

INTELLIGENCE REPORT

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'SOVEREIGNS' IN BLACK



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by Leah Nelson

Members of 'Moorish' groups and other black Americans are taking up the ideas of the radical 'sovereign citizens' movement

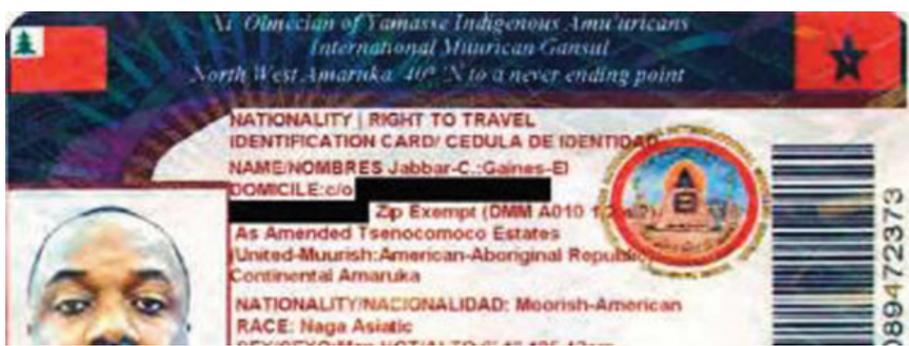
On March 29, John McGauley, county recorder for Allen County, Ind., came home to find a disturbing message on his answering machine.

"Mr. McGauley, this is Jabbar Gaines-El. I'm calling about your article about the Moorish Americans," it said. "I just wanted to let you know that if you ever have any problem with members of the Moorish Nation, you can call me."

As it happens, McGauley, whose county encompasses the city of Fort Wayne, was having trouble with members of the "Moorish Nation."

Starting in December 2010, nearly a dozen black men had come into his office and recorded bogus documents purporting to change their names, grant themselves "power determining my own political, social, and economic status of the state."

McGauley was not thrilled to learn that their leader, who calls himself "Sheik" Jabbar Gaines-El, had uncovered his home number. "I got a very distinct impression from the phone call that they wanted me to know that they know where I live," he told the *Intelligence Report*. "I've never wanted to own a gun in my life, but the phone call I got made me think about it for a second."





^ Jabbar Gaines-El carries a "Nationality and Right to Travel" card that includes a "Tax Immune Number."

The situation never turned violent, but McGauley's gut sense that something was amiss was correct. Gaines-El, who politely declined the *Report's* request for comment, is a 38-year-old Indiana native whose real name is Jabbar C. Gaines. He's one of a growing number of black Americans who, as members of outlandishly named "nations" or as individuals, subscribe to an antigovernment philosophy so extreme that some of its techniques, though nonviolent, have earned the moniker "paper terrorism." Communicating through social media and learning from an ever-expanding network of websites and online forums, they perplex and often harass law enforcement officials, courts, and local governments across the country.

What may be even stranger about Gaines and his black Fort Wayne cohorts is that the "sovereign citizens" ideology to which they adhere — a conspiratorial belief system that argues that most Americans are not subject to most tax and criminal laws promulgated by the government — was originally thoroughly anti-black. But its racist roots have been virtually forgotten by increasing numbers of black Americans who have melded it with selective interpretations of the teachings of pioneer black nationalist Noble Drew Ali, who founded the exclusively black Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA) almost 100 years ago.

The core ideas of the sovereign citizens movement originated in the racist and anti-Semitic Posse Comitatus group, which roiled the Midwest in the 1970s and 1980s and believed that the county sheriff is the highest legitimate law enforcement authority. Posse ideologues argued, in effect, that God gave America to the white man and therefore the government cannot abridge most rights of whites unless they submit to a "contract" with that government. But black people were only made citizens by the 14th Amendment, they argued, meaning that they have permanently contracted with the government and therefore must obey all its dictates.

The movement of sovereign citizens — most of whom are clearly unaware of the ideology's racist roots — has grown extremely rapidly in the last two or three years. And, while black Americans remain a relatively small fraction of the estimated 300,000 sovereign citizens nationwide, it seems clear that their numbers are growing. In the last year, more and more black sovereigns, including several arrested in Georgia and elsewhere for using bogus documents to try to steal houses, have been implementing the movement's basic ideas and techniques, which have spread into a number of radical black nationalist groups.

That convergence may not be entirely surprising, given that the MSTA's Noble Drew Ali taught that black "Moors" were America's original inhabitants and are therefore

entitled to self-governing, nation-within-a-nation status. (Many American black nationalist groups refer mistakenly to the people of northern Africa as black; in fact, the Moors were a mix of Arabs, Berbers and black people.) Today, black nationalists who see themselves as Moors and white sovereign citizens both believe they have key rights that pre-date by eons the present government.



‘Paper Terrorism’

In practice, the conduct of “Moors” can be nearly identical to that of their white counterparts in the sovereign citizen movement.

The weapon of choice for both is paper. A simple traffic violation or pet-licensing case can provoke dozens of court filings containing hundreds of pages of pseudo-legal nonsense. These fake documents typically are written in nonsensical language that is all but incomprehensible to non-sovereigns.

“The first five or six or eight times we saw these guys, they were belligerent, they were hard to get along with,” McGauley recalled. “They came in here and immediately said, ‘We aren’t subject to these rules.’ They’re standing there at the counter lecturing my staff on their independence from the recording statutes and the fees that go along with them, and basically saying, ‘We aren’t governed by the laws of Indiana.’”

They refused to pay the fees associated with filing the documents, McGauley said, and seemed unconcerned when he explained that their name-change and other documents had no legal validity.

But McGauley’s alarm bells really went off when he learned that at least one Moor had used his “Power of Attorney General” document to open a bank account and pass a number of bad checks. Concerned that the others would use similar bogus papers to commit fraud, he contacted law enforcement and the local media.

Soon afterward, the Fort Wayne *Journal Gazette* published an article describing what the Moors were doing and warning locals to be on alert for official-looking documents that seemed “off.” The article quoted McGauley extensively. Two days later, he found

Gaines' message on his answering machine.

A few weeks after that, *Frost Illustrated*, a weekly newspaper aimed at black readers in Fort Wayne, turned over its front page to Gaines, who accused McGauley of racism and excoriated him for “spewing” what Gaines characterized as “negative propaganda.”

“It is my contention there exists a conspiracy within the local halls of government to deliver ‘smear’ tactics against the Moorish Republic with the aim and attempts to discourage unregistered Moors ... from declaring their true and authentic nationality;” Gaines wrote in an editorial laced with sovereign theory.

Roots of the Moors

The Moorish Science Temple of America was founded in Newark, N.J., in 1913 by Timothy Drew, a North Carolina native who changed his name to Noble Drew Ali and proclaimed himself a prophet. Drew Ali taught that the earth's original single continent, called Amexem, was inhabited entirely by Moors. A massive earthquake split the continent and created the Atlantic Ocean, leaving those in what became the Americas as that continent's first inhabitants, long before the arrival of the ancestors of American Indians.

God eventually sent European colonists to enslave the Moors as punishment for their forgetting their history and ways, Drew Ali said. The only way for black Americans to regain their heritage, he preached, was to “proclaim their nationality and their Divine Creed ... and know that they are not Negroes, Colored Folks, Black People or Ethiopians, because these names were given to slaves by slave holders.” Instead, MSTTA members were given cards and passports identifying them as Moorish Americans.

Unlike the white-dominated [sovereign citizen movement](#) today, however, MSTTA was explicitly *not* antigovernment. Asserting their noble Moorish heritage was supposed to enable blacks to gain the government's recognition and respect as full citizens rather than second-class descendants of slaves. Drew Ali exhorted young MSTTA members to “see the duty and wisdom of at all times upholding ... obedience to law, respect and loyalty to government,” and “not to use any assertion against the American flag.”

Many white sovereign citizens today also carry fake IDs proclaiming themselves members of imaginary nations, but these are supposed to show that they are outside U.S. jurisdiction and therefore not subject to codes, statutes or courts.

The MSTTA fragmented rapidly after Drew Ali's death in 1929, but his call for reclaiming a proud heritage has captured the imagination of tens of thousands of black Americans — including Jabbar Gaines-El and his fellow travelers in Fort Wayne. They, like those in many MSTTA offshoots and other black nationalist and black Muslim groups, took to adding suffixes like “Ali,” “El,” “Dey,” “Bey,” and “Al,” to their last names.

Today, the head of MSTTA is none too happy to see its prophet's words used to encourage antigovernment activity.

MSTA's grand sheik, Brother R. Jones Bey, is arbiter of orthodoxy for the movement's members. He believes the behavior of groups like Gaines' is utterly out of line with the prophet's teachings.

"We do not follow 'sovereignty.' The prophet never talked about that," he told the *Intelligence Report*. "Our organization has been misunderstood by people who see the value of our religion but don't want to conform," he said. "They are not members of our organization. I don't know what they're doing, because they're misrepresenting the Moorish Science Temple of America."

Jones Bey said that the proliferation of non-members claiming ties to the MSTA and Noble Drew Ali and imbued with sovereign ideas came to his attention about a year ago. MSTA immediately added to its website a note stating that it does not endorse sovereign ideas or behavior. "We are citizens of the United States of America, and we want to make our contribution to the United States of America, not tear it down," Jones Bey said.

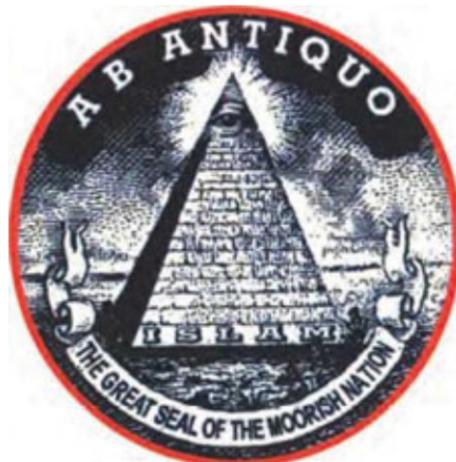
That's not how Gaines-El sees it. He predicates his argument that Moors are not U.S. citizens on the U.S. Supreme Court's 1857 Dred Scott ruling, which described black people as "beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."

In his *Frost Illustrated* article, Gaines-El noted — as many white sovereign citizens also do — that the [Dred Scott decision](#) was never reversed. (It was rendered moot by passage of the 14th Amendment). He went on to argue that, as indigenous Moors, black people *never agreed* to become U.S. citizens. The Moors had simply "granted permission for the Europeans to settle." The presence of the "all-seeing eye" on the dollar bill, he says, is proof that the "visiting European nations" made a contract with the Moors — a contract, he says, that remains in effect today.

Other Moorish Offshoots

Sovereign ideas have leaked into other black Moorish groups as well.

R. V. Bey, Noble Nature El Bey and Taj Tarik Bey, lead polemicists of the Moors Order of the Roundtable, propounds a nearly indecipherable political theory that melds sovereign concepts and an antigovernment reinterpretation of MSTA doctrine.



^ The Eye of Providence is a popular symbol among Moorish sovereigns. Many claim its presence on the dollar bill signifies a contract between the founding fathers and the supposedly "indigenous" Moors of Amexem.

Central to their thesis is a rejection of the

14th Amendment, claiming it merely created a set of “artificial persons... . Black, Negro, Coloreds and African-Americans are not living people; these ‘tags’ are politically and lawfully ‘brands’ that have been put upon the Aboriginal Indigenous Moors of Morocco.” They refer instead to actual treaties made between the United States and Morocco (the traditional home of the Moors) in the late 18th century, which described a category of “Free Moor” who could not be enslaved or subjected to U.S. law, even as other Africans were being packed into ships and sent to the New World as chattel.

They advise Moors not to cooperate with the police or the courts. Government officials, he says, know they have no jurisdiction over Moors — and as long as Moors refuse to comply, there is nothing the courts can do.

Queen Renita Bey, a lecturer on Moorish nationality and sovereignty who is affiliated with a group called the Great Seal Moors, argues that as descendants of “visiting” Europeans who were never granted citizenship by the Moors, white people can never be sovereign in this land. “If they want to be sovereign, they’ve got to go home. They cannot be sovereign here,” she said in a 2008 lecture posted on YouTube. “If you walk into a courtroom and nobody else has the status to be there, automatically challenge the jurisdiction of the court. There’s nothing else that you need to state. There’s nothing else that needs to be said. Stand mute. Let them proceed, because, guess what, they cannot proceed.”

Oh, yes, they can, retired judge Robert McLeod, who was on the bench for 17 years in the municipal courts of Asbury Park, Holmdel, and Keyport, N.J. — recent hotbeds of Moorish activity — told the *Intelligence Report*. “They’d show up, sometimes wearing fezzes, sometimes in robes, and they’d pull out excerpts from treaties that were signed in the 1780s and the 1790s between the United States and the Barbary Coast states,” McLeod — who also happens to be a history buff — said of the Moors he encountered in court.

“Those treaties were with nations that existed independently for a short period of time, [and] any treaty was totally abrogated by subsequent events initiated by the Barbary states. ... I simply rattled that off at them, and they looked at me blankly, took off their robes and fezzes, and went back to their birth names, and pled guilty.”

Most of the Moors McLeod encountered were summoned for failing to pay tickets for motor vehicle violations.

“They were abiding by other laws; it’s just that they had these absurd notions which were taught to them,” the retired judge recalled. “If they persisted in it after I gave them my little lecture, I’d tell them they were in contempt of court.”

‘Free and Sovereign’

Not every judge can claim as much success as McLeod. Gaines-El, for instance, appears to have been summoned to court several times on minor violations, but his experience

has not deterred him from repeated attempts to expatriate himself, dating back to December 2000. Just months before joining the U.S. Army in July 2001, Gaines-El recorded a “Declaration of Indigenous Identity” as “kin and family to this soil whose indigenous name is ‘Turtle Land’ and whose fictitious corporate name is America,” at the Allen County Recorder’s Office.

The phony document proclaimed that he belonged to the Great Council of the Thirteen Fires of Justice, United Mawshakh Nation of Muurs (some Moorish groups use that spelling of Moors). He also recorded a “Declaration of Nationality” stating, “I, Jabbar Gaines-El, declare that I am a free and sovereign individual of this land... . Any and all past and present affiliations implied by operation of law or otherwise with foreign entities are hereby, now, and forever dissolved and revoked.”

While serving in the army, Gaines became active on a message board on which members of similar “indigenous” tribes exchanged thoughts about uniting to form a more powerful movement. He dropped off the Moorish map after being honorably discharged in 2005 due to a combat-related injury, but took another stab at sovereignty in November 2010, acquiring a “Nationality and Right to Travel” card from the Autonomous Autochthon International Muurish Gansul.

The official-looking card identifies him as Jabbar-C:Gaines-El, of Moorish-American nationality and Naga Asiatic race. The card, which has no expiration date, also includes a “Tax Immune Number.” (The strange punctuation in Gaines’ name is straight out of the sovereign citizen playbook: Sovereigns believe that by writing their name that way, they are indicating to government officials that they are not subject to U.S. jurisdiction.)

In an interview this April 15 — Tax Day — with a local Fort Wayne TV news program, Gaines-El said that he does pay taxes, “but I do so under the threat of arrest or coercion.”

In early June, a new face — El Clay Kenyatta Blackburn Bey — hit the county recorder’s office with a fresh set of documents demanding proof from Indiana’s Superior Court that it has jurisdiction over his traffic violation case. If he did not receive a copy of the oath of office, oath of ethics, and “bond number” for “all state/government officials, employees, Judges, prosecutors, agents, clerks, and anyone who has touched or is in any way involved with this case” within 21 days, he wrote, he would presume that jurisdiction could not be proved.

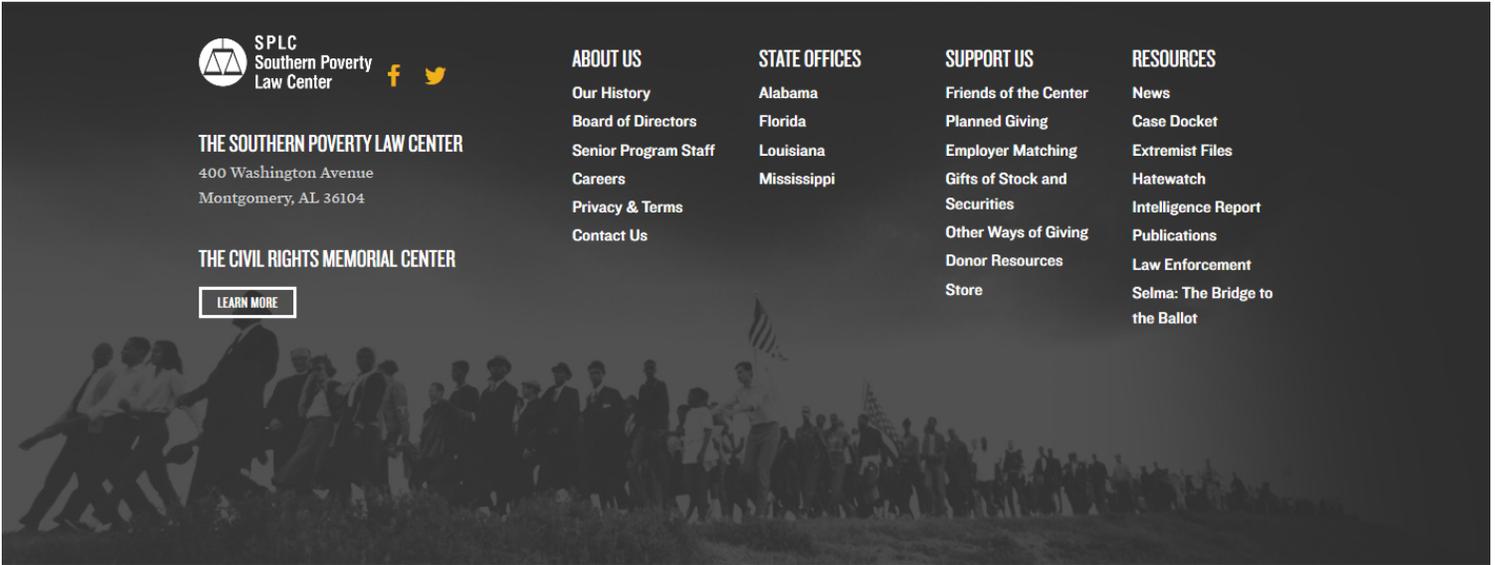
Blackburn Bey may care only about getting out of a couple of tickets, but his actions reflect how the local movement Jabbar Gaines-El started in Fort Wayne — like similar Moorish movements inflected with sovereign ideas — is picking up speed. At the County Recorder’s office, John McGauley and his employees are keeping in touch with law enforcement and have begun to discuss strategies for handling the Moors’ filings.

McGauley doubts he’s seen the last of them. “They are absolutely organized,” he told

Intelligence Report. “There may not be a hundred of them, but they’re absolutely organized.”

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