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From Ruby Ridge to Oklahoma City: The Radicalization of Timothy McVeigh

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ABSTRACT

The Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995 was a watershed moment in American history and indelibly changed the way Americans viewed terrorism and public safety. While the effects of the bombing are well-documented, not as much attention has been paid to the motivations of the bomber, Timothy McVeigh. He was spurred to action by the events of the Waco siege, where the FBI engaged in a 51-day standoff with the Branch Davidians, a small religious group suspected of owning illegal weapons. However, this was not the first incident that inspired his later actions. In 1992, the Weaver family entered into their own standoff against federal agents, after Randy Weaver failed to show up to court on illegal weapons charges. Over the course of the standoff, his wife, Vicki Weaver, and twelve-year-old son Samuel were killed. Both Waco and Ruby Ridge galvanized the far right, who saw it as the government using deadly force against their own citizens, who merely wished to live their lives as they saw fit. McVeigh was further influenced by *The Turner Diaries*, a novel in which the protagonist blows up a government building as a part of a revolution against the government. These three factors are analyzed in regards to the influence they had on McVeigh's decision to attack the Murrah building.

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**FROM RUBY RIDGE TO OKLAHOMA CITY:
THE RADICALIZATION OF TIMOTHY MCVEIGH**

“When an aggressor force continually launches attacks from a particular base of operations, it is sound military strategy to take the fight to the enemy.”

– Timothy McVeigh

On April 19, 1995, shortly before nine AM, Timothy McVeigh parked a truck in front of the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City. Before walking away toward the YMCA close to the building, he lit two fuses. At 9:02 AM, the truck exploded, destroying the building and killing 168 people inside. The blast injured over 500 others. At 10:20 AM, McVeigh was pulled over on I-35 for having no license plates on his vehicle. He was arrested for carrying a concealed weapon and for having no vehicle registration. On April 21, 1995, one of McVeigh’s former coworkers identified him as the man in the FBI’s “John Doe No. 1” in police sketches of the bomber. Terry Nichols, an accomplice to the crime, turned himself in that evening. On August 11, McVeigh and Nichols were indicted on charges of murder and conspiracy. When, on June 2, 1997, the McVeigh trial closed, he was convicted on all eleven charges. Eleven days later, the jury sentenced him to death. On June 11, 2001, Timothy McVeigh was executed for bombing the Alfred P. Murrah building and killing 168 people (Linder, n.d.).



Figure 1: The Alfred P. Murrah building after the bombing (Time, n.d.)

The Oklahoma City bombing was undoubtedly a watershed moment in American history. It shocked a nation that had previously thought that terrorism was something that came from overseas. The idea that an American could carry out an attack that killed so many people, including many children, was unthinkable prior to this event. The initial search for the culprit looked for Middle Eastern men, and many supported taking drastic action against the Middle East in retaliation. Mike Royko, journalist for the Chicago Tribune, wrote, two days after the bombing, that it was clearly an “act of war.” He advocated ending immigration from hostile countries, and, for retribution, not to take “an eye for eye,” but that the US “should take both eyes, ears, nose, the entire anatomy” (Royko, 1995). Soon after the bombing, Jordanian-American Ibrahim Ahmad was questioned by both American and British law enforcement agencies about his role in the bombing (Fuchs, 1995). Before McVeigh was known to be the culprit, a reporter for the Chicago Tribune wrote an article encouraging retaliation:

“So I would have no objection if we picked out a country that is a likely suspect and bombed some oil fields, refineries, bridges, highways, industrial complexes, airports,

military bases, and anything else that is of great value but doesn't shelter innocent civilians. If it happens to be the wrong country, well, too bad, but it's likely it did something to deserve it anyway. Or would in the future. And its leaders, as well as other troublemakers, would get the message: Terrorism is too costly a game (Royko, 1995).”

Royko’s extreme views were shared by many Americans. When McVeigh was arrested, their anger and fear turned to a new target. To this day, the Oklahoma City bombing remains the largest incident of domestic terrorism in American history. The FBI defines domestic terrorism as activities which “involve acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law, appear intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping, and occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S. (FBI, 2013).

The Oklahoma City bombing ends with the execution of Timothy McVeigh on June 11, 2001. But the beginning of the story is harder to pinpoint. It is easy to assume that it began when McVeigh was born, that he was born a killer, and nothing could have prevented this tragedy. Others look at McVeigh’s discharge from the army as the reason he became disillusioned with the government, with the fiery end to the Waco siege as the tipping point into violence. But the seeds for this violence were planted far before Waco, which occurred a mere two years before the bombing. While he was still in the army, McVeigh was fascinated by *The Turner Diaries*, a novel depicting a violent overthrow of the government. In his mind, the Ruby Ridge incident showed that the government would turn against its own people, and the Waco siege confirmed that not only would they not hesitate to murder their own people, the general public would applaud them for it. The Branch Davidians of Waco and the Weavers of Ruby Ridge were martyrs in the mind of McVeigh and others on the far right. They, along with the ideology and

rhetoric of *The Turner Diaries*, laid the groundwork for the violent outburst of the Oklahoma City bombing, years before McVeigh chose the Murrah building. An analysis of these various factors leading up to and influencing the bombing by McVeigh is the centerpiece of my paper.



Figure 2: This picture of a firefighter holding the body of Baylee Almon was taken by an amateur photographer on the scene (Barkun, 1997).

RUBY RIDGE

“[M]y wrongs did not cause Federal agents to commit crimes. Nothing I did caused Federal agents to violate the Constitution of the United States. I did not cause Federal agents to violate the oath of their office. My actions did not cause Federal agents to violate direct orders from Washington. My choices did not cause Federal agents to violate State and Federal law. My behavior did not cause

Federal agents to violate their own agency policies. Federal agents have admitted to illegal acts.” – Randy Weaver

In 1992, after an 11-day standoff with federal agents, Randy Weaver and his family surrendered to authorities. By that time, a US Marshal, Vicki Weaver, and twelve-year-old Sammy Weaver were dead (Brittanica, 2018). This incident is often considered to have sparked the American militia movement.



Figure 3: The Weaver cabin in northern Idaho (Keneally, 2017)

The Weaver family were white separatists, who moved to a remote mountain in Idaho to avoid contact with others. As opposed to white nationalists, white separatists prefer to separate themselves from multiracial societies, instead of taking action to make those societies into ethnostates. Their only neighbors were an Aryan Nation compound, sixteen miles away (Goodman, 2017). The Weavers attended social events at the compound, although they did not belong to the group. An informant for the Bureaus of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF)

approached Randy Weaver in 1989, persuading him to saw off the tops of shotguns and sell them to the informant. Both the creation and sale of sawed-off shotguns are violations of federal law. The ATF intended to use this as leverage to turn Weaver into an informant, as he was closer to the Aryan Nations than any of their undercover agents (Linder, n.d.). When Weaver refused, he was charged with the crime and summoned to appear in court.

Believing it to be unjust, Weaver refused, and failed to appear on the court date. This caused his case to be turned over to the US Marshal service, who were tasked with tracking down anyone who failed to appear in court. At this point, it did not matter whether Weaver was guilty of the crime with which he was charged. The US marshals had one goal, to ensure that he stood trial (Goodman, 2017). Over the course of several months, the marshals staked out the Weaver cabin, but did not approach, not wanting to have a potential shootout near the three Weaver children. However, the media picked up on the story, adding pressure to subdue Weaver and have him stand trial. At that point the marshals added video surveillance around the Weaver home. The video showed that, in addition to the Weavers, a family friend, Kevin Harris, was also present. The marshals also became aware that the Weavers and Harris were frequently armed.

On August 21, 1992, a three-man team went out to surveil the woods surrounding the Weaver cabin. The team was spotted by the family dog, who barked at them and alerted the Randy Weaver, his son Sammy, and Harris. The three men investigated the noise, and instigated a shootout. By the end, the dog, US marshal William Degan, and Sammy Weaver were dead (Goodman, 2017). The chronology of the shootout is disputed. At the trial, Weaver claimed that the marshals shot first, while the government claimed the opposite. It has also been suggested that the first shots from the marshals killed the dog, prompting Sammy Weaver to retaliate. It is known that William Degan was killed by Kevin Harris. Sammy Weaver's death is less clear, with some theories arguing that he was struck by friendly fire from his father or Harris.

In the aftermath of the deadly shootout, the FBI revised its rules of engagement. Any armed adult seen outside the cabin was to be shot on sight (Lardner & Lei, 1995). The FBI Hostage Response Team arrived at the mountain on August 22, and the team's elite snipers took up posts surrounding the cabin (Linder, n.d.). Later that day, Weaver, his daughter Sara, and Harris left the cabin, headed to the shed where they had stored Sammy Weaver's body. Lon Horiuchi, one of the snipers, fired at the group and non-fatally struck Weaver. The Weavers and Harris ran back to the house after the gunshot. As Harris ran through the door of the cabin, Horiuchi fired again. At the time, the FBI did not know whether the final bullet had hit anyone, and would not find out for days that the bullet had struck and killed Vicki Weaver, before lodging in Kevin Harris's arm (Linder, n.d.). Vicki Weaver held open the door for her husband, daughter, and Harris, which put her in Horiuchi's line of fire. At the time of her death, Vicki was holding her youngest child, 10-month-old Elisheba.

Negotiations continued for days, but were ineffectual. The negotiators operated on the assumption that Vicki Weaver was still alive and the best option to end the standoff. One negotiator attempted to get the children out of the house by saying, "Good morning, Mrs. Weaver. We had pancakes this morning. And what did you have for breakfast? Why don't you send the children out for some pancakes, Mrs. Weaver?" This was interpreted as a cruel joke by the surviving Weavers, who assumed the FBI knew of Vicki's death (Goodman, 2017).

On August 28, Weaver agreed to speak to a new negotiator, former Green Beret Bo Gritz, who was known for his right-wing views, and at the time was running for US president on the Populist ticket (Goodman, 2017). The Weavers regularly listened to Gritz's radio show. He was one of the few people they trusted to negotiate with them (Goodman, 2017). Gritz convinced Harris to surrender in order to get medical attention for his arm. Weaver surrendered the next day, after news that the famous defense attorney Gerry Spence had agreed to take his case

(Linder, n.d.). Spence was a lawyer known for his “theatrics in and out of court” (Johnson, 1996).

After the end of the standoff, Weaver did stand trial. The ATF’s actions were found to be entrapment, defined as a legal defense on the basis that "Government agents may not originate a criminal design, implant in an innocent person's mind the disposition to commit a criminal act, and then induce commission of the crime so that the Government may prosecute." *Jacobson v. United States*, 503 U.S. 540, 548 (1992). Because the ATF informant suggested that Weaver commit a crime, rather than Weaver coming up with it on his own, he cannot then be punished for that crime (FBI, 2018). He was convicted of failing to appear in court, and sentenced to 18 months in prison (Linder, n.d.).

The standoff ended after eleven days, but the effects it had lasted far longer. For some, it was confirmation of their deepest fears: that the United States government would turn on its own people. Regardless of the charges against Randy Weaver, the prevailing notion of the incident was that the Weavers were targeted because of their anti-government leanings. Since they did not conform to the typical way of life, the government made an example of them. In the midst of the standoff, crowds gathered at the bottom of the mountain where the Weavers lived to protest the handling of the incident. The death of Sammy Weaver was the most egregious mistake in the eyes of the protesters, but many of them thought the Weavers should have been left alone from the beginning. Bill Morlin, of the Southern Poverty Law Center, calls Ruby Ridge the beginning of the modern militia movement (Wilson, 2017).



Figure 4: Protesters during the Ruby Ridge incident, August 23, 1992 (Wilson, 2017)

Ruby Ridge sent a message to people who did not trust their government. It told them that the government was willing to take action against those who disagreed with them. Since Weaver was brought up on weapons charges, it confirmed their fears of gun confiscation, in addition to the general fear of governmental overreach. The Weaver case provided a reason to stockpile arms and prepare to defend against a totalitarian government (Wilson, 2017).

WACO STANDOFF

“And you will find out in the judgement that you're fixin' to witness that it was lie. You will find out very clearly every detail, every thought, every statement made, every, every ah, manipulation done behind the scenes will be made apparent to you. You do not understand what you're dealing with. You do not understand what position of time you're in. This nation does not understand. I know you don't want to hear this.” – David Koresh

The Waco standoff ended on April 19, 1993, with 75 people dead after a 51-day standoff between the federal government and the Branch Davidian group, led by David Koresh.

On February 28, agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) went to Mount Carmel, the Branch Davidian compound outside Waco, Texas. The Branch Davidians were an offshoot of Seventh Day Adventists who focused on the coming of the End Times prophesied in Revelation (Christian Research Institute, 2009). The agents planned to serve warrants for the arrest of David Koresh and the search of the compound. The Branch Davidians were suspected of possessing an illegal cache of weapons. A journalist, who has been informed of the raid, told one of the compound inhabitants that the government is coming. When the agents arrive, they are met with armed resistance. A firefight breaks out, leaving four agents dead, sixteen wounded, and an unknown number of Branch Davidians killed or injured (PBS, 1995). There is debate over who initiated the firefight. A 2000 investigation concluded that the ATF was not responsible, but Branch Davidian survivors remain convinced that the first shot was not fired by the compound. FBI agent Byron Sage is appointed chief negotiator. Over the course of the next day, Sage successfully negotiates the release of ten children from the compound. Koresh assured negotiators that suicide was not being considered (PBS, 1995). At the time, the FBI was concerned that Mt. Carmel would become the next Jonestown, where a cult committed mass suicide in 1978. Over 900 people died (Chiu, 2018).

On March 1, Koresh agreed that the Davidians would come out from the compound if a recording of his message was broadcast nationally. The message was aired the next day on the Christian Broadcasting Network, but Steve Schneider, Koresh's second in command, informed negotiators that God had instructed them to wait. The FBI moved the tanks closer to the compound, getting impatient. On March 5, the last child was released from Mt. Carmel (Hancock, 2018). Heather Jones, then nine years old, was one of only 21 children who made it

out of the compound. When she was released, she had a note from her mother pinned to her jacket which said that once the children were out, the adults would die (PBS, 1995). FBI negotiators attempted to convince Koresh to release more children, but he refused, saying that only his biological children are still in the compound.

On March 9, the electricity for Mt. Carmel is cut off by FBI commanders, without consulting with the negotiators. Over the next few days, they periodically cut off the electricity for hours, until March 12, when Jeffrey Jamar, an FBI commander, orders that it be cut off for good, saying “he wanted those inside the compound to experience the same wet and cold night as the tactical personnel outside (PBS, 1995). At the same time, the FBI began shining spotlights and broadcasting from loudspeakers into the compound. Tibetan monk chants, Nancy Sinatra’s “These Boots are Made for Walking,” Christmas carols, and dying rabbit screams were all broadcasted to the Davidians over the course of the siege (Hancock, 2018).

On March 22, the negotiators send a memo to FBI headquarters that approves a tear gas strategy. The next day, the last adult, Livingston Fagan, surrenders and leaves the compound (Hancock, 2018). A total of 14 adults left Mt. Carmel before the siege ended.



Figure 5: Branch Davidians hang a banner on March 14, 1993. It says "FBI Broke Negotiation, We Want Press." (Hancock, 2018)

Lawyers Dick DeGuerin and Jack Zimmerman, hired to defend Koresh and Schneider, meet with them in the compound. On their last visit, they tell negotiators that the Davidians will surrender after Passover, which begins April 5 (Hancock, 2018). That same day, FBI commanders say they will not attempt to fight the fires that may break out if there is a gas assault. On April 17, Attorney General Janet Reno approves the FBI tear gas plan. The next day, one of the negotiators warns the commanders that the gas plan will not work. He believed that the Davidians would not abandon the building despite the gas (Hancock, 2018).

At dawn on April 19, 1993, FBI tanks begin pumping tear gas into the compound. Instead of following a gradual insertion plan, they increased the speed after reports of gunfire (Hancock, 2018). The FBI's surveillance devices pick up some of the Davidians discussing starting fires in the compound. Just after noon, the compound is burning in at least three places. Nine Davidians escaped the fire and were subsequently arrested by the FBI (PBS, 1995). Over 70 people were killed, including at least 17 children (Hancock, 2018). The FBI report states that the fires were

started by the Davidians. This is disputed by many of the survivors, who contend that none of the Davidians would have done so. At the time, most Americans supported the decision to raid the compound, feeling that the Davidians were dangerous (Oxygen, 2018).



Figure 6: A monument with a picture of David Koresh outside the remains of Mt. Carmel (Catlin, 2018)

Over the course of the standoff, a significant number of people travelled to Waco to observe the event. A student reporter from Southern Methodist University, Michelle Rauch, took a spring break trip to the site and interviewed those people to get their perspectives. Three years later, she discovered that one of the interviewees was Timothy McVeigh. Although he had been arrested almost a year earlier, and his face was broadcasted across news outlets, she did not connect the bomber who killed 168 people with the friendly and personable man she talked to outside Waco. She remembers him being distrustful of government, but at the time he did not strike her as violent or dangerous. Her article reads:

“McVeigh said he believes the government is greatly at fault in Waco and has broken constitutional laws. He quoted the U.S. Constitution and said U.S. armed forces should not be used against civilians, yet they were used against Koresh and his followers.”

McVeigh seemed concerned with the government’s intrusion into the daily lives of private citizens, and fearful of that trend continuing. Rauch’s main impression of him was that he was afraid, rather than angry (Tulsa World, 1996).

TIMOTHY MCVEIGH

“Because the truth is, I blew up the Murrah building, and isn't it kind of scary that one man could reap this kind of hell?” – Timothy McVeigh

Timothy McVeigh grew up in Pendleton, New York. He was primarily raised by his father, as his mother moved to Florida with his two sisters when he was ten (McVeigh, 2001). He was bullied as a teenager, and joined the Army in 1988, after a brief stint in business school. McVeigh served in the Gulf War, and received a Bronze Star for bravery (Biography, 2017). He was chosen for Special Forces boot camp, but washed out after only two days. When asked about the war, he said it was not what he expected.

“I went over there hyped up, just like everyone else,” he said. “What I experienced, though, was an entirely different ballgame. And being face-to-face close with these people in personal contact, you realize they're just people like you” (CBS, 2000).

McVeigh’s experiences in the war led him to the conclusion that violence is an effective means to bring about change. He saw it as following the example of the United States government, saying, “If government is the teacher, violence would be an acceptable option.

What did we do to Sudan? What did we do to Afghanistan? Belgrade? What are we doing with the death penalty? It appears they use violence as an option all the time," said McVeigh (CBS, 2000).



Figure 7: McVeigh leaving the courthouse, April 21, 1995 ("Look Back," n.d.)

After being discharged, McVeigh initially returned to New York, but did not stay long. He took up a more nomadic lifestyle following the gun show circuit. During this time, he stayed in contact with Terry Nichols and Michael Fortier, friends from his army days. Nichols was charged as an accomplice in the bombing, while Fortier was not, despite McVeigh's admission of discussing the plan with him. The three men discussed far-right ideology, their passion for guns, and distrust of the federal government.

THE TURNER DIARIES

“It is because Americans have for so many years been unwilling to make unpleasant decisions that we are forced to make decisions now which are stern indeed.” – William Pierce, *The Turner Diaries*

Although the events at Waco and Ruby Ridge played a part in convincing Timothy McVeigh to carry out an attack in Oklahoma City, they were not the only factors at work. More than the events themselves, the intrigue and mystique surrounding them –in the eyes of far-right fringe groups– transformed them from tragedies into legends, complete with heroes, villains, and martyrs. Additionally, the infamous book, *The Turner Diaries*, provided not only the rationale, but a blueprint for anti-government rebellion. The eponymous protagonist of the book, Earl Turner, is presented as a martyr for the cause.

Traditionally, martyrdom is “an act of fatal religious witness for the purpose of demonstrating one’s faith and commitment (Barkun, 2007).” Early Christian martyrs, like the apostles, were killed for refusing to deny Jesus. Although there is debate over the exact definitions and criteria, the basic framework requires faith, commitment, intentional risk-taking, and death. Martyrs, however, are not self-selecting. Those who come afterwards decide who is, and is not, a martyr. For the radical right, the Branch Davidians at Mt. Carmel fit the bill. Despite holding views antithetical to the far right, the mere fact that they opposed the government seems to endear them to the self-styled patriots of fringe groups. The Branch Davidians were a multi-racial group, pro-Israel, and did not have run-ins with the government prior to 1993 (Barkun, 2007).

The Davidians do not fit the classic model of martyrdom, which requires them to have intentionally placed themselves in harm's way for the benefit of a cause, religious or otherwise. The only way for the Davidians to fit this model would be if they intentionally set the fire in the compound. However, this reduces government culpability in their deaths (Barkun, 2007). If the deaths at Waco were suicides, they, by definition, cannot be government-sponsored murder. And right-wing ideologues have a vested interest in the Davidians being victims of an overreaching government. These groups benefit by presenting the victimization of the Davidians as a rallying cry, and therefore hold them up as martyrs to the anti-government crusade. But in doing so, they fail to meet the criteria of martyrdom. This loose interpretation of martyrs changes the criteria from a purposeful death in the service of a cause to a persona created from an interpretation of the death, designated a martyr afterwards, in the pursuit of ideological gain.

After the Waco siege was over, right wing groups appropriated the events to better serve their agenda. Key to this goal was the characterization of the Branch Davidians as passive victims, with no culpability in anything that occurred. Linda Thompson, a far-right activist and self-titled "Acting Adjunct General of the Unorganized Militia of the United States", produced two films, *Waco: The Big Lie* and *II: The Big Lie Continues*, in which she claims the "the ATF agents supposedly shot by the Davidians at the beginning of the standoff were actually executed by the government; that the tanks used by the FBI to insert CS gas into the compound were actually equipped with flamethrowers; and that the government shot survivors as they fled the burning buildings (Barkun, 2007)." The insistence on the passivity of the Davidians indicates a shift in the idea of a martyr, now not an active intent, but a function of victimization (Barkun, 2007). The act of being victimized confers martyr status, rather than the decision and faith of the deceased. The right takes as its martyrs the byproducts of governmental violence, not limiting

itself to those who actively and knowingly send themselves to death as a symbol of commitment to their beliefs.

Timothy McVeigh was deeply impacted by the novel *The Turner Diaries*, by William Pierce. Pierce wrote the book under the pseudonym of Andrew MacDonald. He also founded the National Alliance, after being involved with the American Nazi party and the National Youth Alliance (Gallagher, 1997). He lent a copy to a fellow soldier at Fort Riley, Kansas, cautioning him to keep it hidden so they would not get in trouble. He later lent a copy to his sister Jennifer, who testified regarding his communications with her at his trial.

The obvious connection to the Oklahoma City bombing is one of the book's most significant plot points: the bombing of a government building using a truck bomb made of ammonium nitrate fertilizer. It has long been accepted that the book not only served as an impetus for McVeigh, but also a blueprint. However, this discounts the ideological effect of the novel. It is filled with imagery of the rebellion against the government as a kind of civil religion. The "hero" of the story, Earl Turner, comments on it as he takes the oath to join the Order, the secret revolutionary group, saying that they must develop "an essentially religious attitude to our purpose and our doctrines." He goes on to say that he feels "born again" and the Order members are "instruments of God."

These appeals to religion, although not part of an obviously religious text, lend a sense of legitimacy to the mission and goals that Pierce advocates. Many far-right groups invoke religious purpose both to retain the loyalty of "believers", their current membership, and also to recruit new members, or "convert" them (Gallagher, 1997). *The Turner Diaries* never makes an explicit reference to Christianity or other religions, but it makes liberal use of the language of religion. These subtle references are not mere rhetorical devices or set dressing for the underlying

ideology. Rather, it fits the mold of the American civil religion, as characterized by sociologist Robert Bellah:

“[It] has its own prophets and its own martyrs, its own sacred events and sacred places, its own solemn rituals and symbols. It is concerned that America be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as men can make it, and a light to all the nations (Gallagher, 1997).”

The religious pronouncements throughout the novel serve to give the revolutionary movement, both in the *Diaries* and the real-life movement Pierce wanted to spark, legitimacy. Its audience of traditional, patriotic Americans would see religion and its trappings as the ultimate authority, the arbiter of right and wrong. Pierce co-opts the credibility of religion, especially among blue-collar workers and rural Americans, to recruit new members to the cause and further entrench his beliefs in those who already share the same viewpoint.

CONCLUSION

Discussions of the Oklahoma City bombing tend to begin with the event itself, then move on to the aftermath. The search for the culprit, the trial and execution, and the reaction of the nation are covered in depth. But the most important question, why he did it, is not answered by looking at what happened afterwards. A cursory description of the Waco siege is often given as the sole reason for the bombing, but it, by itself, remains insufficient. The entire nation watched the siege, either on television or by travelling to Waco like McVeigh. Many of those people shared his fears of government overreach. But only Timothy McVeigh reacted by blowing up a government building. Clearly, his motivations were more complex than a knee-jerk reaction to the events of Waco.

While in the army, McVeigh read *The Turner Diaries*, which romanticizes the idea of a rebellion against the government, in which a small but devout group undermines and ultimately destroys the government in its entirety and creates a utopia. It also glorifies the idea of dying for the cause, as the protagonist, Earl Turner, ends the novel with a suicide mission to ensure the success of the movement. McVeigh was so influenced by the book that he lent copies to a fellow soldier as well as his sister Jennifer. His experiences in the Gulf War also contributed to his anti-government leanings. These views were further entrenched after his discharge, while he spent time travelling the gun show circuit. Terry Nichols and Michael Fortier spent a significant amount of time with him during this point in his life, and the three men often discussed their distrust of federal authority.

This distrust gave way to fear in the aftermath of Ruby Ridge, when the government, in the eyes of the far right, murdered a woman and child in cold blood. Even before all the facts were out, many believed the government was unfairly targeting them because of their beliefs. The acquittal of Randy Weaver and Kevin Harris further showed that the government, not the people, were in the wrong. But the government seemed to go unpunished.

Waco, rather than the beginning of the road to the bombing, functioned merely as the last straw. As the fires burned, the people who at first merely distrusted the government began to hate and fear it. A government who would murder its own people, even its own children, with no hesitation could not possibly be trusted. The Branch Davidians became martyrs to the cause, killed so that others would see the light and know exactly what the government is willing to do. But the general public supported the decision to raid the compound at Mt. Carmel. They thought the Branch Davidians were dangerous, that the government was protecting them. And after the raid and the fires and the trial were over, the public forgot about them. The Davidians were ignored, and the government, so it was believed, was given a free pass for the crimes it had

committed. On April 19, 1995, Timothy McVeigh reminded the public, and the government, exactly what they had forgotten. In his mind, he reminded them of the crimes of Ruby Ridge and Waco, and he reminded them of the people who did not agree with those actions.

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