
LAS VEGAS SUN

Living in U.S., rejecting its laws, targeted as terrorists



Tiffany Brown

Meetings of the Sovereign People's Court for the United States of America were held in this back room of a printing business until the FBI raided it last week.

By [Jeff German](#)

Sun, Mar 15, 2009 (2 a.m.)

In the back room of a small print shop in the shadow of the Orleans Arena stands a judicial bench next to a U.S. flag.

A large poster of the Ten Commandments hangs on one side of the room, and leaning up against another wall is a blown-up copy of a 1907 speech by President Theodore Roosevelt, touting the merits of a sovereign United States.

A set of the Nevada Revised Statutes and other legal books are lined up in a nearby bookcase. And in a box on the floor are videotape versions of "The Federal Mafia," imprisoned tax protest leader Irwin Schiff's book, the sale of which was banned in 2003 by a Las Vegas federal judge.

For the past couple of years, the back room of Sami V's Signs has been home to the "Sovereign People's Court for the United States," the main local gathering place for the sovereign citizens movement. Nationwide, tens of

thousands of Americans have declared themselves sovereign citizens, above the government's jurisdiction and not obligated to pay taxes.

The sovereign citizens movement, which has its roots in the notorious anti-tax group Posse Comitatus of the 1970s, has been rising in popularity the past couple of years, fueled in part by the declining economy.

"One of the major groups they appeal to are the financially desperate, who are looking for somebody to blame for their troubles," said Mark Pitcavage, the national director of investigative research for the Anti-Defamation League, which monitors extremist groups in the country. "This is a movement that believes our government is illegitimate, a movement that is ingenious at creating frauds and scams."

The chair-filled back room of Sami V's is well-known to FBI agents and other members of the Southern Nevada Joint Terrorism Task Force, who had infiltrated the group for three years, frequently attending seminars and moot courts aimed at teaching followers how to declare their "sovereignty" and how to attempt to get out of their financial obligations. Attendees contribute donations to pay for the lessons.

Since 2006, a steady stream of followers from across the country, as many as 120 at a time, has been showing up for Sovereign People's Court activities, prompting Terrorism Task Force investigators to declare Las Vegas a major gathering place for the movement in the West.

Federal agents executed search warrants and seized records at Sami V's on March 5 as part of a raid in three states on the local organization. The raids resulted in the arrests of four people, including two of the national movement's leading ideologues, on various money laundering, tax and weapons charges.

In sworn affidavits, Terrorism Task Force members described the movement as having "an extreme anti-government ideology embedded in conspiracy theories, inaccurate history and irrational interpretations of the law."

Samuela Villafana, the owner of Sami V's and the record keeper for the Sovereign People's Court, doesn't share that opinion.

In an interview last week, Villafana, who was not arrested in the raid, insisted that the only thing taught in the back room of her print shop were lessons on U.S. history and the Bible and about how the government has gone awry.

Samuel Davis, a national leader who taught some of the seminars, agreed.

"We're basically a group of people who have all been disaffected in some way," said Davis, 54, who was arrested on money laundering charges in the March 5 raid. "We're not malcontents. We're not out there advocating that people not pay their taxes ... We talk about the problems in the world and how we deal with them in the simplest, most efficient and economic way."

Villafana said her life was turned upside down when about two dozen heavily armed agents raided her print shop and hauled away not only records of the Sovereign People's Court, but also some of her business records. She said her landlord is evicting her at the end of the month, and she no longer plans to host the people's court. Seminars scheduled for March 21 and 22 have been canceled, she said.

The Sovereign People's Court, Villafana said, is being targeted because of its anti-tax ideology, as Americans prepare to file their tax returns.

"We interpret the IRS laws to read differently than (the government) interprets the IRS laws, and it's time to scare the public into getting back in line and doing what they're told," Villafana said.

But FBI Supervisor Rod Swanson, who runs the Joint Terrorism Task Force, said the three-year undercover investigation was not about intruding upon the First Amendment rights of the organization.

“As soon as they cross the line and commit criminal acts, that becomes of interest to the FBI and the Task Force,” Swanson said.

He described the movement’s leaders as “greedy people” who are in it “to make money for themselves.”

The Southern Nevada investigation is continuing, as Task Force members pore over records seized in the raid and pursue new leads linking other people, some of whom may be tied to those arrested, to criminal activity, Swanson said.

“These arrests were just the first phase of this investigation,” he said.

Sovereign citizens believe that U.S. currency is invalid, and they cite that belief as justification for their use of other forms of fictitious financial instruments, such as fraudulent money orders and personal checks to pay their debts, the Task Force affidavits said.

On its Web site, the Sovereign People’s Court offers a dozen “writs,” affidavits and other documents that can be downloaded by followers to help them declare their sovereignty. Some of the documents appear to be designed to frustrate government agencies.

One of the documents is a 14-page instruction packet, guiding a follower through the self-declaration process.

“You are about to stand in line with those who stood for the freedom upon which this nation was founded,” the instruction packet says. “Today, as they did yesterday, we stand against an evil so pervasive that it sometimes leaves many of us feeling all alone. We are not alone! This is why we must share our knowledge with other Americans, including making every attempt to educate our public servants and police.”

The federal affidavits, however, alleged that the Sovereign People’s Court had other motives.

Members, the affidavits alleged, were taught the national staple of the movement — how to pull off a “redemption scheme,” which Task Force investigators described as a “white-collar criminal scam.” A redemption scheme is an attempt to pay off credit card companies, mortgage lenders, banks and other creditors, including the IRS, using phony documents and monetary instruments.

Redemption schemes are based on the false belief that when the government stopped backing American currency with gold in 1933, it was forced to secretly declare bankruptcy, invalidating all federal reserve notes, Task Force members alleged. To avoid defaulting on its existing loans, the government supposedly was forced to use its own citizens as collateral for the bonds it issued. As a result, the government established secret \$1 million accounts for all Americans at birth. Sovereign citizens bombard creditors, state officials and the U.S. Treasury Department with a collection of documents aimed at gaining access to that secret money.

The creditors have refused to forgive the debts, the affidavits said.

This turns the movement’s followers into victims of its teachings, according to Andrew Romagnuolo, a North Carolina FBI agent brought here to work with the Joint Terrorism Task Force.

“People are true believers. They want to get out of their financial troubles,” said Romagnuolo, who investigated sovereign citizens in North Carolina. “But that doesn’t happen in these cases.”

Sovereign citizens also practice what the Anti-Defamation League and authorities call “paper terrorism” — the filing of phony legal documents, frivolous lawsuits and liens to harass and intimidate government officials, including those who might be investigating them. This sometimes has the effect of tying up a court case or a legal action against a member of the movement.

In other parts of the county, authorities have documented cases of violence involving members of the movement over the years. The most notorious sovereign citizen member is convicted Oklahoma City bombing conspirator Terry Nichols.

“They are particularly dangerous in spontaneous incidents when confronted by a law enforcement officer, like being stopped for speeding or being visited by an officer,” the ADL’s Pitcavage said.

None of the four men arrested in Las Vegas, however, was charged with violent crimes. One of the defendants, Jan Alan Lindsey, 66, of Henderson, is a former longtime FBI agent charged with simple tax evasion. And none of the four men even has a criminal record.

A federal magistrate ordered them all released on their own recognizance with some travel restrictions while they fight the charges.

One of the defendants, Harold Call, 67, of Las Vegas, was charged with several counts related to possession of an unregistered machine gun. During Call’s initial appearance in federal court, Assistant U.S. Attorney Eric Johnson said Call appeared to be preparing for a siege at his home. In a hidden crawl space, he was storing hand grenades, several rifles, a gas mask, night vision goggles and a stockpile of food. He also had a video camera and monitor in a space above his garage, and suggested to a government informant that he had the urge to kill someone every time he talked to the IRS, Johnson said.

Call is regarded as a leader of another local sovereign citizen organization, the Nevada Lawmen Group for Public Awareness.

The other two defendants — Davis of Council, Idaho, and Shawn Rice, 46, of Seligman, Ariz. — are considered prominent members of the national movement. Davis and Rice were charged with laundering money for undercover FBI agents, some of which allegedly went through religious organizations run by Rice, who says he’s an ordained rabbi with a law degree.

Both Davis and Rice, who plan to defend themselves, denied wrongdoing and said they were entrapped by undercover agents.

Davis said “there is no money,” so he’s been charged with committing a crime “that’s a legal impossibility.

“You can’t launder something that doesn’t exist,” he said.

Rice said the case against him is a “textbook entrapment case.”

“As I understand it, laundering requires a predicate criminal act,” he said. “In this case, there is none. I had a written contract.”

Rice said he drew up the contract in September with a man he later learned was an undercover FBI agent, spelling out the terms of the transactions.

He e-mailed the Sun an unsigned copy of the four-page agreement, which says he entered into it to provide funding for “high technology-based Amish-type communities” to teach the torah.

The contract lists three options for “moving the money,” one of which included moving \$50,000 to \$100,000 at a time into an Arizona bank through Rice’s religious accounts. Another option was to move up to \$100 million to an offshore bank account.

Jeff German is the Sun’s senior investigative reporter.

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Discussion: 15 comments so far...

By [vegasj](#)

3/15/09 at 3:32 a.m.

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And Gibbons says he'll deny stimulus money, Rush wants Obama to fail, guns/ammo flying off the shelves. Hmmmmm

By [fremmasmind](#)

3/15/09 at 5:34 a.m.

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Aaron Russos' "Freedom to Fascism", a documetary you want to see

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=...>

By [KillerB](#)

3/15/09 at 7:08 a.m.

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"...videotape versions of "The Federal Mafia," imprisoned tax protest leader Irwin Schiff's book, the sale of which was banned in 2003 by a Las Vegas federal judge."

No judge has authority to ban this, or anything else. Otherwise the judge is in perjury of his oath to support the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press ..."

Exactly what part does that judge need explained to him??

What I see here is more proof the Patriot Act being used to eliminate the entire Bill of Rights, something no law can do.

As a caveat I've had friends in this kind of movement elsewhere and seen their literature, including redemption. Most of it was ranting in print, and much of what they used as authorities was completely bogus.

However, it's clear the feds, including the judge, are so far off their leashes one what must ask exactly what is the difference between them and the "mafia"??

By [msfreeh](#)

3/15/09 at 7:46 a.m.

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for a partial list of crimes committed by FBI agents over 1500 pages long see

<http://forums.signonsandiego.com/showthr...>

Salt Lake city attorney Jesse Trentadue has obtained FBI documents through a civil lawsuit he won against the FBI. The documents show FBI agents were handling Timothy McVeigh before the Oklahoma City bombing.

McVeigh's co-defendant Terry Nichols has identified the FBI agent as Larry Potts.

google

nichols potts trentadue

To view over 15 pages of pedophile crimes committed by FBI agents see

<http://www.campusactivism.org/phpBB3/vie...>

By [azsk8fan](#)

3/15/09 at 8:37 a.m.

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As with murder there should be NO statute of limitations on any form of child molestation or rape. Honestly why should there be any limitation on ANY crime - so if you commit a crime and can avoid detection/prosecution until the limitation runs out then you get to go scot-free - this is a very messed up system.

By [KillerB](#)

3/15/09 at 9:16 a.m.

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azsk8fan -- Although I wonder why you suddenly brought up the statutes of limitations, there's some very good reason for it. One is one's right to a speedy trial. Another is that old legal maxim "justice delayed is justice denied." Another is more along the lines of the "stale claim" doctrine -- too much time elapsing means memories for details fade and the police have more time to work their mischief.

I quite agree, this is one messed up system. But it's our system, it originated with us, and it's up to us as a people to reform it, since it is now evident those sworn and trusted to protect us have become the predators.

For perspective there's that warning from Judge Kennedy (9th Circuit in 1980):
"Indifference to personal liberty is but the precursor of the State's hostility to it."

By [reg373](#)

3/15/09 at 9:53 a.m.

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Nationwide, tens of thousands of Americans have declared themselves sovereign citizens, above the government's jurisdiction and not obligated to pay taxes.

So, the bust comes at an inopportune time. I was hoping on 4/15 to join up... ;^) -- found a cool site; [Balkingpoints.com](#) -- incredible satellite camera view of earth

By [gotjobs](#)

3/15/09 at 4:37 p.m.

[Suggest removal](#)

A number of states are aligning themselves with this thing they call "sovereign" lately. Some don't want the DC stimulus money because there are strings attached, no not strings but chains.

By [Babyboomer](#)

3/15/09 at 4:49 p.m.

[Suggest removal](#)

People like this feed on others at moments like this when they're down and out. They fed on the uneducated how else can they survive.

By [KillerB](#)

3/15/09 at 8:21 p.m.

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gotjobs -- the kind of "sovereign" you're thinking of was enshrined by the 10th Amendment: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

The Constitution's framers were against all power being centralized in the federal government. This Amendment tells us the Constitution needs to be read strictly, not liberally, when determining federal powers. It was a hot debate between the states and Congress from around 1835 through 1937.

By [reg373](#)

3/15/09 at 8:40 p.m.

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I think there was even a civil war over it... ;^)

By [dbltrbl](#)

3/16/09 at 2:26 a.m.

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A man who acts as his own lawyer has a fool for a client.
French Proverb

By [redferret](#)

3/16/09 at 8:42 a.m.

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I actually looked up The Federal Mafia. It turns out that the book isn't banned as some try to claim. Only certain people are barred from distributing it.

Nearest as I could tell the main point that the court didn't like was that the book contains "fraudulent" information and actively tells people to break certain laws.

These guys are just toadstools still thinking that the 16th Amendment is fraudulent. These are also the same people who bought stock in aluminum foil for their hats. And they banned the number 23 from their premises.

By [goingbust](#)

3/16/09 at 8:56 a.m.

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I more conservative and small-government than maybe 90% of the population, but these guys look like either kooks or outright criminals. Glad they are getting arrested. Why would someone facing scrutiny have illegal guns? The legal ones aren't good enough for you (The AR-15, the Barrett M82 are totally legal for non-felons and are sufficient for the military)? Just stupid.

By [TheWolfsLair](#)

3/16/09 at 12:11 p.m.

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Government thugs strike again! Get used to it friends



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