

TO: Deputy Attorney General Heymann
and Assistant Secretary Noble

FROM: Nancy T. Ammerman

RE: Waco Report - Addendum

September 10, 1993

Since completing my report, I have received additional information from Steven Zipperstein regarding the experts consulted during the siege in Waco. He was able to supply an expanded list of persons consulted and, for several of them, background on the nature of the consultation. While none of this information causes me to alter my basic assessment of the situation of my recommendations, it does warrant this brief addendum to my report.

1. During March, agents on the scene received communication from several persons who claimed biblical expertise and urged the negotiators to take Koresh's beliefs seriously. In all cases, it appears, the information was taken down, passed along, and ignored. For instance, the logs from March 17 make clear that agents on the scene did not take seriously the possibility that Dr. Philip Arnold's broadcast discussion of biblical prophecy might be useful to their negotiations. They recognize that Arnold is a reputable scholar, but had apparently not talked with him or listened to the broadcast themselves.

Some of the theologians who got through to Waco were of doubtful credentials, but they were uniform in their suggestions that successful negotiations would require meeting Koresh on his own biblical ground. However, in the log of March 15, negotiators report that they will start being "more firm with the group - no more Bible babble...".

2. The interview transcripts document that Mr. Rick Ross was, in fact, closely involved with both the ATF and the FBI. He supplied ATF with "all information he had regarding the Branch Davidian cult," including the name of an ex-member he believed would have important strategic information. He also supplied information to the Waco newspaper and talked with the FBI both in early March and in late March. He clearly had the most extensive access to both agencies of any person on the "cult expert" list, and he was apparently listened to more attentively. The ATF interviewed the persons he directed them to and evidently used information from those interviews in planning their February 28 raid. In late March, Ross recommended that agents attempt to publicly humiliate Koresh, hoping to drive a wedge between him and his followers. While Ross's suggestions may not have been followed to the letter, such embarrassment tactics were indeed tried.

The FBI interview report includes the note that Ross "has a personal hatred for all religious cults" and would willingly aid law enforcement in an attempt to "destroy a cult." The FBI report does not include any mention of the numerous legal challenges to the tactics employed by Mr. Ross in extricating members from the groups he hates.

Both the seriousness with which agents treated Ross and the lack of seriousness with which they treated various theologians demonstrate again the inability of agents on the scene to make informed judgements about the information to which they had access and their inability to seek out better information. It also demonstrates the preference given to anti-cult psychological tactics over strategies that would meet the group on grounds that took faith seriously.

REPORT TO THE JUSTICE AND TREASURY DEPARTMENTS
regarding law enforcement interaction with the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas
submitted by Nancy T. Ammerman
September 3, 1993

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY JUSTICE AND TREASURY

The following report and recommendations are based largely on oral briefings conducted on July 1-2 at the Justice Department, as well as on August 3 at the Treasury Department and at the FBI Training Academy at Quantico. In addition, I have had access to a number of other sources. We were supplied with background information on many of the persons in the Investigative Support Unit, and I was supplied with a list of the experts consulted by the FBI during the affair. I have consulted with academic colleagues and have reviewed a good deal of the academic literature on New Religious Movements. Various political and lobbying groups have sent me information. I talked with Glean Hilburn at Baylor, and I spent two hours with Pete Smerick and Gregg McCrary at the FBI Academy.

I do not pretend that this represents a full accounting of what happened at Waco. That has not been my aim. Rather, what follows attempts to assess the nature and quality of the expert advice available to the agencies involved in this situation and to make some suggestions about how that advice might better be utilized in the future.

I. What information sources were available in the Waco affair?

A. The Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms. In the months that led up to the February 28 attempted "dynamic entry" at the Branch Davidian compound, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF) apparently failed to solicit any social science background information about the nature of the group with which they were dealing. BATF has no internal behavioral science division and did not consult with any other behavioral science persons within the government. Nor did they consult with outside persons in religious studies, sociology of religion, or psychology of religion. There were, for instance, persons in the Baylor University Department of Religion who had studied this particular group for much of its history; they were not consulted. Investigators reviewing the Waco incident have repeatedly told us that BATF simply did not consult with anyone who might be considered an "expert" on this group or groups like it.

In their attempt to build a case against the Branch Davidians, BATF did interview persons who were former members of the group and at least one person who had "deprogrammed" a group member. Mr. Rick Ross, who often works in conjunction with the Cult Awareness Network (CAN), has been quoted as saying that he was "consulted" by the BATF. My suspicion is that he was merely one among many the BATF interviewed in its background checks on the group and on Koresh. However, it is unclear how information gained from him was evaluated. The Network and Mr. Ross have a direct ideological (and financial) interest in arousing suspicion and antagonism against what they call "cults". These same persons seem to have been major sources for the series of stories run by the Waco newspaper, beginning February 27. It seems clear that people within the "anti-cult" community had targeted the Branch Davidians for attention.

Although these people often call themselves "cult experts," they are certainly not recognized as such by the academic community. The activities of the CAN are seen by the National Council of Churches (among others) as a danger to religious liberty, and deprogramming tactics have been increasingly found to fall outside the law. At the very least, Mr. Ross and any ex-members he was associated with should have been seen as questionable sources of information. Having no access to information from the larger social science community, however, BATF had no way to put in perspective what they may have heard from angry ex-members and eager deprogrammers.