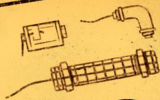
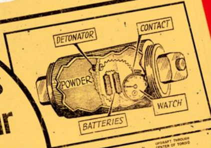
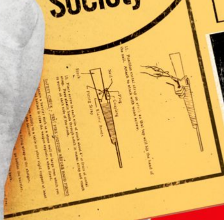
THE WRONG HANDS



Popular Weapons Manuals and Their Historic Challenges to a Democratic Society





ANN LARABEE

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Popular Weapons Manuals and Their Historic Challenges to a Democratic Society

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Larabee, Ann, 1957–
The wrong hands : popular weapons manuals and their historic challenges
to a democratic society / Ann Larabee.
p. cm.
ISBN 978–0–19–020117–3 (hardback)
1. Radicalism—United States—History. 2. Underground literature—United States—History.
3. Explosives—Handbooks, manuals, etc.—History. 4. Weapons—Handbooks, manuals, etc.—History.
5. Political violence—United States—History. 6. Terrorism—United States—History. I. Title.
HN90.R3L37 2015
303.48'4—dc23
2015001253

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

Books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay they do preserve in a vial the purest efficacies and extraction of that living thing that bred them. I know they are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous Dragon's teeth; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men.
—John Milton, "Areopagitica"

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My greatest thanks go to Randy Scott, of Michigan State University Library archives, and the staff in the Interlibrary Loan section. Many of the documents I viewed were difficult to obtain. Special thanks go to David Foreman, who allowed me special access to his papers at the Denver Public Library, and to Yvonne Creamer, who got me there. I had an invaluable discussion with Jason Scott, who has collected many of the old BBS textfiles and has great insight into those early days of the Internet. William Powell was willing to correspond with me about his sources for *The Anarchist Cookbook*. My best intellectual companion has been Arthur Versluis, editor of the *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, who has always strived for balance and sensitive observation. David McBride, of Oxford University Press, was a thoughtful editor and gave many invaluable comments on the manuscript. The anonymous reviewers provided much helpful advice. Richard Bach Jensen shared my enthusiasm for the project and liked to talk about historical anarchism and policing. Randall Law urged me to think about terrorism and technology in a broader context. With his probing mind, Paul Sunstein helped me work out my conclusions. At the eleventh hour, Ronen Steinberg provided me with a few crucial insights. Thanks to Beverly Gage, Claudia Verhoeven, and Carola Dietz, the "terror chicks," for encouraging me from the beginning. This book is built on the work of many fine scholars, too numerous to mention, who have lately been thinking about the histories and consequences of wars on terror. I also owe special thanks to Lissa Blon-Jacot, Jay Jacot, and Maksen Kai Mecher for giving me the moral support, the meals, and the writing space to get the job done.

Introduction

Al-Qaeda's online magazine, *Inspire*, appeared on the Web in 2010. It included a section on "open source jihad," defined as "a resource manual for those who loathe the tyrants; includes bomb making techniques, security measures, guerrilla tactics, weapons training and other jihad related activities." In its first issue, it provided instructions for how to "make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom."[1] This was a step-by-step guide, illustrated with glossy photographs, for making a bomb in a pressure cooker. Responding to the news of *Inspire*, Republican congressman Peter Hoekstra called for the nation to "ratchet up our law enforcement and intelligence counterterrorism programs," warning that "we underestimate this kind of radical jihadist propaganda at our peril."[2] *Inspire*'s editor was a young US citizen, Samir Khan, who had traveled from Charlotte, North Carolina, to reside with the radical cleric and senior al-Qaeda operative Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen. Both were killed in 2011 in a secretive drone strike: highly controversial because it involved the assassination of an American citizen without trial. While some observers wondered whether Khan had been killed for editing a magazine, the Obama administration said he was collateral damage. It was not, however, unhappy at his death.[3]

When the Tsarnaev brothers bombed the Boston Marathon in 2013, a photograph of one of the devices was released, showing what appeared to be a piece from a pressure cooker. Internet forums and news stories buzzed with the speculation that the bombers were al-Qaeda and had used *Inspire*'s bomb-making directions. Some wondered what could be done about such texts, whether censorship was in order. *Inspire*, along with other "jihadist" texts, appeared as evidence in the indictment of the surviving bomber, Dzhokhar.[4] The government was preparing a case that would feature his radicalization process, made deadly by dangerous instructional speech.

Popular weapons instructions like "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom" have been around for a very long time and have excited curiosity, hope, fear, and anger. Efforts to control them, suppress them, and use them against public enemies in the United States go back to the nineteenth century, when the

first anarchist directions for making bombs and dynamite appeared in a Chicago courtroom, leading to the executions of four innocent men who circulated them. Unresolved questions linger over whether what we read and watch—or simply own in our computers and on our bookshelves—can reveal our states of mind, our predispositions, our beliefs, and our willingness and preparation to act. Sometimes, as in the Tsarnaev case, a direct link appears between popular technical instruction and the construction of a weapon, making works like "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom" acceptable evidence of a suspect's know-how to carry out a crime. But the history of popular weapons manuals in the words of their own makers, in the courts, on evidence lists, and in testimony at congressional hearings shows that their meanings go far beyond the merely technical.

This book explores why radical groups and alternative publishers have produced popular weapons manuals, how police detectives and prosecutors have used them to pursue political enemies, and how scientific and legal experts have tried to suppress them. Central to the debates over popular weapons manuals is whether they allow information to fall into the wrong hands, a shifting designation that has accommodated, for example, labor movement organizers, anti-development environmentalists, anti-nuclear activists, school shooters, white supremacists, anti-government militias, and armed jihadists. During police investigations, popular weapons manuals found on the bookshelves and the computer hard drives of those deemed the wrong hands are instantly taken as signs of their malevolent intentions. In an important sense, though, the anonymous hands shown making illegal weapons in these manuals are always the wrong hands because they challenge the right hands of law and order, which are charged with public protection.

Popular weapons manuals have been called "knowledge-based speech," "dangerous instructional speech," "terrorist speech," or, more popularly, the "bomb-making manual," "the mayhem manual," and "the anarchist cookbook." In efforts to define and regulate this form of speech, the category has been hazy. Policymakers and legal experts have only a fuzzy definition of what may be problematic texts. In 1996, the US Congress ordered the attorney general to conduct an investigation into the public availability of bomb-making instruction. Not surprisingly, FBI investigators found many texts on explosives from both "underground" and mainstream sources, not only on the Internet, but also in the Library of Congress.[5] More recently, policy experts on terrorism have attempted to identify a subcategory of "terrorist speech" that involves online instruction in making suicide vests, ammonium nitrate fertilizer bombs, biological weapons, ballistic missiles, and other dangerous weapons. Some have concluded that the Internet is a "virtual training camp" for radicals, who circulate encyclopedias of weapons information and offer consultation in weapons making.[6] Other analysts have challenged the practical application of this online technical information,

but have remained interested in the prevalence of "terrorist *techne*" on "jihadi" websites.[7] Many terrorism consultants and analysts fear that we are facing a time of escalating access to widespread dangerous information that puts us in unprecedented danger. Terror experts suggest that terrorists are "knowledge workers" who excel at digital transfers of technical and tactical knowledge.[8]

Fully understanding popular weapons manuals and their historic challenges to our tolerance for radical speech can help us develop a framework for realistically judging their dangers. Our current understanding is thin and distorted. On the ground, the police look for the same infamous titles in the possession of suspects during searches and seizures. Books and computers are confiscated as evidence of evil intent and conspiracy. In the courts, sensational texts are introduced as evidence to prove criminal intention and sometimes purely to taint the suspect's character. The same texts—like *The Anarchist Cookbook* and its online variants—tend to turn up time and time again: on evidence lists, in court cases, and in news stories. Governing bodies pass laws that enhance the ability of the police to charge suspects with the production and possession of dangerous instructional texts.

In the United States some caution has been exercised to always combine such charges with more serious charges that a suspect has intended to actually implement the technical information, but, in Britain, it is possible to be thrown in jail simply for possession of popular weapons manuals with no requirement that the suspect be proven to have used them for a terrorist purpose.[9] For example, in 2007, eighteen-year-old Abdul Patel was found guilty under the Terrorism Act for possessing *EOD: Improvised Explosives Manual*, but acquitted of the charge that he planned to use it in a terrorist attack. Published by Paladin Press in 1991 and written by a bomb squad consultant, this book contained information on how to produce a variety of improvised explosive devices, including radio-controlled detonators. Patel joined Samina Malik, known as "the Lyrical Terrorist" because of her violent poetry, who was convicted for possession of an "extremist library," including an official technical manual for a sniper rifle. Malik won her appeal against these charges.[10] The perceived danger surrounding Patel and Malik was not simply ownership of dangerous books, but the context in which they were found. Patel is the son of Mohammed Patel, a veteran of the Afghan war against the Soviets, whose charity shop was alleged to be "a meeting place for Islamist extremists."[11] Other seemingly damning evidence included a book on the Taliban and a picture of Osama bin Laden and the message "Kill Bush" on Patel's mobile phone. Malik had visited the websites of radical Islamist clerics and had worked at a bookstore at Heathrow airport where she wrote a note on the cash register roll that proclaimed her desire for martyrdom. Yet the prosecution was not able to prove terrorist conspiracy in these cases, and relied instead on the flimsier section 58 of the Terrorism Act that suggests mere interest in violent crime is criminal.[12]

As British legal scholar Ian Cram has argued, cases like Malik's "raise normative issues of principle concerning the circumstances, if any, in which the state is entitled to criminalize the mere possession of information."[13] One issue is whether speech like a bomb-making manual is a distinct form of speech and an appropriate exemption to free speech protections. Some have argued that "instructions for building a bomb are not a point of view" that deserves protection.[14] Others are skeptical, suggesting that democratic states have overstepped their bounds in legislation aimed at terrorist speech, which is often passed during times of perceived emergency.[15] Laura Donohue maintains that emergency legislation ends up enshrined in criminal law without sufficient oversight, broadening the base of potential suspects beyond what was originally intended.[16] Two key laws have been passed in the United States to regulate dangerous instructional speech: 18 U.S.C. § 842(p), which bans the teaching or demonstration of a making or use of an explosive weapon, and 18 U.S. Code § 2339, which prohibits "providing material support to terrorists." Terror suspects have recently faced charges under these statutes in highly controversial cases that have raised questions about what kinds of speech are now forbidden.

Although the problem of popular weapons manuals may seem a special challenge of our fight against terrorism and our digital environments, it is not a new one. In the United States, popular weapons manuals have provoked a series of confrontations between radicals and governing authorities over the freedom to circulate potentially dangerous, unclassified technical information. The outcomes of these confrontations have avoided the more severe repression of other Western democracies, but have represented a significant fluctuation in social tolerance of dissenting speech. With individualism, freedom of speech, and love of technology enshrined in public culture, the US federal government has generally conceded that popular weapons manuals can't be formally censored. However, some texts, like *The Anarchist Cookbook*, have become what anarchist Johann Most once called "literary Satans," used in criminal profiling and as legal evidence to demonize persons critical of the state. With the escalation of information in digital environments, both overt and covert means of censorship have intensified. Whether our time merits a special set of rules to control this form of speech is the subject of this book, which examines direct confrontations between radicals and the government over the right to technical information.

Defining the Genre

The first task is to identify what kind of technical speech has seemed dangerous enough to warrant surveillance, criminal profiling, and punishment. Print materials have most often entered the courts, but instructional speech may also

be relayed through verbal instructions and audiovisual materials. Generally, the texts that have fallen under government scrutiny consist of these types:

1. Training manuals produced by military branches. These manuals are unclassified documents in the public domain. Veterans (who may become members of radical organizations) carry them into wider circulation, and public libraries sometimes collect them. They may contain information about blasting during military operations, care and handling of firearms, biological and chemical weapons, and improvised explosive devices used in irregular warfare. These are only perceived to be dangerous when alleged criminals and political radicals own them.
2. Popular weapons manuals produced by paramilitary publishers. These manuals may simply be direct reprints of official army training materials in the public domain. Often an anonymous, self-proclaimed expert has compiled the work from a variety of legitimate sources—such as military manuals and science textbooks. These manuals may contain information on biological and chemical weapons, improvised explosive devices, and firearms and missiles. The texts aim to translate technical information into the ordinary speech of do-it-yourself (DIY) popular mechanics. Hauled before congressional committees and into the courts, paramilitary publishers have often claimed a legal right to publish this kind of information.
3. Weapons manuals produced by radicals. These texts have the stated aim of providing weapons information so that their audiences may resist the state. The DIY ethos becomes a political statement that radicals have the right to the violent knowledge typically controlled by the state. These manuals strongly resemble those produced by military and paramilitary publishers with the exception that they include an introduction and commentary that is overtly political. Although they contain information found in other sources, the texts are most likely to provoke efforts at suppression.

As this book will show, fictional works containing technical description have sometimes come under surveillance, but overall they have remained in a separate category of imaginative, rather than technical, speech. The category does not include classified technical information, which falls under a different set of controls.

Authorship of popular weapons manuals is difficult to identify. The genre relies on collation and outright plagiarism as the information is copied from text to text, like culinary recipes. That is why the word "cookbook" has been applied to these manuals; they strongly resemble this more benign form of technical exchange. The "recipes" contain ingredients lists and procedural directions and often hold the promise that they can be made in an ordinary household setting,

with simple, easily obtainable tools and materials. Typically, any political statements are made in introductions and conclusions, so that the stated intention is added to a technical core. These are distinct forms of speech that coexist uneasily, especially since political speech is more ephemeral than the technical information continually circulated across many texts. In recent years, technical instructions are often accompanied by weak disclaimers that the information is "for educational purposes only" or by references to the First Amendment.

Popular weapons instruction circulates in a variety of venues. This book is primarily concerned with its textual dissemination, from the rudimentary handouts in paramilitary groups to handbooks published by commercial presses to websites. Recipe books for weapons have been found in written form since at least the twelfth century. Then, handbooks combining magic and pyrotechnics appeared, including the "vagabond" Marcus Grecus's *Book of Fires for the Burning of Enemies*, which compiled formulas for incendiary weapons and secret handwriting and other illusions.[17] It wasn't until the nineteenth century—with its expanding international news media, professional consolidation of science and technology, and violent conflict between radical groups and elites—that the dirty tricks and pyrotechnics handbooks became the site of political struggle. Then, popular weapons information began circulating in radical newsletters and pamphlets and continued throughout the twentieth century to be associated with a dissident and alternative press. Paramilitary publishers catering to anti-communist, white supremacist groups appeared in the early 1960s, widely disseminating DIY explosives manuals and reprints of military training manuals that are still circulating today.

In the early 1990s, much of this information, already existing in print media, was uploaded to pyrotechnics BBS (bulletin board system) forums and eventually found its way into torrents and websites. Photographs in popular weapons instruction are relatively new because of the risks and difficulties of obtaining clear images and the cost of reproduction. Prior to the digital age, publishing outfits could afford to include a few grainy photographs, but independent creators usually relied on the written form. This has changed dramatically with the multimedia capabilities of digital technologies, so that "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom" features very clear color photos. Since the advent of video hosting sites, video versions of older print directions and video demonstrations of amateur experimentation have proliferated. Multimedia productions enhance instructional clarity, transfer, sharing, and access: users no longer need to understand the printed language.

The information found in popular weapons manuals can also be found in other sources and represents a state of common, widely dispersed knowledge about explosives and weapons engineering. It is not classified information. One of the most common arguments against criminalizing popular weapons manuals

is that the information they convey is already in the public sphere. Even if the information were banned from the Web, an energetic would-be bomb maker can go to a research library and find information in accessible government documents and standard chemical and engineering textbooks. Indeed, authors of popular weapons manuals readily plagiarize from other sources, and this plagiarism is often seen as a political act, a theft of what Irish nationalists in the nineteenth century called "the resources of civilization." Many authors and publishers of popular weapons manuals present themselves as Prometheuses, liberating information from the hands of the powerful and placing it in the hands of the people.

For these authors, the application of knowledge is not as important as the democratizing of the knowledge that maintains governmental power. Despite their fantasies of military and scientific prowess, many authors of popular weapons manuals are not proficient as military engineers, nor are their instructions especially reliable or useful, because they exist solely in the realm of theory.[18] Rather, these authors aim to empower people with the mere idea that they can command the resources of civilization if they should so choose. The means of rebellion are always present and seemingly concretized in practical knowledge. The mode of address is both to an inside audience of rebellious readers and to an outside audience of authorities exposed as having only a fragile control of knowledge. Although the vast majority will never apply the information, readers avidly consume and circulate popular weapons manuals, participating as rebels against governmental and corporate control over information. Popular weapons manuals are a form of popular culture, and popular culture has often provided imaginative spaces for experimentation with rebellious identities. The motivations of the producers of popular weapons manuals have rarely been examined, though they provide insight into the formation of radical identities and sets of beliefs about technologies.

The Wrong Hands

The fear of weapons-making capabilities getting into the wrong hands is as old as the nation. When Thomas Morton arrived in Massachusetts Bay in 1628, he set up an outpost, Merrymount, where he and his seven companions began commerce with the southern New England Indians. Celebrated in American history and literature as the "Lord of Misrule," Morton shocked his Plymouth colony neighbors with his licentious antics. He was soon arrested and deported, ostensibly for selling guns to the Indians and instructing them in their use.[19] In his journal, William Bradford, governor of Plymouth, outlined a long list of grievances against Morton, including drunkenness and riotousness, rudeness and incivility, and "base covetousness" in trading liquor and guns. Bradford explained

that Morton's gun trade included teaching Indians how to repair weapons and make bullets, and perhaps worst, "how gunpowder is made, and all ye materialls in it, and that they are to be had in their own land; and I am confidente, could they attaine to make saltpeter, they would teach them to make powder. O the horiblnes of this vilanie!" Bradford painted a grim future of the Indians becoming technologically superior combatants and the "colonies in these parts . . . over throwne by these barbarous savages, thus armed with their own weapons." So taken away is he by dark fantasies of murder and betrayal that Bradford stopped to apologize: "I have forgotten myself."[20]

Popular weapons instruction emulates and opposes the military power of governing authorities. This spread of knowledge may pose a direct threat to the legitimacy, if not the very existence, of those authorities. This is tacitly understood on both sides. That is why spokespersons for the state so often use the cliché "falling into the wrong hands," and why producers and disseminators of illicit instruction never do. "The wrong hands" are mysterious in the official discourse, shadowy actors who pose an existential threat. The "wrong hands," rather than the "wrong minds," implies a doing—a concrete action against government—though the information in a manual is still abstract. "The wrong hands" implies the "right hands," the government-supported entities that produce weapons and other dangerous technologies to be used in a theoretical just cause. Gatekeepers—like journalists and academic experts—allow themselves to read and openly discuss dangerous instructional texts, deciding which parts can be read and shown to the public. Their discussion of dangerous texts is surrounded by a discourse of fear and anxiety about the wrong hands that establishes their continuing role as the right hands.

Because the information is dangerous and fearful, most citizens are willing to go along with this arrangement, trusting experts for a sense of security, but a substantial number of citizens reject that control. The majority of these dissenters have no aim to commit real criminal or revolutionary acts. Their dissent lies in reproducing information outside sanctioned venues. They know that simply disseminating a dangerous instructional text is a thorn in the side of the government that legitimates itself by protecting the people. They don't even have to accompany instruction with dissenting political speech, though some do. When that happens, even though the information is publicly available in other venues, the government's law enforcement arm may come down with full force, especially on any designated enemy of the state—left or right—who dares toy with dangerous instructional speech. Investigators and prosecutors profile and then publicly vilify enemies of the state to gain public support for their condemnation. The courts and media organs are the theaters for this punishment of speech, although not all judges and editors are willing to play along. The spectacle creates a cycle in which dissenters know that producing such texts will gain

the government's attention and provoke its displeasure. Sometimes this speech is tolerated, and sometimes not.

Popular weapons manuals test the boundaries of what Herbert Marcuse called "repressive tolerance." In his formulation, the United States as "an advanced industrial society" practices an uneven form of tolerance to suppress real dissent and truthful social analysis: all opinions are tolerated so that none can emerge. This tolerance has limits when it threatens an elite that holds a "privileged position" in public discourse and the means to suppress dissent through "legalized violence or suppression." Within the regime of tolerance, dissent has no "subversive sting," as Slavoj Žižek puts it. Žižek comments on President Bill Clinton's reaction to the antiglobalization protests in Seattle, Washington, in 1999, when he urged the WTO leaders to listen to the demonstrators while reminding them that they had to "behave properly" and purge the "violent extremists." Žižek calls this a form of containment: "The system is by definition ecumenical, open, tolerant, ready to 'listen' to all—even if you insist on your demands, they are deprived of their universal political sting by the very form of negotiation."[21] How to break through an illusionary, tightly administered tolerance to gain an effective dissent—a sting—is the question, opening the possibility of violence. Marcuse saw the intolerance of all violence as the prerequisite for a peaceful, truthful, beautiful society. Žižek has been more willing to argue for violence as a possibility. The popular weapons manual has the potential to deliver a real sting, and resides at the border between word and deed and therefore at the edge of tolerance.

Abbie Hoffmann's *Steal This Book* is the most self-reflective popular weapons manual ever written and was a Yippie performance of Marcuse's idea. *Steal This Book* was a manual of antiestablishment practices and provided advice on shoplifting, setting up pirate radio stations, creating political graffiti, using slugs in commercial washing machines, winning at hand-to-hand combat, making pipe bombs, and other acts of "creative disruption." Hoffman gave directions for the "Froines," a butyric acid stink bomb named after one of the Chicago Seven who had been charged under a provision of the Civil Obedience Act against bomb-making instruction. Parodying Paladin Press's how-to manuals and published in the same year as *The Anarchist Cookbook*, *Steal This Book* was promoted as "a handbook for survival and warfare for the citizens of the Woodstock Nation."[22] With loans from his friends, Hoffman had set up his own publishing company when the major publishers had refused to take it. Major newspapers refused to run advertisements for it.

Hoffman made free speech a central argument for his book. He listed the reluctant publishers on the back cover under the bold announcement that "This Book Will End Free Speech." From the Cook County Jail, where he was imprisoned for resisting arrest, Hoffman wrote in his introduction: "Literally anyone

is free to print their own works. In even the most repressive society imaginable, you can get away with some form of private publishing."[23] Echoing the popular philosopher Herbert Marcuse, he warned, however, that a "repressive tolerance" might seemingly allow such small-scale productions, in the name of free speech, as long as the ideas gained no wider dissemination and disruptive force.

Steal This Book solicited state suppression—and overreaction—as a way of exposing the sham of tolerance. Hoffman tweaked the forces of government and the hegemonic mass media with his discourse of cons, dirty tricks, urban survivalism, improvised weapons, and strategies for avoiding the law. One of his "yippie proverbs" was, "Free speech is the right to shout 'theater' in a crowded fire." The FBI, which had Hoffman under surveillance for years, kept track of *Steal This Book*, as agents sent back reports on Hoffman's statements about free speech and his alleged efforts to establish a "Rip-off Institute" with experts in safe-cracking, drug dealings, and shoplifting.[24] Despite its depictions of illegal activities, the comic elements and tone of his work made it difficult to label it abetting or incitement, and the US assistant attorney general decided that it fell short of any criminal liability even though it "encouraged" criminal activity.[25] The book's comic status as a playfully perverse Boy Scout manual gave it immense popular appeal.

From the point of view of the state, avowed radicals circulating weapons-making information are definitely "the wrong hands," which the state believes it has the power to define. Only the "right hands," as defined by the state, should properly have access to such information. It is considered acceptable for certain groups to circulate technical information about explosives, bombs, and other weapons for purposes such as science education and military defense. The right hands include scientists and engineers in research institutions, military personnel, terror experts, police, students, librarians, and crime writers and journalists on the crime beat who condemn the activity. Impossible to really know, the audiences for these texts are imagined to be similarly benign. That is why an environmental activist is arrested for demonstrating an arson device, while a television station gets away with showing video footage of the same presentation.

For the government, the issue is not technical information itself, but rather who possesses it. As Donohue explains, dangerous instructional speech is usually rooted in other legitimate uses.[26] Historically, the problem of popular weapons information has arisen during a surge of fear over a violent group that has in some way opposed the government and its institutions. This fear arises only periodically despite a constant background of thousands of crimes involving explosives in the United States every year. Indeed, some ideologically motivated bombings—such as during the long period in the United States of bomb violence against blacks and Jews—are overlooked because the groups responsible have not directly challenged governmental power, and the victims are not

considered worth defending. Given their publicly stated values, democracies find it difficult to overtly suppress mere antigovernment speech. Governments find other ways to discipline speech, and the new security measures percolate through the courts and law enforcement agencies. Technical information about explosives and other weapons is frightening and concrete enough that its subtle criminalization seems a practical measure to ensure public safety.[27]

In the United States, despite numerous congressional investigations and legal debates that will be discussed in this book, popular weapons manuals have never been overtly censored, as they have in more repressive regimes. The federal government has typically opted to control substances, like dynamite and ammonium nitrate fertilizer, rather than texts. Because popular weapons manuals are only conceived as dangerous when associated with radicals, they have been used primarily as a means of criminal profiling, when investigators make assumptions about the owner of such a manual, and as prosecutorial evidence to encourage impressions of a defendant's character and criminal intent. These uses of evidence have come under fire for their relevance and constitutional violations, and have led to some of the most egregious instances of judicial malfeasance and mistaken justice in US history. During periods of repression, like the 1919–1920 Red Scare, when political dissent was met with physical violence and exile, texts that encourage sabotage and guerrilla warfare have been swept up in police investigations and used to demonstrate that vast seditious conspiracies are underway. Politicians, journalists, prosecutors, and police wave these texts before the public and proclaim that severe action against the radicals, bent on murder and mayhem, must be taken. Legislative committees debate the problem of instructional speech and the limits of free speech, calling authors and publishers before them to testify. Laws are passed to deliberately impose a chilling effect and to provide the police with greater latitude in using these texts as evidence against presumed terrorists. None of these efforts have diminished the production of popular weapons manuals, which now proliferate on the Internet.

Bruce Hoffman has written that the accumulation of information has led, in part, to an "amateurization of terrorism."[28] However, amateurishness is fundamental to the way that official and unofficial knowledge domains have been defined. In the mid-nineteenth century, a split occurred, with the professional specialist worlds of technicians and scientists (including military weapons developers) on the one side, and amateurs encouraged by science education and popular science journals on the other.[29] Information about explosives and explosive devices circulated in pyrotechnics and military manuals, science textbooks, encyclopedias of household arts, and even children's fiction. During the Second Industrial Revolution, considerable economic power was concentrated in a new network of industrialists and research scientists and technicians, but

there also arose an interest in popular science and technology among radicals opposed to the concentration of power and wealth. From a range of revolutionary philosophies and inspired by a democratic discourse on science, these radicals believed that technological power—the power of the new dynamite—had to be wrested from the hands of the capitalist owners and the imperial rulers and delivered into the hands of the people. At this time, the "underground" of popular weapons information flourished transnationally—from New York to Paris to Bengal to Tokyo—as radicals passed print and verbal instructions from hand to hand, sometimes attracting the eyes of police, judges, and politicians. Many of the most powerful, easily deployed weapons known today use the high explosives invented in the nineteenth century. Well-known devices such as the pipe bomb came from the nineteenth century and were described in radical texts of those days. Emerging from a context of an advancing technological warfare and internal conflict between capital and labor, radicals dreamed of exploiting aircraft—balloons—to drop bombs over cities, disguising bombs in parcels and other benign-looking objects, and pouring arsenic in the water mains to poison entire cities. This period coincides with creation of the first published anarchist cookbook—Johann Most's *Science of Revolutionary Warfare*—which introduced the genre we know today and its first court appearance in a political trial.

The weapons information "underground" grew through an increasingly literate population of military enthusiasts and household inventors who have greatly contributed to the popular weapons manual. *Backyard Ballistics* author William Gurstelle has termed this population the "Technological Underground," by which he means a space where "ardent technophiles" take intellectual, psychological, and physical pleasure in creating dangerous devices like rockets and flamethrowers in their garage workshops, resisting the enclosure of invention in "large, corporate, methodical and highly specialized work teams."[30] The "Technological Underground" is not really underground in the sense of existing in secret or in code. Rather, it is entirely aboveground: it publicly resists the enclosure of protected knowledge domains, educates people without access to these domains, liberates information for popular use, and flaunts its technological prowess. It is the slanted mirror of official military research and development. The amateurs love science and technology but rebel against its institutionalization. The activities of these enthusiasts, most of whom do not see themselves as part of any group, are mostly tolerated unless they violate safety and local nuisance laws. Many people who became intrigued by science as children can remember the illicit pleasures of blowing something up in a field and perhaps reading encyclopedias, almanacs, chemistry textbooks, and DIY explosive manuals with their edgy pleasures. The technophiles may experiment with very dangerous technologies, as in the case of Richard Handl,

a former factory worker in Sweden with an interest in science, who blogged about his attempts to create a fission reaction in his kitchen with nuclear materials he gleaned from clocks and smoke detectors. Handle was arrested for violation of a public safety law, Sweden's Radiation Protection Act.[31] Few would argue against community controls on explosive, highly flammable, and radioactive materials, such as preventing their manufacture, use, and storage near residences.

There is a subtle transition from edgy backyard pyrotechnics to technological threat, when the acceptable hands become the wrong hands condemned by the government, the news media, and the scientific establishment. In my university library there is a copy of an old organic chemistry manual with directions for making picric acid, a volatile substance used in explosives. Next to this recipe, some reader has drawn in pen the symbol for anarchy. In my many travels through these kinds of texts, this is the most rudimentary example I have seen of altering explosives information with an antiauthoritarian statement. Even though it may end only in the defacement of a library book, this small symbol changes the meaning of the text, revealing that while chemistry students may use it for an ordinary education, other readers may steal it for rebellious purposes.

This book discusses these tipping points, when the anarchy sign[32] gives new meaning to instructional texts and provokes police investigations, arrests, and incarcerations; debates over their use as evidence in the courts; and congressional hearings. It begins in the nineteenth century, when small groups associated with a burgeoning labor movement become entranced with the ease of producing the new portable high explosives. The first "anarchist cookbooks" are introduced in this period, leading to the first court case to feature such a manual, with a shocking outcome that will change the course of free speech protections. Other historic legal cases will show how the courts have dealt with popular weapons manuals as problematic evidence, leading to legal disputes over freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to read. The book ends by considering recent terror cases and instructions for weapons of mass destruction within this context. Biographies of popular weapons manuals show that they have had many purposes: sometimes to sew the dragon's teeth for an armed revolution, sometimes to provoke a low-level criminal resistance to the state, sometimes simply to test the government's commitment to freedom of speech, sometimes for sheer entertainment, sometimes as an angry emotional expression, and sometimes to explore political and technical ideas. In the end, it is easy to see that popular weapons manuals are not merely technical and instrumental, but cultural expressions.

Covering all the most important texts and cases, the book doesn't aim to defend popular weapons manuals, but to explore their legal, cultural, and social

meanings and their challenge to public tolerance. That way, when the next criminal or terrorist case associated with a popular weapons manual appears, we will respond with a reasoned understanding. Perhaps as a society we will decide, in the interests of peace, that we must find ways to scour popular weapons instructions from public view. Or perhaps we will again decide that targeting and suppressing this form of speech is not worth the cost to a democratic society. The past lends us some cautionary tales to show that the problem is much more challenging and complex than it first appears.

1

The Science of Revolutionary Warfare

In a Chicago courthouse in 1886, a condemned man stood before the judge to make a final argument for his innocence in a case of murder and political conspiracy. His road to the gallows began in a violent confrontation between demonstrators and police at an evening labor rally. A fuse-lit grenade had been thrown, the police had opened fire, and bloody mayhem had ensued, leading to the deaths of eight police officers and at least three civilians, dozens of injuries on both sides, and the defendant's arrest for murder. Yet the prosecution had been unable to present any substantial evidence of his material association with the bomb. Using his printed words and his reading materials, the prosecution had constructed him as one of the masterminds behind a massive conspiracy, and the newspapers had painted him a violent, animalistic monster bent on the destruction of civilization, a symbolic enemy of order. August Spies's crime was vague encouragement; his public words had made him an accessory before the fact.

One of the texts introduced against him and his seven codefendants was a slender volume, *Revolutionäre Kriegswissenschaft—The Science of Revolutionary Warfare*. It was mostly a compendium of directions for making high explosives, bombs, and other covert weapons, written in a conversational style as if among friends. Like nineteenth-century pyrotechnics manuals, it included curiosities like blowpipes, invisible ink, and exotic poisons like curare and ptomaine taken from corpses.[1] Very occasionally the text would identify the potential targets of these homemade weapons in the tone of a mean-spirited joke. Describing a well-known inflammable compound often used for arson, the text observed: "Clothes, of course, burn well. In this regard experiments were made in France with detectives, and those experiments have warmed them up pretty lively." Of a successful experiment involving a forged iron globe filled with dynamite, it suggested: "Just think, if this bomb had been placed under the table of a gluttonous dinner party, or it had been thrown through a window on the table what a beautiful effect it would have had."[2] This sensational content fulfilled the expectations of most readers of the city's daily

newspapers who had already damned the defendants as vicious enemies of their civilization.

Despite objections that the book was irrelevant and inadmissible, the prosecution spent most of an afternoon reading lengthy excerpts from *Revolutionäre Kriegswissenschaft*, keeping the court an hour longer than usual. The book had been found in the library of Spies's newspaper office, he had published excerpts in his socialist newspaper, *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, and he had corresponded with the author, Johann Most, a German anarchist famous for his black humor, hyperbole, and bitter invective against rulers and capitalists. Arriving in the United States in 1882, Most was well known in Chicago, where, in a duel of insults, the press had called him the "craziest lunatic" who had had the temerity to take advantage of the speech rights accorded to him in the United States: "He has clearly demonstrated that he is without principle, an incendiary, an inciter of lawlessness, rapine, and murder, and a person unfit to breathe the free air of heaven associated with his fellows."[3] The papers dared Most and his followers in Chicago to put rhetoric into action: "There is not a person in the United States who would care to restrain Herr Most from preaching [his] doctrines from Dan to Beersheba and from now until doomsday, but in case any effort should be made to carry them into effect he would find that the entire population, with the exception of a handful of lazy and crazy beer-drinkers, would rise in their wrath."[4] With fragile evidence the police witnesses tried to show that bombs allegedly confiscated from an anarchist's residence were based on the book's instructions, but the link could not be proven. Despite failed attempts to tie the book to murder, *Revolutionäre Kriegswissenschaft* stood as the threshold between speech and action. Whoever owned it, discussed it, or was even adjacent to it in the next room was guilty of a conspiratorial preparation. Presiding Judge Joseph Gary, now infamous for his bias, ruled that the defendants needed only have been near the book for the prosecution to use it as evidence of criminal conspiracy: "If there is evidence . . . tending to show a state of things, tending to show objects which individuals have in view and that those objects are the overturning of civil order by force, then the means by which it is proposed to be accomplished, are admissible in evidence, and if among those means are books treating of and instructing how to do it, the possession of those books is one thing that may be proved."[5] Set against the discussion of tolerance for violent anarchist speech, *Revolutionäre Kriegswissenschaft* had raised the stakes with its combination of revolutionary rhetoric, vague threats, and technical instructions that imaged the anarchist as smart, rational, adept, and armed, in command of a science usually employed by empire-builders, military officers, and learned men. The prosecution knew that its introduction would create a sensational narrative of the defendants conspiring with the demonized Most.