

Violence Against Abortion Clinics Conspiracy (VAAPCON)

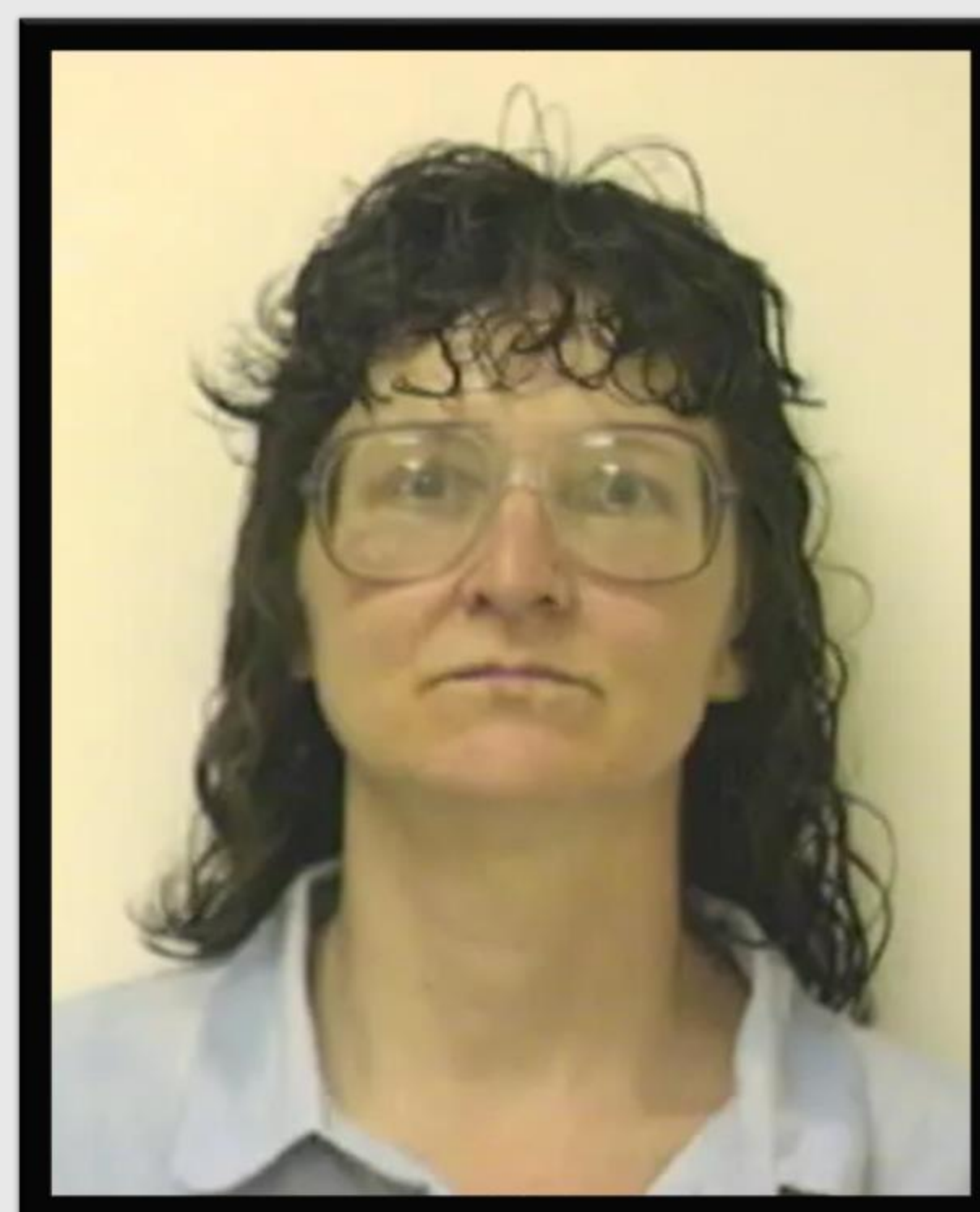
Alayja Dodd, Professor Micheal McVicar

Introduction

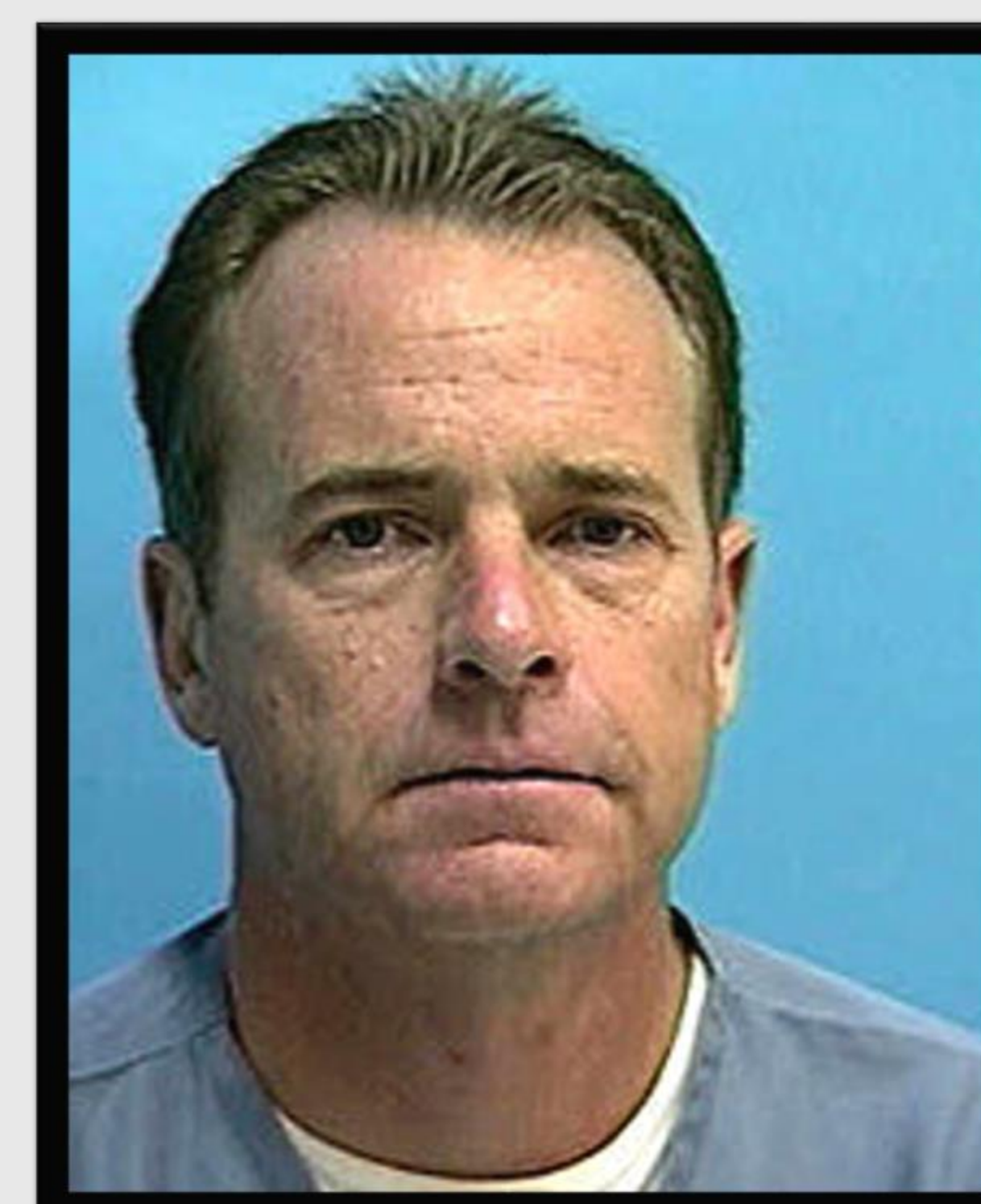
Cataloging Federal Documents regarding The Violence Against Abortion Providers Conspiracy (VAAPCON) is crucial to understanding the social and legislative changes made within the FBI in managing terrorism between the 1990s and today. The documents being cataloged were highly controversial and were sought after by organizations like the Army of God and other extreme right-wing groups. Now recently released, these documents showcase the tensions of the time and the FBI's precautions when dealing with VAAPCON.

The VAAPCON investigations were first prompted by the killing of Dr. David Gunn by anti-abortionist Michael F. Griffin in Pensacola, Florida. Dr. Gunn's death and the resulting controversy over access to women's clinics prompted Congress to pass the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (F.A.C.E) in 1993—the passing of F.A.C.E prompted an outbreak of anti-abortion violence, specifically from anti-abortion group Army of God.

When conducting VAAPCON investigations the FBI had significant difficulty in creating investigation procedures that didn't have political influence. Stuck between enforcing F.A.C.E and protecting First Amendment rights, the FBI swiftly learned that when dealing with the topic of reproductive rights, its bound to be innately political. My research project, which is to analyze FBI files about VAAPCON, is to see how political and constitutional stressors impacted the FBI investigation.



Shelley Shannon, Mugshot



Micheal F. Griffin, Mugshot

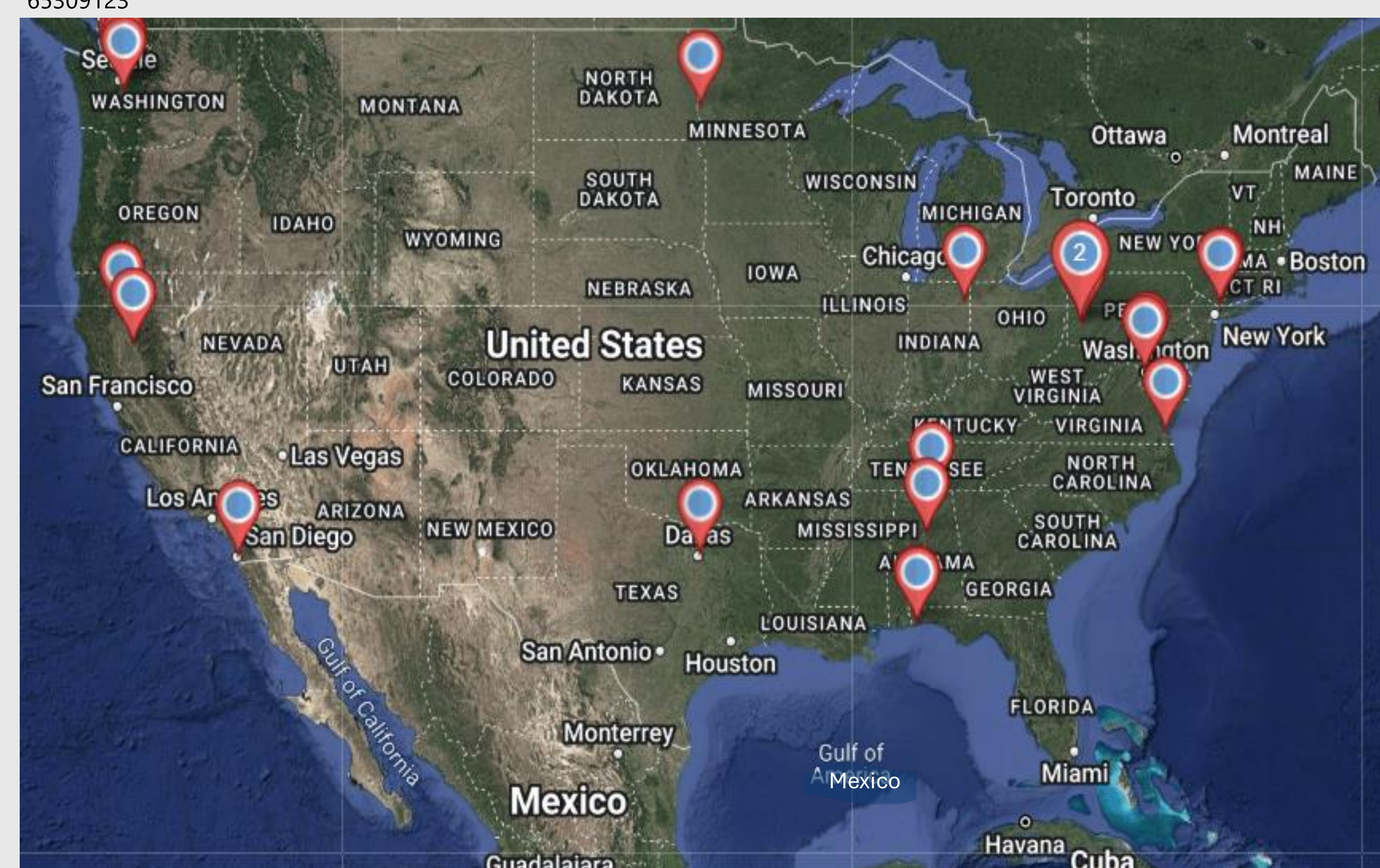


Paul Jennings Hill, Mugshot



Army of God spokesman [Donald Spitz](#) holds Army of God banner.

Clinics in contact with FBI, Data from OCR-
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Discussion

In my reading of the VAPCON files, I found that the FBI focused on three primary activists Hill, Shannon, and Micheal Fredrick Griffin. Shannon tried to assassinate Tiller and failed and Hill repeatedly tried to kill David Gunn until he succeeded. Micheal F. Griffin killed David Gunn. During the investigation, The FBI files focused on the first adamant implications of enforcing F.A.C.E and conducting the wider VAAPCON investigation. They worried about the Freedom of Religion issues, Freedom of Assembly, and Speech while protesting at abortion clinics.

My research showed that 35 clinics received threats, violence or were in communication with the FBI about their concerns about violence against their staff and property. Every individual that the FBI focused upon they all protested in front of clinics before enacting violence, so finding the line between ensuring free speech protections and seeing the warning signs of violence was tricky.

F.A.C.E is still a controversial act, as we see in recent times with Donald Trump pardoning two dozen anti-abortion activists who were soon charged for violating F.A.C.E. If F.A.C.E were to be challenged under the current administration it may be likely to be rescinded.

Methods

I examined VAPCON files which I received from my UROP Professor, when reading I created an Excel spreadsheet to organize crucial information like names, dates, locations, and reasoning behind the allotted crimes committed. With the information collected, I then used online sources such as the New York Times and Washington Post Databases to find old newspapers to decode some of the files. Alongside the decoding, I researched current FBI standards regarding F.A.C.E (Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances) which was passed in 94 and utilized during the Biden administration, and compared the differences in investigation techniques.

Results

In the end, the FBI learned that it wasn't a conspiracy but rather a grassroots movement with individuals around the United States becoming inspired to enact violence. Even though there was difficulty enforcing F.A.C.E, groups focused on violence such as the Army of God made it easier to differentiate between those utilizing their First Amendment rights and terrorism. As the past mimics recent tensions surrounding reproductive rights, it can be said that controversy will always follow abortion and reproductive policy.

References

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We assert that if Micheal Frederick Griffin did in fact kill David Gunn his use of lethal force was justifiable, provided it was carried out for the purpose of defending the lives of unborn children"

- Paul Hill Petition

"RIFLE, SCOPE, LESBIAN BABY KILLERS, YOU PUT IT TOGETHER"

- Anonymous prank call from an anti-abortion advocate