



# The Ashes of Waco: An Investigation

*Dick J. Reavis*

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## **The Ashes of Waco: An Investigation** Dick J. Reavis

Examined from both sides - the Bureau of Alcohol and Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) and the FBI on one hand, and David Koresh and his followers on the other - this text focuses on the events at Mt. Carmel, near Waco Texas. Dick J. Reavis contends that the government had little reason to investigate Koresh, and even less to raid the compound at Mt. Carmel. The government lied to the public about most of what happened - about who fired the first shots, about drugs allegations, and about the child abuse. The FBI was duplicitous and negligent in gassing Mt. Carmel - and that alone could have started the fire that killed 76 people.

## **The Ashes of Waco: An Investigation Details**

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Author : Dick J. Reavis

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## From Reader Review The Ashes of Waco: An Investigation for online ebook

### David Ward says

The Ashes of Waco: An Investigation by Dick J. Reavis (Simon & Shuster 1995) (364.1523) attracted me because I wished to learn more about David Koresh, the Branch Davidians, and the attack upon them by the ATF. However, the author failed to produce. Try as I might, I could not get interested in the author's narrative. Perhaps I should have been tipped off by the author's dedication: "To Sitting Bull and the Ghost Dance believers." My rating: 1/10. Finished 2/23/11.

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### Prognomore LAFIANZA says

Written just two years after the event, at the dawn of email, well before Google, cell phones and personal digital video, Mr. Reavis produced an excellent 300 pages the old school way, through interviews, snail mail correspondence, reading books, and tracking down official documents, no easy feat thanks to the era, thanks to the many governmental agencies involved eager to make themselves look good, and worst of all, thanks to the infamous fire that destroyed so much evidence and consumed so many.

The economy of language and broad scope of the work are refreshing. This nearly contemporary account holds up well and is still worth reading.

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### Renee says

Although the book was a little confusing with some jumping around and in the end there is still no definitive answer to "whodunit", it was a very good book. I thought it was fairly unbiased and I was surprised to read how much information from the government side is still classified. I definitely learned more in this book than I did when I was following the situation as it was happening.

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### Chans says

5/10

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### Stephen says

What happened at Waco? Dick Reavis had an itch to find out, and since no one else at his alternative newspaper was curious, he volunteered as man on the ground to investigate. Getting close wasn't easy: during the fifty-one day siege, the ATF and FBI kept journalists at a distance, and their scissor job with the phone lines restricted communication in and out of the surrounded center. Inside the center were nearly a hundred members of the Branch Davidians, a splinter sect of the Seventh-Day Adventists, expecting the apocalypse and living in the belief that their leader David Koresh was chosen as the next messiah, meant to

reveal God's word to the world. What Reavis found was a gung-ho mob of bureaucrats and gunmen, constantly getting in one another's way and approaching a situation that demanded delicacy with all the tact of a bull in a china shop.

The Ashes of Waco is a more comprehensive text on the Waco disaster, which started off with the deaths of ten people – six civilians, four agents -- and ended in an inferno that killed eighty more, including children. Reavis covers the sect's religious background in a series of introductory chapters, covering their revolution from an Adventist group to one increasingly dominated by Koresh's interpretative of the Book of Revelation, then moves on to the ATF investigation and the bloodshed that followed. If Reavis seems at all partial in his sharp criticism of the government which follows, this owes more to their half-cocked Rambo tactics than overt sympathy for the Davidians. He doesn't dwell on the child marriages, but at the time of writing Koresh was still being lynched by the media as a deranged pedophile with a private arsenal. Reavis doesn't shy away from their kookiness, covering aspects that Tabor missed altogether, like a belief in biblical UFOs that transported people from Earth into Heaven. In Reavis' eyes, however, a government which uses extreme force recklessly is far more dangerous than a religious group that had lived peaceably in Texas for decades. From moment one, Waco was a catastrophe for civil, competent law enforcement. From the raid's opening, with a helicopter strafing the building, to its closing fifty-one days later with tanks used to batter down walls and shoot in tear gas grenades banned from war and known to be incendiary in enclosed situations, the operative word was Fiasco.

The Ashes of Waco is well-done, drawing on extensive interviews with Federal agents, Waco residents (the centers' neighbors), and Davidian survivors. Reavis conveys a good sense of what life was like inside the community, including maps of the connected buildings. He also looks beyond the front lines to consider how neighbors reacted to the showdown, including one radio host who -- after realizing the center's residents were listening to his show -- had them move a dish mounted on their roof in response to questions, a la Christopher Pike in "The Menagerie", in Star Trek. Although obviously appalled by the actions of the ATF and FBI, they are not villainized, All told, this is as even-handed and thorough an account one could hope for, written so soon after the debacle.

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### **Becka says**

Very eye opening introduction to the travesty done to a peaceful people by the government of the U.S. I would've given five stars for the content alone, but the author tried too hard at times to be artistic instead of informative.

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### **Horace Derwent says**

<http://baike.so.com/doc/693228-733742...>

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### **Mary Ann says**

For content, see the review by Erik Graff below; he says very well what I think about the challenges this book presented to my own thinking and biases I held regarding the victims. I rated this a little lower because I don't think it's nearly as well-written as Ruby Ridge by Jess Walter or Oklahoma City by Andrew Gumbel. Although all three situations expose the inter-agency competition, incompetence, duplicity, and deception by

federal law enforcement agencies, Reavis faced a particular challenge presented by the sheer volume of information-interviews, transcripts, unredacted official reports, etc. that remain classified to this day despite repeated FOIA requests which have been denied or unreasonably delayed. I believe this is because the actions of the ATF in the first raid and those of the FBI in the second were particularly egregious. A number of reviewers have commented that there is still much that is not known about Waco, and they are correct. That will remain true unless and until the entire record is exposed, and, sadly, I doubt that will happen.

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### **Justin Espe says**

Author Dick J. Reavis wrote the The Ashes of Waco because he initially wrote a newspaper article for the Dallas Observer. He wanted to write more but the company wouldn't let him. So, he secured a deal with his agent to write a book about it. The theme of the book is that the government should keep to their own and not bother people of different religious backgrounds unless they are doing something that could harm the nation. The book is descriptive because it tells you first hand and includes interviews with survivors of Church Davidson. The book tells the stories of the people that live there and the government officials from ATF. My opinion of the book is that it is a good book. I like the information in it and how it was arranged. I disliked that it had some boring parts especially in the beginning, but once it picked up it got really good. One thing I would do to change it a bit would be to add some pictures of the building both before and after the explosion.

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### **Jill Crosby says**

Pretty heavy-handed on the whole Davidian scripture business, not so much on motivations (either side), etc. What WERE the Davidians stockpiling weapons (legal weapons, but still---, Why did this bother the government so much, What were the details of the negotiations between the two---los of questions unanswered for me.

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### **Erik Graff says**

I picked this up along with another book about the Ruby Ridge murders which had occurred shortly before those at Waco, moving directly from the first to the second. Both involve religious 'extremists' (Christian Identity and Adventists, respectively) and federal agencies (BTFA and FBI), both involve governmentally provoked violence and murder, both involve governmental coverups. Together, they paint a pretty dismal picture. Although I'm prone to dismiss conservative Christians, both books portray them as the good guys, relatively speaking, and their opponents as murderously amoral bullies.

Previously, I'd read a book about the theology of the Adventists (usually referred to as 'Branch Davidians' by outsiders, but not by themselves), the authors of which are mentioned in Reavis' text, and, having spent a good deal of my life near Berrien Springs, Michigan, home of Andrews University, I've encountered a good number of mainstream Adventists in my time. They are, in my opinion, gravely mistaken in their appropriation of biblical materials, but no more mistaken than any other Christians who maintain the delusion that there is such a thing as an inerrant, unitary bible. In other words, they're no crazier than Southern Baptists, Pentecostals and any number of other conservative Christian churches. Yet, in the case of those Adventists on their Texan Mt. Carmel, the government and the slavish press treated them distinctively and derisively as 'cultists', so as to distance them from constitutional protections and alienate them from their

coreligionists in other conservative denominations. Meanwhile, sadly, apparently no one on the government's side took their religious concerns seriously--no one, apparently, being assigned to the matter who could begin to understand what David Koresh and his followers were talking about--no one of authority, apparently, giving an ear to professors of religion who volunteered their services.

I've mentioned this book as having shaken my usually strong prejudice against conservative Christians. There's another prejudice it, and the previous book about the Weaver family in Idaho, shook as well, namely my prejudice against the National Rifle Association.

In both the Idaho and Texas cases there were legal issues associated with firearms. Randy Weaver had produced two sawed-off shotguns for a federal informant--though that may have been an instance of entrapment. Koresh's group, some of them, had illegally converted some semiautomatics to automatics. But those 'crimes' were possibly the only ones committed by the civilian victims and, given the disregard for human (including juvenile and infant) life evinced by the Feds in both cases, I found myself almost wishing, for the sake of fairness, that the Christian forces had been much more heavily armed than they were.

Finally, and on reflection, I find yet a third prejudice as having been challenged by these two books and others like them, namely my prejudice against right-wing survivalists and radical constitutionalists.

Suspicion as regards big government, however paranoid, has a strong evidential basis.

One minor correction: author Reavis confuses the First and Second Roman Wars (or 'Jewish revolts', depending on your perspective), placing the Jewish revolutionary Bar Kochba in the wrong war.

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## **Glenna Johnson &#x1f339; says**

This book is an absolute mess from start to finish. Reavis is unabashedly pro-Koresh and the Branch Davidians, despite promising "the definitive book about what happened at My. Carmel, near Waco, Texas, examined from both sides" (interior front jacket) (hey look! A citation!! Something Reavis has apparently never seen nor heard of unless it's citing the Bible).

The first half of the book is primarily concerned with Koresh's beliefs, as well as the pre-Koresh history of the Davidians and Mt. Carmel. It's excessive and poorly constructed. The first half, as well, defends Koresh's status as a child rapist, in espousing the cult's earnest beliefs about spiritual marriage, and reiterating again and again that Texas only requires the consent of a legal guardian to marry off a 14 year old (regardless of the age of their spouse). Reavis takes the position that "yeah, it may look a little off to us from the outside, BUT it's their religion! It's ok! And it's technically barely legal, so it's fine for Koresh to rape his 14 year old sister-in-law/spiritual bride!" It's disgusting.

The second half delves into the siege, and while it is more coherent than the first half, Reavis's argumentation is sloppy and utterly lacking in documentation and citation. His position is so heavily colored by his transparent support of gun rights and disdain for the federal government that it is impossible to take seriously.

While the ATF and FBI made egregious mistakes and utterly botched its interactions with the Davidians, and justly deserve harsh critique, Reavis creates a binary wherein either one side is right and the other is wrong or vice versa. He doesn't allow for the very real possibility that, in addition to the government using loose reasoning and legal loopholes to justify a poorly executed raid that led to countless deaths, David Koresh was also dangerous man with dangerous beliefs who was endangering the children in the compound on a daily basis.

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## **Mazola1 says**

The Ashes of Waco bills itself as an investigation of the government attack on the Branch Davidian settlement outside Waco, i.e., "what the press didn't tell you." There certainly are things in the book that were not reported in the press then, or now, chiefly an examination of the Davidian beliefs, how the government misunderstood those beliefs and how that misunderstanding contributed to the fiery destruction of the settlement. The book is heavy on Davidian theology, complete with lengthy and copious scriptural citations and quotes, and many quotations from Davidian leader David Koresh's teachings.

But while Reavis treats the Davidians with sympathy and makes a serious attempt to understand and explain their beliefs, the same can't be said for the government. Rather, he simply seems to assume that all the government agents held the Davidians in contempt, loathed what they thought were their weird beliefs, and set out consciously to exterminate them. The government's attack on the Davidians was brutal and used excessive force, resulting in the deaths of dozens of innocent women and children. Still, I couldn't escape the feeling that The Ashes Of Waco didn't tell the whole story. The puzzle that Reavis didn't solve, and indeed didn't even attack, is what led the government to take the actions it did. In sum, The Ashes of Waco is an interesting look at a tragic and misunderstood event in American history, but it is told mostly from the Davidian point of view.

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## **Ariel says**

Very detailed and well researched. Didn't take a particular side, but showed both the flaws and the triumphs of both sides.

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## **Jacob Capes says**

If you ask anyone about the massacre that took place outside of Waco, Texas you are likely, as with most major political events, to hear what they think happened mixed with some opinions and mostly making one side seem better than the other. The Ashes of Waco: An investigation by Dick J. Reavis sets out to offer the reader the whole picture, without opinions and told from both sides. In this aspect Reavis succeeds with flying colors. Not only does Reavis tell the story of the standoff between federal agents and Branch Davidians, but he tells of everything that played a role in the events that played out. The author guides the reader through the life of Vernon Howell (who later became David Koresh and led the cult group of Branch Davidians), but also through the investigation and eventual siege of the religious compound. Reavis tells of how the government hid so much from the public. This book is not a political statement trying to tell you how you should think. It is a well researched documentation of the events of February 28th to April 19 1993 free from bias. The reader is not bogged down with opinions but given facts and left to draw their own conclusions. People that would enjoy this book are people who want more information than what major news outlets brief synopses provide, or people who do not take articles at face value and wish to have all the information so they may form their own opinions. I picked this book up because many books about this kind of subject matter are written by participants or witnesses of said events. This book is different because it was written by a journalist, a neutral third party who knew how to investigate and search for the truth as well as how to write about it. This kind of subject matter has always intrigued me as it not always so black and white and very controversial.

