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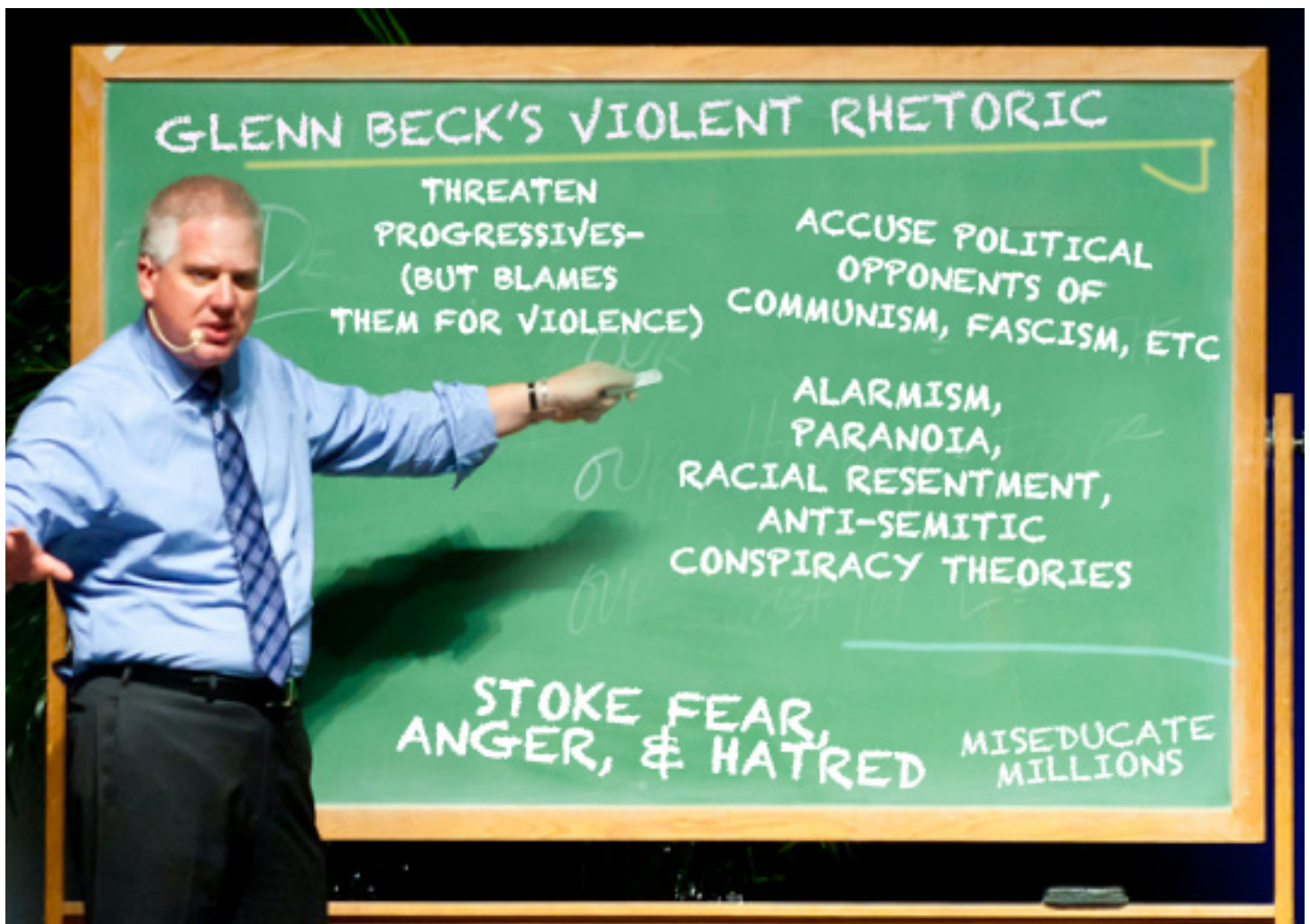
RIGHT WING WATCH



**MEDIAMATTERS
FOR AMERICA**

Glenn Beck: Irresponsible And Indifferent To The Violent Consequences of His Dangerous Rhetoric

Beck and His Enablers Should be Held Accountable



A joint project of People For the American Way and Media Matters

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Introduction

Radio and TV personality Glenn Beck plays a unique and extraordinary role in our political discourse. He's an entertainer who once referred to himself as a "rodeo clown." He's a self-appointed "educator" whose books and "university" are miseducating millions of Americans with false claims about American history and a distorted view of our Constitution. And he's an increasingly messianic figure who claims that he has been divinely anointed to lead the nation back to God.

Central to Beck's influence is the intensity of his fans' devotion to him. And central to the danger he poses is his willingness to stoke fear, anger, and hatred among those fans with a toxic, if lucrative, mixture of conspiracy theories and charges that America is on the verge of being destroyed by enemies from within. In Beck's world, those enemies include not only President Obama and Democratic congressional leaders, but also progressive advocacy organizations, unions, and even churches that promote social justice as a part of their religious mission. What Beck preaches is that these are not merely political opponents with policy disagreements, but agents of evil whose goal is the destruction of America and who will stop at nothing – including the deaths of millions – to advance their freedom-destroying plans.

Beck has also raised the stakes by claiming a divine mandate for his view of the Constitution and the U.S. government. He has not only attacked President Obama's politics, but has called the president's views on the nature of salvation "evil" and "satanic." Beck and David Barton, the Religious Right pseudo-historian he promotes, claim that their views of limited government and the Constitution are divinely inspired. So progressives are not only un-American, they are un-Christian and anti-God. "If we do not put God at the center of our own personal lives and the center of our country, we will not survive," Beck said in August. "The country will be washed with blood and then someone will have to start over, and God only knows how long that takes."

Beck's propaganda traffics in alarmism, paranoia, racial resentment, and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. These would make for a combustible mix at any time. But it's an even more dangerous combination during a time of widespread economic hardship, when so many people are hurting and increasingly desperate. While backing politicians who don't believe the government has a role in addressing that pain, Beck offers explanations that can deepen the desperation.

"Times of threat bring increased aggression," 21-year CIA veteran Jerrold Post told Politico last fall. "And the whole country's under threat now, with the economic difficulties and political polarization. The need to have someone to blame is really strong in human psychology. And once you have someone to blame, especially when there's a call to action, some see it as a time for heroic action."

For some troubled Beck fans, that "heroic action" has meant taking up arms against the nation's "enemies" as Beck has defined them. The poison that Beck administers daily to our political culture has intensified the nation's divisions and inspired murderous violence. But rather than take any responsibility for the impact of his irresponsible rhetoric, Beck has responded by dismissing his critics, raising the volume of his violent rhetoric, and repeatedly suggesting to his viewers that he is in danger of being killed by progressive leaders.

Beck's indifference to the damaging consequences of his language and actions has led a number of public interest organizations to join forces in an effort to hold Beck and Fox News accountable, with a campaign asking owners of televisions in public locations to turn off Fox, and a campaign urging advertisers to drop Fox and stop funding Beck's irresponsible rhetoric.

We are not arguing that even his most inflammatory language makes him legally responsible for the actions of unstable or ideological individuals. But there is no question that words and ideas have consequences, and that he and those who support him bear moral responsibility for the consequences of his actions. His language creates a climate in which violence is more likely and less surprising.

Beck complains that his critics are enemies of free speech out to silence any dissenting voices. In fact, his critics are using their own First Amendment freedom to challenge Beck's irresponsibility. His false charges and almost-impossible-to-parody conspiracy-theory chalkboard moments, go well beyond the kind of hard-hitting political disagreement that we expect and embrace in an open and democratic society. Beck is peddling something different and pernicious. It's time to hold Beck, and those who enable him, accountable.

Media Matters and People For the American Way are two of the organizations Beck has identified as his enemies. Media Matters documents Beck's actions on a daily basis, creating a massive archive of evidence supporting the challenge to his enablers. People For the American Way's Right Wing Watch has analyzed and reported on Beck's rhetorical tactics.

This report provides an overview of Beck's rhetorical strategies and some of the deadly and damaging impact they have had; a more comprehensive catalogue of his radio and television comments can be found at Media Matters.

He's no MLK (or Gandhi)

Beck tries to protect himself from criticism by comparing himself to Martin Luther King, Jr., and telling his followers that they should not engage in violence. But Beck undermines those calls to eschew violence by regularly employing his own violent imagery, and by portraying his political opponents in extreme terms – as murderous thugs bent on destroying

freedom and America itself.

As author Gerald Posner told MSNBC's Chris Matthews, the atmosphere created by hostile rhetoric is "a license that allows somebody who's on the edge to cross the edge from thinking about acting out to actually crossing the line and being violent and thinking they can change history with a single bullet. And we have shown time and time again that that's possible."

Some of Beck's own followers aren't so willing to renounce violence. Stephen Broden, who has appeared frequently on Beck's Fox News show and spoke at his Restoring Honor rally this summer, has promoted Beck-style inflammatory rhetoric about death panels, claimed that the country's economic crises were contrived, and compared the Obama administration to Nazis, all charges familiar to Beck's listeners. When Broden, who was a Republican nominee for Congress from Texas this year, was challenged by a reporter, he backed away from some of his statements. But he would not renounce the possibility of political violence. "Our nation was founded on violence," he said, affirming that he believes violent overthrow of the U.S. government is an option that "is on the table."

The Threat of "Great and Powerful Evil"-- Communism, Fascism, or Both

Not long ago, American conservatives loudly cried foul if any activist on the left used language comparing the American Right Wing to fascist regimes elsewhere, but the same conservative movement now applauds and repeats charges made by Beck (and other pundits and elected officials) that the Obama administration is filled with communist revolutionaries and that the administration is bent on a Hitlerian destruction of American democracy. With images of Nazis marching behind him, Beck said, "People are once again feeling oppressed by an out of control state.... Like it or not, fascism is on the rise."

Beck has suggested that the Obama administration is looking for a "Reichstag moment" that it would use to seize military power and put an end to democracy. But that's not the worst charge: Beck has said that the progressives – or, in his mind, communist revolutionaries – in the administration are willing to pursue their goals with genocidal violence resulting in millions of deaths. "The revolution of 1776 was a picnic compared to what the revolutionaries of today would like to do," he charged, "It's not a lot of fun. Usually millions of people die." Here's more:

"Great and powerful evil is on our doorstep...it is starting all over again...it shows you how close we came to falling into the same kind of trap that Europe

did, that led to 70 million dead in China, led to 40 million dead with Stalin, 10 million dead by Hitler. We were this close. The progressive movement, it's the same thing, we know better than you, we're smarter than you...it's not about freedom, don't let them lie to you, it's not about democracy, it is about control."

But the enemies aren't abroad, Beck says, they are here. He tells union members that their dues are going to stand with communists and revolutionaries. After playing a clip about the Weather Underground and warning about extremists who want to kill people, Beck said, "These are the same people that are everywhere in our government and our education system."

On his June 10 show, Beck warned that "anarchists, Marxists, communists, revolutionaries, Maoists" have to "eliminate 10 percent of the U.S. population" in order to "gain control." They couldn't achieve such a goal when Richard Nixon was president, Beck stated, because "the family was together" and the government under Nixon "wasn't as corrupt as it is now." Beck added: "Now they can. Now they can."

On a smaller scale, when speaking to a woman who called in fearful that the Obama administration will want to kill her because she's going on disability, Beck agreed that they would.

The Left is Planning Violence

Beck frequently charges that the left is planning to provoke violence in America to achieve its aims. As *Washington Post* reporter Dana Milbank put it, "Beck has at times spoken against violence, but he more often forecasts it." Beck has said that progressives support "armed insurrection," and that President Obama is "poking and prodding" the Tea Party to violence.

- "I believe these are the most dangerous two years of our republic. Because in the end, in revolutions, the real dangerous killers show up when things start to fall apart. When the nudge moves to shove, and the shove doesn't work, the killers show up. It happens every time. That's why we must be united for peace, we must be united with love, we must be united with God." [The Glenn Beck Program, 9/27/10]
- "Violence will come. And violence will come from the left. Violence is part of the plan. Not mine, not yours." [The Glenn Beck Program, 9/13/10]
- "I fear a Reichstag moment, a -- God forbid -- another 9-11, something that will turn this machine on, and power will be seized and voices will be silenced. God help us all." [Newsmax.com, 10/7/09]

Beck even twisted straightforward comments by former administration official Van Jones encouraging progressives to

advocate for their priorities with the administration into a revolutionary plot. In Beck's telling, Jones told activists "you have to force the president to do what he knows he has to," which is reminiscent of a story about Franklin Delano Roosevelt telling an advocate, "I agree with you, now make me do it." But in Beck's hands it becomes code for the 1957 Czech revolution with "bad guys" orchestrating riots and violence so that the average people would support an authoritarian response.

"The far left needs the violence...they create chaos... they're all infiltrated in the government... the government can swoop in to fix the problem."

Beck is even promoting his novel *The Overton Window* by claiming that its conspiratorial plot to frame a Tea Party-like group in a violent attack is about to come true, with Beck himself as the one about to be framed. He cited a phrase in Tides Foundation founder Drummond Pike's letter to Fox News advertisers -- "no one ... wants to see another Oklahoma City"-- and claimed, "They are setting up another Oklahoma City. They are claiming that one is coming. And they've already marked the one who caused it."

Beck Predicts His Own Martyrdom

Beck has repeatedly suggested that the biggest targets of his criticism -- President Obama and philanthropist George Soros -- may be planning to have him killed. Last year he said, "[Y]ou can shoot me in the head ... but there will be 10 others that line up." Beck claimed that "the most powerful people on the planet on the left" were "not going to go away easy" because "[t]his game is for keeps. This is who controls the United States of America and its destiny." He asked his listeners to "please keep me in your prayers, keep my staff in your prayers, for safety, for wisdom," adding, "Just pray for protection, please." [The Glenn Beck Program, 9/8/09]

Back in March, it was the Obama administration: "For those of you in the administration, who are coming after me ... remember, you've broken three [of the 10 Commandments], let's not make it four; thou shalt not kill." [Glenn Beck, 3/23/10]

During his recent prolonged attack on Soros, he said "I do have a bulletproof car, George. I just want you to know." He also said to Soros, "You can gun me down in the street, I'm not shutting up." He said that he had upgraded his home security "two days before the George Soros show."

He warned his viewers that a recent Soros gift to National Public Radio was "a bounty on my head" and announced, "This may be it for me." He even portrayed himself in cosmic good-and-evil terms, intoning, "Strike me down, Vader, strike me down," a reference to the Star Wars movie series implying that his legacy would be even stronger if he were martyred.

The U.S. Itself is at Risk

As inflammatory as all Beck's previous charges have been, perhaps his most violence-inciting charge is that Obama and his allies are actually seeking the destruction of the Constitution and the United States itself. In one show he portrayed the president pouring gasoline on the American people and lighting it on fire, and warned that Obama was "closing Gitmo and letting the terrorists onto the streets."

Last summer he warned that "the republic is in danger" and that "the American way of life is being systematically dismantled and destroyed." [The Glenn Beck Program, 8/5/09]

In January he warned, "Our Constitution, our republic -- if it survives -- it will only survive because the people are waking up and through the grace of God, because we are that close to losing our republic." [The Glenn Beck Program, 1/20/10]

In May he suggested that Obama is "trying to destroy the country" and is pushing America toward civil war. [The Glenn Beck Program, 5/19/10]

And just this month he said that all the nation's enemies are uniting to "destroy the United States of America." He has described the main goal of Soros-funded progressive organizations as "the overthrow of the United States government and the collapsing of the dollar."

Promoting Classic Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theory

Beck recently devoted a huge amount of airtime to a multiple-show attack on George Soros, a financier and philanthropist who has funded a number of the progressive organizations that Beck tells his viewers are out to destroy America. Journalist Michelle Goldberg called the Soros attacks "a new low on American television" and spelled out the way Beck's anti-Soros conspiracy theory was just an updated version of standard malevolent-Jews-secretly-control-the-world anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitism, like all ideologies, tells a story about the world. It's a story about almost occult Jewish power, about cabals that manipulate world events for their own gain. In classic anti-Semitic narratives, Jews control both the elites and the masses; they're responsible for the communist revolution and the speculative excesses of capitalism. Their goal is to undermine society so that they can take over. Through the lens of anti-Semitism, social division, runaway inflation, and moral breakdown all make sense because they all have the same cause. Nazi propaganda called Jews *drahtzieher*—wire-pullers. They constitute a power above and beyond ordinary government authority. "There is a super-government which is allied to no government, which is free from

them all, and yet which has its hand in them all,” Henry Ford wrote in *The International Jew*.

If you know this history, you’ll understand why Glenn Beck’s two-part “exposé” on George Soros, whom Beck calls “The Puppet Master,” was so shocking, even by Beck’s degraded standards. The program, which aired Tuesday and Wednesday, was a symphony of anti-Semitic dog-whistles. Nothing like it has ever been on American television before.

Oddly, Beck complained that Soros had “brought down four governments” – Soros’ Open Society Fund did back pro-democratic forces struggling against communist tyrannies – and warned that the U.S. would be the fifth.

Beck’s implication is that there was something sinister in Soros’ support for anti-communist civil society organizations in the former Soviet Union. Further, he sees such support as evidence that Soros will engineer a communist coup here in the United States. This kind of thinking only makes sense within the conspiratorial mind-set of classic anti-Semitism, in which Jews threaten all governments equally. And as a wealthy Jew with a distinct Eastern European accent, Soros is a perfect target for such theories.

And it goes without saying that this kind of conspiracy theory has often fueled anti-Jewish hatred and violence.

Progressive radio host Cenk Uygur described another part of Beck’s attack on Soros as “a lie so grotesque that it goes beyond the pale of even dirty politics.” As a child, Soros’ father tried to protect him from Nazis by bribing a local official to claim that Soros was the official’s Christian godson. At one point, the 14-year old Soros had to accompany the official on a trip to appraise land that had been confiscated by Jews. In Beck’s version, that became Soros helping the government confiscate the land of his friends and neighbors, and worse, “a Jewish boy helping send the Jews to the death camps.”

The episode is classic Beck, told without regard for the truth, and with an intention to cast the most awful aspersions on his target. The Anti-Defamation League’s Abraham Foxman called Beck’s criticisms of Soros “horrific,” “repugnant,” and “offensive.”

In recent months Beck, in his eagerness to smear his opponents as America-hating-communists, has been promoting books that turn out to have been written by notoriously anti-Semitic authors. Beck cited Elizabeth Dilling’s 1934 “The Red Network” as evidence that “McCarthy was absolutely right.” Media Matters calls Dilling “one of the more prolific anti-Semites of the mid-20th century.” Beck has also quoted from “Secrets of the Federal Reserve” by white supremacist Eustace Mullin.

Beck’s Own Violent Rhetoric

In a speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference, Beck called progressivism “a cancer” on our society, and said, “It must be cut out of the system....You must eradicate it. It cannot co-exist.”

Beck said that if government agents tried to force his children to take the flu vaccine – a favorite fear on the right-wing fringe – they would “meet Mr. Smith and Mr. Wesson.”

He has joked about putting poison in Nancy Pelosi’s wine, choking Michael Moore to death with his bare hands, and beating Charles Rangel with a shovel.

“I’m thinking about killing Michael Moore, and I’m wondering if I could kill him myself, or if I would need to hire somebody to do it. No, I think I could. I think he could be looking me in the eye, you know, and I could just be choking the life out.”[xii]

“I want to kill [Rep.] Charlie Rangel with a shovel.”

“Every night I get down on my knees and pray that Dennis Kucinich will burst into flames.”

Last year, referring to a photo of Obama and other Democrats, he said, “...These bloodsucker vampires are not gonna just be satisfied with sucking the blood out of [business], their thirst for power and control is unquenchable. They will not stop... Either the economy becomes like the walking dead, or ya drive a stake through the heart of the bloodsuckers.”

Beck has warned “ACORN, GE, Obama, SEIU” that “you are awakening a sleeping giant, and I have nothing to do with it” and that “America is waking up. You know the American Revolution took place with 12 percent of the population? Twelve. Are you telling me there is not 30 percent of this population that you will have to shoot me in the forehead before I let somebody into my house to tell me how to raise my children; you will have to shoot me in the forehead before you take away my gun; you will have to shoot me in the forehead before I acquiesce and be silent.”

And he has quoted a letter by Thomas Jefferson warning “ ‘If they lose freedom’ -- he’s speaking of us, future generations -- ‘if they lose freedom, there will be rivers of blood.’ “ Beck continued in his own words, “Boy, I hope that’s not true, but I can tell you there will be rivers of blood if we don’t have values and principles.” [Glenn Beck, 5/14/10]

Beck is among right-wing voices opposing the construction of the Islamic center that has been inaccurately labeled the “Ground Zero Mosque.” And he has warned American Muslims that other terrorist attacks or a war in the Middle East could provoke violence against them:

All you Muslims who have sat on your frickin’ hands

the whole time and have not been marching in the streets and have not been saying, “Hey, you know what? There are good Muslims and bad Muslims. We need to be the first ones in the recruitment office lining up to shoot the bad Muslims in the head.” I’m telling you, with God as my witness, America is -- no I’m not going to make this an American thing -- human beings are not strong enough, unfortunately, to restrain themselves from putting up razor wire and putting you on one side of it. When things -- when people become hungry, when people see that their way of life is on the edge of being over, they will put razor wire up and just based on the way you look or just based on your religion, they will round you up. Is that wrong? Oh my gosh, it is Nazi, World War II wrong, but society has proved it time and time again: It will happen.

He has issued a similar warning to “illegal aliens”:

I’ve got a quick message for illegal aliens if you happen to be watching. You better start packing your bags. And to the politicians in Washington who are soft on illegal immigration, start packing up your office, because when the terrorists strike, which they will, and we find out that they’re here illegally from some other country, we will be telling all of you to get the hell out. [Glenn Beck, May 9, 2007]

With all that, Beck is happy to blame progressives and “political correctness” for violence. Rich Gardner of the Philadelphia Independent Media Center wrote:

Yet, Beck says that ‘the American people...feel disenfranchised right now. [They] feel like nobody’s hearing their voice. The government isn’t hearing their voice. Even if you call, they don’t listen to you on both sides.’

...

Beck goes on: “And every time they do speak out, they’re shut down by political correctness. How do you not have those people turn into [Michael McLendon, the killer of 10 people in Alabama]?”

Violent Consequences

Discussing inflammatory rhetoric and its consequences with MSNBC’s Chris Matthews last year, author Gerald Posner said, “It’s a license that allows somebody who’s on the edge to cross the edge from thinking about acting out to actually crossing the line and being violent and thinking they can change history with a single bullet. And we have shown time and time again that that’s possible.”

Glenn Beck’s inflammatory rhetoric has been tied to a number of violent attacks and threats against Beck’s targets and other

public figures.

The Tides Foundation

In July, the San Francisco-based Tides Foundation was targeted for a massacre by Byron Williams. Fortunately, Williams was stopped by police and injured after a ferocious gun battle before he could carry out his assassinations at Tides and the ACLU. As the Christian Science Monitor reported,

Since then, alleged attacker Byron Williams has said in jailhouse interviews that he wanted to “start a revolution.” He says Beck was not the direct cause of his turning violent. But he does say: “I would have never started watching Fox News if it wasn’t for the fact that Beck was on there. And it was the things that he did, it was the things he exposed that blew my mind.”

Beck has waged a rhetorical war against the Tides Foundation, placing them at the center of his chalkboard conspiracy theories, calling the foundation “bullies” and “thugs” and central to George Soros’ plans to destroy America. After Williams’s alleged assassination plot, Beck continued to demonize Tides. Saying he had a “message” for the “people at the Tides Foundation,” Beck warned: “I’m coming for you. Oh, I’m coming for you. Oh, no, not in a -- Glenn Beck making threats, no, nope -- I’m just gonna reverse all the things that you have done. ... I’m coming for you, on the battlefield of ideas.”

As Media Matters detailed, Byron Williams told journalist John Hamilton that Beck, “blew my mind,” adding that Beck is “like a schoolteacher on TV.” Williams also said that “Beck is gonna deny everything about violent approach and deny everything about conspiracies, but he’ll give you every reason to believe it. He’s protecting himself, and you can’t blame him for that. So, I understand what he’s doing.” Williams continued:

And I’d say, well, you know, that’s the thing. It’s that anything you do is going to be considered promoting terror attacks or promoting violence. So now they’ve got Beck labeled as this guy that is trying to incite violence. And what I say is that if the truth incites violence, it means that we’ve been living too long in the lies.

Beck’s response was to dismiss any responsibility for violence by the “nutjob” and to “savor” – in journalist Milbank’s words – the fact that “no one knew what Tides was until the blackboard.”

Pittsburgh Police

In April 2009, Richard Poplawski shot and killed three police officers who had been called to his Pittsburgh house. Poplawski

was reportedly a white supremacist who believed the Obama administration was planning to take away people's guns and set up a police state. He once posted a YouTube clip of Glenn Beck discussing a conspiracy theory about FEMA setting up concentration camps to a white supremacist website.

Journalist Will Bunch interviewed Poplawski when researching his book *The Backlash: Right-Wing Radicals, High-Def Hucksters and Paranoid Politics in the Age of Obama*. Bunch found that Poplawski's fears about the "Obama gun confiscation" were the proverbial tip of the iceberg when it came to the increasingly paranoid ideas that he seemed to glean largely from talk radio and from Beck.

"Rich, like myself, loved Glenn Beck," Poplawski's best friend Eddie Perkovic told me during a long interview in his narrow rowhouse on the steep hill running down to the Allegheny....Perkovic and his mom -- who also had a close relationship with the accused cop-killer, still awaiting trial -- told me that for months Poplawski had been obsessed with an idea -- frequently discussed by Beck, including in ads for his sponsor Food Insurance-- of the need to stockpile food and even toilet paper for a societal breakdown. Poplawski was also convinced that paper money would become worthless -- another claim given credence by the Fox News Channel host, particularly in close connection with his frequent shilling for the now-under-investigation gold-coin peddler Goldline International.

Senator Patty Murray

Charles Wilson was convicted of making death threats against Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, which included a series of violent phone messages on themes familiar to anyone who has listened to Beck or other right-wing pundits. Among the messages cited in court documents:

By your attempts to overtake this country with socialism, somebody's gonna get to you one way or another and blow your fucking brains out, and I hope it does happen. If I have the chance, I would do it.

Kill the fucking Senator! Hang the fucking Senator! I hope somebody puts a fucking bullet between your fucking eyes. Far left liberal socialist democratic bitch. You mother-fucker. You sold the fucking people of the country out for socialism. I hope somebody fucking erases your fucking life. Yes, I hope somebody assassinates you, you fucking bitch.

We are going to fuck you up. We are going to fuck you up as bad as we can. Yes, the independents. The real people of this country, not you spineless fucking socialists. You better watch your fucking back, baby, because there's people gonna come after you with

fucking both fucking barrels, bitch.

Court filings also include a statement by a cousin of Wilson that his fears "were grown and fostered by Mr. Beck's persuasive personality" and that he "was under the spell that Glenn Beck cast."

Illinois League of Women Voters

Beck targeted two officials of the League of Women Voters of Illinois after an October 20 debate in which one official declined an audience member's request that the event start with the Pledge of Allegiance. After Beck attacked the two officials by name, they experienced an uptick of hateful calls and emails. Executive Director Jan Czarnik said she had reported death threats to the FBI.

Among the emails Czarnik received was this one:

You had better put a leash on your liberal lunatic Tate-Bradish. She will take you down. Her Pledge of Allegiance video is going viral, now that Beck outed her fanaticism. You will follow NPR down the rathole, thanks to her.

On the October 25 edition of his Fox News show, Beck said that the two women are "almost like in bed with George Soros."

Ideas and Rhetoric Have Consequences

Concerns about the impact of violent, inflammatory rhetoric like Glenn Beck's are widespread and extend well beyond the progressive advocacy community to include members of law enforcement and some Republican commentators.

"The Becks of the world are people who are venting their opinions and it is inflammatory, it generates a lot of emotion and generates in some people overreaction..." says International Union of Police Associations spokesman Rich Roberts. "Inflammatory speech has a tendency to trigger those kinds of emotions."

Former Republican Member of Congress and MSNBC host Joe Scarborough criticized Beck last year for calling President Obama a racist. As reported by *Politico*, Scarborough said, "You cannot preach hatred. You cannot say the president's a racist. You cannot stir up things that could have very deadly consequences."

Security experts told *Politico* that potentially violent loners "can be influenced by the atmosphere around them" and that "angry rhetoric and images in the culture can agitate and inspire those loners to cross the line from anger to violence."

James Alan Fox, the Lipman Family Professor of Criminology,

Law and Public Policy at Northeastern University in Boston, told the *Christian Science Monitor* in October that people who act out in violence tend to be scapegoating for things going on in their own lives. And, as David Neiwert, journalist and author of *The Eliminationists: How Hate Talk Radicalized the American Right*, has noted, right-wing conspiracy theories of the type promoted by Glenn Beck support scapegoating narratives.

More from Neiwert:

Ideologues who inspire violent action through radicalizing propaganda have been with us for many decades, even centuries....And what we know from experience about volatile, unstable actors...is that they can be readily induced into violent action by hateful rhetoric that demonizes and dehumanizes other people. And thanks to human nature and those same freedoms, we will certainly always have fearmongering demagogues among us. But the purveyors of sible rhetoric need to be called on it -- especially when they hold the nation's media megaphones.

Criminologist Fox sees the media's role this way: "It gives them the opportunity to see themselves as a political martyr. Someone who is going to show society that he is right and everyone else is wrong. And [the media] gives him the opportunity to think he could become a hero for fellow conservatives."

After the police shootout that prevented Byron Williams' planned attack on the Tides Foundation, Rep. Peter King (R) of New York, senior Republican on the Homeland Security Committee, told Media Matters, "It is important that everyone in public life, whether on the right or on the left, realize that words have consequences."

Glenn Beck and his enablers do not want to accept that his words – particularly his false, inflammatory rhetoric that is designed to stir passionate fear and apocalyptic anger – can be responsible for creating a climate of violence that undermines our democratic society and for encouraging deadly violence among some of those who hear it.

The Washington Post's Dana Milbank had some advice for Beck:

Beck has prophesied darkly to his millions of followers that we are reaching "a point where the people will have exhausted all their options. When that happens, look out." One night on Fox, discussing the case of a man who killed 10 people, Beck suggested such things were inevitable. "If you're a conservative, you are called a racist, you want to starve children," he said. "And every time they do speak out, they are shut down by political correctness. How do you not have those people turn into that guy?"

Here's one idea: Stop encouraging them.

A Call for Accountability

In a previous report on free speech and irresponsible speech, People For the American Way wrote:

Among Americans' most prized possessions are the freedoms enshrined in the First Amendment to the Constitution. In a free society, controversial public policy issues should be expected to generate vigorous and even heated debate. Our political leaders should expect to be subject to exacting scrutiny and energetic criticism. And Americans must be willing to embrace the First Amendment rights even, or especially, of those whose opinions we disagree with and find offensive.

But Americans must also be willing to use their First Amendment freedoms to challenge those who exploit their political positions or media megaphones to promote lies that are intended to inflame rather than inform, that encourage paranoia rather than participation, and whose consequences are at best divisive and at worst, violently destructive.

Those who are challenging Beck and Fox are taking on the responsibilities of engaged citizenship, and are acting to promote the nation's best values. ■