

**Sick man or “Strawman”: The  
assessment and management of  
sovereign citizens**

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**Disclosures**

- No financial or other disclosures
- For clinical material presented, have removed identifying details and presented a composite patient
- All other information is publicly available

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**Objectives**

- Discuss clinical challenges unique to sovereign citizens
- Understand how presentation of sovereign citizens pertains to competency to stand trial
- Examine the role of the forensic evaluator when assessing a sovereign citizen

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### My Work



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### Competency to Stand Trial

- ORC 2945.37-38
- Many functional capacities inherent in this
- Not enough to simply say the person is mentally ill

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### Chief complaint: Mr. Doe

“... I am under true law. Common law. Not Admiralty law. This is sovereignty. If you’re a U.S. citizen, you have no rights. Rights mean privileges. When you signed your birth certificate, you transferred your natural rights into a corporation. The name on your birth certificate in capital letters, that’s not you, that’s an artificial corporation. It’s a bond on you traded in the stock market. You are collateral for the government debt. You don’t even own your own kids. We’re leasing our kids.”

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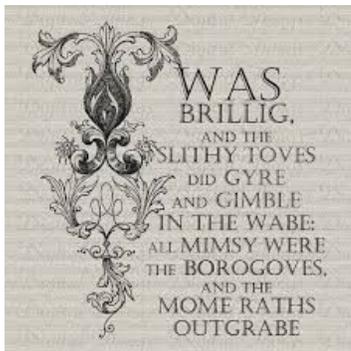
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*Jabberwocky*, by Lewis Carroll (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42916/jabberwocky>)  
Masterson, JR. "Sovereign Citizens": Fringe in the Courtroom. *American Bankruptcy Institute Journal* 2011; 30(2): 65-67.

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### More tidbits...

- “Excuse me if my terminology exceeds the comprehension of you.”
- “When we talk about facts and laws, the judge cannot beat me. The only way he can beat me is by force. Everyone has been indoctrinated since they were kids. I am an expert, a doctor at my old rights. I’m a contract lawyer, an expert in constitutional law. Public policies are not applicable to me...”

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### Case of "John of the Doe family"

- 28 year old man (his "nativity" was in 1988)
- Dropped out in 11<sup>th</sup> grade
- Supported himself by "rule-free delivery. Living on the land."
- Never married, had two children
- No past psychiatric or medical treatment
- Past pattern of problematic alcohol use
- Convictions for theft, criminal trespass, criminal damage, drug possession and public intoxication dating back to 2007

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### Hospital Course

- At jail, was maced and restrained to bring to hospital
- Mood was "peaceful," sleeping well.
- At times, grandiose
- Expressed odd beliefs about the law
- Energetic and animated, especially regarding beliefs
- Will speak incessantly about these beliefs
- Refused psychological testing

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### Differential diagnosis

- Delusional disorder
- Bipolar disorder
- Narcissistic personality disorder
- Paranoid personality disorder
- Schizotypal personality disorder
- Educational limitations
- Temporal lobe epilepsy
- Substance-induced psychosis
- Schizophrenia
- Schizoaffective disorder

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### Sovereign citizens: What are they?



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### Sovereign citizens

- Hold a variety of beliefs that challenge the legitimacy of the United States government and the justice system.
- In criminal cases, sovereign citizens raise a variety of seemingly odd and nonsensical objections to the proceedings.
- Beliefs include: common law courts, admiralty law, redemption theory, strawman accounts, rejection of drivers' licenses and license plates, and the significance of a name written in all capital letters.

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### Historical origins

- **Christian Identity Movement**
  - Introduced to US in late 19<sup>th</sup> Century
  - Believe European people are descendants of the 10 lost tribes of the Old Testament
  - God's "chosen" people ruling by divine plan
  - Gained in popularity during the great depression
  - Developed into an anti-Semitic philosophy
  - Spread through right-wing extremist groups in the 1960s
  - Declined as a separate movement in the 1990s

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### Historical origins

- **Tax protest movement**
  - Began in the 1950s and 60s
  - Coalesced around the failed Liberty Amendment to the constitution
  - Proposed that the Sixth Amendment was in violation of the Thirteenth amendment on the grounds that income tax placed citizens into involuntary servitude
  - Members adopted creative strategies to avoid paying taxes (invoking Fifth amendment right against self incrimination on tax forms)

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### Historical origins

- **Posse Comitatus**
  - Late 1960s
  - Combined Christian identity and tax protestation ideologies
  - Move towards more secretive, decentralized, and organized extremist groups
  - **Only legitimate form of govt. are those of counties and towns**
  - Refuse to pay taxes, obtain driver's licenses
  - Pioneered the use of **paper terrorism**
  - Movement faded when many leaders were convicted of various offenses

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### Historical origins

- **Militia movement**
  - Grew from anger about Ruby Ridge in 1992 and Waco in 1993
  
  - By late 1990s: many disbanded due to convictions
  
  - 2008 recession facilitated growth in the movement again

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Sovereign Citizen Beliefs – as illustrated by Mr. Doe



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“People just don't understand **nature's law** and sovereign citizenship; because they don't understand they call me crazy”

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Common Law Courts

- Believe that Common Law derives from the American Revolution-each colonist sovereign over his own property.
- No court ruling, government statute, or regulation can deprive a citizen of his common law rights, particularly with regard to property
- Common law courts created by sovereign citizens and militia groups are based on their understanding of common law and have been used as instruments to issue summons, impose fines, and dismiss convictions from other courts.

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“The U.S. is a **corporation**. The U.S.A. is for the people. I'm for the people, not for this corporation; there's a difference.”

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### The Fourteenth Amendment

- Shifted all Americans from the status of being citizens of individual states to being citizens of a corporate entity, the federal government.
- This change in status can occur only if a citizen voluntarily agrees to give up common law rights by seeking licenses or permits, paying taxes, or holding a Social Security number.
- A citizen can revoke these licenses and numbers and thus regain common law rights and become a sovereign citizen, immune to the judicial system and state and federal government.

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“He's an expert, so am I. You don't need a license to practice law. He's a non-union lawyer, he's not within the corporation.”

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### The (missing) Thirteenth Amendment

- Proposed amendment would have denied American citizenship to anyone who possessed or accepted a title of nobility.
- Lawyers hold a title of nobility, signified by the use of "Esq." after their names.
  - Meaning lawyers are not legal citizens of the United States.
- Sovereigns typically proceed *pro se* in court.

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"The criminal court is all civil, actually. They are just suing my trust account. Criminal courts are actually under admiralty [*sic*] jurisdiction."

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### Admiralty Law

- State and federal courts in the United States are actually military or admiralty courts that administer both the law of the sea and the law of international commerce.
- The key symbol of the true identity of the court system is the presence of a gold fringe on the American flag in all courtrooms.
- Courtroom actions are rooted in contracts.

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“In 1933, the U.S. went bankrupt and there was no lawful money in the U.S. In response, the U.S. government collateralized their debt through individual citizens, which were considered corporations.”

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**Redemption Theory**

- After the delinking of the dollar from the gold standard in 1933, the U.S. government went bankrupt, and to recover, the government collateralized U.S. citizens as payment for the debt.
- Sovereign citizens identify the all-caps format of names on birth certificates as proving the existence of these secret Treasury accounts (also called “strawman” accounts)
- Sovereign citizens believe that they can “redeem” the value these accounts by becoming sovereign or a “flesh-and-blood human being.”

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“All it is is just credit and debit. You don’t owe nobody nothing.”

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**Accepted for value**

- Bills in mail
- Taps your secret trust fund
- Can enforce “security agreements”
  - “I, flesh and blood human being, have authority over Dr. Marett”

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“If someone's name is spelled in capital letters on a document, they are a corporation.”

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**Use of capital letters**

- Having names in all capital letters on official documents, driver's licenses, birth certificates, Social Security cards, etc. represents the artificial corporation or “strawman.”
  - JOHN DOE = Strawman
- The names of the **flesh-and-blood person** are written with initial capital letters only.
  - John:Doe or John of the Doe Family
- Since court documents also capitalize the name, believe the charges are against the strawman

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“... I’m a driver. I’m a traveler of this land. I don’t have to show my license and registration or give my Social Security Number under 42 USC 408(A)(8), I can’t be compelled to provide my Social Security Number, and if they try, it’s punishable by up to five years.”

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### License plates and driver’s licenses

- God-given right to travel over the land
- Reject the use of driver’s licenses and license plates, to free themselves from the control of the corporate government.
- Sometimes create their own license plates and driver’s licenses
- Stops often lead to a frustrating or violent encounter between the officer and the sovereign citizen

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### License plates



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### Tactics

- Sheer volume of court filings
  - Dog licensing example
  - Typical criminal case may have 70 entries; sovereign case has 1200
- Use nonsensical language that judges, court staff cannot understand



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### Paper Terrorism

- Retaliatory, bogus property liens
- Fake tax forms to ruin credit or trigger an audit
- Fake public services, e.g. trust funds, malpractice insurance, deeds
- Many states passed laws against these actions during the mid 1990's

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### How Mr. Doe came to sovereignty

- Summer 2016, while incarcerated
- "sovereign master gave me two pieces of paper and opened my eyes"
- Referred to having a "mentor" who was also a "contract lawyer"

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### CST Evaluation

- Handwritten affidavit of "Beneficial Ownership"
- Handwritten affidavit of the "Fraudulent Practices of the State of Ohio Currently Doing upon John:Doe (Sovereign Soul) American State Citizen" by Mr. Doe
- Handwritten "Notice of Intent to Enforce U.S.C title 15 Commercial Lien against jail"

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### Competent?

- "Let's say the Judge says it's a \$1000 fine. You can say, 'I don't accept that contract. I'll give you a dollar.' Everything is a contract; it's negotiable."
- "These charges are all new to me. I do not accept this offer of contract. Charges are just a lien on the artificial corporation."
- "Everything I want, I get. They said, 'You're crazy' because I go after Mike Dewine, the attorney general, and stuff. They quashed my subpoena. I will quash their final judgment entry."

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### Competent?

- Believed his criminal case "is all civil, actually. They are just suing my trust account." Criminal courts are actually under "admiralty jurisdiction," which means that it is rooted in contract law, particularly maritime contracts. He said that this construction created enemies to the constitution, and therefore, it was his duty, as a sovereign, "to change the conversation in the courtroom" to discussing contract law.

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### Evaluator's role

- Student
- Educator
- Effective communicator

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### Psychotherapeutic Formulation

- Temperament: slow to warm
- Attachment style: avoidant/dismissive
- Cognition: rigid
- Internal working model: we can have fun together, but I'm in it for me
- Themes of control

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### Proposed interventions

- Cognitive Behavioral therapy
- Supportive psychotherapy
- Family therapy (family members may share beliefs or problematic behavior, may mitigate violent behavior)
- Little or no role for medications, at least in this patient

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### Clinical challenges

- Rapport
- Diagnosis and treatment
- Can be sovereign AND mentally ill
- Getting around the sovereign belief to other, competency-related topics

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### Clinical challenges

- Curiosity
- Heightened suspicion- you are part of the corporation
- Frequent requests, e.g., copying and notarizing handwritten documents
- “Folie a deux” aspects- family members/close acquaintances who share beliefs
- Educating staff members on this – it’s weird!
- Resisting urge to treat as mental illness, give medications

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### What would you want them to know?

- “Be curious. Don’t accept everything.”
- “Be skeptical. Challenge things. Ask questions and you will get the answer. Do that, and you will be okay.”
- “3 rules: Don’t kill, steal, or cheat.”
- Get educated:
  - 4 most important topics: sovereignty, Strawman, secure party creditor, American state citizen

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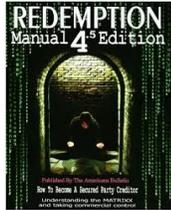
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### His "Bibliography"

- Black's Law Dictionary
- The Redemption Manual
- The Uniform Commercial Code




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### What Does Accepted for Value Mean?

Millions of people use the phrase "accepted for value" everyday without knowing what it means and why it is so powerful. You have the right to make personal choices that affect your commercial affairs. You can be in control, or you can be controlled. Acceptance for value is one means of being in control.

*This is a publication offered to those who seek the truth by  
The American Connection*

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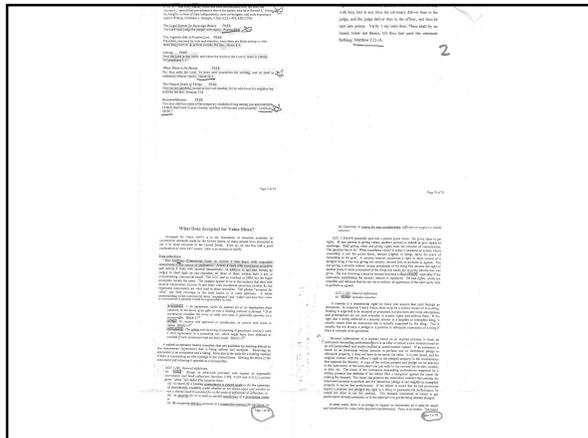
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### Future concerns for this person

- Recidivism risk (particularly white collar crimes, theft)
- Problematic, potentially tragic, encounters with law enforcement, others
- Easy target for scams
- Possible scammer

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### Traffic Stops

- Danger to officers
- Recommendations:
  - Know warning signs
  - Do not engage the dialogue- either produce it, or not
  - Shut it down, call for backup



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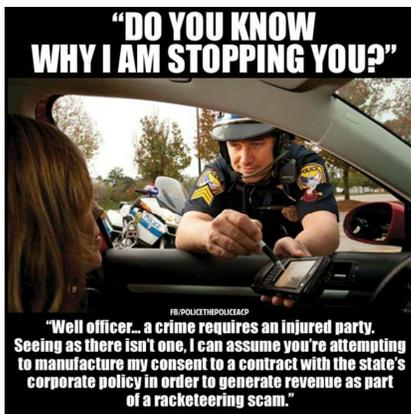
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### Other Tragedies



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### How it is propagated

- Now worldwide. Often tied to when the economy is not doing so well, comes in waves.
- Seminars
- Jail
- Religion- may create own churches, esp. in jail
- Internet
- Family

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### Summary

- Sovereign citizens movements have historical root in various anti-government movements
- Have variety of beliefs that are best considered as extremist political views rather than delusional
- Important to build rapport and circumvent the views by posing hypothetical competency-related questions
- Must educate the court about sovereign citizens beliefs and communicate why they are not due to mental illness

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## Resources

- Parker G. Competence to stand trial evaluations of sovereign citizens: a case series and primer of odd political and legal beliefs. *JAAPL* 2014; 42(3):338-49.
- Pytyck J and Chaimowitz G. The Sovereign Citizen Movement and Fitness to Stand Trial. *Int J Forensic Mental Health*, 12:149-153, 2013.
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- Traffic Stops of Sovereign Citizens: In the Line of Duty, Barber R and March D. 2015.
- Van Ness S. Understanding the Sovereign Citizen Movement: A Guide for Corrections Professionals. *Corrections Compendum* 2011; 36, 4.
- Masterson LR. "Sovereign Citizens:" Fringe in the Courtroom. *American Bankruptcy Institute Journal* 2011;30(2): 65-67.

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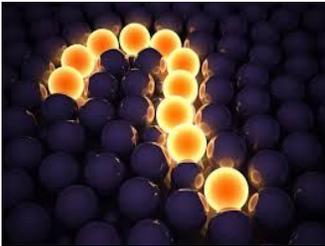
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