

# CALIFORNIA ANTI-IMMIGRANT GROUP PLANS IOWA TOUR

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## CENTER FOR NEW COMMUNITY BACKGROUND BRIEF CALIFORNIA ANTI-IMMIGRANT GROUP PLANS IOWA TOUR

Following an appearance at a major white nationalist event in Virginia earlier this spring, Glenn Spencer, leader of the Sherman Oaks, California-based American Patrol (also known as Voice of Citizens Together [VCT]), will bring his anti-immigrant message to the heartland in April.

According to announcements by Spencer, he will spend April 11-18 in Iowa, spreading his hate-filled message of anti-immigrant vigilantism and conspiracy mongering to anyone who will listen. Spencer has become a minor celebrity by peddling his "reconquista" conspiracy theory that the Mexican government, the Catholic Church, and numerous other groups are working to re-conquer the American Southwest for Mexico. He has also drawn attention for making racist comments directed at Mexican-Americans

This background brief is designed to expose the white nationalist rhetoric and the dangerous anti-immigrant vigilantism of Glenn Spencer and American Patrol / Voice of Citizens Together.

### American Patrol in Iowa

In an email sent out to supporters discussing his Iowa plans, Spencer notes, "We will be working with FAIR and others to coordinate the effort." FAIR is the Federation for American Immigration Reform, the Washington D.C. based anti-immigrant group responsible for recent TV and print ads in Iowa blaming the September 11 attacks on immigration.

Though preferring to maintain public distance between themselves and hate groups, FAIR has been supportive of American Patrol. On the American Patrol / VCT web page, the group reprints a note about VCT from FAIR regional coordinator Rick Oltman saying, "Glenn Spencer and his VCT website perform an essential service to our country and all Americans. He keeps us informed about the many immigration related outrages taking place along our border and throughout our country. Keep up the great work, Glenn!" (From VCT webpage, April 10, 1998).

Although the California non-profit license of American Patrol has been officially suspended and the group is under investigation by the California Franchise Tax board for failure to file American Patrol tax returns, FAIR has nonetheless supported American Patrol financially, contributing at least \$11,000 since 1994, according to IRS records.

Among the "other groups" coordinating Spencer's trip to Iowa: the Iowa Reform Party, which he will address on April 13 in Ames; and the Iowa Society for Educated Citizens – a group of tax protestors - where he is scheduled to speak on April 14 in Little Amana.

National anti-immigrant groups have been on the ground organizing in Iowa since at least January of 2000. Both FAIR and ProjectUSA (the New York-based group known for its inflammatory billboards) have held meetings in several Iowa communities. In 2000, a FAIR umbrella group called "Coalition for the Future of the American Worker" ran ads that blamed layoffs on immigrants. Anti-immigrant activists were also successful in the passage of Iowa's new English-Only Law, which was signed by the governor on March 1st. The role of American Patrol will be to stir up racial tension through the promotion of racist conspiracies.

### The "Reconquista" Conspiracy

By spinning outlandish racial/ethnic conspiracies of a Mexican conquest of the United States, Glenn Spencer's recurring

battle cry has taken his group into a position of national leadership among grassroots anti-immigrant groups.

"An invasion is spreading across America like wildfire, bringing gangs, drugs and an alien culture into the very heartland of America," Spencer warns in an American Patrol videotape he is peddling on this current tour. The video, entitled "Immigration: Threatening the Bonds of Our Union," argues that because of immigrants, there are drugs in Iowa, gang takeovers in Nevada, and "traitors" in the Democratic Party, the Catholic Church and among the "corporate globalists."

For Spencer, the United States, and its southwestern region in particular, stands on the threshold of destruction, and in imminent danger of an actual takeover engineered by the Mexican government. He has described Mexico as a "two-bit gangster-run country." (Letter to the Editor, Los Angeles Times, May 20, 1996). This invasion has a name: "La Reconquista," or the Re-conquest.

For Spencer and those who heed his words, the fantasized Mexican takeover is not first and foremost a battle being fought out between the militaries and political leaders of the United States and Mexico; it is a battle being fought within America's borders. "THE CENSUS PROVES WE ARE BEING INVADED. This is not a rehearsal. This is the real thing. The numbers are in, and there is no doubt. If we do not speak out now in the face of this reality, we deserve to be overwhelmed." (USA TODAY, April 8, 2001).

With these conspiracies of ethnic takeover, American Patrol has fashioned a clarion call for civil war. During one demonstration Spencer told the Daily Bruin, "When the time's right there's going to be the greatest civil war that America has ever seen. Those are Mexican flags out there...It's just like the Matadors. Behind that flag. They're poised to attack. Don't be fooled by Mexican tricks." (Daily Bruin, 1998).

#### Glenn Spencer and White Nationalism

Behind Spencer's visions of imminent civil war and ethnic takeover lies a nationalist fervor that equates American citizenship with membership in the white majority. This is white nationalism. Like Christian Identity believers who claim that Jews are behind a diabolic plot to destroy the white race, and modern Klansmen who equate interracial marriage and affirmative action with genocide against whites, Spencer's vision of the Reconquista is backed by a vision of racial nationalism

Despite the rich and diverse history of people from around the globe making the United States their home, Spencer's vision is one of blatant white nationalism:

We are in a struggle for the very survival of America. Those who would subvert our nation, including judges who reject our laws, must remember that the ultimate power is with the people. For a while at least, we the people of the United States are still in the majority. We must use that power while we still have it. (Voice of Citizens Together Newsletter).

For Spencer, "we the people" equals the majority population (whites). Disagreements over policies such as affirmative action are not disagreements between citizens, but "betrayal" of this "American people." Glenn Spencer is a white nationalist.

In the Voice of Citizens Together newsletter, Perry Lorenz of the European-American Issues Forum exhibits another characteristic often associated with white nationalism – a belief in biological determinism. This belief holds that the characteristics of a people are determined by their genetic makeup, passed down through their blood. Depicting a battle of whites to keep control of the United States for those of "European descent:"

We claim, as the heirs of Western Civilization, that it is right and proper, for the European people, and all nations descended from the European people, to continue our existence, as a people, for ever....We claim, no less than any other people, the gift that nature has bestowed upon us and which distinguishes our ancestors and our descendants: that which we pass on by blood from generation to generation, the characteristics and history that make us who we are....

While those of non-European descent, in small numbers, may be tolerated and even welcomed within the borders of Western Civilization, it is clear that in large numbers, ethnic conflict will ensue in the short-run, and undesirable cultural transformation will follow...

As the alien tide rises within the borders of Western Civilization, there is no point at which stemming the flood becomes easy. Rather, it becomes more difficult with each passing year. The seriousness of the threat to our Civilization is without precedent. Yet our survival does not depend on the strength of our countries, whether military, political, or economic. It depends simply on the common man recognizing and rejecting the demographic aggression being waged against us. (Voice of Citizens Together newsletter).

Notions of "alien tides" waging "demographic aggression" against the "blood" descendants of "European people" are at the

heart of white nationalist ideology.

As often the case with racially-defined forms of nationalism, the “national” culture of the “out group” – in this case Mexican-Americans – is attacked and disparaged. This was the case in an infamous statement made by Spencer in a 1996 editorial in the Los Angeles Times:

The Mexican culture is based on deceit. Chicanos and Mexicanos lie as a means of survival. Fabricating false Ids is just another extension of that culture. Mexicans who have truly become American have shed themselves of this survival mechanism. They are not Chicano and they are not Mexicanos (Los Angeles Times, August 28, 1996).

When queried about the statement, which Spencer also directed at Chicanos, or U.S. citizens of Mexican descent, he repeated it again, stating,

What I said about the Mexican culture is totally consistent with the conclusions of Andres Oppenheimer and, according to him, a great many historians. I talked about the Mexican culture, not a race of people...The United States is being invaded by Mexico. Lying and cheating are part of Mexico's culture. Another part of their culture is the belief that the Southwestern United States belongs to them and that it is their responsibility to take it back.” (Los Angeles Times, Oct. 25, 1996; reprinted on VCT webpage).

Frequently, these attacks extend beyond their most targeted group to include other groups of people of color.

In a passage on the VCT webpage, Spencer declares that “Prop 187 + Prop 209 + Prop 227 = Stop the invasion!” That is, support for California's 1994 anti-immigrant Proposition 187, the 1996 anti-affirmative action Proposition 209, and the 1998 English Only Proposition 229 are means of stopping an invasion of, implicitly, people of color.

In another VCT webpage statement concerning the Yaqui Indian Nation's request for Congress to approve passports for tribal members – who describe being harassed as they cross the border over their land that straddles the U.S.-Mexico border – VCT comments, “The Reconquistas are making alliances wherever they can. It is time to end the tribal system in the United States.” Spencer's vision of stopping the “reconquista” thus extends to the treaty-protected rights of Indian nations, and thus branches beyond Mexican-Americans to include other people of color – again a recurring theme in white nationalist race hatred (Comment on Indian Country Today article posted to VCT webpage May 20, 1998).

In addition to openly espousing white nationalism, Spencer and American Patrol maintain connections with several openly white nationalist organizations.

§ Over the weekend of February 22 – 24, 2002, some 230 racist activists gathered at the Dulles Hyatt in Herndon, Virginia, near Washington, D.C. for the American Renaissance Conference. They came to network and socialize with “their own kind” and to hear from self-described “white nationalists” leaders. Saturday's keynote speaker was British National Party (BNP) leader Nick Griffin, who received a standing ovation for his speech in which he declared that things are now so bad for whites that “we have left to conserve but the color of our children's skins.” Also speaking was Glenn Spencer, who received his own standing ovation, and spent the weekend interacting with the group of white nationalists.

§ Additionally, the VTC website features articles from H. Millard, a columnist for the largest white nationalist group in the country - the Council of Conservative Citizens. Millard bemoaned the “slimy brown mass of glop” that immigration and interracial relationships were making of the U.S. population.

- On a weekly radio show that airs in several cities, Spencer has hosted a series of guests like Kevin McDonald, a professor who accuses Jews of devising an immigration policy specifically intended to dilute and weaken the white population of America.

- Spencer has even gone so far as to use Betina McCann, the fiancé of neo-Nazi Steven Barry, as a courier to hand-deliver copies of his videotape “Bonds of Our Nation” to every member of Congress (Intelligence Report, Spring 2001).

### From Words to Action: Turning Immigrant Hatred into Political Mobilization

Rooted in this conspiratorial white nationalist vision, the logical next step for American Patrol activists, guided by Glenn Spencer, is the mobilization to make this vision a political reality. This is being accomplished through electoral mobilization, demonstrations, educational forums, and the promotion of vigilante actions. They promote actions that can only heighten racial tension and foster animosity and violence.

Like members of all social movements, American Patrol / VCT's activists engage in a wide range of political activities. Because they seek to shape the political face of American society to ensure the domination of the “majority” (white) population, the group engages in political activity and the promotion of candidates for elected office who share all or part of their vision.

For instance, in 1996 Glenn Spencer joined Patrick Buchanan's "Operation Paul Revere," a caravan of anti-immigrant activists that arrived in New Hampshire in time for the presidential primary. During the trek to New Hampshire, Spencer praised the Eisenhower Administration's "Operation Wetback" saying that Eisenhower "knew an invasion when he saw one." In April 1998 VCT announced plans for a "a new Operation Paul Revere." (VCT/AP Newsletter, March/April 1998).

Continuing its electoral aspirations, in early 1998 VCT joined a number of anti-immigrant groups in endorsing the candidacy of Darrell Issa for a U.S. Senate seat in California. Joining VCT in the endorsement were representatives of Americans for Responsible Immigration, the Bay Area Coalition for Immigration Reform, Border Solution Task force, the California Coalition for Immigration Reform and the Federation for American Immigration Reform, according to VCT (VCT/AP newsletter, March/April 1998).

On January 29, 2002 American Patrol officially endorsed California Secretary of State, Republican Bill Jones, for governor of California because of his support for Proposition 187.

After the horrific September 11 attacks, Spencer attempted to turn American's fears into public policy, demanding "ALL NON CITIZENS OUT OF U.S. Contact your Congressman, Senators and the President. Demand that all non-citizens leave the United States IMMEDIATELY!!" (Email, emphasis in original).

#### Border Vigilantism: American Patrol In Action

VCT has also taken such rhetoric to its logical conclusion with the formation of American Patrol. American Patrol is essentially the "enforcement" apparatus set up by VCT to monitor documented and undocumented immigrants, and to seek the arrest of the undocumented. On its webpage, VCT offers a form through which individuals who have "had an experience with illegal or legal immigration which you think might interest other Americans, [can] let us know." The form includes a space for recording the location at which suspected "illegals" were seen, the number witnessed and their mode of travel, and the response of the Border Patrol once it was notified. The group's American Patroller magazine includes "high quality maps showing problem areas, immigration routes, etc." (VCT Web Page June 11, 1998).

While American Patrol literature advocates monitoring and coordination with law enforcement, in reality the organization has emerged as a vigilante border enforcement organization. Several examples serve to illustrate the end results of American Patrol. A 1997 article in the Houston Chronicle is worth quoting at length for its description of American Patrol member Dob Cunningham:

One hand on the trigger of his AR-15 semiautomatic and the other steadying his binoculars, Dob Cunningham spied two men on the far side of his pasture several football fields away. One was armed...Cattle thieves, the 63-year-old rancher figured. It was sundown last summer. As Cunningham scrambled down a brush country bluff, bushwhacking through sage and mesquite, he heard gunfire somewhere along the Rio Grande. Thirty rounds and 30 minutes later, Cunningham held one suspect at gunpoint. The other had fled back to Mexico when Cunningham, clad in a combat jacket and camouflage hat, emptied his clip into the sultry South Texas air... After ordering his prisoner, a young Mexican man, to strip naked, Cunningham asked him in Spanish if he wanted to live or die. Then he ordered him back across the shallow Rio Grande with a message. "I told him to tell his buddies they're lucky they weren't all killed," said Cunningham. To illustrate his point, Cunningham had fired a few shots short of the riverbank on the Mexican side as the would-be rustler waded home...

So fed up is Cunningham that he has joined a Southern California-based organization called American Patrol, which relies on dispatches from border property owners to issue an illegal immigration "weather report" on the Internet. American Patrol urges its correspondents to track illegal immigrants, not to confront them. But the ranchers in Maverick County say they have no choice. "The law won't help you," said Cunningham...Meanwhile, Cunningham is spreading the rumor that the military is patrolling." At least that's what Cunningham told his suspected cattle thief last summer, when he held him at gunpoint amid the dense river cane that lines the Rio Grande. "I told him I was Marine from Presidio," said Cunningham. "I told him, 'President Clinton sent me down to kill you guys.'" (Houston Chronicle, 1997).

Cunningham's exploits are repeated in less dramatic, though potentially as lethal, fashion by the family of American Patrol Advisory Board member Donna Tisdale, the leader of her own local organization, Alien Traffic Opposition.

At the 1997 "Good Fences Make Good Borders Rally" co-sponsored by VCT and the California Coalition for Immigration Reform, Tisdale declared "We want the military or the National Guard sent to the border, as an interim measure, to stop

the blatant trafficking of the people and drugs.” The on-the-ground actions of the Tisdale family, however, indicate that they themselves pose a potential threat to both citizen and immigrant alike. The following descriptions are pulled from newspaper accounts of the Tisdale family’s “border enforcement” activity.

- “Tisdale said family members run into people almost daily who they suspect are illegal immigrants. The Tisdales' daughter, Tracy, 17, has met groups of strange men while walking alone to school. Her son's fiancée pulled a gun recently on two men she thought were illegal immigrants after they kept insisting she sell them a car (Los Angeles Times, July 26, 1996, emphasis added).

- “On several occasions, her [Donna Tisdale] husband and son have pulled guns on migrants and fired warning shots to run them off in the middle of the night,” she said. ‘You don't know if they are all hard-working guys or if they are criminally minded people,’ said Tisdale” (The Times-Picayune, August 18, 1996, emphasis added).

As a national grassroots organization, American Patrol / VCT has used anti-Immigrant vigilantism to create a broader base for white nationalism, helping to move the ideas from the margins to the mainstream. Continued growth of white nationalist anti-immigrant groups like VCT/American Patrol pose a danger to American society in two ways: They can imperil civil rights and public safety due to the violence associated with their vitriolic rhetoric. As important, they also can also pose a danger to democracy by attacking the cornerstone of pluralism and by impeding rational discourse on public policy.

For additional information, please contact the Center for New Community.

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