

Sharpton, Jackson, and the Onslaught of Radical Race Politics

By Cheryl K. Chumley

Summary: The Reverends Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson have long generated controversy, yet the Obama administration has done much to heighten their reputations, as well as skew government policy in the direction of their racial rhetoric. Now even more extreme groups like the New Black Panther Party are waiting in the wings, hoping to rise to the same kind of respectability.

It was 2008 and two New Black Panther Party (NBPP) members had just been captured on video standing mere feet from a polling place in Philadelphia. They were dressed in black military garb and by all appearances—one was waving a billy club—threatening and intimidating would-be voters. After the video caught the attention of the nation, the Department of Justice, under President George W. Bush, launched an investigation.

Fast-forward a few months to the newly seated Obama administration. Attorney General Eric Holder dropped the voter intimidation case against one of the Panthers, and against the party itself, claiming a lack of evidence. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, tasked to investigate the second NBPP defendant, closed its case and suspended publication of its findings.



Malik Zulu Shabazz (left), national chairman of the New Black Panther Party, in an undated photograph.

Meanwhile, career Justice Department lawyer J. Christian Adams came forth with firsthand accounts of his colleagues' bias, declaring publicly that the Justice Department ignored the facts of the case in order to protect minorities. Americans concerned about the integrity of the country's electoral system were outraged. Holder himself fueled the flames of outrage in testimony before a House Appropriations subcommittee, when he responded to a Democratic activist's charge that the NBPP incident was an egregious act of voter intimidation:

“Think about it,” Holder said. “When you compare what people endured in the South in the '60s to try to get the right to vote for

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African Americans, and to compare what people were subjected to there to what happened in Philadelphia—which was inappropriate, certainly that—to describe it in those terms, I think does a great disservice to people who put their lives on the line, who risked all, for my people.”

This statement was proof to many that racial politics had tainted the investigation. As Rep. John Culberson (R-Texas) said at the same hearing, “There’s clearly evidence, overwhelming evidence, that your Department of Justice refuses to protect the rights of anybody other than African Americans to vote. There’s a pattern of a double standard here.”

Holder denies such a double standard. Yet black activist and militant groups do hold considerable influence in how black/white issues are debated on a national scale.

Just look to the Trayvon Martin case in Florida: Martin, a black teen, was shot and killed by George Zimmerman in what Zim-

merman described as an act of self-defense. Before any facts of the case were known, the NBPP called for the arrest and prosecution of Zimmerman, placing a \$10,000 bounty on his head and distributing a “Wanted” poster urging his capture.

Holder, meanwhile, promised hands-on involvement and told the Detroit chapter of the NAACP that “as this case moves through the legal system, Justice Department officials will continue to communicate closely with state and local authorities to ensure that community concerns are heard, tensions are alleviated, and—as with every investigation at every level—appropriate actions are guided by the facts and the law.”

Nationally known black activists like the Revs. Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson rallied. Sharpton called for “justice for Trayvon,” while Jackson used the case as a platform to further his view that “blacks are under attack.”

Interestingly, most facts from the case that put Martin in a bad light or that reflected positively on Zimmerman were largely ignored in the weeks of saturation media coverage that followed. Of course the media should be held accountable for failing to do their due diligence in this case, but so-called civil rights groups and radical activists with views unsupported by reality were driving the media coverage and influencing public discourse.

Admittedly, not all such groups receive the same level of media respect. The NBPP, for instance, is decidedly more militant and anti-white than, say, Sharpton and his National Action Network, or Jackson and his Rainbow PUSH Coalition. Yet the NBPP still holds considerable sway. One has to wonder if the same journalists who amplified the views of the NBPP during the Trayvon Martin case

would pay similar attention to the Ku Klux Klan on a story of a black man shooting a white teen. Do reporters make an effort to include KKK views in stories with racial aspects in order to provide readers with a balanced account—with “the other side?” Of course not; the KKK is considered a fringe source with opinions that don’t—and shouldn’t—count. Yet even though many would consider the NBPP just as racist as the KKK, the media, and even Holder, who has yet to condemn the NBPP or its members’ actions, grant these types of groups a substantial public platform.

Here’s the deeper point: Even some groups whose political stances are less radical than Sharpton’s are often just as radical in their messages, so much so that their agendas and core principles are actually aligned with the more overtly radical groups like the NBPP.

And that raises the question: Just what are all these groups and how are they shaping America’s politics, media, and public perceptions?

The Rev. Al Sharpton, a man of the (black) people

In April CNN raised an interesting question. When Holder agreed to speak at Sharpton’s annual convention earlier this year, during which the Trayvon Martin case was to be heavily debated, did the attorney general’s presence at the meeting enhance the left-wing activists’ stature and legitimacy in the eyes of the public? The answer, according to a political analyst quoted in the CNN report: “It certainly is a sign of Sharpton’s very close relationship with the White House.”

Holder sang Sharpton’s praises at the event. CNN reported that the attorney general thanked Sharpton for his friendship and for his “tireless efforts to speak out for the voiceless, to stand up for the powerless and

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Address:

1513 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-1480

Phone: (202) 483-6900

Long-Distance: (800) 459-3950

E-mail Address:

mvadum@capitalresearch.org

Web Site:

<http://www.capitalresearch.org>

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to shine a light on the problems we must solve and the promises we must fulfill.”

Sharpton himself, meanwhile, saw Holder’s presence as a sign of respect for his activism and his National Action Network’s efforts. But Americans should be concerned about Holder and the Obama administration’s needless injection of race into day-to-day politics, as well as the administration’s skewing of laws away from the ideal of a color-blind America and toward racial favoritism and demagoguery. Sharpton may deny that the bulk of his politics and causes are rooted in race-baiting, but history proves otherwise.

In 1987, a 15-year-old black female New Yorker, Tawana Brawley, was found in a street alley covered in dog feces and with racial slurs written over her body. She said she was the victim of rape by several white men, one of whom she later identified as a local prosecutor, Steven Pagonis. Ever the ambulance chaser, Sharpton rushed to her defense. It wasn’t long before facts revealed Brawley was lying; she fabricated the whole story so she wouldn’t get in trouble for leaving home for four days. Pagonis subsequently sued for defamation and won. In 1998, Sharpton was ordered to pay Pagonis his \$65,000 share of the \$345,000 in damages awarded by the court. Even then, however, Sharpton refused to recant his belief in Brawley’s story. Years later, he not only still stood by her allegations, but also refused to apologize to Pagonis.

By comparison, when radio host Don Imus referred to the Rutgers University women’s basketball team in April 2007 as “nappy-headed ho’s,” Sharpton was quick to condemn him, even though Imus apologized repeatedly for his ugly remark. Sharpton called for Imus’s firing and said “this is not about insensitivity, this is about the abusive, racist, sexist use of our federal regulated airways.”



Al Sharpton (left) with Tawana Brawley, circa 1988

MSNBC host David Gregory pointed to the seeming double standard during an April 2007 show: “You didn’t go as far as apologizing to the people who you hurt through that [Brawley] incident. This was, the courts have concluded, a hoax, accusations against whites by a young black woman about a race-based assault. A court ordered you to pay restitution for a defamation suit against people whose reputation you hurt. You didn’t apologize for that,” Gregory said.

No matter. The bias didn’t hurt Sharpton any, or his ability to influence politics at the highest levels. In 2010, he became the president’s *de facto* spokesman for the black community. As the *Wall Street Journal* reported, Sharpton “has found a new role: telling black leaders to quiet their criticisms and give the government a chance. President Barack Obama has turned to Mr. Sharpton in recent weeks to answer increasingly public criticism in the black community over his economic policy. So black leaders are charging that the nation’s first African-American President has failed to help black communities hit hard by the downturn . . . Mr. Sharpton has emerged as an important part of the White House response . . . directly rebutting the President’s critics, arguing that Mr. Obama is right to craft

policies aimed at lifting all Americans rather than specifically targeting blacks.”

Justice for all, regardless of color—that’s a strange line of logic for Sharpton to advance, given his own personal failure to do the same.

Sharpton’s National Action Network

Sharpton founded the National Action Network in New York in 1991 to “work within the spirit and tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to promote a modern civil rights agenda that includes the fight for one standard of justice, decency and equal opportunities for all people regardless of race, religion, national origin and gender,” according to the group’s mission statement. (For more on National Action Network, see Fred Lucas’s profile in the May 2010 *Foundation Watch*.)

Curiously, this stated devotion to racial diversity is not reflected in the staff at NAN. Of nine persons listed on the group’s website as members of the national staff, seven are pictured as black, and one person is not pictured. Of the 28 persons pictured as members of the board of directors, all are black.

Sharpton favors causes that advance his

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narrow view of justice and race relations. The title of a March 23 NAN press release: “Stand for Trayvon As If He Were Your Own.” A March 9 release: “Time to Rush ‘Rush’ [Limbaugh] Off The Air.” A March 2 release, “Why We’re Marching Again in Alabama,” details Sharpton’s presence at rallies in Alabama to protest voter identification laws that “clearly target the poor, minorities” and are “down-right racist.” (For more on voter fraud, see the May 2012 *Organization Trends*.)

But being black and a victim of racial violence does not guarantee Sharpton’s support. Remember Kenneth Gladney? He was a black conservative who passed out “Don’t Tread on Me” flags at an August 2009 town hall event in Missouri hosted by Rep. Russ Carnahan (D-Missouri). Several Service Employees International Union (SEIU) members accosted him and called him a racial epithet. The incident was captured on video and put on YouTube. Gladney ultimately sued the union members for assault, but lost. Yet the video did show an altercation. So where was Sharpton during this incident? Nowhere to be found, even though the initial findings of the incident ought to have been enough to bring on at least talk of a hate crime investigation.

As *Investor’s Business Daily* opined:

The beating of Kenneth Gladney by people wearing the purple shirts of the [SEIU] outside a Missouri health care town hall meeting three months ago met all the classic definitions of a hate crime.... As Gladney recounted the incident on *biggovernment.com*, a person shouted: ‘what kind of [N-word] are you?’ Then, ‘he grabbed my board, so I quickly grabbed it back, then the man punched me in the face

and charged at me.’ ... The national media weren’t paying attention, and neither were the ACLU, civil rights groups or the Revs. Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton. Gladney was the wrong kind of victim.

Sharpton also didn’t mind stepping into the largely white Occupy movement, which aligned itself perfectly with his own social engineering agenda. In October 2011, Sharpton told MSNBC that Occupy should be about “really, how we distribute the wealth in this country.”

Sharpton can’t afford to deviate too far from his liberal base. At risk are millions of dollars in annual donations. In 2010 (the latest year available), his group describes itself on its tax return (IRS Form 990) as a “Christian activist organization” and reports contributions and grants totaling \$3.12 million. Of that, \$241,732 went to Sharpton for salary. Another \$19,174 and \$187,078 were lent to two of Sharpton’s for-profit ventures, Sharpton Media LLC, and Bo-Spanky Consulting, respectively.

Meanwhile, NAN paid for first-class travel and charter flights for unnamed officials, according to the tax return. In 2011, such financial shenanigans continued. *Nonprofit Quarterly* reported in December 2011 that NAN maintains a busy activist schedule, despite Sharpton’s day job as host of MSNBC’s “PoliticsNation” and the group’s financial troubles.

The *New York Post* lays out the specifics:

In all, the controversial activist and his empire, including the NAN and two for-profit companies, were \$5.3 million in the red, public records show. Most of NAN’s money woes

stemmed from more than \$880,000 in unpaid federal payroll taxes, interest and penalties. It also paid more than \$100,000 to settle two lawsuits, byproducts of the unpaid bills. And it still owed \$206,252 in loans to Sharpton’s for-profit[s] ... He owes the IRS \$2.6 million in income tax, and nearly \$900,000 in state tax.

While the debt mounts, Sharpton turns to corporations for financial help. His 2012 annual NAN convention, which focused on the Trayvon case and drew notable speakers like Holder, was funded in large part by corporations. Corporate sponsors included AT&T, FedEx, Facebook, Ford, Home Depot, Wal-Mart, and News Corp., the parent company of Fox News. Various unions also pitched in; for instance, SIEU Local 1199, National Education Association, and International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers.

NAN also receives financial support from foundations. The Altus One Fund in New York has given NAN \$250,000 since 2007. The president of the foundation is Randall Weisenburger, executive vice president and chief financial officer of Omnicom Group Inc. Wal-Mart Foundation gave NAN \$20,000 in 2010.

Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow PUSH Coalition

Sharpton is not the only civil rights activist to make a living exploiting minorities. His mentor, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, has a thriving activist business all his own. The two have been joined at the hip for decades.

Jackson appointed Sharpton in 1969 to direct his youth group, Operation Breadbasket, which promoted better jobs for blacks. Sharp-

ton went on to form his own youth group, the National Youth Movement, while Jackson created the Rainbow Coalition to fight for social justice. The Rainbow Coalition joined with Operation PUSH to become the Rainbow PUSH Coalition. The merger has paid off handsomely. In an April 2001 report, the Capital Research Center outlined some of Jackson's financials: "At the end of the Carter administration, Jackson's nonprofits received \$6.5 million in grants from federal agencies, including \$5.7 million to PUSH for Excellence (also called PUSH Excel). A federal audit launched in 1979 found PUSH Excel misspent \$737,000 and questioned the use of another \$1 million in grant monies. The government filed suit in 1984 and later said PUSH Excel owed more than \$1.4 million to the Education, Commerce and Labor Departments."

Despite the financial scandals, PUSH Excel and Jackson are hardly pariahs today. Rather, the group was just handed a brass ring of influence via a partnership with Chicago's Public School (CPS) system, comprising 675 schools and 405,000 students.

"Chicago Public Schools and the PUSH for Excellence Inc. (PUSH Excel) today announced a partnership to encourage CPS graduating seniors to register to vote so they can be a part of the general election in November 2012. CPS and PUSH are working to reach as many CPS high schools as possible, with the goal of ultimately ensuring all seniors are registered to vote by graduation," according to a May 23 release on the Rainbow PUSH website. It would require considerable naïveté to believe that this voter registration drive will be politically neutral.

Rainbow PUSH has taken in substantial donations from institutional philanthropy. Do-



Rev. Jesse Jackson

nors include Citi Foundation (\$750,000 since 2001), Supervalu Foundation (\$150,000 since 2009), Jacoby Dickens Foundation (\$110,000 since 2000), Chicago White Sox Charities Inc. (\$100,000 since 2010), Mel Karmazin Foundation (\$100,000 since 2003), and General Motors Foundation (\$50,000 since 2005).

As with Sharpton, Jackson found the Trayvon case a lucrative public relations venture. He was a keynote speaker at several "Justice for Trayvon Martin" rallies held in Florida in the weeks following the shooting, telling the thousands in attendance the case was solely "about racial profiling," according to one CBS report. "We will use our marching feet, civil disobedience, and every weapon in our non-violent arsenal until justice is served," Jackson added.

Jackson also lent his voice and image to the Occupy Wall Street movement. For months, he was seemingly everywhere—all across the nation, all over the media. And his message

carried similar strains: Occupiers are to be applauded for their peaceful protests rooted in justice for all. Put another way, the Occupy movement gave Jackson a powerful national platform to advance his radical views among America's youth.

In October 2011, Jackson was on hand to greet 19 Washington, D.C. Occupy protesters who were being released from jail. There, he drew comparisons between Occupy and the civil rights movement of the 1960s. "Martin's [Luther King] last movement was an occupation of Washington," he said. "He wanted to call attention to injustice with the drama of jail-going sacrifice, same as these people. People say this is new, but to me it's just part of a 40-year movement." He added that "shared economic security is the message.... And of course, the occupation must mature ultimately to legislation."

In November 2011, Jackson visited the Occupy Lincoln camp before speaking at the

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University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Diversity Leadership Symposium. There, he told a crowd of hundreds that "too few have too much," the *Daily Nebraskan* reported.

He repeated the mantra in greater detail in a fawning January 24 op-ed for CNN titled, "Occupy in Memory of Martin Luther King." He wrote, "Too few have too much, too many have too little, too much poverty, too much wanting in the land of plenty, too many costly wars. Biblically, Jesus was an occupier. Born under occupation, facing a death warrant on his life, He fled to Egypt—an immigrant, a political refugee. He represented hope for the oppressed; his mission was to serve the poor. He challenged the prevailing ethos and power of Rome."

Jackson may hold the title of reverend, but doubtless many others of the cloth would refute his characterization of Jesus as an Occupier, as well as his glib summary of the Christian savior's mission as simply providing social services to the poor.

It's puzzling how Jackson gets so many free passes. It could be the media wants a Sharpton and Jackson to turn to when quotes from the minority communities are needed. Sharpton and Jackson have been around for decades; they do know how to garner attention and fuel controversy, to say the least. Combine that with the high regard both men and both men's civil rights groups continue to receive from notable places of authority—the Justice Department and Chicago's public schools, to name two examples—and the recipe for continued visibility and influence is complete.

It doesn't hurt that the alternatives—the New Black Panther Party or the New Black Liberation Militia—seem almost crazy by contrast. But look beneath the surface and it's

soon evident that much of the agenda pushed by NBPP and Nation of Islam members is uncomfortably similar to that pushed by Sharpton and Jackson.

The New Black Panthers Party

Not to be confused with the Black Panthers, the NBPP—its full name is the New Black Panther Party for Self-Defense—was founded in Texas in 1989. Its roots are tied to the very radical Nation of Islam (NOI). Former NOI minister Khalid Abdul Muhammad became the NBPP's national chairman in the late 1990s and held the post until his death in 2001. Muhammad brought many of his former NOI colleagues into the group. The current NBPP leader is Malik Zulu Shabazz, whom the Anti-Defamation League labels as "anti-Semitic and racist."

In fact, information from the NBPP's own newspaper indicates a radical society composed of angry, uncompromising activists who are bent on bolstering opportunities for blacks by whatever means possible. The lead article from its spring 2012 newspaper, for example, reads: "The Ballot or the Bullet: Which Way for Black People?"

Like Jackson and Sharpton, the group turns to historical black activists to draw parallels to today's culture and politics. But rather than the comparatively peaceful entreaties of Martin Luther King, the NBPP favors the more violently fueled words of Malcolm X. Like Jackson and Sharpton, the group disavows free enterprise for a socialistic style of government-enforced equality for all, with an emphasis on building up the economy of minorities. And like Jackson and Sharpton, the group vowed justice for Trayvon Martin—adding to the rhetoric with calls for a citizen's arrest of Zimmerman as

well as offering a \$10,000 reward for his capture.

Further fueling the Trayvon flames was another black activist group, the New Black Liberation Militia, led by Prince Najee Shaka Muhammad. One media report on this group's actions regarding Martin provides a perfect example of the group's intolerance and impatience with the rule of law:

"Members of a self-described black militia group will attempt a citizen's arrest on a white neighborhood watch leader who has admitted to fatally shooting an unarmed African-American teen in an Orlando suburb, but has not been charged, a leader of the group said. Members of the New Black Liberation Militia plan to take 28-year-old George Zimmerman to federal authorities this week since local police haven't acted, said Najee Muhammad, a leader of the militia group. "We'll find him. We've got his mug shot and everything," Muhammad said.

Jackson's response to such threats? A March 26 Mediaite (website) headline stated plainly, "Rev. Jesse Jackson Denounces New Black Panther Bounty on George Zimmerman." But the story fell far short of showing any denouncement.

When asked for reaction to black groups that were distributing "Wanted, Dead or Alive" flyers and posters for Zimmerman's capture, Jackson replied rather blandly, according to the Mediaite report, "The violence comes from Zimmerman. The cover-up, from the police department. We would do well to remain disciplined, focused and non-violent. Any diversion from that takes attention away

from Zimmerman and Trayvon and the family. I hope we remain in the face of all these provocations focused and non-violent. We need to keep the focus on Trayvon and who killed him and how that killing will be processed.”

That was hardly a rousing call to eschew violence. It sounded more as if Jackson were walking a political tightrope, searching for the safe median between his personal views—epitomized by the Justice for Trayvon rallies that rode the wave of emotion, not fact—and the discourse that would be accepted by the nation at large, including the media, his nonprofit’s grant-makers, and his more peaceful yet liberal followers. That line is far from imaginary. Even Shabazz recognizes it—and therein lies a danger.

As the Anti-Defamation League reports, Shabazz has “sought to recast himself as a serious civil rights leader in recent years by cloaking his bigotry and intolerance in religious and civil rights principles and inserting himself in high profile, racially charged issues around the country. Shabazz’s efforts have been supported, at times, by prominent members of the African-American community, which has provided him with a measure of status as a legitimate leader. This status is also reinforced by media accounts, which increasingly ignore his divisive record.”

Examination of Sharpton’s and Jackson’s pasts has revealed plenty of skeletons, not to mention racially charged political agendas. Yet they’ve managed to not only survive but thrive in their activism, gaining acceptance from mainstream society and high-ranking political and social leaders in the process. Enter lesser known black activist groups with rougher, tougher talk than Sharpton and

Jackson, a smaller mainstream following, and significantly tighter fiscal constraints—but a similar passion to use government to bring about their agendas. Is it possible that Shabazz and his radical hate-mongering ways will one day be treated to the same level of respect as Jackson, or that he’ll be given his own political talk show, like Sharpton?

The circles these groups run in are often identical. So, too, are the tenets they tout. But beneath the surface, hidden by rhetoric, it’s morphing: Sharpton is Jackson is Shabazz is Najee Muhammad. With the ears they command—from the media to the White House and Justice Department—an ensuing shift in race relations, and ultimately public policy, could prove detrimental to this nation’s ability to uphold the rule of law and its core constitutional principles.

Cheryl K. Chumley is a digital editor with the Washington Times’s latest endeavor, Times247.com.

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Money opens doors. Radical philanthropist **George Soros** has visited the White House on at least five occasions since **Barack Obama** became President, according to new Capital Research Center research. The data appear in the White House's visitor access database. During two of the visits Soros met with **Lawrence (Larry) Summers**, who at the time was chairman of the White House National Economic Council. Soros hasn't spent nearly as much time at the White House as former **SEIU** president **Andy Stern** (more than 20 times in the president's first six months in office), but five visits is still a lot.

A left-leaning voter registration outfit called the **Voter Participation Center** has reportedly distributed voter registration forms to roughly 5 million people. Unfortunately, many of the recipients are dead, non-citizens, or non-human (e.g., household pets). "I think it's tampering with our voting system," Seattle resident **Brenda Charlston** told reporters. "They're fishing for votes: That's how I view it."

The largest branch of **ACORN**—**ACORN Housing Corp.**—has finally kicked the bucket despite cash injections from the **Obama** administration. The massive Chicago-based nonprofit quietly shut down operations earlier this year. Like a con artist trying to escape his past, ACORN Housing legally changed its name to Affordable Housing Centers of America (AHCOA) two years ago after the devastating "pimp and pro" videos in several ACORN offices surfaced in 2009.

Yet another ACORN front group emerges. California-based activist group **Home Defenders League** was formed in late 2010 around the time of the collapse of the lead entity in the ACORN network, **ACORN Inc.** The new group, which stages occupations of bank offices and encourages squatting in foreclosed houses, is an offshoot of **Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment** (ACCE). The Internet domain name www.homedefendersleague.org was registered by longtime California ACORN operative **David Lagstein**, now an ACCE employee.

ACORN founder **Wade Rathke** is urging Catholics to quit their church because it objects to the abortifacient mandate in Obamacare. Of course, he doesn't say that outright, but instead writes that "The inability to effectively manage the staff ... has led to some dioceses declaring bankruptcy, multi-million dollar damage settlements, and a general uneasiness about how faith and flock have been stewarded by priests." The criticism is an interesting one for Rathke to make, given that he is one of the worst managers in the history of nonprofit activism. His brother embezzled nearly \$1 million from ACORN in 2000, and Rathke covered it up for eight years, which led ACORN's national board to fire him in 2008.

Steve Coll is stepping down as president of the **New America Foundation** later this year when a successor is appointed. Coll has led the vaguely left-of-center think tank for the past five years. When a new president is installed, Coll will become a Senior Fellow with New America's National Security Studies Program.