

Tragedy in waco texas

Literature



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Many people in this world tend to belong to a religious group.

People feel that religion is a way to fill an emptiness they may be feeling inside. It is a way to comfort those who may have lost loved ones knowing that they are now in a "better place" and we too will join them there once it is our time. However, some people belong to either a religious sect or cult. These groups are not considered meet the standards of what it means to be a religion or they simply do not have enough people following them. In the early 90s, many people had a narrow-minded vision of what exactly the Branch Davidians were in Waco Texas. Stuart A. Wright presented an unbiased opinion in his book Armageddon in Waco so everyone could question what really happened and whether or not the government was justified in their actions.

There are several differences between a religion, a sect, and a cult. According to our notes worldly religions meet a certain criteria to be known mainstream. Each religion has a long history of existence and ancient texts. The religion has many people who follow it and elites that adhere and accept it (i. e. Emperor Constantine). The religion is normalized an influential; no one questions the faith.

Finally, there is a cultural/social integration of the religion; for example, when someone new is being initiated into the presidency they must swear on the Bible. Some major religions are Christianity containing 2.1 billion followers, Islam containing 1.5 billion followers, and Judaism containing 14 million followers (class slide show dated 11/18). A religious sect has similar qualities of a religion, but they feel they have made improvements to older

established religious. According to our notes, sects are a branch of previously existing religions; the group uses old ancient texts (like the Bible or the Qur'an) and mix new interpretations of that text. An example of this would be the book of Mormon.

These sects are not fully accepted in mainstream society and are considered to be "weird" by major religions. The sect usually contained a small number of followers who have a disdain for mainstream religions. Elites are not usually members of religious sects, but rather choose to attack them claiming they are blasphemers. Finally, many sects started to reform a much larger church. Some examples of religious sects would be the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Scientologists (class slide show dated 11/18). Although, I would argue that Scientology has more cult like qualities than sect like qualities; it is only labeled a sect because its members are people like Tom Cruise and John Travolta. A group that is considered a cult usually does not have many members all of which are not dependent on orthodox religious beliefs.

According to our notes, cults usually have many different ideas, a lot of which are about the end of the world. These groups are often hostile, but at the same time provide members with everything the group needs. Outsiders often view these groups as threats; this is why they are labeled a cult. Cults have deviant beliefs about sex, drug use, and other acceptable behavior (class slide show dated 11/18). Myths are also associated with cults and the media plays on these myths to present these cults as a threat to society.

According to our notes from the slideshow, some cult myths are that members are brainwashed, they are sexual deviants, there is abuse among

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members, and there are strange acts like sacrificing animals etc. An example of a cult would be Jim Jones and the People's Temple masssuicide.

Jim Jones managed to create one of the largest mass suicides in history convincing 900 people to kill themselves by drinking poisonous Kool-Aid. In my opinion, the Branch Davidians in Waco Texas could be classified as a sect with cult-like characteristics. According to the documentary, " The Final Report: Waco Tragedy," the Branch Davidian group is a branch of the Seven Day Adventist Church. Their leader, David Koresh, taught his follows of many end time prophecies. Koresh was following the teachings of the founding Davidian named Victor Tasho Houteff. According to Stuart A. Wright, who edited the book Armageddon in Waco, " Houteff interpreted the Bible in terms of prophecy fulfillment...he reconstructed a history on the basis of mysterious and arcane passages recorded in Daniel, and interpreted signs in current events which suggested fulfillment of end times" (pg.

23). Many myths circling cults are about end times and the end of the world itself. Since that is the basis of the Branch Davidian group it is obvious why they were view as " different" or " crazy" when thinking the world will end. During the early 1990's, the Davidians were a very closed off group living in their compound called Mt. Carmel; this played right into cult like myths presented by the media. It brought about questions like " What are they doing it there? " or " Why is everything secretive? It must be illegal. " It didn't help that the Davidians had their own moneysystem and educational system in order to design the culture for future generations (Wright pg.

27). According to the documentary "Waco: Rules of Engagement," David Koresh had several children with various different "wives. All of said "wives" were in actuality the legal wives of his followers. This played right into another cult myth; the myth that the Branch Davidians had deviant beliefs toward sex. Although the Davidians have many cult-like myths circling them, the fact remains they are just myths not proof. The group did not meet any other of the criteria for being considered a cult. It was obvious that the government wanted to pose this little branch of the Seven Day Adventist Church as a threat because they did not meet social norms.

Cults are said to be their own group entirely with new thoughts, beliefs, and ideas. The Branch Davidians share the beliefs of the Seven Day Adventists since that is the religion they stem from. This makes the groups more of a sect with some cult-like characteristics. David Koresh was also look upon as a threat because he was housing illegal firearms. According to the documentary "Waco: The Rules of Engagement," Koresh was presented to the people as an insane cult leader who was in possession of illegal weapons. The media, BTAF, and FBI construed people into believing Koresh would use these weapons on people thus making Koresh a threat to the public. The ATF warrants against Koresh accused him of holding these illegal weapons as well as sexually abusing children (which still cannot be proven).

To make the Waco group more of a threat to the public the media, former Davidians, and the government all make certain claims about the group and play into people's fears. "Claims-making is more effective if the particular issues target problems that reflect pre-existing or widespread social fears and apprehensions" (Wright 79). Claims making allows a small window for <https://assignbuster.com/tragedy-in-waco-texas/>

what they consider to be outside of the social norm; in other words you can be “ weird,” but not “ too weird. ” The media presented David Koresh with the nickname “ The Sinful Messiah. ” The name itself sends out an alert in people’s minds; anyone who hears this derogatory name is now well aware this man must be a “ weirdo. ” On March 3, 1993, Mark England and Darlene McCormick released an article in the Waco Tribune-Herald Series called “ The Sinful Messiah,” calling David Koresh by his birth name (Vernon Howell) and spreading rumors about various things he was accused of in the Mt. Carmel compound.

England and McCormick claim they have interviewed several former Davidian members who said Koresh was guilty of abusing children physically and psychologically, having sex with underage girls, and had at least 15 “ wives. ” England and McCormick also make claims that Koresh (or Howell as they refer to him) fathered many children from his various “ wives” while living in the compound. It says in the article, “ County records show no birth certificates for many children whom former cult members said have been born to Branch Davidian women since the late 1980's. A former cult member once registered as a midwife in McLennan County said she delivered twin girls in 1991 to a young Branch Davidian woman living at Mount Carmel. The midwife said Howell ordered her not to register the babies with local officials, a violation of state law. ” The problem with these accusations however, is that they are all from “ anonymous” sources. It is almost like reading a tabloid magazine.

If a tabloid is trying to make it seem like two people in Hollywood are dating they will write in the article quotes from these “ anonymous” sources that <https://assignbuster.com/tragedy-in-waco-texas/>

are proven false majority of the time. When I read this article I had the same feeling as if I were reading a bogus article in Star Magazine. I also feel the way England and McCormick refused to call him David Koresh seemed derogatory. The fact that the writers purposely called him Vernon Howell gave the article an air of sarcasm. It was as if they were saying, " Look at this crazy guy who thinks he's the messiah; his name is Vernon Howell. " However, the article fails to mention Vernon Howell did in fact change his name legally to David Koresh. I do not think by any means that David Koresh was the messiah, but I think it was wrong to mock the fact that he changed his name.

The media wanted to present him as some crazy man from Texas; the writers were clearly mocking him and wanted to let the public know it was allowed and encouraged to look at David Koresh as if he were insane. The only real source in the article seemed to be from a girl by the name of Kiri Jewell. Kiri's father and mother were divorced and had joint custody of her. However, her father rarely saw her when Kiri and her mother went to live in the compound. However, the child abuse thing was blown completely out of proportion. After the massacre occurred and the hearings were going on in congress in 1995, Kiri Jewell testified against David Koresh claiming he sexually abused her. According to footage shown in the documentary " Waco: Rules of Engagement," Kiri went on record saying that when she was just 10 years old she was sexually assaulted by Koresh.

However, Kiri Jewell is not a reliable source as well. In the documentary, after Kiri makes her statement, the Davidians defense attorneys show that Jewell has made several contradictory statements in the past. The documentary <https://assignbuster.com/tragedy-in-waco-texas/>

then flashes to an interview with the Sheriff of Waco. He explains that they are yet to charge Koresh of any form of abuse, but if there was anything like that going on with girls that were at least fourteen and had parental consent then it is not illegal. It may be morally wrong to outsiders looking in, but to them it was perfectly natural and acceptable (not saying I agree with that, but I'm not a Branch Davidian). However, I do think the media took one girl's accusations and made a mountain out of a molehill. They knew people would respond poorly after hearing any form of abuse toward children, thus justifying the military actions towards the Waco group.

In class we watched two documentaries; one was titled "The Final Report: Tragedy at Waco" the other titled "Waco: Rules of Engagement." Both documentaries gave viewers extremely different feelings toward the same event in Waco, Texas. When watching "The Final Report: Tragedy at Waco," the producers of the documentary purposely make the Branch Davidian group seem alien and obviously cannot be trusted since they were so closed off from everyone else. The documentary starts off by asking a series of questions like "Who are the Branch Davidians?" and "Who is David Koresh?" There is music playing in the background almost comparable to that someone would hear in a horror movie. It is clear from the start the purpose of this documentary is to make the Branch Davidians seem like a menacing crazy cult from the Boondocks of Texas. This documentary also only seemed to present one side of the story. They made it seem like it was the most obvious thing in the world that the Davidians wanted to kill themselves in a mass suicide and therefore, when under attack by the FBI, started a fire.

This documentary was shorter and did not present a fair amount of details from both sides of the story. This documentary even has the word “tragedy” in the title; right away people will play into the idea that the fire was just another mass suicide by some insane religious “cult” in the middle of nowhere Texas. It played right into what the media stereotyped the group to look like. The second documentary we watched was titled “Waco: Rules of Engagement.” In my opinion this documentary was much more fair and presented both sides as best as it could. This documentary was done with a more unbiased eye, unlike the first one. However, this documentary did do a successful job of making the FBI look like screw-ups and this whole thing was just a big government cover-up.

Maybe it just showed the incident at Mount Carmel for exactly what it was. Technically in the documentary the FBI did a good job of making themselves look like screw-ups because the documentary simply showed footage of things various agents said. On some level this documentary did manipulate viewers; for example when they showed the dead bodies that were burned it gave the Davidians a sympathy vote. However, this documentary did not alter anything, but rather presented it as it was. I felt it allowed the people to get a clearer look at what happened and maybe see the media altered people’s perception of what really happened. It is difficult to say who started the fire. In my opinion this whole raid was a complete screw up.

In the book *Armageddon in Waco* it says, “The BATF raid was a monumental failure. Subsequently, the April 19, 1993, FBI CS gas assault on the compound and the ensuing fire (whatever its cause) fulfilled only one stated objective—that of suppressing an armed group. The children who

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were to be saved from abuse died instead” (Wright pg. 229). There is no accurate cause of what started the fire. However, according to the documentary “ Waco: Rules of Engagement” I have reason to believe it was started by accident from the FBI tanks. After the FBI released the gas that was supposed to be harmless and “ nonflammable” into the compound it was shown by the person who invented infrared cameras and readings that several shots were fired from FBI tanks even though they went on record saying no shots were fired that day.

During the trials they tried to present it like those flashes were light being reflected, however, these cameras only pick up heat so it would be virtually impossible to pick up a reflection; needless to say Congress and everyone in the courtroom were obviously stunned. In my own personal opinion I feel the shots from the FBI tanks mixed with the gas released into the compound were the cause of the fire. After seeing interviews with various Branch Davidian members who died on that day it was obvious they had no intention of this mass suicide. It doesn’t even coincide with their beliefs; they believed that there would be a final battle, which they would come out victorious. Although on some levels this was a battle I do not believe they would have given up and killed themselves. If there who belief system was based on this battle wouldn’t they fight back? When the fire started it looked like several explosions were going off. That could only have occurred when the shots mixed with the gas that was spread throughout the building.

The FBI did not want to admit they messed up big time so they formed an alliance with the media presenting a completely different story. If someone were to see a headline about the Branch Davidians they would see words like <https://assignbuster.com/tragedy-in-waco-texas/>

“cult” and “mass suicide.” The media presented the story as if the group started the fire themselves. Media groups claimed to have phone conversations indicating they had planned these actions; however, the phone conversations so no indication that the Branch Davidians had any intention of starting a fire to kill all its members. Most people even tried to escape the compound when it was in flames. If a mass suicide were really the planned course of action why would people be trying to escape? Although the media presents that the fire was entirely the Branch Davidians’ fault, other evidence can prove otherwise. We discussed in class that this incident at Waco was indirectly to the Oklahoma City bombing.

Timothy McVeigh felt it would send a clear message to attack the groups involved in the trials of the Branch Davidians because of their greatest mistake and cover-up. McVeigh was so angered by this government cover up that he felt he should bomb the federal buildings where people like FBI and ATF agents worked. He realized after it was wrong to kill innocent people and said he should have only gone after those involved in the incident at Waco. Although very different, religions, sects, cults have lots in common. They each have a group of lost souls who are looking beyond this life in hopes of a better afterlife. The Davidian’s beliefs may have been questionable, but it is what they believed. This is America where in our first amendment we have freedom of religion.

The Davidians were nice people and did not deserve they fate they were delt.