



# Let's Call It What it Is

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.  
Tribune Media Services

Can we finally say the thing we have not said so far?

Last week, a white supremacist shot up a Sikh temple near Milwaukee, killing six people and wounding three. It is considered likely that the shooter mistook the Sikhs, whose men wear beards and turbans, for Muslims. The massacre came a few weeks after a characteristically baseless charge by Michele Bachmann and several other conservative legislators that a Muslim aide to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has ties to Islamic extremism.

The juxtaposition of those two events is emphatically not meant to suggest Bachmann somehow "caused" the Wisconsin rampage. No, the point is that we are looking for terror in all the wrong places. Or, perhaps more accurately, that we are not looking for it in all the right places.

In the almost 20 years since the first attack by Muslim extremists on the World Trade Center, the following things have happened: the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City leaves 168 dead and hundreds more injured; one person is killed, more than 100 wounded, in a bombing at the Olympics in Atlanta; seven people are arrested for plotting to attack U.S. military bases; Dr. Barnett Slepian is shot and killed in Amherst, N.Y.; five people die in a shooting spree near Pittsburgh; the FBI arrests a man who tried to buy ingredients for sarin, the deadly nerve gas, from an undercover agent; Dr. George Tiller is shot and killed in Wichita, Kan.; a man and his daughter are killed in their home in Arivaca, Ariz.; a man flies a small plane into a building in Austin, killing himself and one other. And now, this.

These incidents and dozens more comprise a list maintained by the Southern Poverty Law Center in a publication entitled "Terror From the Right: Plots, Conspiracies and Racist Rampages Since Oklahoma City." What they all have in common is that they spring from motivations (i.e., opposition to taxation, government, immigrants, blacks, gays, abortion and Muslims) that more or less define modern, mainstream, conservatism. So yes, it is time to say the ob-



Leonard PITTS

vious thing no one seems to be saying: America is under attack by right-wing terrorists. And here, again, it is necessary to say what the point is not. Namely, it is not that conservatism equals terrorism. These criminals are fanatics, and fanaticism is restricted to no particular ideology. Ironically, that's an argument to which conservatives often turn deaf ears when it is made on behalf of Muslims, but that doesn't make it any less true — or applicable here.

That said, what's telling is that we won't even call this what it is. When the Symbionese Liberation Army and the Weather Underground were committing violence in the 1970s, we were not slow in decrying left-wing terrorism and requiring progressives to disown it. When al-Qaida kills and maims, we are not shy about branding it Islamic terrorism and requiring moderate Muslims to disown it.

For some reason, though, we are reluctant to call right-wing terror by name. And you can forget requiring conservatives to distance themselves from it.

Rather than see a pattern that grows more glaring every day, we see a series of discrete events — this individual tragedy here, that one there, regrettable certainly, but surely not suggestive of any larger picture.

Maybe this is because the perpetrators of these crimes are overwhelmingly white Christian men and thus, invisible in a nation where danger is routinely defined as Them, not Us. Maybe it's because media have become cowed and self-censoring, reflexively flinching from that which might bring accusations of anti-conservative bias.

Either way, one wonders how we can confront what we won't even name. These plots hatched in the fetid backwaters of conservative paranoia ought to be called what they are. The blood of victims demands an honest accounting.

We have given them a dishonest silence instead.

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# Voter ID Laws Good For Democracy

BY STEPHAN AND ABIGAIL THERNSTROM  
The Los Angeles Times

Without a personal identification card issued by some level of government, you are a second-class citizen. You cannot board an airplane, ride an Amtrak train, buy a six-pack of beer or a pack of cigarettes, open a checking account, enter many public and some private office buildings or even attend an NAACP convention without proving that you are who you say you are. You cannot even qualify for means-tested public support programs such as Medicaid without valid identification.

These requirements have provoked strikingly little objection from the American public. No one argues that it is grossly discriminatory to deprive people without picture IDs access to this wide range of places, programs and activities.

But when it comes to voting, that is exactly the argument. The Democratic Party, the attorney general of the United States and a vocal chorus from the civil rights community are waging war on voter photo ID laws enacted recently in 10 states, laws they see as part of a new voter suppression movement.

In their view, measures ostensibly designed to limit the franchise to people who are U.S. citizens and legal residents of the jurisdiction in which they seek to vote have the real purpose of disfranchising poor people in general and especially poor African Americans and Latinos.

The charge leveled against photo ID requirements has a particularly nasty echo: It is, critics say, no different than the Jim Crow poll tax used in Southern states until the mid-1960s to keep blacks from the voting booth. But the Supreme Court has addressed that issue. In a 2008 decision upholding Indiana's voter ID law, the opinion of the court, written by Justice John Paul Stevens — certainly no conservative — dismissed the poll tax argument on the grounds that the state had a legitimate interest in preventing voter fraud. Five justices agreed with him.

Critics of ID requirements assert that voting is special — a right, not a privilege, and therefore not comparable to things like driving a car or gaining access to the NAACP convention. But the distinction is not so clear. Medicaid is arguably a right for those who are income eligible.

And rights are not absolute. Nine-year-olds cannot vote; nor can illegal immigrants. An estimated 1 million illegal immigrants live in Texas today. If many of them turned up at the polls and were able to vote in the absence of a requirement for government-issued identification, the right of all Texas citizens to choose their representatives might be seriously compromised.

Many of the voter ID laws will first be tested in the

2012 presidential election. For now, no one can say with great certainty how they will affect minority and low-income political participation, and that's a question that deserves further study.

New York University's Brennan Center for Justice recently issued a report claiming that 11 percent of voting-age citizens who live in the states that have passed voter ID laws currently lack valid identification credentials. The Brennan Center also marshals evidence that getting IDs could be difficult for these mostly poor, mostly minority and often elderly citizens. But how many of those who lack an ID actually voted in the past?

Over the last four presidential elections, nearly 40 percent of American citizens eligible to cast a ballot did not bother to do so. It is reasonable to surmise that a high proportion of the people who had not taken the trouble to get a government-issued photo ID may be among that huge group of no-shows. If they weren't going to vote anyway, new ID laws wouldn't affect their behavior.

In the case of Indiana, whose voter ID law was in effect for the 2008 presidential election, there is some data about participation. That was a very good year for Democrats in general, but Democratic turnout rose more in Indiana, with its ID law in force, than in any other state. Georgia, which also had a new voter ID law in place that year for the first time, also had a huge jump in turnout, almost all of it from Democratic voters.

There are better and worse ID laws, and it seems obvious that the requisite proof of identity should not be needlessly burdensome to get; the process should be made as convenient as possible. The Texas Department of Public Safety, for example, provides free election identification cards to citizens who request them. Every state should make acquiring an ID equally easy.

President Ben Jealous of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has blasted voter ID laws and called for a "high tide of registration and mobilization and motivation and protection." If, indeed, the voter ID laws inspire drives to register citizens and get them to the polls (and get them photo IDs), won't America be better off? More people will gain the freedom to watch an argument in a court of law, board a train or a plane, and even buy a bottle of Scotch. Democracy will have been enhanced. Sensible civil rights advocates might consider that, and join the drive for ID laws.

*Stephan Thernstrom is a professor of history emeritus at Harvard University. Abigail Thernstrom is vice chairwoman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Her most recent book is "Voting Rights — and Wrongs: The Elusive Quest for Racially Fair Elections." They wrote this for the Los Angeles Times.*

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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

## Farm Bill Proposals: What Reforms ...?

MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL (Aug. 14): President Barack Obama told Iowa farmers Monday to pressure Republicans — including the newly minted Republican vice-presidential candidate, U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan — to pass a new farm bill. That's the best way to help farmers hard hit by drought, the president argued.

"The best way to help these states is for leaders in Congress to pass a farm bill that not only helps farmers and ranchers respond to natural disasters but also makes necessary reforms and gives them some long-term certainty," Obama said.

We're not sure what legislation Obama has in mind because we haven't seen a bill in Congress this session that "makes necessary reforms."

Congress should help farmers in need. And it should pass a new farm bill, the five-year blueprint for federal farm policy that funds everything from crop insurance to food stamps.

But the president should urge lawmakers to pass a bill that actually reforms the bloated, outdated system of farm supports. Neither bill under consideration does so.

The Senate passed a version in June that cuts farm spending by \$23 billion over 10 years. The House Agriculture Committee agreed on an approach that would cut \$35 billion, but House Republicans were unable to round up enough support to bring it to the floor. Instead, the House passed a short-term measure aimed at drought relief, which the Senate didn't take up. The result was a stalemate and increasing criticism in the Farm Belt.

With only a few working days in September before heading home to campaign, it's looking less likely that a farm bill can be passed before the lame-duck session after the presidential election. The current bill expires Sept. 30, although programs can continue for a time after that.

Both bills are flawed. While they end the wasteful practice of making direct payments to farmers whether they need them or not, the bills leave untouched large swaths of the farm-subsidy system. They also expand crop insurance programs that guarantee farmers' profits and line the pockets of insurance companies instead of simply insuring against losses.

Both bills cut too much from conservation programs, which help farmers prepare for future natural disasters.

But a key difference between the bills — and a sticking point for conservatives — is how food stamps are treated. The Senate bill cuts \$4.5 billion from the program; the House bill cuts \$16.5 billion. We think all government programs should be scrutinized, but we question big cuts to a program so essential to the social safety net at a time when so many people remain out of work.

Congress should provide short-term, targeted relief for farmers who need it. But lawmakers should plow under some of their work on these bills and get tougher on farm subsidies while preserving a reasonable allowance in the bill for food stamps and conservation programs.

And they shouldn't be pressured into a bad bill just to hit a deadline.

## TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, Aug. 16, the 229th day of 2012. There are 137 days left in the year.

**Today's Highlight in History:** On Aug. 16, 1962, The Beatles fired their original drummer, Pete Best, replacing him with Ringo Starr.

**On this date:** In 1777, American forces won the Revolutionary War Battle of Bennington.

In 1812, Detroit fell to British and Indian forces in the War of 1812.

In 1861, President Abraham Lincoln issued Proclamation 86, which prohibited the states of the Union from engaging in commercial trade with states in rebellion — i.e., the Confederacy.

In 1858, a telegraphed message from Britain's Queen Victoria to President James Buchanan was transmitted over the recently laid trans-Atlantic cable.

In 1920, Ray Chapman of the Cleveland Indians was struck in the head by a pitch thrown by Carl Mays of the New York Yankees; Chapman died the following morning.

In 1937, the American Federation of Radio Artists was chartered.

In 1948, baseball legend Babe Ruth died in New York at age 53.

In 1954, *Sports Illustrated* was first published by Time Inc.

In 1956, Adlai E. Stevenson was nominated for president at the Democratic national convention in Chicago.

In 1977, Elvis Presley died at his Graceland estate in Memphis, Tenn., at age 42.

In 1987, 156 people were killed when Northwest Airlines Flight 255 crashed while trying to take off from Detroit; the sole survivor was 4-year-old Cecelia Cichan. People worldwide began a two-day celebration of the "harmonic convergence," which heralded what believers called the start of a new, purer age of humankind.

In 1991, Pope John Paul II began the first-ever papal visit to Hungary.

**Ten years ago:** Major League Baseball players set a strike deadline of Aug. 30. (Both sides finally reached an agreement with just six hours to spare.) Terrorist mastermind Abu Nidal reportedly was found shot to death in Baghdad, Iraq; he was 65. Former United Auto Workers president

Stephen P. Yokich died in Detroit at age 66.

**Five years ago:** Jose Padilla, a U.S. citizen held for 3 1/2 years as an enemy combatant, was convicted in Miami of helping Islamic extremists and plotting overseas attacks. (Padilla, once accused of plotting with al-Qaida to detonate a radioactive "dirty bomb," was later sentenced to 17 years and four months in prison on the unrelated terror support charges.) A cave-in killed three rescuers in the Crandall Canyon Mine in Utah; the search for six trapped miners was later abandoned.

**One year ago:** Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and French President Nicolas Sarkozy, meeting in Paris, called for greater economic discipline and unity among European nations but declined to take immediate financial measures.

**Today's Birthdays:** Actress Ann Blyth is 84. Sportscaster Frank Gifford is 82. Singer Eydie Gorme is 81. Actor Gary Clarke is 79. Actress Julie Newmar is 79. Actor John Standing is 78. College Football Hall of Famer and NFL player Bill Glass is 77. Actress Anita Gillette is 76. Actress Carole Shelley is 73. Country singer Billy Joe Shaver is 73. Movie director Bruce Beresford is 72. Actor Bob Balaban is 67. Ballerina Suzanne Farrell is 67. Actress Lesley Ann Warren is 66. Rock singer-musician Joey Spampinato is 62. Actor Reginald VelJohnson is 60. TV personality Kathie Lee Gifford is 59. Rhythm-and-blues singer J.T. Taylor is 59. Movie director James Cameron is 58. Actor Jeff Perry is 57. Rock musician Tim Farriss (INXS) is 55. Actress Laura Innes is 55. Singer Madonna is 54. Actress Angela Bassett is 54. Actor Timothy Hutton is 52. Actor Steve Carell is 50. Former tennis player Jimmy Arias is 48. Actor-singer Donovan Leitch is 45. Actor Andy Milder (TV: "Weeds") is 44. Actor Seth Peterson is 42. Country singer Emily Robison (The Dixie Chicks) is 40. Actor George Stults is 37. Singer Vanessa Carlton is 32. Actor Cam Gigandet is 30. Actress Agnes Bruckner is 27. Actor Shawn Pyfrom is 26. Country singer Ashton Shepherd is 26. Actor Kevin G. Schmidt is 24. Actress Rumer Willis is 24. Singer-pianist Greyson Chance is 15.

**Thought for Today:** "Action may not always bring happiness; but there is no happiness without action." — Benjamin Disraeli, British statesman (1804-1881).

## FROM THE BIBLE

*[Jesus] entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. Hebrews 9:12.* Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

## YOUR LETTERS

### Czech This Out

Adolph Sejnoha, Yankton

This is in response to the letter "You Have it Backwards" (*Press & Dakotan*, July 25). Regarding communist manifestos:

1. I have seen the faces personally in their own country. The Czech people who voted for a communist regime. (They could have voted for their fine president and had a thriving economy. Instead, they had: A. a sad, very sorry people and a poor economy, with all guns confiscated, and the disappearance of their beloved president; B. sometime

later, the Red Army came in; C. after that, the people revolted and did gain their freedom.)

2. Remember when the Soviet premier told our president: "We will bury you"? (Khrushchev said it) The news reporters have programs every day on MSNBC from 4-10 p.m. showing all lies, misstatements are traced and proven.

Please watch any contradiction to a lie. Example, Romney said "Obama has spent more money than any other president." Truth: Congressional Budget records show Obama did not!

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