Simmons and Terry Lee Herron, had allegedly changed the locks, posted a “deed” in the window, and erected “no trespassing” and “Spiritual Sanctuary” signs. Simmons had hijacked six homes—five in Chula Vista and one in San Diego; he was convicted in August 2009 on 15 counts of filing and possessing false documents and forgery, and was sentenced to nearly three years in prison. Herron’s trial ended in a mistrial when the jury deadlocked and he will be retried.

Some sovereign citizens have reached decades back to resurrect old sovereign theories and schemes to protect property that originated in the 1970s and 1980s.

One such tactic is attempting to use gold or silver coins to purchase properties or interfere with their resale. The theory behind such attempts rests on the sovereign citizen belief that paper money holds no value and only gold or silver actually is valid money. For example, in 2008, three Pennsylvania sovereign citizens—Victor Balleta of Allentown, Michael Proetta of Whitehall Township, and Michael Reis of Bethlehem—attempted to purchase foreclosed property with gold and silver coins. When outbid, they challenged the bids. Proetta explained that the other bidders “made an unlawful money bid in credit in opposition to my lawful money bid. I was the only lawful bidder and therefore the only bidder.” The men might not have been trying to obtain the properties for themselves but trying to hinder the banks’ ability to re-sell the properties by challenging their ownership (as actually happened; it was not until 2010 that their suit was dismissed).

Another ancient sovereign tactic given new life in recent years is the notion of putting a lien on one's own property because of the "sweat equity" an owner has put into it. The theory is that no other creditor can take the property until the owner's lien has been satisfied. As one Michigan-based Moorish sovereign citizen group, the Moorish Republic Trust, puts it, "Under common law, life experience has value. The idea is that you have lived, worked, played, laughed, cried, in other words, you have put yourself into the property, and the property owes you as a result." The Moorish Republic Trust suggests that the figure of \$3,000 per year of ownership is an "uncontestable" figure; they generously offer to help people, presumably for a fee, prepare such "common law liens." However, the courts have ruled that such self-targeted liens are illegitimate.

Most common has been the resuscitation of the notion of the "land patent." Sovereign citizens take historical and legal references to an old legal concept (land patents are how the federal government historically transferred title of public lands to private ownership) and imbue it with the magical quality of being able to protect one's property from creditors and foreclosure. Along with the related concept of "allodial titles," the "land patent" concept dates at least as far back as the early 1980s in the sovereign citizen movement—and has been struck down by the courts many times. In recent years it has seen new life, as sovereign citizens across the country have begun promoting the notion and offering instructions—for a price.

"The mortgage industry doesn't want anyone to know about land patents," claims one Web site promoting the tactic. According to these promoters, "a land patent claim has never successfully [been] challenged in court." How are more people are not aware of land patents? Because "state and local authorities are in collusion to ensure that this information never reaches the public."

Many sovereign citizens have rushed to become land patent promoters, including people one might not ordinarily associate with such schemes. One example is Rita Granberry, a model who helped parley stints on the Howard Stern radio show into a career as a nude model. Of Afro-Italian descent, Granberry recently became involved with the Moorish movement, changed her last name to Granberry-El, and even delivered presentations (one of which was uploaded to YouTube) promoting the notion of land patents.

Granberry-El has a lot of company. In fact, not only are sovereign citizens heavily involved in promoting the notion of land patents, but the idea has now slipped the bounds of the movement and some non-sovereign con artists have also recently picked up on the scheme.

Other Scams and Frauds

Sovereign citizen con artists engage in a wide variety of other scams and frauds. Some recent examples include:

- **Tamarac, Florida, December 2009:** Sovereign citizen Audie Watson received a 168-month federal sentence for running an immigration fraud ring. Watson sold membership documents for a fictitious Native American tribe, the Little Shell Pembina Band of North America, to hopeful undocumented immigrants for up to \$2000 apiece, promising them that it would guarantee them legal status.
- **Seattle, Washington, July 2009:** Sovereign citizen John Wayne Zidar was sentenced in a federal court in Seattle to 30 years in prison for a pyramid scheme he had operated that had taken in more than \$73 million from 3,500 people. Only around \$23 million was recovered by the government.
- **Sacramento, California, June 2009:** A federal jury convicted long-time sovereign citizens James Kalfsbeek and Donna Jean Rowe of conspiracy, mail fraud, and money laundering related to a bogus insurance scheme. Kalfsbeek was the head of the Puget's Sound Agricultural Society, Limited, which marketed (primarily to anti-government extremists) a quasi-insurance scheme for automobiles, taking in millions of dollars.
- **Las Vegas, Nevada, May 2008:** The Securities and Exchange Commission shut down the Las Vegas-based Gold-Quest International, which it said had been operating a \$27 million pyramid investment scheme in the United States and Canada. Its owners, including "Lord" David Greene, claimed that because they were members of the Little Shell Pembina Band of North America, a fictitious sovereign citizen Native American tribe, the government had no jurisdiction over them. Canadian officials also shut down the scheme.
- **North Platte, Nebraska, September 2007:** Dentist and sovereign citizen Thomas Miller pleaded guilty in federal court to fraud and tax related charges related to a complicated investment scheme involving "certificates of deposit" that took in more than \$2.4 million. Ironically, Miller himself was being defrauded by other con artists at the same time. During subsequent legal proceedings, Miller claimed that he was not subject to federal law because he was a member of the Little Shell Pembina Band of North America (a fictitious tribe created by sovereign citizens) and threatened to convene a grand jury to indict treasonous court officials. A psychiatrist believed Miller's sovereign citizen arguments were indicators of a "delusional disorder" and he was ruled incompetent and the charges against him were dismissed prior to sentencing.

VIII. Sovereign Citizen Tactics: Threats, Takeovers and Violence

Sovereign citizens engage in harassing tactics such as bogus liens, as well as a variety of scams and frauds, but as the West Memphis shootout involving Jerry and Joseph Kane tragically demonstrated, they are willing to resort to violence as well.

Indeed, threats and ultimatums, attempted “citizens arrests” and takeovers of government or other buildings, and acts of violence, especially during traffic stops and residence visits, are common among the sovereign citizen movement, making them a serious officer safety threat as well as a potential threat to public officials and private citizens in the communities in which they operate.

In addition to the West Memphis shootout, other recent incidents include:

- **Seattle, Washington, July 2010:** Sovereign citizen Andrew Steven Gray was sentenced to four years in federal prison after being arrested in Snohomish in May 2009 for unlawful machinegun and silencer possession, being a felon in possession of a firearm, and marijuana possession (with intent to distribute). The investigation into Gray had begun after the FBI learned Gray had been shooting at the so-called “Militia Training Center,” a Snohomish County firing range. Agents discovered a fully automatic M-16, 20 other firearms, 4 unregistered silencers, multiple sets of body armor, and nearly 10,000 rounds of ammunition.
- **Monroe County, Tennessee, April 2010:** A retired naval officer, Walter Fitzpatrick, was arrested for trying to conduct a “citizens arrest” of a Monroe County grand jury foreman, reportedly because the foreman had refused to convene the grand jury to indict Barack Obama for treason. Following this arrest, another man, Carl Swenson of Georgia, called for volunteers to go to Monroe County, release Fitzpatrick from jail, and make various “citizens arrests.” On the appointed day, several of them showed up in Monroe County, but made no arrest attempts. However, one follower, Georgian Darren Huff, also a militia member and member of the extremist Oath Keepers group, was arrested and charged with intending to incite a riot, allegedly after he told police he had an AK-47 in his vehicle.
- **Sumpter County, Florida, and Winsted, Connecticut, March-April 2010:** In April 2010, sovereign citizen Brody James Whitaker was arrested in Winsted, Connecticut, after an extensive search. Authorities had tracked him to Connecticut following a March 25 incident in Sumpter County, Florida, in which Whitaker allegedly shot five times at a Florida state trooper while fleeing from a traffic stop. At his first court appearance after his capture, Whitaker challenged the court’s jurisdiction over him, explaining that he was a “sovereign,” not an “American citizen.”

- **Various states, April 2010:** Representatives of a sovereign citizen group called Guardians of the Free Republics mailed ultimatums to all 50 state governors, listing a number of demands, including the vacation of their offices. The group was started by sovereign citizen gurus Sam Kennedy, Tim Turner, Regan Dwayne Reedy, and Tom Schultz, who formed “grand juries” of sovereign citizens in a number of different states. State governments ignored the ultimatums, other than increasing security in several instances. The group has remained rather quiet since.
- **Concord, New Hampshire, January 2010:** Sovereign citizen, militia activist, and tax protester Ed Brown was given a 37-year federal sentence for an arsenal of weapons and explosives in his house during a nine-month-long standoff with the federal government in 2007. His wife, Elaine Brown, was sentenced a few months earlier to 35 years in prison. The Browns and their supporters had improvised explosive devices, assault rifles, booby traps, and 60,000 rounds of ammunition, among other items.
- **Gassville, Arkansas, April 2009:** A Baxter County jury sentenced self-declared “Constitutionalist” Richard Bauer to four life sentences in prison after convicting him of aggravated robbery and four counts of kidnapping for a bank robbery in Gassville. Bauer, representing himself, declared his crime justified because the IRS had stolen his money and he wanted it back.
- **Richland County, Wisconsin, April 2009:** Sovereign citizen Robert Bayliss received a 48-year prison sentence for a violent standoff and shootout at his home in Richland County in April 2008, during which he used guns and explosives against police trying to evict him.
- **Las Vegas, Nevada, March 2009:** The FBI arrested several prominent sovereign citizens in Las Vegas on a variety of charges. One of them, Harold Call, was charged with possession of an unregistered machine gun. According to prosecutors, Call had created an arms cache in a hidden crawl space, where he stored grenades, dozens of firearms, a gas mask, night vision goggles, and supplies. Two others, Sam Davis of Idaho and Shawn Talbott Rice of Arizona, prominent sovereign citizen gurus, were charged with money laundering.
- **Spokane, Washington, March 2009:** Sovereign citizen Ronald Struve pleaded guilty to having an arsenal of illegal weapons and explosives, including dozens of machine guns, plastic explosives, two grenade launchers, dozens of grenades, and more.
- **Minneapolis, Minnesota, February 2009:** Millionaire and sovereign citizen Robert Beale received a 48-month federal prison sentence for conspiring to threaten and intimidate a federal judge with the intent of preventing her from discharging her official duties. Beale and three other sovereign citizens (members of his “common law court,”

who received various lesser sentences) had plotted to show up at the court of a federal judge overseeing a tax evasion case against Beale, to arrest her if she did not dismiss the charges. “I want her to be intimidated,” Beale was recorded as saying in a telephone call. He also said that God “wants me to destroy the judge...He wants me to get rid of her.” Beale and his followers had also placed bogus liens and engaged in other forms of paper terrorism.

- **Miami, Florida, July 2008:** A sovereign citizen group known as The United Cities Group (TUCG), with many African-American and Hispanic associates, attempted to take over a Miami branch of the Bank of America after it refused to honor \$15 billion worth of bogus checks issued by TUCG. Although some of the members were allegedly armed, police were aware in advance that the attempt would be made, and it failed, with two members arrested on trespass charges.
- **Kansas City, Missouri, October 2007:** Long-time Kansas City sovereign citizen Denny Hardin was convicted of simulating legal process for issuing an arrest warrant against an assistant Missouri attorney general. He was angry because she had earlier successfully made a motion to dismiss a lawsuit he had filed earlier in the year to abolish the Missouri Bar Association.