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## Author says radical right may be down but not out

By [GAIL SCHONTZLER](#) Chronicle Staff Writer

Radical right-wing groups like the Montana militia movement have fallen on hard times, but many of their alarming ideas, racist attitudes and conspiracy theories have gained acceptance among ordinary Americans, says author Daniel Levitas.

Levitas, 43, author of "The Terrorist Next Door: The Militia Movement and the Radical Right," spoke to about 100 people Thursday night at Montana State University.

While most in the audience applauded his talk, Levitas was challenged by a handful of local residents. Some argued that Montana militia members aren't racist, while others said that the New World Order and United Nations threaten American liberty.

One man, who declined to give his name, said during Levitas' book signing that the real mastermind behind the Oklahoma City bombing that killed 168 people wasn't Timothy McVeigh, but the U.S. government.

Levitas argued in his lecture that radical right-wing groups must be taken seriously for two reasons.

First, some, like the World Church of the Creator, now headquartered in Wyoming, have inspired people to

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violence and killing non-whites. Second, he said, their ideas can infect the attitudes of ordinary Americans.

"Organizationally, the radical right is facing some hard times," Levitas said. Yet their ideas have crept into the mainstream and show up in "goofy" legislation, he said, such as former Montana state Sen. Aubyn Curtis' attempt to require federal investigators to get permission from local sheriffs to operate in Montana counties.

Levitas called on people who believe in tolerance and who don't see all Muslims as a threat to organize and speak out. Radical right groups will succeed, he said, if "fewer people are willing to stand up and articulate a different set of beliefs."

"Social progress is not inevitable," Levitas warned.

Anti-Jewish attitudes appear to be on the rise in America, judging from opinion polls, Levitas said. Anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant feeling are also increasing. After Sept. 11, an alarming 40 percent of people in one poll called Muslims a threat to America, he said.

Levitas cited as disturbing evangelist Franklin Graham characterizing Islam as "wicked"; the Rev. Jerry Falwell's recent comment that a nuclear bomb should be put in the State Department; and an Army intelligence official saying Muslims do not worship a "real God."

When Levitas started discussing the Montana militia, local resident Clinton Cain objected.

"That's a damned lie," he said.

After the lecture, Cain told Levitas the militia movement is all about the Constitution. "I resent you coming and preaching hate against" militia members and Christians.

Leita Beardsley also challenged Levitas, saying his

research about the dangers of the New World Order wasn't as thorough as that of the John Birch Society's New American magazine.

Franke Wilmer, head of MSU's political science department, said afterward that militia sympathizers often turn up at lectures, like Levitas', sponsored by the Montana Human Rights Network.

"Democracy requires all opinions are expressed," Wilmer said. "It's a good sign."

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