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Tamerlan Tsarnaev: 21st century conspiracist

Just as Timothy McVeigh was in the 1990s, the Tsarnaev brothers are quintessential conspiracists of their era

BY ALEX SEITZ-WALD [Follow](#) 1.7k

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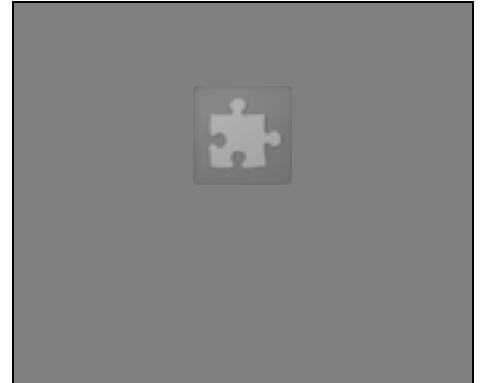


Tamerlan Tsarnaev (Credit: AP/The Lowell Sun/Julia Malakie)

We already knew that Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the apparent mastermind of the Boston Marathon bombing, “[took an interest in Infowars](#),” the website run by conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, but now the BBC’s investigative program [Panorama reports](#) that Tsarnaev had literature espousing all manner of anti-government conspiracy theories and even white supremacism.

After a months-long investigation into the bombing, including exclusive interviews with friends of Tamerlan and his brother Dzhokhar, Panorama found that Tsarnaev had articles claiming that both 9/11 and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing were perpetrated by the government, while another warned about “the rape of our gun rights.” The brother also subscribed to publications espousing white supremacy, including one that stated that “Hitler had a point.”

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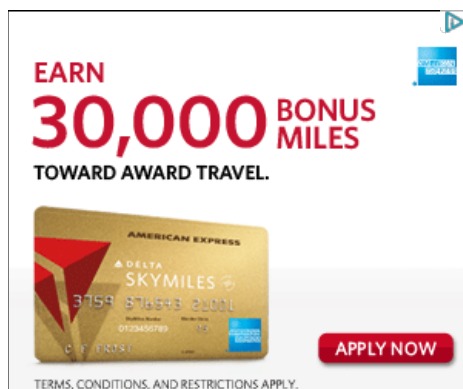
It complicates the picture of the Tsarnaev brothers presented in the media as simple home-grown jihadis, inspired by violent Muslim groups like al-Qaida.

The BBC describes the literature as “right-wing,” but it’s actually much more complicated than that. Tsarnaev illustrates how 21st century anti-government conspiracism melts down typical ideological barriers in a postmodern stew of various radicalisms, united by a common deep distrust of the government.

This manifests itself in different ways, depending on the political movement from which a believer grew out of — maybe everything from 9/11 to Sandy Hook is a plot to take away the guns, or maybe it’s all a scheme to enrich Wall Street — but the paranoid right and paranoid left are finding common cause online at places like Infowars unlike any other time in history. And when even the political center is vehemently anti-Washington, and revelations like those brought forward by Edward Snowden lead moderates to distrust the government, the fringes seem more appealing than ever.

The brothers were clearly also influenced by radical Islamic thinking. Just before he was captured, Dzhokhar scrawled a note reading, “We Muslims are one body. You hurt one you hurt us all.” And a friend who spoke with the BBC echoed what many others have said about Tamerlan, stating, “He just didn’t like America. He felt like America was just basically attacking all Middle Eastern countries ... you know trying to take their oil.”

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