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Author(s): Stuart A. Wright

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Revisiting the Branch Davidian Mass Suicide Debate

Stuart A. Wright

ABSTRACT: This paper revisits the controversy, recently revived by British religious studies scholar, Kenneth C. G. Newport, that the Branch Davidians had a theological rationale for mass suicide and likely set fire to their own home. Newport couples the theological argument with assertions of “unassailable evidence” regarding the government’s reports as if no alternative explanation is plausible. The paper challenges Newport’s claim to the “unassailable evidence” found in government reports. Despite his largely uncritical acceptance of the official version of events, the reliability of the government’s case is hampered in a number of ways. These include, among other things: false or misleading statements by federal officials; lost, mishandled, and/or concealed evidence; an independent arson report that challenges the government’s conclusions; the suppression of evidence through extensive redaction and the use of procedural rulings; and exclusion of evidence in the federal civil trial. I also contend that the tragic *dénouement* at Waco has to be viewed in the cultural context in which it emerged. Waco came to symbolize a deep political divide during a period of growing fears about “big government” and broad swaths of antigovernment sentiment, and, as such, served as a proxy for culture war battles in the early-to-mid 1990s. When examined against the backdrop of these disturbing machinations and conditions, the evidence supporting mass suicide at Mount Carmel is hardly unassailable.

Fifteen years removed from the deadly conflagration outside Waco, Texas, in 1993 which killed seventy-six members of the Branch Davidian sect, the controversy surrounding the origins and the cause of the massive fire persists. In the aftermath of what has been called the worst federal law enforcement disaster in American history,

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the United States government has steadfastly maintained that the fire was the result of actions by sect members, essentially claiming that the Davidians committed mass suicide. This paper revisits the controversy, recently revived by a British religious studies scholar, Kenneth C. G. Newport, who contends that the Branch Davidians had a theological rationale for mass suicide and likely set fire to their own home.¹ That the fire was an act of martyrdom/suicide in the face of a violent government siege is certainly a possibility, but the evidence is far from conclusive. Newport would have us believe otherwise, coupling the theological argument with assertions of “unassailable evidence” and “hard facts” regarding some of the government’s reports as if no alternative interpretation or explanation of events is plausible. Indeed, there are other explanations of the events surrounding the fire which do not comport with Newport’s thesis and which can be readily accessed in government reports, in court documents, in the scholarly research, and in the public domain. The most glaring deficiency in Newport’s argument, I suggest, is the failure to address the valid documentation and evidence adduced in this body of record.

While I find Newport’s arguments unconvincing, the appearance of this work provides scholars an important opportunity to reexamine the fateful dénouement of this religious community with the advantage of some historical distance and perspective. Equally important, in the years following the Waco tragedy significant new developments and/or evidence have emerged. Though I do not think the new information ultimately resolves the question of how the fire started, together with the ongoing inquiry into this calamitous event, we move in a direction of better understanding both the factors and the circumstances that led to the sect’s destruction.

Let me begin by stating what I intend to cover and not cover in this paper. I intend to leave the theological argument advanced by Newport to others better trained in biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. However, let me say by the way of a caveat that I have deep reservations about imposing a literal reading upon what is essentially allegory and metaphor in the biblical texts, particularly with regard to Endtime prophecy. Prophetic pronouncements about “signs and wonders” signaling the apocalypse are routinely read into contemporary social and political events by fundamentalist and sectarian leaders, and routinely they are wrong. As such, religious believers have learned to accommodate failed prophecy without serious challenge to the continuation of the faith.² This elasticity of prophetic interpretation has served the religious mission well. The accommodation to failed prophecy may take several forms that allow believers to explain away disconfirmation.³ Scholars such as Gordon Melton and Diane Tumminia conclude from their studies of prophetic failure that, from the perspective of the groups in question, “prophecy never fails.”⁴ One may deduce from this

peculiar kind of religious logic that there is little downside to making bold predictions, and, thus, prophetic beliefs should not be taken as literal formulas for action. Among many conservative fundamentalist, evangelical, charismatic/Pentecostal, and new religions, dire apocalyptic warnings and predictions are a vital part of the religious culture. The surge of prophetic activity leading up to the new millennium and the alarm surrounding the “Y2K” phenomenon attest to the enduring nature of religious groups to survive and even thrive in the face of failed prophecies.⁵ Newport’s method of post hoc transliteration of Davidian prophetic teachings is suspect for this reason. To impute a motive of mass suicide from apocalyptic content in the message of a religious sect requires strong independent evidence, and this is where I want to focus my attention.

My paper will explore Newport’s claim to the “unassailable evidence” found in government documents or reports that the Davidians set fire to Mount Carmel and committed mass suicide. Despite Newport’s endorsement and largely uncritical acceptance of the official version of events, there has been substantial controversy and quite credible criticism surrounding the government’s selective account of the Waco disaster. Among other things, the reliability of the government’s case has been hampered by false or misleading statements by federal officials; lost, mishandled, and/or concealed evidence, including pyrotechnic devices that could have started the fire;⁶ an independent arson report that challenges the conclusions of the government’s reports on the origins and causes of the fire; the suppression of evidence through extensive redaction or dubious national security classification; the use of procedural rulings and exclusion of evidence in the federal civil trial; and the unfortunate politicization of Waco as it became a proxy for culture war battles in the early-to-mid 1990s.⁷ When examined against the backdrop of these disturbing and perplexing machinations and conditions, the “hard facts” supporting mass suicide at Mount Carmel are hardly certain or unambiguous.

EXAMINING THE CONTESTED EVIDENCE FOR MASS SUICIDE

Newport’s case for mass suicide based on relevant material and circumstantial evidence is found in chapter fourteen of his book. In chapter fifteen, he proceeds from a theological perspective to outline the case for mass suicide, drawing on discussions and analyses from earlier portions of the book. I will address key assertions and claims made in chapter fourteen with regard to the evidentiary arguments. To be sure, Newport makes clear from the outset of this chapter that he believes the Branch Davidians set the fire that precipitated the suicide.

In this chapter and the next an account of the fire is given and a particular case is argued regarding its origin. It will quickly become apparent that the case advanced here is not the one that has in general been argued in scholarly circles, at least not at any length. Nevertheless, the case is both consistent with the unassailable evidence, and best able to account for that part of the evidence that is not so clear; it would not have been put forward otherwise. In essence the argument is that the Davidians set fire to Mount Carmel themselves, and did so with a clear goal in mind . . . The evidence relied upon by the United States government that the Branch Davidians set fire to Mount Carmel themselves and did so intentionally is extensive, unequivocal and detailed.⁸

The certainty with which Newport endorses the government's account of the fire to buttress the argument for mass suicide is surprising in light of other conflicting material which I examine below. Newport suggests four plausible explanations of how the fire started: (1) the Davidians set the fire intentionally; (2) government agents set the fire intentionally; (3) the Davidians set the fire accidentally; and (4) government agents set the fire accidentally. He spends a substantial amount of space challenging option two in order to make a case for option one. Interestingly, his arguments principally address conspiracy theories and do not delineate those from the scholarly inquiry and research. There are some notable omissions regarding the latter. For example, in 1999 I published an article in the journal *Terrorism and Political Violence* identifying sixteen violations of basic hostage-barricade standards and protocols by the FBI at Waco that point to government culpability.⁹ Newport is apparently unaware of the publication, for nowhere does it appear in his references. One of the key violations includes the conditions under which CS should be used and I explore the medical research on its lethality. The manufacturers of CS post stern warnings against its use indoors, and extensive exposure to CS has been cited as a cause of death by Amnesty International.¹⁰ According to one standard chemical reference text, CS forms "flammable vapor-air mixtures in larger volumes. *May be an explosion hazard in confined space.* Combustion may produce irritants and toxic gases. Combustion by-products include hydrogen chloride and phosgene."¹¹

The use of CS must be considered in the calculus of the fire at Mount Carmel. CS can be both an explosion hazard and a fire hazard under the conditions that were created by the FBI attack on Mount Carmel. These conditions specify high concentrations of CS in confined space which is precisely what the barricaded sect members experienced during the six-hour insertion of the chemical warfare agent. A single spark produced by the tracks of the 29-foot long, 52-ton M60 Combat Engineering Vehicle (CEV, often described as "tanks") in metal-to-metal contact during the insertion and penetration of the Mount Carmel Center would have been sufficient to ignite the initial fire. Indeed, the first indication

of a fire was observed in the FLIR (Forward-Looking Infrared) at 12:07:41 in the second floor window in the southeast corner of the Mount Carmel Center, less than two minutes after a CEV breached that area of the building.¹² By noon, Mount Carmel was a virtual tinderbox after the massive insertion of CS which coated everything inside the building producing a flammable vapor-air mixture. The CEV may have also knocked over a lit Coleman lantern in the vicinity, a possibility which I will discuss later in the paper. My point here is that modified military armored vehicles recklessly crashing through a structure with no consideration for potential metal abrasion that could produce a deadly spark under these circumstances is a formula for disaster.

I want to stress that the variable factors and conditions that may lead to the start of a fire when using CS are greater and more precarious than the official government reports on Waco admit. Consider the following account recorded by two FBI crisis negotiators in one barricade incident. In attempting to force suspects out of a building, the police fired a CS canister into the area where the men were thought to be holed up. But when the SWAT team fired the CS into house, the “gas canister landed on a sofa and burned down the entire structure.”¹³ The agents do not offer any details about how the CS canister’s contact with the sofa caused the fire, but they clearly attribute the fire to the CS. Because of the range of possible sources of combustion in such violent police confrontations involving destruction of property and CS insertion, absolute declarations to “unassailable evidence” of the fire source in the Waco case is tenuous at best. The mass suicide thesis, of course, has other problems.

CS is not technically a gas but a particulate or powder, a riot control agent designed for crowd dispersal in open spaces. Although it is designated as a non-lethal weapon for crowd control, a number of studies have challenged this classification.¹⁴ The debate seems to center on the quantity used, whether it is deployed in confined space, and the length of exposure. In other words, the issue revolves around whether CS is used properly as prescribed by the manufacturer and responsible authorities. The quantity to which one is exposed is a significant consideration. In elevated concentration, CS can significantly damage the heart and liver, produce severe pulmonary damage, and even induce chemical pneumonia.¹⁵ According to chemical weapons experts, there is a “mean lethal dose” of CS that occurs when exposure exceeds a specific quantity in cubic space.¹⁶ Consider the following testimony of Frank Bolz in the 1993 Waco hearings before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary. Bolz pioneered hostage negotiation techniques and procedures while with the NYPD in the 1960s and later trained FBI hostage negotiators at Quantico.

Well we know that chemical agents are supposed to be less than lethal.
We also know that chemical agents kill. If people ingest too much

chemical agent physically than their body medically can withstand, if they coat the alveoli sacs inside of the lungs and inhibit the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide into the blood, people get what is known as chemical pneumonia. Moisture forms in the lungs and they die.¹⁷

It is not uncommon for police and military to misuse CS. A study undertaken on the effects of CS and published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* concludes that the use of CS by law enforcement and the military is often “indiscriminate” and “not used correctly” resulting in “severe traumatic injury” and “lethal toxic injury.”¹⁸ One misuse of CS involves dispersal in closed spaces. Clarke and Robinson observe that “All the data available for CN . . . and CS are calculated for *low concentrations obtained by dispersion in the open air*. But it must be emphasized that when powder is thrown into a closed area much higher concentrations build up.¹⁹ The distinction is not insignificant: “Inhalation toxicology studies at high levels of CS exposure . . . have demonstrated its ability to cause chemical pneumonitis and fatal pulmonary edema. In situations in which high levels of exposures have occurred the same effects, as well as heart failure, hepatocellular damage, and death, have been reported in adults.”²⁰ Further, “Oral toxicology studies have noted the ability of CS to cause severe gastroenteritis with perforation. Metabolic studies indicate that absorbed CS is metabolized to cyanide in peripheral tissues.”²¹ Calculations by engineers for an independent laboratory, Failure Analysis, concluded that the average concentration of CS inside Mount Carmel was ten to ninety times that necessary to deter trained troops.²²

A retired United States Army expert who helped develop the ferret round method used to deliver CS reported that the concentrations of CS at Waco were “excessive” and likely “incapacitated” the Branch Davidians “to the point where they were physically unable to exit the gassed areas.”²³ This is a critical point of contention I have with Newport and with the government reports. If the sect members were incapacitated by the high levels of chemical agent, by definition, their failure to escape was not a voluntary decision. One cannot call this suicide. It is well established in the training protocols for critical incidents that the use of CS is potentially lethal in closed spaces.²⁴ But what is not often well monitored by enforcement officials is the degree to which security force personnel comply with their training and codes of conduct to ensure that CS is used properly. At Mount Carmel, it appears that the use of CS was excessive, particularly considering that massive amounts were poured into enclosed spaces over a period of six hours.

Newport is dismissive about the lethal effects of CS citing the 2000 government report issued by John Danforth’s Office of Special Counsel (OSC). Newport repeats the government’s claim that the gas was not lethal because the persons inside were able to leave the area where the

gas was present. Thus, he concludes that a “short period of exposure to the gas, even in high dosage, would not have resulted in death.”²⁵ He does not, however, examine the possibility that six hours of massive insertion of CS might inundate and saturate the interior of the building, leaving no place for Davidians to flee and causing severe incapacitation. Rather, he repeats the FBI’s disputable claim that strong winds on the day of the assault dissipated the lethal effects of the gas. Yet the inner rooms of the Davidian complex from where many of the sect members were gathered had little ventilation. The kitchen and bunker²⁶ areas, where most of the children were concentrated, had no back door or windows to allow escape of the CS.

The delivery system for the insertion of CS is also a consideration. The FBI fired ferret rounds and used sprayers to insert CS inside Mount Carmel, both of which employ methylene chloride as a suspension agent. Methylene chloride is toxic and may be metabolized by the body to form carbon monoxide.²⁷ Combustion of methylene chloride can generate toxic gases, including phosgene, an extremely poisonous gas. Burning CS can also produce cyanide. CS creates a severe burning sensation in victims and if it comes into contact with water—a common reaction is to splash water on the burn—can form hydrogen cyanide fumes.²⁸ We know from reports of survivors that mothers inside Mount Carmel attempted to cover the faces of infants and children with wet towels since they had no gas masks small enough to fit children. Forty-four of the Branch Davidian corpses tested positive for cyanide, some with enough to reach concentration levels in the blood to produce a coma or death.²⁹

CS mixed with methylene chloride also poses an explosion and fire hazard. Dow Chemical’s Material Safety Data Sheet notes that methylene chloride forms flammable vapor air mixtures; in closed spaces the vapors can build up, causing “unconsciousness and death.”³⁰ The amount of methylene chloride used by the FBI at Mount Carmel reached 8,000 ppm or sixteen times the level needed to cause intoxication.³¹

It appears that full disclosure of the toxicity and lethal aspects of the CS insertion proposed by the FBI was not readily conveyed to the Attorney General in seeking approval for the chemical assault plan. Dr. Alan Stone, professor of psychiatry and medicine at Harvard Medical School, was asked by the Department of Justice to review the actions of the FBI at Mount Carmel in the aftermath of the incident. He had the following comments on the government use of CS on the Davidians, particularly the children:

It is difficult to believe that the U.S. government would deliberately plan to expose twenty-five children, most of them infants and toddlers, to CS gas for forty-eight hours . . . Based on my own medical knowledge, and

review of the scientific literature, the information supplied to the Attorney General seems to minimize the potential harmful consequences for infants and children . . . The Attorney General's information . . . understated the potential health consequences in closed spaces.³³

Stone also cites a study that "closely approximates the expected Waco conditions" in which a four month-old infant male was exposed to canisters of CS fired by police into a house to subdue a disturbed adult. The exposure lasted two to three hours (roughly half the exposure endured by Davidian infants and children). The infant male was immediately taken to an emergency room after the incident where he was found to suffer from life-threatening conditions, including "severe respiratory distress typical of chemical pneumonia. The infant had cyanosis, required urgent positive pressure pulmonary care, and was hospitalized for twenty-eight days. Other signs of toxicity appeared, including an enlarged liver."³⁴ Stone states that "the infant's reactions reported in this case history were of a vastly different dimension than the information given the AG (Attorney General) suggested."³⁵

In 1996, a special report by the House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight in conjunction with the House Committee on the Judiciary concluded that the insertion of CS into the enclosed bunker at Mount Carmel "could have been a proximate cause of or directly resulted in some or all of the deaths attributed to asphyxiation in the autopsy reports."³⁶ The report contradicts claims by a Department of Justice expert minimizing the effects of CS, citing medical case studies showing CS can be lethal in closed quarters.

Finally, the length of exposure must be a consideration. Proponents of CS claim that high levels of exposure are precluded because people are averse to remaining where the chemical agent is present. But people may be placed in extenuating circumstances that do not permit flight or escape. As such, length of exposure must be examined together with concentration. Independent of the obvious problem that Branch Davidians may have been incapacitated by the chemical agent, there is ample evidence to suggest that the demolition of Mount Carmel by combat engineering vehicles collapsed the stairwells and possible escape routes during the FBI assault on 19 April, trapping some sect members within the structure.³⁷ Newport dismisses this possibility:

The question of whether, in fact, there was a blocking of exit point either by accident or by design has been much discussed in the literature, and there is no space to deal with this issue in detail here. Suffice it to say, however, that the evidence clearly points to the fact that there were numerous avenues of escape open to the Branch Davidians had they wished to leave the burning building, and some of the members

of the community (though not those in the “bunker” area) probably had a good fifteen to twenty minutes to make their way out.³⁸

In fact, there is clear evidence that the demolition of the building by CEVs did collapse stairwells and did obstruct exits. Several Branch Davidian survivors described in gruesome detail at the civil trial their desperate attempts to escape Mount Carmel in the face of the deadly firestorm and fallen debris all around them. I attended the federal Branch Davidian civil trial in Waco and heard firsthand the witnesses’ sworn testimonies in the summer of 2000. Marjorie Thomas testified at the trial and told the jury that she was “trapped in the building when the fire broke out.”³⁹ Unlike others, she did manage to escape before the chemical agent and the fire devoured her. She said she was frantic and felt her clothes starting to melt. She saw a little bit of light from a window on the second floor, put her hands over her head and leapt out the window. Marjorie suffered severe burns over seventy percent of her body. By the time of the trial she had already endured thirteen operations to repair skin damage. She faced more operations in the future. Marjorie Thomas stated emphatically that there was no plan for suicide. She was asked by attorneys if Koresh or the Davidians had a theological position on suicide. Contrary to Newport’s claim, Ms. Thomas said “it was unacceptable.”⁴⁰

Another Branch Davidian, Misty Ferguson, testified at the civil trial. Misty is the daughter of Rita Riddle, one of the Davidians who came out early during the standoff. Misty was badly burned in the fire, but managed to escape. When Misty was sworn in, she raised her hand to the sounds of gasps in the courtroom. All her fingers on both hands had been amputated. She also had extensive scarring on her face and arms. Misty described the events on April 19 as a desperate effort to make her way through collapsing structures and debris. She said the floors of the building began to buckle; the stairways were blocked by debris and cut off any exit routes. Smoke filled the air and she was unable to see much of anything. The floor collapsed underneath her and she held out her hands to stop the fall. Her fingers and thumbs were burned off as she grabbed hold of something. She ran down a hallway and saw a glimmer of light left by a hole punched in the building by a CEV. She jumped through the hole to the ground outside.⁴¹ Misty was the youngest of nine survivors on 19 April. She was seventeen years old.

Newport’s claim that there were “numerous avenues of escape open to the Branch Davidians had they wished to leave”⁴² is purely speculative and ignores the accounts and sworn testimonies of survivors. The few sect members who escaped describe frenetic efforts of people inside Mount Carmel trying to find their way through the blinding black smoke, the rubble, wreckage and debris, not to mention the raging heat and burning CS by-products, phosgene and cyanide.

David Thibodeau, another survivor, provides an eyewitness account of 19 April in his book, *A Place Called Waco*, and describes encountering several escape routes blocked by collapsing structures, fallen beams, and piles of debris.⁴³ He reports following two other sect members, Jamie Castillo and Derek Lovelock, through an opening in a wall as they successfully escaped the inferno. Thibodeau also notes that sect members were anxious about jumping out of the building for fear that they would be shot by federal agents.⁴⁴ Even in the face of the intolerable heat, the Davidians deliberated, however briefly, the prospect of escaping only to be gunned down. This is a significant consideration since even a moment of hesitation may have been the difference between life and death for some inside Mount Carmel. My interviews with other Branch Davidian survivors also support Thibodeau's assertion that they believed they would be killed by federal agents if they came out.⁴⁵

Newport cites findings from Danforth's OSC Final Report on the causes of the fire. This report concludes that three separate fires were started by the Davidians in the interior of the building, that they were intentionally set within a two- or three-minute span, and that there was no external source for the fires.⁴⁶ The report states its findings definitively and unequivocally without concession to alternative explanations. But a declaration filed in the civil case by Richard Sherrow, a former Fire and Explosion Investigator with the ATF and retired Senior Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician with the Army, states that the evidence is entirely consistent with a fire that originated from a single point and spread throughout the Mount Carmel structure.⁴⁷ Sherrow contends that the evidence is not as certain as government investigators claim. The same evidence could be used to support an entirely different conclusion: "It is also consistent with evidence that the original fire was started by an M728 CEV striking the southeast corner tower of Mount Carmel."⁴⁸

According to official records, a heat signature was observed on the Forward-Looking Infrared (FLIR) in the second window of the southeast corner tower less than two minutes after a CEV made violent contact with that area of the building. Survivors reported that a lit Coleman lantern was located in that vicinity.⁴⁹ Sherrow explains how this could be the source of the fire.

A Coleman-type lantern becomes extremely hot in operation, reaching as much as 700 degrees Fahrenheit. This temperature is sufficient to cause ignition of combustible material even in the absence of an external flame source. Moreover, if the flame of the lantern had been extinguished, the fuel would continue to be expelled from the manifold under pressure from the tank . . . If a lit Coleman-type lantern, which had been operating for some time, had been knocked over by CEV contact with the building or shaking of the building by vibration from the operation of the CEVs outside, the heat from the lantern chassis, the

mantle flame, and the continued production of atomized fuel could cause a fire consistent with that observed on the FLIR at 12:07:41.⁵⁰

The rapid spread of the fire was facilitated not only by thick clouds of methylene chloride but “large amounts of highly flammable and combustible materials” inside Mount Carmel, “including, but not limited to, gasoline, kerosene, lamp oil, Coleman lantern fuel, paint, petroleum distillates, tar and roofing materials, acetylene and oxygen containers, gunpowder, metal shavings and a large quantity of small arms ammunition.”⁵¹

Sherrow offers another possible explanation for the government claim that three separate fires were started by the Branch Davidians because they were detected by the FLIR in three separate parts of the building. Technically, the “heat signatures” revealed by the FLIR indicate infrared heat radiation that is hotter than the background. These differences may be interpreted as fire, but they may also have other explanations, he observes. “A FLIR camera cannot distinguish between reflection and emission or between visible flame and hot smoke and gas.”⁵² Uneven heat emissions may not be detected but still be part of a common combustible system or structure. Heat signatures in FLIR technology only detect the hot-to-cold contrast in radiation. However, “there are no industry accepted standards for use of this technology in fire cause and origin determination.”⁵³

Finally, Sherrow observes that the velocity and direction of the ambient winds outside Mount Carmel are consistent with the lines of fire growth and propagation. Two large holes made in the front of the structure by the CEVs helped to create an airstream pulled from the southeast corner of the complex where the first fire was sited.⁵⁴ The breaches created a “venturi” or wind-tunnel effect, possibly creating the “fireball” later described by some survivors.

GOVERNMENT MISFEASANCE AND THE POLITICIZATION OF THE BRANCH DAVIDIAN CASE

A distinct and equally disquieting problem with the evidentiary material and arguments provided by the state is that its credibility has been undermined. The Branch Davidian case has been hampered by false or misleading statements from federal officials, lost, mishandled, or concealed evidence, and suppression of evidence through extensive redaction of official reports and documents and dubious national security classification. I have written about these disturbing machinations elsewhere in several peer-reviewed publications (of which Newport also seems to be unaware and does not cite in his book).⁵⁵ Space does not permit an extensive review of this material, but suffice it to say that, taken as a whole, these actions do not portend favorably for the reliability or

veracity of statements by government officials. It is the government's incompetence and/or misfeasance in the case as a whole that has called into question the integrity of the evidence regarding the origins of the fire. A few examples of government missteps in the preservation and control of evidence should adequately convey the problem.

After the conflagration, the FBI placed the evidence in a secure storage facility under the command of the Texas Department of Public Safety in Austin, but would not allow defense attorneys access. Joey Gordon, a Texas Ranger who inventoried the evidence, later testified in a videotaped deposition during the civil trial that a number of critical items (e.g., military or pyrotechnic rounds) were mislabeled or missing.⁵⁶ At least one of the military rounds photographed at the crime scene disappeared. Four or five pyrotechnic "flashbang" grenades used by federal law enforcement agents and found in the storage facility were mislabeled or misidentified by the FBI Crime Lab as well, including Q1237 projectiles, and Q379 and Q380 prototypes, all capable of starting a fire. The FBI also misidentified "cooked off" rounds of ammunition.⁵⁷ This information was not made available to the jury in the criminal trial in 1994 and only became known to the public in 1999 through a serendipitous miscommunication between the United States Attorney's office in the Western District of Texas and the Department of Justice that allowed an investigator in the civil case to examine the evidence in the secure facility. Indeed, it is unlikely that the civil trial would have gone forward at all without the discovery of this new evidence. Bill Johnston, the Assistant United States Attorney who gave the investigator permission to examine the evidence, was forced to resign over the incident. Labeled a whistleblower, he quickly became a pariah and a target of reprisals by the Justice Department, even though the plaintiffs in the civil case had every legal right to see the evidence.⁵⁸ Justice officials turned on Johnston, claiming he concealed information from the Danforth investigation about incendiary devices used at Mount Carmel. But Johnston accused Danforth and the Justice Department of making him a scapegoat when government misdeeds were exposed.

A number of other items in the evidence record disappeared or were mishandled. While these items do not shed light on the origins of the fire, they are pertinent to the larger issue of the preservation and integrity of evidence. The right front door of the Branch Davidian complex was a key piece of missing evidence in the criminal trial because it would have shown whether the bullet holes were caused primarily by incoming or outgoing rounds. The Branch Davidians claimed that, on 28 February, ATF agents shot first through the front door, initiating the shootout. ATF officials claimed that the Branch Davidians shot through the door from the inside. Preservation of the right front door would have allowed investigators and the jury to determine which account was accurate. Mysteriously, the door disappeared.

Another piece of missing or mishandled evidence was the videotape of the initial ATF raid. ATF agents mounted a camera on the telephone poll at the entrance of Mount Carmel to record the raid. After the failed raid and heated disputes about who fired first, ATF officials reported that the videotape was blank. The videotape could have established several contested facts in the case, including whether federal agents fired first, whether David Koresh actually appeared at the front door to plead with agents not to fire, and whether agents shot through the front door, as the Branch Davidians claimed.

Still another missing piece of evidence was the videotape on board the Blackhawk helicopter that circled Mount Carmel prior to and during the initial ATF raid. The videotape was critical in determining if federal agents fired weapons from the helicopter, strafing the Branch Davidian residence even before the ATF team arrived at Mount Carmel. Several Branch Davidians reported gunfire from the helicopters. Colonel William Petit was aboard the Blackhawk on the day of the raid and testified in the civil trial. He told the court that he never saw gunfire from the helicopters. But when asked about the tape, he said he was aware of the tape but had not seen it and did not know what happened to it.⁵⁹ The videotape made on board the Blackhawk, like the pyrotechnic military rounds, the flashbang grenades, the right front door, and the videotape from the camera on the telephone poll to record the initial raid, disappeared or was mishandled.

A particularly egregious example of government misfeasance concerns the evidence of alleged illegal firearms recovered at Mount Camel after the fire. As part of an agreement between the Department of Justice and Congressional committee members prior to the 1995 Waco hearings, an independent analysis was to be conducted by Failure Analysis, a firm routinely used by federal agencies, to assess the gun tampering charges (converting semiautomatic into fully automatic weapons) in the warrants.⁶⁰ When scientists from Failure Analysis arrived in the Department of Public Safety in Austin, however, officials declined to make the firearms available to them. According the 1996 Final Congressional Report on the Waco hearings, "The (Justice) Department agreed instead to conduct the tests itself and present its findings to the subcommittees. A short time later, the Department urged, for cost considerations, that tests not be performed. As a result, no tests were (ever) performed on the firearms."⁶¹ This is hardly an incidental matter. If the Departments of Justice and the Treasury thought they had material evidence to support the charges in the warrants that the Davidians were illegally converting semiautomatic rifles to fully automatic weapons (the rationale for the raid), it is inconceivable that they would prevent these findings from being made public. Indeed, they would have made every effort to broadcast this information to the media and the public because it would offer some vindication for the initial enforcement action.

Finally, a key record of evidence that disappeared was the after-incident reports based on interviews conducted with the crisis negotiators by Justice Department officials. It was evident to me and other observers that during the fifty-one day standoff the negotiations between the Branch Davidians and the crisis negotiators were effectively undermined by the Hostage Rescue Team's tactical strategies, which employed a bewilderingly mixed message. Instead of rewarding the barricaded sect members for concessions made during the negotiations (e.g., sending children or adults out, providing a video tape), the HRT would "punish" them by turning off their electricity or destroying more of their property with the CEVs.

The effect of this mixed-message approach was a breakdown both in communication and trust between sect members and negotiators. In the preparation for the 1994 criminal trial, defense attorneys believed that exculpatory evidence could be found in the after-incident reports, and filed requests with the Justice Department to examine these materials. But the defense attorneys were told that the reports did not exist. However, years later, some of the complaints and grievances of FBI negotiators were leaked and in the 2000 civil trial, the Justice Department suddenly "discovered" the missing reports. Not surprisingly, they were damning. Several negotiators objected loudly to the HRT's threatening tactics and even predicted that the standoff would end in the deaths of the sect members.⁶²

It is imperative to remember that the disastrous federal siege of the Branch Davidian community took place in a cultural and political climate of growing far-right political activity and antigovernment sentiment in the early-to-mid 1990s. For far-right militias and patriot groups, Waco became a political symbol of government abuse and tyranny. Indeed, the federal sieges at Ruby Ridge and Waco, only six months apart, were key factors in the mass mobilization of the far-right leading eventually to the Oklahoma City bombing by antigovernment insurgents on the second anniversary of the 19 April FBI assault.⁶³ In the three years following the Waco raid, the number of militia and patriot groups climbed from less than a dozen to 858.⁶⁴ In this context, the raids, the trials, the Congressional hearings and reports became heavily politicized, symbolizing a culture war between liberals and conservatives, big versus small government, gun enthusiasts versus gun control advocates. I contend that the Branch Davidians never got a fair hearing in the courts, or in the court of public opinion, largely because the incident could not be extricated from the politics. While the Branch Davidians were never far-right political militants, their plight was appropriated by the far-right and came to represent a much larger conflict and cultural divide.

I testified in the 1995 House hearings on Waco and witnessed this firsthand as conservative Republicans used the hearings to attack

President Clinton and the Democrats.⁶⁵ On the other hand, Democrats in the House committees were defensive and eager to label critics of the Waco raid as right-wing reactionaries or antigovernment zealots. As a liberal Democrat and editor of a highly critical book on the federal siege,⁶⁶ I was unsettled by this peculiar development. My own objection to the federal raid was purely on civil liberties grounds, not as a gun enthusiast or right-wing patriot. Yet the battle lines were clearly drawn.

Behind the scenes, the White House staff assembled a damage control team and retained the services of a public relations specialist to deflect negative publicity.⁶⁷ Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin contacted at least one member of the joint committees, Representative Bill Brewster (D-Oklahoma), and requested that he not ask any questions that would embarrass the administration.⁶⁸ President Clinton himself used the Oval Office as a bully pulpit and charged that the hearings were an “attack on law enforcement.”⁶⁹

Investigators for the House committees prior to the hearings reported a concerted lack of cooperation from the White House and the Departments of the Treasury and Justice.⁷⁰ Officials attempted to narrow the scope of the committees’ requests and restrict access to information. According to the Final Congressional Report, the first delivery of important documents requested by House committees arrived only three weeks before the hearings and “tens of thousands of others were received after the hearings had already begun. This ‘wait-and-dump’ strategy rendered meaningful staff review of many key documents virtually impossible prior to commencement of the hearings.”⁷¹ In addition, the Treasury Department’s documents arrived in no apparent order, making the retrieval of any single document extremely difficult. However, “in what became symbolic of the administration’s uncooperative attitude,” it was later discovered that Democrats were provided an index for locating Treasury documents while no such index was given to Republicans.⁷²

Many of the documents requested by the House committees of the White House, the Departments of Justice and the Treasury, and the FBI were eventually produced for the hearings, but heavily redacted. In some cases, entire pages were blacked out making comprehension and discovery of events virtually impossible. The White House and the federal agency leaders claimed redaction was necessary based on national security grounds, but most observers recognized this strategy for what it was: a self-serving obstruction to the investigation.

Sadly, the real victims in this episode at the pinnacle of the culture wars were the Branch Davidians and their families. The Branch Davidians could not be vindicated, I suggest, because in this polarized, political context it would have symbolized a victory for far-right, antigovernment ideology and beliefs. I have argued elsewhere that the best explanation for the disproportionate federal response to the Davidians

(the largest enforcement action in the history of the ATF) was that key federal actors *perceived* the group to be part of the far-right Posse Comitatus and Christian Identity networks.⁷³ ATF officials developed an inflated martial image of the Branch Davidians as a violent extremist group bent on war with the government, in part because they listened to the cultural opponents of David Koresh and in part because the ATF was receptive to a “warfare narrative” that served the interests of an opportunistic agency. “ATF investigators and officials framed the information they received to fit the narrative of warfare, causing them to overlook or ignore contradictory, conflicting, or ambivalent evidence. This explains the puzzling decisions by ATF officials who failed to consider less lethal options or opportunities as they arose in what the Treasury report later referred to as ‘steps taken along what seemed to be at the time a preordained road’.”⁷⁴ The FBI uncritically adopted this warfare narrative in its operation of the standoff and final CS insertion. The pervasive disregard for and violation of standard hostage-barricade protocols—the “noose-tightening” approach of tactical pressure above the objections of crisis negotiators, the use of psychological warfare, provocation and intimidation, and the dangerous CS insertion and demolition of the Branch Davidian complex—all speak to the antipathy and contempt that the FBI and its HRT had for those inside Mount Carmel. Even after it became apparent that the Branch Davidians were not part of either the Posse Comitatus or Christian Identity networks in the weeks and months following the conflagration, the government continued to exploit this narrative and frame the group as antigovernment extremists. The government could not or would not acknowledge this grievous miscalculation.

Newport discounts the idea of a government cover-up,⁷⁵ but I think there is compelling evidence and a quite plausible argument to be made. The collapse of trust in government during a period of growing fear about “big government” and even broad swaths of anti-government sentiment in the United States threatened to ignite a crisis of moral authority—an incalculable cost to bear, at least in the minds of some leaders. Moreover, the Clinton White House and Democrats in Congress saw the appropriation of Waco by right-wing leaders as a thinly veiled attack on liberal ideology in the context of the culture wars, and rightly so. Keep in mind that the hearings took place less than a year after conservative Republicans swept into power and seized a majority in both houses of Congress. Democratic leaders likely saw Waco as symbolic of a larger battle they could not afford to lose. My point here is that the question of mass suicide or the cause of the fire that destroyed the Branch Davidian community is inextricably tied to the profoundly polarized politics of the culture during this time. Thus, finding the truth about the conflagration is acutely obscured and filtered through layers of deeply held beliefs, values, and political passions.

As a British observer, Newport does not seem to be aware of the significance of the political environment that shapes and redefines the terms of the controversy at Waco. Independent of the actual cause of the fire is the broader social construction of meaning and the assignment of blame, an imputing of characteristics and motives, the identification of culpable agents, villains, and enemies. Control over the framing of the Waco disaster confers power because it represents a struggle over cultural ideas imbued with greater import. Given the seriously compromised custody of evidence, we may never know how the fire started at Mount Carmel. But if and when any new evidence does arise, or perhaps some principal actor in the tragedy comes forward to make a startling confession in the future, it is likely that the meaning of Waco for most people will still be construed through the cultural lens of the period. Not unlike other highly contested government actions (e.g., the invasion of Iraq, extraordinary rendition, warrantless surveillance of citizens), explanations tend to entail coded interpretations of ideological canons or principles. Waco has become something of a Rorschach test for social actors, telling us more about their politics and values than about the actual chain of events that led to the annihilation of this religious community.

ENDNOTES

¹ Kenneth C.G. Newport, *The Branch Davidians of Waco: The History and Beliefs of an Apocalyptic Sect* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

² See Jon R. Stone, ed., *Expecting Armageddon: Essential Readings in Failed Prophecy* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Diana Tumminia and William Swatos, eds., *The Failure of Prophecy: Fifty Years after Festinger* (London: Brill, forthcoming).

³ Lorne L. Dawson, "When Prophecy Fails and Faith Persists: A Theoretical Overview." *Nova Religio* 3, no. 1 (1999): 60–82.

⁴ J. Gordon Melton, "Spiritualization and Reaffirmation: What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails," *American Studies* 26 (1985): 17–29; Diana G. Tumminia, "How Prophecy Never Fails: Interpretive Reason in a Flying-saucer Group," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 59 (1998): 157–70.

⁵ In October 1991, the FBI issued alerts to law enforcement agencies in the United States about potential Y2K violence involving "extreme cultists" together with militias and radical Islamist groups in the *Megiddo Report*. The FBI also worked with their Israeli counterparts in formulating a threat assessment of millennial religious groups. Israeli authorities expelled members of two Christian millennial groups, House of Prayer and Solomon's Temple, and denied entry to a third group, the Denver-based Concerned Christians, citing suspicions of violence or possible mass suicide. None of these groups engaged in violence and the millennium passed without incident. The furor associated

with apocalyptic prophecy and Y2K was largely overblown. See “FBI Issues Alerts for Possible Y2K Threats,” ABC News (20 October 1999); “Israel Arrests Christian Groups Accused of Planning to Harm Public Safety; Reawakens Fear of Millennium Violence,” ABC News (25 October 1999); “Israel detains Christian group in pre-millennium sweep—The Christians were seized near Jerusalem’s Mount of Olives,” CNN (25 October 1999); Deborah Camiel, “Israel to Expel 20 Members of Christian Groups,” Reuters (25 October 1999); “Christians appeal to Israel ministry to prevent deportation,” Associated Press (28 October 1999). For response from the evangelical Christian community, see Douglas E. Cowan, “Confronting the Failed Failure: Y2K and Evangelical Eschatology in Light of the Passed Millennium,” *Nova Religio* 7, no. 2 (2003): 71–85.

⁶ Newport contends in his paper that the FBI did not conceal evidence of the pyrotechnic rounds in the CS assault and that the information was only covered up later by Assistant United States Attorney Johnson. This is misleading. The information supplied by the FBI to DOJ was buried and obscured, referring only to “military rounds” or “bubbleheads.” Johnson said he didn’t know what military rounds or bubbleheads were and a number of other experts said they were not familiar with these terms. I think this obfuscation by the FBI was deliberate and tantamount to concealment. Johnson complained that they were punishing him for allowing the plaintiff’s investigator into the storage locker to find the pyrotechnic devices, some of which were mislabeled.

⁷ Stuart A. Wright, “Field Notes: Isabel Andrade et al v. U.S.” *Nova Religio* 4, no. 2 (2001): 157–64; Stuart A. Wright, “Justice Denied: The Waco Civil Trial.” *Nova Religio* 5, no. 1 (2001): 143–51; Stuart A. Wright, “A Critical Analysis of Evidentiary and Procedural Rulings in the Branch Davidian Civil Trial,” in *New Religious Movements and Religious Liberty in America*, ed. Derek Davis (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2002), 101–113; Stuart A. Wright, “A Decade after Waco: Reassessing Crisis Negotiations at Mount Carmel in Light of New Government Disclosures.” *Nova Religio* 7, no. 2 (2003): 101–110.

⁸ Newport, *Branch Davidians of Waco*, 279.

⁹ Stuart A. Wright, “Anatomy of a Government Massacre: Abuses of Hostage-Barricade Protocols during the Waco Standoff,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11, no. 2 (1999): 39–68.

¹⁰ *Amnesty International Report*, 1 June 1988. The report notes that CS and CN gas contributed to more than forty deaths of Palestinians in an attack by Israeli forces against persons in closed spaces.

¹¹ Cited in Dick J. Reavis, *The Ashes of Waco: An Investigation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 268.

¹² Fire Investigation Report, Branch Davidian Compound, Waco Texas, April 19, 1993. Prepared by Paul C. Gray et al., p. 5, Appendix D, *Report to the Deputy Attorney General on the Events at Waco, Texas, February 28 to April 19, 1993*. Washington, D. C.: United States Department of Justice, October 1993.

¹³ Michael J. McMains and Wayman C. Mullins, *Crisis Negotiations: Managing Critical Incidents and Hostage Situations in Law Enforcement and Corrections* (Cincinnati, Oh.: Anderson, 1996), 313.

¹⁴ Howard Hu, Jonathan Fine, Paul Epstein, Karl Kelsey, Preston Reynolds, and Bailus Walker, “Tear Gas: Harassing Agent or Toxic Chemical Weapon?” *Journal*

of the American Medical Association 262, no. 5 (1989); retrieved from <www.zarc.com/english/tear_gases/jamateargastoxic.html>, accessed 27 July 2009.

¹⁵ Hu, et al., “Tear Gas,” n. 8; see also Testimony of Frank Bolz, *Hearing Before the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate: The Aftermath of Waco: Changes in Federal Law Enforcement, October 31 and November 1, 1995* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1997), 118, 134–35.

¹⁶ Testimony of Frank Bolz, 135.

¹⁷ Testimony of Frank Bolz, 135.

¹⁸ Hu et al., “Tear Gas.”

¹⁹ Robin Clarke and Perry Robinson, “United Kingdom,” in *CBW: Chemical and Biological Warfare: London Conference on CBW*, ed. Steven Rose (London: George G. Harrop & Co., 1968), 91–92, emphasis added.

²⁰ Hu et al., “Tear Gas.”

²¹ Hu et al., “Tear Gas.”

²² Declaration of Richard Sherrow, Fire Investigators’ Civil Suit Affidavit on Origin of April 19, 1993 Fire at Mount Carmel, United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas, Houston Division, H-94-0923, 17 January 1996, 4.

²³ Rex Applegate, Unpublished Report on FBI Planning and Operations Relating to the CS Gas Assault at Waco, Texas, February 28 to April 19, 1993 (Scottsburg, Oregon, 1995), 23.

²⁴ Michael J. McMains and Wayman C. Mullins, *Crisis Negotiations: Managing Critical Incidents and Hostage Situations in Law Enforcement and Corrections* (Cincinnati, Oh.: Anderson, 1996), 313.

²⁵ Newport, *The Branch Davidians of Waco*, 289.

²⁶ Federal agents termed the concrete room at the base of the central tower on the ground floor of the residence a “bunker.” It was actually a vault constructed years earlier for the previous Administration Building that stood on the site, and which burned to the ground in 1983. Clive Doyle has reported that printed pamphlets and journals published by the Branch Davidians, particularly Lois Roden, were stored in the vault at the time of the 1983 fire, and that all of the contents of the vault were untouched by the fire. When David Koresh and his followers began building the large residence on the site, they incorporated the concrete vault into the plan of the new building. Koresh’s Branch Davidians moved out of individual houses at Mount Carmel into the new single residence in the spring of 1992.

²⁷ J. Fagin, J. Bradley, and D. Williams, “Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Secondary to Inhaling Methylene Chloride.” *British Medical Journal* 281, no. 6253 (1980): 1461.

²⁸ David B. Kopel and Paul H. Blackman, *No More Wacos: What’s Wrong With Federal Law Enforcement and How to Fix It* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus), 159.

²⁹ Kopel and Blackman, *No More Wacos*, 159.

³⁰ Kopel and Blackman, *No More Wacos*, 158.

³¹ Kopel and Blackman, *No More Wacos*, 158.

³² McMains and Mullins, *Crisis Negotiations*, 313.

³³ Dr. Alan A. Stone, *Report and Recommendations Concerning the Handling of Incidents Such as the Branch Davidian Standoff in Waco, Texas*. Report to the Attorney General, 8 November 1993, 30–31.

³⁴ Stone, *Report and Recommendations*, 34.

³⁵ Stone, *Report and Recommendations*, 34.

³⁶ *Investigation into the Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies Toward the Branch Davidians*, Thirteenth Report by the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight Prepared in Conjunction with the Committee of the Judiciary (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 4.

³⁷ Wright, “Field Notes: Isabel Andrade”; Wright, “A Decade after Waco.”

³⁸ Newport, *The Branch Davidians of Waco*, 280.

³⁹ Stuart A. Wright, Waco Trial Journal, author’s personal notes from the civil trial.

⁴⁰ Wright, Waco Trial Journal.

⁴¹ Wright, Waco Trial Journal.

⁴² Newport, *The Branch Davidians of Waco*, 280.

⁴³ David Thibodeau, *A Place Called Waco: A Survivor’s Story* (Washington, D. C.: Public Affairs, 1999), xvi–xvii.

⁴⁴ Thibodeau, *A Place Called Waco*, xvii.

⁴⁵ Catherine Matteson, interview with author, 10 September 1993; Rita Riddle, interview with author, 17 December 1993.

⁴⁶ Walter Wetherington, *Final Report Concerning the Fire at the Branch Davidian Complex, Waco, Texas, April 19, 1993. Prepared for the Office of Special Counsel Waco Investigation*, 12 September 2000.

⁴⁷ Declaration of Richard L. Sherrow, 2.

⁴⁸ Declaration of Richard L. Sherrow, 2.

⁴⁹ Newport criticizes me for making a case that a CEV may have knocked over a lit Coleman lantern and chides me for using “unreferenced survivor reports.” I am not drawing on unreferenced survivor reports but Richard Sherrow’s sworn affidavit submitted to the court in the civil trial. Sherrow is a former Fire and Explosion Investigator with the ATF and retired Senior Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician with the Army. The argument here is clearly in the context of Sherrow’s affidavit and the specific point Newport contests as “unreferenced survivor reports” is indeed referenced in this document.

⁵⁰ Declaration of Richard L. Sherrow, 5.

⁵¹ Declaration of Richard L. Sherrow, 2.

⁵² Declaration of Richard L. Sherrow, 5.

⁵³ Declaration of Richard L. Sherrow, 5.

⁵⁴ Declaration of Richard L. Sherrow, 5–6.

⁵⁵ Wright, “A Critical Analysis of Evidentiary and Procedural Rulings”; Wright, “A Decade after Waco”; Wright, “Field Notes from Waco”; Wright, “Justice Denied.”

⁵⁶ Wright, “Field Notes from Waco,” 352.

⁵⁷ “Cooking off” refers to the explosion of ammunition as a result of surrounding heat.

⁵⁸ Bill Johnston, letter to the editor and statement, *Dallas Morning News*, 9 November 2000.

⁵⁹ Wright, "Field Notes from Waco," 353.

⁶⁰ *Investigation into the Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies Toward the Branch Davidians*, 9.

⁶¹ *Investigation into the Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies Toward the Branch Davidians*, 9.

⁶² Wright, "A Decade after Waco," 107–108.

⁶³ Stuart A. Wright, *Patriots, Politics and the Oklahoma City Bombing* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶⁴ Southern Poverty Law Center, "The Rise and Decline of the Patriots"; retrieved from <<http://splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?aid=195&printable=1>>, accessed 29 July 2009.

⁶⁵ I worked with Republicans on the House committees leading up to the hearings and in my judgment this was largely their motive.

⁶⁶ Stuart A. Wright, ed., *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995).

⁶⁷ Ann Devroy, "Clinton Team Focuses on Damage Control on Waco," *Washington Post* (19 July 1995): A12.

⁶⁸ *Investigation into the Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies Toward the Branch Davidians*, 7.

⁶⁹ *Investigation into the Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies Toward the Branch Davidians*, 7–8.

⁷⁰ *Investigation into the Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies Toward the Branch Davidians*, 8.

⁷¹ *Investigation into the Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies Toward the Branch Davidians*, 8.

⁷² *Investigation into the Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies Toward the Branch Davidians*, 8.

⁷³ Wright, *Patriots, Politics and the Oklahoma City Bombing*, 155–65.

⁷⁴ Stuart A. Wright, "Explaining Militarization at Waco: Construction and Convergence of a Warfare Narrative," in *Controversial New Religions*, ed. James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 75–97.

⁷⁵ Newport, *The Branch Davidians of Waco*, 282.