

A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF BIAS IN COVERAGE  
IN TIME, NEWSWEEK AND U.S. NEWS &  
WORLD REPORT OF THE BRANCH DAVIDIAN  
STANDOFF IN WACO, TEXAS, FROM  
MARCH 15, 1993, TO  
MAY 17, 1993

By

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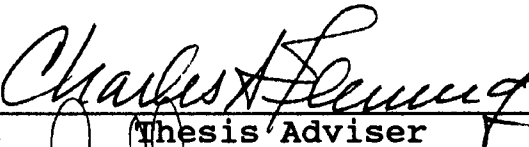
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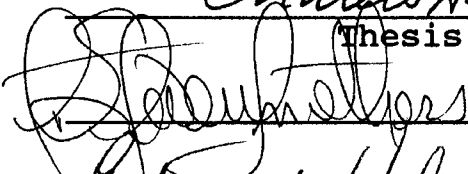
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## PREFACE

This thesis is a content analysis of bias in coverage of the Branch Davidian standoff in Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report. The actual time period covered was from March 15, 1993, to May 17, 1993 (the standoff lasted from February 28, 1993, to April 19, 1993). The author examined the three newsmagazines for extent of bias as well as for types of bias against Branch Davidian leader David Koresh and his followers. Proportions of coverage were calculated for the extent of bias. The types of bias were broken down into seven categories of adjective bias, verbal bias, adverbial bias, attribution bias, contextual bias, outright opinion and photographic bias. The biases were also determined to be either positive or negative.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis adviser, Dr. Charles Fleming, for guiding me through this experience almost painlessly. He will be remembered fondly for using his green pen sparingly and having infinite patience with my inability to remember the finer details of complex chi squares. This is not a reflection of his teaching, but a probable flaw in my short-term memory - which explains why I forgot some of our meeting sessions. Thanks also to Dr. Steven Smethers and Dr. Edward Welch for their much-needed advice on some of the aspects of this paper.

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Thank you, John, for being the best husband and father, but most of all for being the biggest supporter of my work. I never gave you enough credit for all the times you took care of Jamie and Christopher when I had to go study, type, research, rewrite, revise and generally have to just stay at the library until it closed.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### General

On February 28, 1993, a religious compound in Waco, Texas was raided by agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms armed with weapons and the idea that the compound was stockpiling illegally-bought firearms. Both sides suffered losses. The raid itself might not have received much media attention if the organization did not resist, but a possible tipoff by someone prompted the Branch Davidians and their leader, David Koresh, to hold their ground and fight back. The 51-day standoff that ensued resulted in a fiery end that left their leader and most of his followers dead. What started out as the worst loss of life of federal law-enforcement personnel also ended with the worst death toll of any law-enforcement action in history.<sup>1</sup>

Of the many questions that were raised concerning this incident, many focused on the responsibility of the media toward this type of situation. After all, the mass media "are one of the major forces that mold and shape social movements, which challenge the established order and prescribe different paths along which change should take



place. In certain instances the media have even become 'central to their life and death'."2

Most people agree that the news should cover all sides of the issue, but unfortunately, much of the criticism directed toward the media has been for its lack of balance. The news media has been "found to embrace a status quo, hegemonic approach to issues, espousing only the dominant values and norms of mainstream society and functioning as an institution of social control that marginalizes and discredits oppositional movements."3

The idea of the media bearing a social responsibility to the public was presented by the Hutchins Commission in the 1940s. It stated that although man was "free and basically rational", there was the need of "big-government encouragement of media idealism and performance."4

#### Coverage of New Religious Movements

The guidelines for the media become even more unclear when they deal with new religious movements or cults. The news clearly concerns information by "outsiders for outsiders", and although not "uniformly negative, can best be described as a stream of controversies with little attention to the history or human side of the new religions."5 Many times the media do not define what is meant by "cult" or new religious movements(NRMs). In a study conducted in 1986 (Von Driel), it was found that these new movements represented "major oppositional phenomena to

mainstream society" and that the groups' "perceived transgression of cherished norms and values has led to considerable opposition toward them from various quarters."<sup>6</sup>

Their definition of NRM came from looking at extensive social science literature on this subject and listing those groups found in the indices. Both sides of the controversy have attempted to legitimize the existence of the "reality of cults" including those who have headed the anti-cult movement. The media have played a "central role in this conflict, strongly influencing the various parties involved."<sup>7</sup>

#### Background on Branch Davidians

The Branch Davidians are an off-shoot of the Seventh-day Adventists, although the latter do not claim to associate with the Davidians. The organization recruits members with apocalyptic teachings that preach the second coming and involve preparations for the end of the world.<sup>8</sup> They believe they will be "among a handful of righteous people to be spared from the scourges of famine and war that will accompany the end."<sup>9</sup> The Davidians that settled in Waco, Texas accepted David Koresh (formerly Vernon Howell) as their spiritual leader and self-proclaimed Messiah.<sup>10</sup>

#### Statement of the Problem

The problem that this study will address concerns a

lack of impartiality and subjectivity in coverage of issues in major newsweekly magazines or other forms of the media. Unfortunately, subjectivity and personal biases often enter into many of the stories. This study addresses such biases by reporters and journalists.

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to gather data concerning possible biases in reporting in Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report concerning the Branch Davidian incident. It will measure how well journalists and reporters, in these three major newsweeklies, fulfilled their responsibilities to be clear, concise and impartial.

The semantics or use of the language will be the important consideration in this study. There is special emphasis on the "presence or absence of loaded words and expressions and on general contextual impressions presented."<sup>11</sup> A study by John C. Merrill in 1965 analyzed types of biases found in news magazines, Time in particular. The types of biases are broken down into seven categories: attribution, adjective, verbal, adverbial, contextual, outright opinion and photographic.<sup>12</sup>

This study looks at the extent of coverage in order to obtain accurate representations of how much coverage was actually devoted to the Branch Davidians among the magazines. The study also also examines the extent of bias in the magazines' coverage of Koresh and his followers as

well as the government's involvement in this situation.

### Research Objectives

This study will provide answers to the following questions:

- a) What types of bias were found in each of the magazines?
- b) Which magazine was more biased in coverage toward the Branch Davidians?
- c) Which types of bias were most frequently used by each of the magazines?

### Methodology

The research method used for this study was content analysis. The focus was on magazine coverage of the Branch Davidian standoff in Waco, Texas during the period of March 15, 1993, through May 3, 1993. The magazines used were Time, Newsweek and U.S News and World Report.

### Significance of Study

The significance of this type of study is useful to the readers of such news magazines who assume that their coverage will be unbiased and impartial. It is also important for students of mass communication to realize the difficulty of reporting news with a sense of responsibility in order to present a realistic picture of what is going on. Finally, it is beneficial to reporters, journalists and

professors of mass communication to set examples of objective and unbiased coverage of such incidents so as not to skew the readers' thinking.

#### Limitations

Because the research in this study was limited to three news magazines, the results cannot be generalized to other journals or other media types. Also, the results should not be applied to other events or time frames. The duration of the study is limited as ongoing trials of cult members and subsequent events concerning the standoff.

The coverage of the Branch Davidian standoff by the three news magazines may not be typical for other events covered by the same magazines. It is also not typical of coverage by other magazines.

#### Organization of Research

Chapter II examines other research studies relevant to the this research, and reviews theories of mass communication that are significant to this study.

Chapter III explains the methodology employed in this research effort.

Chapter IV presents the research findings and provides a detailed discussion of those findings.

Chapter V provides a summary of the study with conclusions and recommendations for further study.

1. Harrison Rainie, "The Final Days of David Koresh," U.S. News and World Report, 114 (May 3, 1993): 27.
2. Barend Von Driel and James T. Richardson, "Print Media Coverage and New Religious Movements: A Longitudinal Study," Journal of Communication, 38 (Summer 1991): 37.
3. Ibid., 37.
4. Tracy Daniel Connors, Longman Dictionary of Mass Media & Communication (New York: Longman, 1982), 220.
5. Ibid., 37.
6. Ibid., 37.
7. Ibid., 38.
8. "Prophet's Fulfillment," New Yorker 69 (May 3, 1993): 4.
9. Chris Wood and Virgil Garfield, "A Prophet of Doom" Maclean's 106 (March 15, 1993): 24.
10. Ibid., 24.
11. John C. Merrill, "How Time Stereotyped Three U.S. Presidents," Journalism Quarterly 42 (1965): 564.
12. Ibid., 564.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Media Responsibility

Expectations of the media have changed dramatically over the centuries and different theories have emerged to define the media's purpose and accountability to the public. Today, the American media reflect the concept of social responsibility which states that the media have responsibilities linked to their rights -- a concept established by the Hutchins Commission in the 1940s which called for an accurate, comprehensive account of the day's news.<sup>1</sup> This concept, developed in the 20th century in the United States, explains the purpose of the media -- which is to inform, entertain, sell, and raise conflict to the plane of discussion.<sup>2</sup> Under this doctrine, the media are meant to be a forum for the exchange of comment and to disclose the truth about facts. Objectivity in reporting is important, but it is also necessary to go beyond the facts to look at what lies under, over and behind events to present the full truth. Social responsibility is a theory to explain the principles upon which the American press is based, but this concept can also be used as a guideline for journalists to follow when reporting the news. This theory also rejects

sensationalism and provides a foundation for investigative reporting. Responsibility in reporting includes writing in clear and concise language so the reader is not confused.

Throughout history the media have been the object of kudos and criticism in their attempt to diffuse information. Many times the extent of freedom was dependent on the social controls of the existing government. Before the 16th century, severe governmental restraints were placed on the media in much of the world, exercising partial and even total control. Censorship was a definite part of the media even where political criticisms by the press were tolerated. Under this authoritarian system, laws existed that discriminated against those associated with the press for written opposition of their governing body. This dominant philosophy of the press resulted in societies suffocating from the lack of information that should have been accessible to them in the first place.<sup>3</sup>

During the 16th and 17th centuries a framework for journalistic ethics developed. As society evolved into a marketplace of ideas, the press provided a forum to reflect the free expressions of John Milton, Karl Marx and others.<sup>4</sup> Journalistic activity, according to Marx, was based on the one general concept of "truth" stating that "not only the result but also the route belongs to the truth," in essence providing the framework for social responsibility.<sup>5</sup> A libertarian theory was established by philosophers such as Milton and Thomas Jefferson to promote a total freedom of



the press.<sup>6</sup> Although this theory was reflected in Early American and British media, an almost imperceptible transition to the theory of social responsibility had taken root based on this libertarian foundation. It emphasizes that although the press possesses freedoms, codes of ethics are encouraged as self-regulatory devices to promote social responsibility.<sup>7</sup> Sandra Dickson writes in a 1988 article in Journal of Mass Media Ethics that there are no universally agreed upon standards due to the diverse forms of the press and economic realities of the marketplace, therefore, individuals will resort to a situation-to-situation analysis to come to their ethical decisions. There are only formative guidelines, not based on a common moral philosophy, to which the press tries to adhere.<sup>8</sup>

#### Basis of Study

This study used a system in a content analysis conducted in 1965 by John C. Merrill which looked at stereotyped images of three U.S. Presidents as presented in Time magazine. The author measured the different types of bias used by the magazine to subjectivize its news. Such an analysis examined whether or not journalists had fulfilled their social responsibility to report an accurate and unbiased account of the news. The results concluded that Time did indeed editorialize in its regular news columns and used "a whole series of tricks to bias the stories and to lead the reader's thinking."<sup>9</sup>

Other studies that used the same system by Merrill were examined for this study. Keqin Jiang conducted a case study in 1990 that analyzed news coverage concerning former Romanian leader Ceausescu. It examined how the three major newsmagazines -- Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report -- presented the image of the former Romanian president over the past three decades as well as the coverage during the Romanian revolution which took place at the end of 1989.<sup>10</sup>

Jiang also used Merrill's method as a basis for analyzing possible biases in the newsmagazines. The author found that the news stories in these magazines contained subjective, judgmental and opinionated statements.

Jiang concluded, "The presentation of Ceaucescu's image by Time, Newsweek and U.S News appears to indicate that the United States' anti-communism ideology subtly shaped the news coverage, and produced an unfavorable image of Ceausescu, which would have affected public perception."<sup>11</sup>

Another study conducted by Heidi McLean in 1991 also analyzed media bias during the coverage of the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War. The author wanted to determine, through the use of general semantics, whether the three major newsmagazines fulfilled their professional responsibilities to write clearly, objectively and in an unbiased manner while covering the war.<sup>12</sup>

McLean concluded that the three magazines did not fulfill their responsibilities as ethical members of the

journalistic profession and said, "Coverage... was not in keeping with the theories of the press under which the newsmagazines claim to operate."<sup>13</sup>

This content analysis is the study of words and the language they constitute. According to Merrill, "What was considered important was the language used... with special emphasis on the presence or absence of 'loaded' words and expressions and on general contextual impressions presented."<sup>14</sup>

It is important to study the meaning of words as presented in the mass media. Since the media are the channels through which communications flow, they "influence the contents and directions of the flow."<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, what is read in print may not always adhere to the rules of objective reporting, which state that the reporting should be capable of verification and second, it should exclude inferences and judgments.<sup>16</sup>

S.I. Hayakawa wrote in Language in Thought and Action that although it is not always possible to verify the statements that are found in magazines and newspapers, it is important to rely to a certain extent on the trustworthiness of the journalist to give reasonable representations of what is going on. Hayakawa wrote that there are everyday situations where it becomes necessary to say things in such a way that everybody will be able to understand and agree with ones formulation.<sup>17</sup>

Inferences made in reporting are statements about the

unknown made on the basis of the known.<sup>18</sup> Although inferences are important to make in real life and in science, reporting them in journalism makes the assumption that the reporter knows what's going on in other people's minds. Such inferences made on the basis of casual social observation can result in errors in reporting.

When judgments are made in reporting, it includes "all expressions of the writer's approval or disapproval of the occurrences, persons, or objects he is describing."<sup>19</sup> Although some words can convey a report as well as a judgment, reporters still must be careful to avoid using personal opinion in their articles. For instance, one could not report, "A crowd of suckers came to listen to Senator Smith last evening in that rickety firetrap and ex-dive that disfigures the south edge of town." They would say, "Between seventy-five and a hundred people heard an address last evening by Senator Smith at the Evergreen Gardens near the South Side city limits."<sup>20</sup>

It is possible that news magazines do not always adhere to these rules for journalism which can result in biased reporting based on personal assumptions and not fact. Journalists can lose credibility when they provide readers with partial and slanted articles. A study by Stephen Lacy (et al.) published in Journalism Quarterly in 1991, which studied fairness and balance in the prestige press, concluded that it is a journalist's responsibility to be concerned about accuracy, fairness and balance in reporting

the news.<sup>21</sup>

### Media and Cults

A longitudinal study published by Barend van Driel and James T. Richardson in the Journal of Communication in 1988, found that much of the controversy surrounding new religions may be a misunderstanding. Van Driel said that not many individuals have first-hand knowledge of new religious movements (NRMs) as much of the information in the media comes from many different sources -- sources which have the power to mold public opinion. This media influence is acknowledged by those who observe the NRMs, but little research has been done concerning media coverage of these movements. Van Driel wrote that it is assumed that most of the coverage has had a negative bias concerning NRMs.<sup>22</sup>

According to van Driel's study, there is an upper-class phenomenon at work concerning the conflict between NRMs and their critics. Both adherents and opponents are from this stratum of society (i.e., politicians, religious leaders, judicial representatives, parents, ex-adherents, etc.) which allows them "easy access to many instruments of social control and often have considerable financial and lobbying power."<sup>23</sup> This group of people relies more on professional print media for their information on social issues than other types of media.<sup>24</sup>

When studying this issue, it is most difficult to define what is meant by those articles which discredit

religious movements. It is hard to determine what violates the groups' "fundamental" cultural values. This also implies the effects of what is written in the story (i.e., moral outrage, punitive sanctions, mobilization of control efforts, etc.) -- something that cannot be defined within the context of a content analysis.<sup>25</sup>

Certain events have changed the way NRMs have been treated over the last 20 years. Van Driel's study stated that before the People's Temple massacre at Jonestown, religious movements were treated more like erratic groups on the fringes of society. After this incident, the "label of 'cult' was firmly attached to a wide variety of movements, and they were all thrown into a single, heavily stigmatized category."<sup>26</sup>

The public had been bombarded with an outpouring of negative information concerning Jonestown. This placed many NRMs in a "hostile" environment giving anti-cultists the opportunity to insist on government intervention with such groups which "helped set the tone of coverage."<sup>27</sup>

Traditionally, cults have been defined as rituals, ceremonies or liturgies that exist outside the mainstream. A cult can be formal religious worship, a system of religious beliefs or a group that has unique characteristics that are not shared with other religious communities, although these are very broad definitions. For most, "cult" can be a more subjective term that designates a "minority religious group whose beliefs or practices are unusual or esoteric in the

eye of the judgmental beholder."<sup>28</sup>

Many religions that were once labelled as cults, such as Mormonism, are established organizations today. They have formalized religious doctrines that may not be altered. On the other hand, cults can be culture-rejecting groups that are established by strong and charismatic leaders and can be perceived as dangerous both to their own members and to others. Rachel Andres wrote in Cults and Consequences (1989), that cults sometimes create fortified boundaries that confine the members and reject those that leave as defectors and traitors. They also see the outside world with much hostility and distrust. The leaders control power hierarchies and material resources and possess some "revealed 'word' in the form of a book, manifesto, or doctrine."<sup>29</sup> Andres wrote that many people, concerned over the welfare of loved ones involved in such organizations, often wonder how seemingly well-adjusted people could join a cult. She said though some might see it as a simple solution to life's complex problems, others see a danger in groups segregating themselves from society.

In a New York Times article in January of 1979, Rabbi Maurice Davis stated how serious the situation could be: "Parents whose kids are in cults and who made their peace with the idea suddenly feel it's no longer a matter of alternative lifestyle but a matter of life and death."

He also emphasized, "The path of segregation leads to lynching -- every time. The path of anti-Semitism leads to

Auschwitz -- every time. The path of the cults leads to Jonestown -- and we watch it at our peril."<sup>30</sup>

A May 1993 article in CQ Researcher stated that cults can differ from NRMs in that they use "manipulative techniques of influence to subordinate well-being and psychological identities of followers to the leaders benefit."<sup>31</sup>

Overall, what is seen in print concerning NRMs according to van Driel, is usually the prevailing attitude of the wider society. The results of his study demonstrated how sensationalized stories get the readers' attention so media support tends to lean toward anticultist views.

#### Media and the Jonestown Massacre

The word "cult" usually conjures images of the People's Temple at Jonestown in Guyana and the events leading up to their demise. As stated previously, the People's Temple became heavily stigmatized as a cult because of the outpouring of negative publicity that surrounded them after the mass suicide occurred.

The cult itself was formed in the 1960s by Indiana-born minister Jim Jones in San Francisco and Los Angeles where members were initially praised for their widespread volunteer work. It was not until 1977 that Jones' practices were scrutinized by the media. CQ Researcher said accusations of mental abuse, staged miracle-healings and misuse of funds drew the attention of journalists, so Jones



moved the cult to Guyana where additional abuses were reported by followers including mass suicide drills. Rep. Leo Ryan, D-Calif., flew down to investigate the tip on possible mistreatment and was shot to death on a remote airstrip. Immediately following this incident, Jones and the 914 men, women and children on the jungle compound completed their final drill by taking a poison-laced fruit drink.<sup>32</sup>

The public uproar over these "mind-controlling cults" eventually died down. In a September 1992 issue of USA Today, Elizabeth Nordbeck wrote that after the intense media coverage of the incident, public awareness was increased about the potential dangers of cults and many anti-cult organizations were formed. Nordbeck said that although the Anti-Cult Movement may have not been a direct result of the media barrage concerning cults, the networking between affiliations within the movement were certainly enhanced by cult coverage in the media.<sup>33</sup>

#### Background on Branch Davidians

Not many people had heard of the Branch Davidians until the raid on the cult's 77-acre Mount Carmel compound. A March issue of Christian Century said that the Davidians are an off-shoot of the Seventh-day Adventists (who deny any connection to them) founded in 1930 by Victor Houtoff. Adventists are known to observe the sabbath on the seventh day (Saturday), emphasize health and nutrition and are also committed to a nonviolent lifestyle according to the

article. Houtoff, in an attempt to "cleanse" the Adventists, claimed himself to be the True Messenger of what was then called "The Shepherd's Rod." He had hoped to gather 144,000 followers to his flock, but at the height of his popularity there were never more than 125 members. His wife continued his work upon his death in 1955. In 1959, she proclaimed that God would establish His kingdom in Palestine, but after that event failed to occur -- including the anticipated resurrection of her husband -- many followers became disillusioned with the sect.

Benjamin Roden took over at this point until his death in 1978 when his wife Lois succeeded him. A few years later, in 1988, David Koresh (then Vernon Howell) assumed leadership after being acquitted following a shootout with Roden's son George. Howell had been asked to leave the Seventh-day Adventists in 1981 by a church in Tyler, Texas. He then joined the Davidians where the apocalyptic teachings may have been more to his taste.<sup>34</sup>

As self-proclaimed leader of this sect, Howell legally changed his name to David Koresh in 1991 and preached a literal interpretation of the Scripture emphasizing that only a select handful of God-fearing followers would be spared from "the scourges of famine and war that will accompany the imminent end of the world."<sup>35</sup>

Koresh was known to have encyclopedic knowledge of the Bible from the time he was in his teens, and would frequently cite passages on command to his congregation.

According to survivors of the fiery standoff, Koresh had Biblical visions of armies attacking the compound precipitating Armageddon which was confirmed by the stockpiles of food and ammunition. Members held target practice on a firing range between the buildings to prepare for the eventual siege. The compound was even renamed Ranch Apocalypse by Koresh. When Mount Carmel was raided on February 28, 1993, Koresh's prophecy that his followers would be martyred "in a violent confrontation with the U.S. Army and then resurrected to slay unbelievers" seemed to be coming true.<sup>36</sup> He and the Branch Davidians had prepared for this day.

The government was aware of the situation at Mount Carmel for reasons other than fulfilling someone else's destiny. A May issue of New Yorker stated that the government had been alerted more than a year before the February raid to tips from the United States Embassy in Australia by someone familiar with the sect that the cult was contemplating mass suicide. There were also allegations of child abuse. (Child-welfare officials declared intervention unnecessary after an investigation.) A suspicious package had been delivered to the Davidians in July of 1992 containing grenade canisters. This incident led local authorities to call upon the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms in order to monitor the shipments of weapons going into the compound. Individually the weapons (i.e., gun parts, ammunition and explosive chemicals) can be

obtained legally from magazines and gun shows that run throughout the Southwest -- but together the parts can be made into illegal firearms which was one of the concerns of the ATF. The Bureau was also aware that Koresh did own a .50 calibre machine gun without a required federal permit.<sup>37</sup>

The Bureau, which is responsible for enforcing restrictions on the ownership of guns, launched an investigation that led to warrants for a search of the compound for illegal weapons.<sup>38</sup>

The agents decided to storm the compound on Sunday, February 28, thinking the congregation would be attending services (although Davidians' sabbath is observed on Saturday). More than 100 agents were met with immediate gunfire from the complex and, according to an ATF spokesperson, were outgunned. After 45 minutes, four agents and at least two cult members were dead -- many were wounded. Roadblocks were immediately set up, and the ATF was reinforced to begin what was to be a 51-day standoff.

On April 19, Attorney General Janet Reno gave permission to re-enter the compound with armored vehicles and to pump tear gas into the structure. A May 1993 issue of Commonweal stated that they chose to attack at this time because of allegations of child abuse and to encourage stalled negotiations. Not long after the agents broke through, a fire started that engulfed the entire complex in less than an hour killing all inside except for a few that escaped through some windows. The source of the fire has not

yet been determined. The FBI claimed it was intentionally set by some cult members, and the Davidians insist that one of the incoming tanks overturned kerosene lamps igniting the blaze.<sup>39</sup>

#### Criticism of the Media

Before the standoff with federal agents, the Branch Davidians were being scrutinized by someone other than the government. A March 1993 issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education stated that Bill Pitts, a professor of religion at Baylor University in Waco, had studied the group from its beginnings in the 1930s. As a church historian, he was curious about the religious organization as it had not been analyzed before and because of the group's proximity to the university. The Davidians were considered to be an "odd but peaceful group whose members shopped and occasionally worked in the central Texas community of Waco."<sup>40</sup>

The article stated that because the media did not understand the ways of the Davidian cult, especially during the siege, they turned to religious historians such as Pitts to make sense of what was going on inside the compound. He became a regular source in national news reports about the standoff and was interviewed by reporters as far away as Norway.<sup>41</sup>

Little went on between the original standoff and the final siege which left reporters with a lot of time to research the cult by talking to the professors on the Baylor

campus nearby. According to the Chronicle, the teachers were able to explain the mission of the Davidians and to clarify why some people would follow a man whose teachings even included the belief that he alone held the secrets of the seven seals (most Christians believe that only Jesus has such power).

Although the media had access to knowledgeable sources such as those at Baylor University, the reporters themselves came under scrutiny for what some people thought were unscrupulous tactics in order to get their stories.

During the negotiations, a local radio station voluntarily aired taped messages by Koresh. Christianity Today reports in a May issue that some criticized this measure, stating that giving Koresh air time lent credibility to his message, while others felt it should have aired only if Koresh were allowed to be cross-examined afterwards. Marvin Olasky, a University of Texas journalism professor agreed that the radio station should not have felt obligated to air the tape stating that "journalists cannot let themselves be controlled by terrorists or blackmailers."<sup>42</sup>

At one point during the siege, the press corps that surrounded the compound became a "mile-long, \$2-million-a-day tailgate party of twelve-wheelers, prefab homes, camera towers and sixty-foot satellite dishes."<sup>43</sup> One BBC correspondent noted that the media menagerie was twice the size of the Reykjavik summit. "Satellite City" soon included

amenities such as Federal Express deliveries, phone lines and portable toilets.

Public opinion was mixed concerning the extent of coverage by the media. In a Times Mirror News Interest Index for May, half of the respondents followed the events in Waco closely, yet most people felt it received too much coverage. Forty percent felt the media had been too critical of the Clinton Administration for its handling of the incident and 42% deemed the amount of criticism about right. In addition, only 16% of those polled said actual coverage was excellent, 52% rated it as good, 21% said it was fair and 8% believed it was poor.<sup>44</sup>

The legal implications and the saturation coverage of the standoff raised serious questions on the way journalists report the news. A Columbia Journalism Review article in May stated: "The questions center on the responsibilities that come into play as a result of the instantaneous nature of contemporary news coverage and of what seems to be an increasing tendency for reporters and broadcasters to become... part of the stories they cover."<sup>45</sup>

In order to look at how the media dealt with the Waco gun battle, a seven-member task force from the Society of Professional Journalists was organized to probe government-media interaction during the incident. The SPJ task force reviewed questionable tactics used by the government and media at that time.<sup>46</sup>

Some critical questions the task force was to address:

-Despite attempts to delay the report by federal authorities, the Waco Tribune-Herald began publishing a seven-part series on the cult on February 27. Was there a legitimate reason to postpone the series?

- Was it unethical to have news reporters in the area when federal officials arrived to seize the compound on February 28? Did the presence of the journalists alert cult members to the seizure or did they find out another way (i.e. through the media) on what was about to happen?

-Some law enforcement officials believe that continuous media coverage contributed to the final confrontation. Is this a valid criticism?

-A radio station in Dallas agreed to air messages recorded by Koresh, as well as conversations between the cult leader and the ATF during deliberations. Was this proper?

-CNN had a live interview with Koresh to verify his calls to the radio station. Was this appropriate in a competitive situation, or should the news station have worked with federal officials in securing the interview?

-Only one local television station accompanied the ATF agents to the compound. Was this merely good news sense or otherwise? Should they have shared their news coverage with other stations despite being in a competitive market?

-At one point during the siege, law enforcement officials moved the media away from the compound and to an area some journalists felt was inadequate to properly cover



the event? Who made this decision and why? Did the move affect sources and speculative information?

#### Negative Criticism by the Media Toward the Government

Whatever went on inside the compound may never be known -- almost every eyewitness is dead and the survivors are not talking. The media reactions to the initial and the final raids were immediate and varied. A May 7th editorial in Commonweal stated: "What was badly begun has been badly ended" and acknowledged: "David Koresh had messianic pretensions and may have been a psychopath. His preachings and biblical exegesis were treated in the media as a species of crazed and apocalyptic Christianity."<sup>47</sup>

The incident in Waco has been characterized from the beginning as "an irreconcilability of meanings" -- one side experienced the siege secularly, the other side religiously.<sup>48</sup> An article in The New Republic stated how government treated the Davidians as if they were criminals and the cult treated the outsiders as forces of Satan.<sup>49</sup>

Some questioned the seriousness of accusations against the cult and whether such accusations warranted an attack on the compound. John W. Kennedy wrote a May 17th article in Christianity Today stating that federal agents may have not used the best advice available in dealing with Koresh. It mentions that cult experts and religious historians say that agents failed to understand the unusual nature of the Davidians. As a result of this ignorance said Ruth Tucker, a

religious professor at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the FBI seemed ill-prepared to handle the eventual outcome.<sup>50</sup>

"In the minds of his followers, David Koresh was the Messiah," said Tucker. "To come out with your hands up is not what a messiah is supposed to do." She said that government officials did not understand that the idea of surrendering, lengthy trial proceedings and possible prison terms were totally unthinkable for Koresh and his followers.<sup>51</sup>

The article quoted a sociologist who criticized agents for using terrorist hostage-taking methods to try to wear down cult members instead of negotiating in apocalyptic and religious terms.

Timothy George, a dean at Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham, said, "Federal officers at the forefront of the attack acted precipitously. To barge into a compound unprovoked raises real serious questions about intrusive federal authority."<sup>52</sup>

According to the article, cult experts were never really consulted to explain the behavior of the Branch Davidians -- "egomaniacal behavior that should have clued agents in to the possibility of the standoff ending as Jonestown did in 1978."<sup>53</sup>

Only one professor in the Christianity Today article said the agents were justified in the early raid to investigate possible weapons violations.

A May issue of the Village Voice stated that Waco was just a skirmish in an escalating war between church and state. Village Voice reporter Jimmie Briggs wrote, "How deeply out of touch the FBI is with what's going on is shown not only by its deadly mismanagement of the standoff but in the imbecility of its thinking Koresh and his followers would not risk everything for the son of God."<sup>54</sup>

Leon Wieseltier reported in a May issue of New Republic, "The response of the American government to the catastrophe in Waco represents a misunderstanding of spiritual life, and American spirituality, and alienation in America."<sup>55</sup>

More than once, editorials and news stories commented that one of the major mistakes of the government was federal officers' failure to take the beliefs of the Branch Davidians seriously. Michael Barkun stated in a June issue of Christian Century that Koresh and his members were seen as in the grip of delusions, but that it was in these misguided beliefs that provided the basis for their reality. The article added that such beliefs were nonnegotiable to those like David Koresh and his followers, and such beliefs were not always based on self interest -- a fact lost on the government. Federal agents did not realize that by being rejected by outsiders, the Branch Davidian's sense of mission was validated and may have encouraged them to hold their view all the more tenaciously.<sup>56</sup>

The Progressive said America has allowed their zeal for

law and order to carry them beyond all bounds of reason citing a national public-opinion poll that reported an overwhelming majority of people that found no fault with the way the authorities brought the standoff to a head.<sup>57</sup> It speculated that the Davidians may have been targeted because their real crime -- a crime that had to be punished by the most extreme means -- was their refusal to accept conventional orthodoxy and official authority.<sup>58</sup>

It stated, "When millions of our fellow citizens are ready to give that kind of blank check to police authorities, democracy is in acute peril."<sup>59</sup>

Overall, a majority of the literature found had a negative bias towards the government and their decision to raid the Branch Davidian compound. Many of these articles and editorials chastised the government for using violence as a supposedly effective way to solve religious conflict.

#### Negative Criticism by the Media Toward the Branch Davidians

The media were also negatively biased toward the Branch Davidians in sources such as People magazine. Before the April 19th conflagration, People magazine said that for someone who claimed he was Jesus, David Koresh was a twisted representation of Christian ideals. The March 15th article said that Koresh frequently punished children as young as 8 months old until they were bruised and bloody.<sup>60</sup> It added that he slept with girls as young as 12 years old and had a harem of 19 wives.

People stated: "And unlike the Prince of Peace, Koresh packed a Glock 9-mm pistol and kept a deadly arsenal he was willing to use."<sup>61</sup>

The article even quoted former cult members that predicted the possibility of impending mass suicide within the compound. The former Branch Davidians also stated that the members were all prepared to die for him. The article added: "To Koresh's followers, he is a sweet-talking evangelist, a charismatic Messiah who will lead them through the rapidly approaching apocalypse."<sup>62</sup> His detractors said Koresh was closer to being another Charles Manson or Jim Jones said author Joe Treen in People.<sup>63</sup>

James Breckenridge, a cult expert at Baylor University in Waco, states in the same People article, "He courts these people with a guitar and takes control of their lives. If you are the Messiah, you have a direct pipeline to God. And if you have that, then the parameters of your power are very wide."<sup>64</sup>

Marc Breault, a one-time recruiter for Koresh, said of the cult leader's sexual prowess, "He taught that all the women in the world belonged to him, and that only he had the right to procreate," adding that he became fixated with sex and with a preference for younger girls.<sup>65</sup> The People article reported how girls became earmarked for the "House of David" (eventual marriage to Koresh) by receiving a necklace with the Star of David on it.<sup>66</sup>

According to People, those who did not comply with

Koresh's rules were severely punished -- especially if they tried to leave the compound. Treen stated, "Leaving was not done easily; former members say Koresh maintained a 'hit list,' forcing some ex-believers to go into seclusion."<sup>67</sup>

As the heavily armed compound came under scrutiny by federal as well as local law officers, Sgt. Ronnie Turnbough of the McLennan County Sheriff's Office seemed to anticipate possible violence when he was quoted in People as saying, "This compound was built with a siege in mind. They have their own water supply, their own generators. They are survivalist-type people."<sup>68</sup>

Treen concluded, "The lyric of a song he once wrote about his archenemy George Roden now seems perversely prophetic about himself: 'There's a madman living in Waco. Pray to the Prince of Hell.'<sup>69</sup>

Another article on March 15th in Maclean's magazine stated, "Koresh has led a small group of followers in an increasingly bizarre strain of apocalyptic Christianity since 1988."<sup>70</sup>

Maclean's also quoted former sect members who recalled details of sexual exploitation of female followers and the psychological domination of the members by Koresh. Reporter Chris Wood wrote, "Koresh's belief that he is that lamb, the biblical symbol of Christ, is the latest twist in his increasingly erratic leadership of the 60-year-old Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventist sect."<sup>71</sup>

The article reported that within the compound, Koresh

controlled every aspect of his followers' lives. A former female cult member, Robyn Bunds was quoted in the Maclean's article, "He said you had to give him all your money. You had to give him your mind. And your body."<sup>72</sup>

According to Maclean's, Koresh's sex-infused theology became increasingly violent and megalomaniacal. Wood stated: "He predicted that he and his followers would one day be martyred in a violent confrontation with the U.S. Army, only to be resurrected to slay unbelievers."<sup>73</sup>

The article reported that some of the Waco residents had complained about the situation and resented Koresh's reluctance to cooperate with authorities. Resident Toni Soto stated, "I feel sorry for the children who have to pay for what the parents did. But I say bomb them and kill them all."<sup>74</sup>

A March 17, 1993, issue of Christian Century said that the Branch Davidians were a "violent cult" that have no connection with the Seventh-day Adventists.<sup>75</sup>

The article gave a brief history of the Davidians and stated that the sect has been marked by much "turmoil and violence" since the mid 1950s when its leadership was in question.<sup>76</sup>

Another March issue of Christian Century (March 24, 1993) commented on the Waco incident and stated, "In Waco, a young rock singer attracted more than 100 followers, employing a combination of mind control and sexual energy to create a well-armed commune called the Branch Davidians, an

organization that seems to owe as much to the National Rifle Association as to any mainstream religious tradition."<sup>77</sup>

The article continued that the media's portrayal of the psychologically disturbed behavior of Koresh and his use of Christian terminology gave a "Christian" cast to his cult that was unjustified.<sup>78</sup>

Christian Century concluded, "Even when the media avoid the adjective 'Christian' in front of 'cult,' the linkage with God coupled with biblical apocalypticism leaves the impression that Koresh is some kind of Christian -- which denigrates the faith of millions of believers."<sup>79</sup>

An April editorial in The Nation stated that the National Rifle Association, silent during the siege, missed an important opportunity to honor one of its own -- David Koresh, and called him a latter-day minuteman who symbolized all the values for which the N.R.A. stands.<sup>80</sup>

The editorial added that Koresh had a right to defend himself and stated: "Anyone in the Messiah trade has a big security problem."<sup>81</sup>

It concluded, "Join us in hailing David Koresh -- N.R.A. Gun Nut of the Month."<sup>82</sup>

James M. Wall, in a May issue of Christian Century, defended law enforcement officials for doing the best they could under the circumstances and said:

Neither the Treasury Department officials, who conducted the initial raid on the compound, nor the FBI, which tried to unnerve a psychopathic personality



with loud music and then gave him the opportunity to precipitate the blazing conclusion he wanted, seemed to comprehend the dangerousness of a charismatic psychopath who was immersed in apocalyptic literature.<sup>83</sup>

Wall commented on Koresh's firepower and said that the right to bear arms is the "shibboleth" that has enabled the National Rifle Association to "enhance the arms industry and endanger society with the widespread availability of weapons."<sup>84</sup>

In explaining the leadership of Koresh, Wall said, "So committed was his emotionally wounded band of followers to Koresh's leadership that they willingly turned over all sexual duties in the compound to him so that he might populate the world with his 'seed.'"<sup>85</sup>

Wall said Koresh would have been investigated much sooner for alleged child abuse if he had not been a religious leader. He added, "No interpretation of religious freedom is broad enough to have permitted these people to stockpile such a large collection of firearms within their tightly controlled compound."<sup>86</sup>

Finally, Wall concluded, "Government investigators will find little that is certain, except that rational conversation and standard police hostage procedures are inadequate in dealing with an armed, self-designated messiah."<sup>87</sup> Wall said that although most believers respected the Book of Revelations, it could become easily

distorted by the deranged.

### Summary

Generally, the coverage of the Waco incident seems to have been criticized from every direction. The media have been criticized for their coverage, prompting a study by a task force of the Society of Professional Journalists. Journalists themselves have questioned the tactics of the government during the siege, as well as the religious beliefs of Koresh. Opinions were included in editorials as well as regular articles.

Stephen Lacy wrote a 1991 Journalism Quarterly article that concerned fairness and balance in journalism and studied how journalists were fulfilling their responsibilities as unbiased and impartial reporters in their writing. The article stated how it is important that fairness and balance be at the heart of journalistic concerns about the social responsibility, the professional performance and the public credibility of the press when dealing with any issue.<sup>88</sup>

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## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### General

The methodology used for this study is content analysis. The area of focus is on newsmagazine coverage of the Branch Davidian standoff that began February 28, 1993, and ended April 19, 1993. The three leading news magazines, Time, Newsweek, and U.S News & World Report, were examined for their coverage of the incident, especially the image of David Koresh and the members of his cult.

Content analysis is a type of methodology used by researchers to "determine the manifest content of written, spoken, or published communications by systematic, objective, and quantitative analysis."<sup>1</sup> Since the object of research may be the intention of the communicator, it is important to look at the behavioral patterns, values and attitudes found in the written material being analyzed to see if they reflect the attitudes of those who actually write the material.

The method of content analysis is useful in this study in order for journalists and readers to see what is written as objective reporting. What is thought of as objective journalism may actually be a misrepresentation of the facts



and misleading twists of a storyline.

The magazines in the study were chosen because of their reports on a full range of human experiences worldwide including international affairs, government analyses and business and industry relations. The high circulation rates of these three news magazines make them highly accessible to many people, and therefore, what is written can have far-reaching effects.

Time magazine is the oldest of the magazines and had a circulation of 4,073,530 in 1992. Founded in 1923 by Henry Luce and Briton Hadden, its mission is threefold: to bring a sense of order to the weekly mass of information and a sense of priorities to the news, to "package that news in a manner that is compelling and accessible" and finally, "to analyze the issues."<sup>2</sup>

Time fosters an authoritative newsweekly style that has made it very profitable through the decades. Improvements have been made over the years to improve the balance of print and graphics and to have bolder layouts. At present, the design of the newsweekly is divided into three main parts: "The Week" which summarizes the news on an eight-page spread; the center which includes about 50 pages of longer, bylined articles; finally, the back includes a "Reviews" section, a "People" page and a closing "Essay."<sup>3</sup> Time has steered away from traditional summary news coverage and opted for more personal point-of-view stories in order to adapt to the nineties.<sup>4</sup>

Newsweek magazine had a circulation of 3,224,770 in 1992 and differentiates itself from the other news magazines through its enterprise. Not only can it cover breaking news over the weekend, but the stories written tend to be "longer and splashier" than the standard newsweekly departments.<sup>5</sup> It also features prominent bylines on "these impact stories and allows writers to speak more forcefully in their own voices."<sup>6</sup>

U.S. News & World Report relies on national and international affairs for its news and had a circulation of 2,237,000 in 1992. Though it does not report over the weekend, it does emphasize its service features and personal-finance pages, "News You Can Use."<sup>7</sup> What was once thought of as "U.S. Snooze," has now redesigned its look in the past few years to reflect a more professional and polished magazine with bright layouts, colorful boxes and smart graphics. It includes such headings as "Currents" and "Horizons" as well as features under home, family, health and fitness. The goal of the editors is to "encourage better writing, more thoughtful analysis and more dramatic photography."<sup>8</sup>

#### Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

This study was intended to answer these questions for the three magazines' news coverage of the Branch Davidian incident that took place from February 28, 1993, to April 19, 1993:

1. Were there any differences in the types and direction of biases and extent of the news coverage of the Branch Davidian incident among the three magazines?
2. What biases, if any, were there in the new stories and were they positive or negative toward David Koresh and his followers?
3. What stereotyped images of David Koresh and his followers were presented by Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News & World Report?

The overall research hypothesis for this study was that Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News & World Report look and read alike and that they had similar unfavorable attitudes toward David Koresh and the Branch Davidians because of the negative biases the media have toward many religious movements.

Null hypotheses were formulated from the research questions and the hypothesis mentioned above:

1. There is no difference in the types and direction of biases in news coverage of the Branch Davidian incident among the three magazines.
2. There is no difference in the extent of news coverage of the Branch Davidian incident among the three magazines.
3. There were no instances of bias, either positive or negative among the three magazines.
4. If there were instances of biases, there were equivalent frequencies of them in the three news magazines.

## Categories of Analysis

This study is based a former study by Merrill (1965) and a replication of the study done in 1979 by Fedler, Meeske and Hall. The following definitions are those used by Merrill.

Merrill established six categories of bias: adverbial bias, adjective bias, attribution bias, outright opinion bias, contextual bias and photographic bias. Another category of bias, verbal, was also added. Each instance of bias was labelled either favorable (positive), unfavorable (negative).

The categories of bias explained in detail are:

### Attribution Bias

This bias indicates how information is attributed to David Koresh and the Branch Davidians. This type of bias is any synonym for the word "said" used in the articles. The word "said" was ignored since it is neutral and evokes no emotional response like other attribution verbs. For instance, the attribution verb "retorted" (which is negative) can be used to appeal to the reader's emotions and therefore is judgmental. The attribution verb "condoned" which may evoke a positive response, is counted as favorable.

### Adjective Bias

This type of bias also tends to build up an impression

of the one being described. This is done by using favorable or unfavorable adjectives. Although the use of adjectives is quite common in reporting, it is important to be very cautious so as not to appear subjective and make a favorable or unfavorable impression. This tends to create an emphasis that is nonexistent.

An example of adjective bias would be a "disgusting piece of work," which is unfavorable, or a "distinguished old gentleman," which is a favorable one. These words can either prejudice the reader for or against the person or group being described in the article. Reporters can easily become subjective if they are not careful when using these judgmental adjectives - which are different from using neutral ones such as "the yellow sun."

#### Adverbial Bias

This type of bias is dependent on magnifiers and qualifiers -- or adverbs -- that can also create an impression in the reader's mind. It usually reinforces another bias expression such as attribution (i.e., She yelled sarcastically). In this respect, a magazine can create a favorable or unfavorable impression in the reader's mind by telling how or why a person said or did something.

#### Contextual Bias

This type of bias is not very specific in that it looks at whole sentences or paragraphs or other units of meaning

to find a favorable or unfavorable impression created by the writer. Entire stories can also be biased in this way so the complete story is examined for contextual bias. For instance, "David Koresh had Messianic pretensions and may have been a psychopath."

### Outright Opinion

Outright opinion concerns blatant and obvious bias found in journalism that is better known as subjectivity. S.I. Hayakawa defines this type of judgment as "all expressions of the writer's approval or disapproval of the occurrences, persons, or objects he is describing."<sup>9</sup> Readers usually expect to find such opinion in editorials, not in supposedly objective newswriting. Sometimes the opinion may be attributed to someone or something else which makes it difficult to discern that it is outright opinion (i.e., "Everyone in Waco seems to think the cult members are crazy" -- an unfavorable opinion).

### Photographic Bias

Photographic bias may be unintentional on the part of the editor, or there may be no other photos available for the article. Because the intent may never be known, the photos are counted nonetheless. Photos are analyzed according to how people are presented and what the captions imply. The captions will be dealt with as if they are other text.

## Verbal Bias

This bias indicates the use of words expressing action, existence or occurrence in reference to David Koresh or Branch Davidians. The use of such verbs can reinforce biased actions within the context of the story. For instance, if Koresh "lambasted" the press in an article, the verb "lambasted" (a negative verb) can be used to appeal to the reader's emotions which would be judgmental.

### Definition of Terms

1) "Extent of News Coverage" was defined as how much information about Branch Davidians appeared in Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report, either in articles or summaries and photographs as defined in square inches.

2) "Bias" was defined as descriptive expressions which may stimulate or affect people's perceptions away from neutrality or create favorable or unfavorable attitudes. It includes positive (favorable meaning) and the negative (unfavorable). In this study, bias was examined with respect to David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, not to other persons or the incident itself.

3) "Categories of Bias," as stated before, referred to the six categories of bias developed by Merrill plus the one that was added: attribution bias, adjective bias, verbal bias, adverbial bias, outright opinion, contextual bias and photographic bias.<sup>10</sup>

In defining these categories, isolated words and

phrases were classified as examples of adverbial, adjective or attribution bias. Overt expressions of someone's personal thoughts that were biased were classified as outright opinion. The overall impression expressed in an article was classified as contextual bias.<sup>11</sup> In the category of photograph bias, photos were judged as positive or negative regardless of what the captions read. Photographs were still seen as positive, for instance, even if the captions were negative, since photos give a more immediate impression of the image portrayed. Captions were counted and evaluated separately for different types of bias.<sup>12</sup>

4) "Magazine" was the three news magazines Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report.

#### Sampling

Since the standoff concerning the Branch Davidians was relatively brief (February 28, 1993, to April 19, 1993), no sampling was used for the study. Ten issues each of the three news magazines (30 issues) were examined from the first time the incident was mentioned (March 15, 1993) through the coverage of the final standoff (May 17, 1993). The information included any article, photograph, summary or interview that concerned David Koresh or the Branch Davidians. Letters to the editor were excluded.

#### Unit of Analysis

Words, phrases or paragraphs that reflected a type of



bias (attribution, adverbial, verbal, adjective, contextual, outright opinion, and photographic) were defined as the basic unit of analysis.

### The Quantification System

#### Instances of Bias

Each item for analysis was counted and listed for each magazine. The items were listed under each category of bias as either positive or negative with respect to Koresh and the Branch Davidians. Nominal data were collected.<sup>13</sup>

#### Extent of Coverage

The articles examined were measured in square inches for each issue. Headlines were included in this measurement as were captions for photographs and any sidebars that accompanied the stories. The number of photographs that were included with the stories were also counted for each issue. The tables of contents were not included in this measurement.

### Coding

Three coders were used for this study including the author. Each coder read every article about the Branch Davidian incident in Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report in order to find and record instances of bias according their appropriate categories and whether they were positive or negative. Any doubts about what was biased was

discussed by the three coders until they came to an agreement.<sup>14</sup>

Pre-testing was done for inter-coder reliability. A formula was used to determine reliability by the number of decisions the coders agreed upon after reading and evaluating an article for possible biases.

### Statistical Analysis

Since the data collected were nominal, chi square analysis was used to determine relationships and differences in coverage in Time, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report. To find out if any differences were significant, a 95% level of confidence was used.<sup>15</sup>

1. Arthur Asa Berger, Media Research Techniques (Newbury Park: Sage Pub. 1991), 25.
2. Standard Periodical Directory (Baltimore, MD: Oakbridge Communication 1993), 1116.
3. Edwin Diamond, "Time and Time Again," New York 25 (April 27, 1992): 18.
4. Edwin Diamond, "Changing 'Time'" New York 24 (October 21, 1991): 34.
5. Edwin Diamond, "Next 'U.S. Timeweek'" New York 21 (December 5, 1988): 43.
6. Ibid., 43.
7. Ibid., 43.
8. Ibid., 43.
9. Ibid., 565.
10. Keqin Jiang, The Image of Nicolae Ceausescu, Former President of Romania, as Presented by Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News & World Report (Stillwater: Oklahoma State University, 1990), 44-45.
11. Fred Fedler, Mike Meeske and Joe Hall, "Time Magazine Revisited: Presidential Stereotypes Persist," Journalism Quarterly 56 (1979): 354.
12. Jiang, 45.
13. Jiang, 49.
14. Ibid., 49.
15. Ibid., 50.

## Chapter IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### General

The following is an analysis of data derived from calculating instances of positive and negative biases against the Branch Davidians in three major newsmagazines. Bias has been broken down into seven categories. The nature of coverage has also been examined which looks at the reporting styles of U.S. News, Newsweek and Time. Finally, examples of each of the seven types of bias are given.

#### Intercoder Reliability

In order to check the reliability of the three coders when counting and categorizing bias, an intercoder reliability test was performed using the formula  $R = \frac{2M}{N1 + N2}$ . R represents the intercoder reliability coefficient, M is the number of coding decisions on which the two coders agree, and N1 and N2 represented the total decisions made by coder one and coder two respectively, coder one and coder three respectively and coder two and coder three respectively. Coder one and coder two had a reliability coefficient (R) of .985, coders one and three had a reliability coefficient of .97 and coders two and three had

a reliability coefficient of .985. On a scale of zero to one, these three scores demonstrate high reliability between coder decisions.

## Findings

### Extent of Coverage

The extent of coverage includes the number of articles and photographs concerning the Branch Davidian standoff in the three newsmagazines from March 15 to May 17, 1993. Overall, U.S. News published six articles, including one cover story, and 16 photographs. Newsweek had 14 articles that included three cover stories and 57 photos. Finally Time published 19 articles, including two cover stories, and 33 photos.

See Table I. The coverage included three issues for each magazine in March, four each in April and three each in May.

TABLE I  
EXTENT OF COVERAGE OF THE BRANCH DAVIDIAN STANDOFF  
IN U.S. NEWS, NEWSWEEK, AND TIME,  
MARCH, APRIL AND MAY 1993

Magazines				
ITEMS	U.S. NEWS	NEWSWEEK	TIME	TOTAL
No. of articles	6	14	19	39
No. of photos	16	57	33	106
Total	22	71	52	145
Complex Chi Square Statistic = 4.24				
Table Chi Square (p < .05, df = 2) = 6				

Time had 19 articles followed by Newsweek with 14 and U.S. News with six. Newsweek had the most photographs with 57, followed by Time with 33 and finally U.S. News with 16 photos. Most of the stories for all three magazines occurred during the March 15 and May issues. U.S. News had six issues without any articles, Newsweek had four and Time had one without any coverage. Newsweek had the most cover stories with three, Time had two and U.S. News had one.

Despite differences in the actual number of articles and photographs for each of the magazines, the complex chi analysis shows that there is not a relationship between magazine (U.S. News, Newsweek, Time) and distribution of content (articles, photographs). In order to figure out the proportion of coverage concerning the Branch Davidians for each of the magazines, three issues of U.S. News, Newsweek and Time were used to calculate the average newshole for total news coverage. The newshole was obtained for each magazines by counting the number of pages devoted to news (excluding advertisements) and multiplying that by the number of square inches calculated for each page (75"). The March 15, 22 and 29 issues were used to obtain the averages. See Table II for total newshole average for each of the magazines. The proportion of coverage was calculated in order to obtain a more accurate representation of how much space each magazine devoted to the Branch Davidian standoff in relation to the amount of space devoted to the other news.

TABLE II  
 AVERAGE NEWSHOLE TOTALS FOR EACH OF  
 THE THREE MAGAZINES  
 FOR MARCH 15, 22, AND 29, 1993

Magazines			
	U.S News	Newsweek	Time
March 15	(51)3825"	(34)2550"	(40)3000"
March 22	(53)3975"	(37)2775"	(40)3000"
March 29	(45)3375"	(38)2850"	(39)2925"
average totals in square inches	3725"	2725"	2975"

( ) denotes total number of pages devoted to news (excluding advertisements)

U.S. News had the greatest average newshole of the three magazines with 3725 square inches followed by Time with 2925 square inches and Newsweek with 2725 square inches.

The following table (Table III) lists the total proportion of coverage concerning the standoff between March 15 and May 17, 1993. The overall proportion of coverage was calculated by using total square inches of newshole averages (multiplied by ten for the ten issues examined for each magazine) and total square inches of Branch Davidian coverage for the time period studied for each magazine.

TABLE III

TOTAL PROPORTION OF COVERAGE CONCERNING  
 THE BRANCH DAVIDIAN STANDOFF BETWEEN  
 MARCH 15, 1993, AND MAY 3, 1993,  
 IN U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, NEWSWEEK AND TIME MAGAZINE

	U.S. News	Newsweek	Time
Total % of coverage	2.4%	9.4%	6.6%

For the period examined between March 15 and May 3, 1993, Newsweek's total newshole average was 27,250 square inches and the magazine devoted 9.4% to the Branch Davidian standoff. Time's total newshole average was 29,250 square inches and it devoted 6.6% to Davidian coverage. Finally, U.S. News's newshole average was 37,250 and the magazine devoted 2.4% to the Davidians. This shows that Newsweek had almost four times as much coverage concerning the standoff than U.S. News. Close to 10% of Newsweek's coverage during that time period was devoted to the Branch Davidians.

See Table IV for the individual proportion of coverage concerning the Branch Davidian standoff concerning articles and photographs in the three newsmagazines.



TABLE IV  
INDIVIDUAL PROPORTION OF COVERAGE CONCERNING ARTICLES  
AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE BRANCH DAVIDIAN  
STANDOFF BETWEEN MARCH 15, 1993,  
AND MAY 17, 1993 IN U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT,  
NEWSWEEK AND TIME MAGAZINE

	U.S. News article/photo	Newsweek article/photo	Time article/photo
March 15	3% / 3.5%	12% / 12.5%	4% / 7.5%
March 22	.5% / -	.3% / .3%	.3% / -
March 29	- / -	- / -	.5% / -
April 5/6	- / -	2.8% / 2.9%	1.4% / .3%
April 12/13	- / -	- / -	- / -
April 19/20	- / -	- / -	.5% / .4%
April 26/27	- / -	- / -	2.8% / .7%
May 3	6.7% / 8.9%	16.5% / 28.5%	20% / 23%
May 10	.7% / .4%	1.3% / 1.2%	.7% / .7%
May 17	- / -	10.5% / 5%	2.5% / .5%

The actual coverage of the Branch Davidian standoff varied from magazine to magazine, and issue to issue. Table IV depicts the proportion of coverage for each issue for articles and photographs in the three newsmagazines.

Again, the greatest proportion of coverage occurred in the March 15 and May 3 issues of all three magazines. For March 15, 12% of Newsweek's articles and 12.5% of its photographs concerned the Waco standoff. Four percent of Time's articles and 7.5% of its photographs were about the

incident. The proportion of U.S. News coverage was 3% for articles and 3.5% for photographs.

For May 3, proportion of coverage for Newsweek's articles was 16.5%, and for photos, 28.5%. Time followed with 20% for articles and 23% for photos. Finally, U.S. News proportion of coverage for articles was 6.7% and for photos, 8.9%.

U.S. News had a total of 408 square inches for articles and 481 square inches for photographs. Most of the coverage was concentrated in the March 15 and May 3 issues during the standoff. A total of six issues during the time period that was studied did not have any coverage.

The extent of coverage concerning articles in Newsweek totalled 1184 square inches. Photographs totalled 1387 square inches. A majority of its coverage for both articles and photographs also occurred on March 15 and May 3. A total of 4 issues did not have any coverage.

Coverage in Time totalled 944 square inches for articles and 987 square inches for photographs. Heavy coverage was also concentrated in the March 15 and May 3 issues. Coverage of the Branch Davidian standoff occurred in all but one issue during the time period that was studied.

#### Instances of Bias in Coverage

The following table (Table V) concerns overall instances of positive bias (broken down by category) in the coverage of the Branch Davidians for each magazine.

TABLE V  
 OVERALL INSTANCES OF POSITIVE BIAS  
 BY CATEGORY FOR EACH MAGAZINE

	U.S. News	Newsweek	Time	Total
<b>Types of Bias</b>				
Verb	1	9	5	15
Adverbial	0	3	1	4
Adjective	4	10	14	28
Attribution	0	0	0	0
Contextual	0	4	4	8
Outright Opinion	3	9	8	17
Photographic	0	8	0	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>83</b>

Complex Chi Square Statistic = 13.689  
 Table Chi Square (p < .05, df=12) = 21

The complex chi analysis demonstrates that there is no significant relationship between type of bias and magazine. That is, no magazine was more apt to use any particular type of bias than any other magazine. However, because the frequency counts are low, the chi-square test may not be valid.

The following table (Table VI) examines overall instances of positive bias by category in the coverage of the Branch Davidian standoff in U.S. News, Newsweek and Time.

TABLE VI  
 OVERALL INSTANCES OF NEGATIVE BIAS  
 BY CATEGORY FOR EACH MAGAZINE

	U.S. News	Newsweek	Time	Total
<b>Types of Bias</b>				
Verb	24	33	49	106
Adverbial	3	7	5	15
Adjective	19	79	65	163
Attribution	1	0	0	1
Contextual	15	40	35	90
Outright Opinion	33	69	73	175
Photographic	3	16	11	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>580</b>

Complex Chi Square Statistic = 18.203  
 Table Chi Square ( $p < .05$ ,  $df = 12$ ) = 21

The results of the complex chi analysis demonstrates that there is not a significant relationship between bias and magazine. Therefore, no magazine was more apt to use any particular type of bias than any other magazine. However, because the frequency counts were low, the complex chi test may not be valid.

Table VII examines the relationship between overall combined negative and positive counts of each of the categories of bias and magazine.

TABLE VII  
 OVERALL COMBINED OCCURRENCES OF THE SEVEN CATEGORIES  
 OF BIAS BY MAGAZINE

	U.S. News	Newsweek	Time	Total
<hr/> Types of Bias <hr/>				
Verb	25	42	54	121
Adverbial	3	10	6	19
Adjective	23	89	79	191
Attribution	1	0	0	1
Contextual	15	44	39	98
Outright Opinion	36	78	81	195
Photographic	3	24	11	38
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 106	<hr/> 287	<hr/> 270	<hr/> 663

Complex Chi Square Statistic = 20.37  
 Table Chi Square ( $p < .05$ ,  $df = 12$ ) = 21

This complex chi square analysis demonstrates that there is no significant relationship between a combined count of both types of bias and the magazine.

Of the seven categories of bias, each was divided into positive and negative and then added for a total count of bias for each magazine. These totals were then calculated in proportion to the size of the newshole for each magazine. See Table VIII for percentages of negative and positive instances of bias per article in each magazine.

TABLE VIII  
 PROPORTION OF NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE INSTANCES  
 OF BIAS PER ARTICLE FOR EACH  
 MAGAZINE

	U.S. News	Newsweek	Time
Proportion of Pos. Bias Counts Per Article	1.3%	3.1%	1.2%
Proportion of Neg. Bias Counts Per Article	16.3%	18%	12.5%

This table demonstrates that overall there were greater instances of negative bias per article than positive ones. Of these, Newsweek had the greatest percentage of negative bias with 18%. It also had the highest percentage of positive bias with 3.1 %. Time had the least proportion of positive bias with 1.2%, and also the lowest proportion of negative bias at 12.5%. The percentages were obtained by dividing the total instances of negative bias by the number of articles for each magazine and also the total instances of positive bias by the number of articles for each magazine.

The following table examines the proportion of negative and positive bias counts per square inch per article in each of the three newsmagazines. Bias counts were examined per square inch since some articles were longer than others. Table IX demonstrates that although the proportion of bias counts per article may be different (see Table VIII), the

proportion of instances of bias per square inch are relatively the same.

TABLE IX  
PROPORTION OF NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE COUNTS  
OF BIAS PER SQUARE INCH PER ARTICLE FOR EACH  
MAGAZINE

	U.S. News	Newsweek	Time
Proportion of Pos. Bias Counts Per Square Inch	.009%	.02%	.02%
Proportion of Neg. Bias Counts Per Square Inch	.11%	.1%	.12%

Table IX demonstrates that there is relatively no difference in the proportions of negative and positive bias counts when examined by square inch for each of the magazines.

The results were obtained by dividing the total square inches by the number of articles for each of the magazines.

#### Nature of Coverage

The three newsmagazines examined in this study read very much alike and often used identical quotes from the same sources. There were a few isolated instances where one article gave new information that the other two did not. Overall, the three magazines had similar reporting styles.

The three magazines gave extensive background information on the Branch Davidians and the rise of David

Koresh as leader of their Waco compound. Several articles included graphic representations of the inside of the compound that pointed out single-sex living quarters, fuel tanks, underground bunkers and the area where four federal agents were killed. The magazines also reported Koresh's preparations for an apocalyptic war in the form of weight training, military-style drills and obstacle-course runs.

All three magazines labelled the religious compound in Waco as a cult, and used this term so freely that it would become an almost generic reference to the Branch Davidians. The word "cult" can sometime conjure negative thoughts, and parallel references of the standoff to the Jonestown massacre only served to reinforce those thoughts. Sidebars to the Branch Davidian articles included several stories about Jim Jones and his own "extremist group" in Newsweek and U.S. News and also Time.

Headlines for the cover stories included "Children of the Cult," an extensive three-article layout in Newsweek that referred to those "religious fanatics in Waco" and how David Koresh had total control over the lives of his followers.<sup>1</sup> It cited Waco as the wake-up call warning of "thousands of groups out there poised to snatch your body, control your mind, corrupt your soul."<sup>2</sup>

Time's cover story for March 15 was called, "In the Name of God: What Happens when Believers Embrace the Dark Side of Faith," and displayed two prominent photos of David Koresh and Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman (whose followers were



suspects in the World Trade Center bombings). The cover stories aligned the two men as "zealots" heading religions that have become a "fortress for the beleaguered tribe in the new world disorder."<sup>3</sup> It names The Branch Davidian's as a cult "apocalyptic and armed to the teeth" that "played out a siege drama that owed something to Jim Jones' last hours."<sup>4</sup> It also stated that Waco "represented a micro-fanaticism."<sup>5</sup> U.S. News reported, "Like pictures of Jonestown suicides or crowds at a Nazi rally, the unfolding saga of Waco's Branch Davidians holds a fascination beyond the spectacle of senseless violence or the story of a gun-toting Svengali."<sup>6</sup>

Generally, the whole incident was seen as "botched mission," a "bungled raid," a "fiasco," and a "fiery apocalypse" according to the magazines. Much criticism was directed toward the government and agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms in their handling of the raid. It was described as "an ineptly planned operation," that was "carried out with the same unfortunate ineptitude."<sup>7</sup> U.S. News stated that one of the problems with the ATF's handling of the raid is that it "does not instill confidence that it is the best agency to figure out what the proper responses should be."<sup>8</sup>

The children of the Branch Davidians who were released earlier in the standoff were given special attention in a cover story (mentioned previously) by Newsweek. Six pages were devoted exclusively to how the children were trying

build their lives "out of the ashes of Ranch Apocalypse," mentioned "horrifying and poignant tales of beatings and sexual abuse," and questioned the type of "emotional toll" such an incident would have on their lives.<sup>9</sup> Several other stories concerned the children, including one in Time which mentioned a statement by FBI agent Bob Ricks, "They are precious innocent children, controlled by a madman."<sup>10</sup>

Although allegations concerning child abuse were dropped due to lack of evidence, an article in Newsweek explained how authorities "missed the child abuse" because investigations were met with "a brick wall of denial from cult members and kids alike."<sup>11</sup> Sophronia Scott Gregory wrote in Time that surviving kids of Ranch Apocalypse had shocking tales of life with David Koresh, where they were denied traditional family bonds and were exposed to Koresh's "warped teachings".<sup>12</sup> Scott reported that the children were disciplined in whipping rooms, prepared for man-to-man combat in an apocalyptic war and encouraged to look to Koresh as their only father.

The following represent some examples of individual bias in articles from U.S. News, Newsweek and Time.

Verbal Bias. Verbal bias explains the action of the sentence. It can set the tone of the story and place a person, place or event in a positive or negative light. Time and Newsweek had almost the same amount of bias while U.S. News had fewer instances of bias than either of them.

Some negative instances of verbal bias when referring

to Koresh and his followers in Time magazine included:  
"seized," "dashed," "avoided," "suspected," "balk,"  
"bombarded," "blasting," "stormed," "killing," "degrading,"  
"mangled," "struggled," "haranguing," "preyed" and  
"punished."

U.S. News' descriptions of Koresh included: "stormed,"  
"isolating," "spoiling," "ranting," "rejected," "blasting,"  
"constricted" and "resists."

Newsweek's examples of negative verbs included:  
"inflated," "demanded," "dominated," "consumed," "whacking,"  
"refused," "cringed," "provoked," "disavows" and  
"disillusioned."

"Love" was one of the few positive verbs attributed to Koresh in Time magazine. Newsweek mentioned how Davidians were "unfairly demonized" and how tanks had "battered" their compound. Verbs such as "batter" were seen as positive if they portrayed the Davidians as victims of the government.

Adverbial Bias. Adverbial forms of bias can be used to create a favorable or unfavorable impression and are usually connected to the verb. Negative and positive adverbs were found in several articles. The adverbs that appear in phrases are underlined.

U.S. News mentioned how Koresh's dream turned "deadly," and how the mission went "tragically awry." Another article described the "ghastly shootout" and how Koresh was "deathly afraid" of giving himself up and going to prison.

Newsweek wrote of relatives trying "desperately to make

sense of the pain," and how they "screamed hysterically" when the compound burned. The mission was viewed as "oddly methodical," "tragically effective" and would end "violently" On a positive note, one article quoted a relative describing Koresh as a "very bright little boy."

Time wrote how ties with the outside world had been "irretrievable broken," and that Koresh "abruptly dashed" hopes of ending the standoff and "centered obsessively" on the coming apocalypse. Michael Riley wrote, "FBI men sourly note...a surrender may be months off."<sup>13</sup>

Adjective Bias. Adjective bias concerns those descriptive words that qualify or define a person, place or thing. The type of adjective used can possible place the noun being described in a positive or negative light in the mind of the reader. The following adjectives that appear in phrases are underlined.

Overall, the words used to describe Koresh were negative. Time and Newsweek had the most instances of negative bias and portrayed Koresh as a religious fanatic with total control over his followers.

Some of the negative adjectives used by Newsweek were: "bizarre cult," "deadliest days," "self-styled Messiah," "rambling discourse," "macabre portrait," "apocalyptic vision," "dangerous threat," "ugly as Medusa" and "scathing series."

Time's negative adjectives included: "preacherly hypnotist," "spartan interiors," "desolate congregation,"

"caustic monologues," "harsh beatings," "stricter rules," "interminable telephone talks," "nerve-grinding standoff" and "bizarre religion."

Some of the negative adjectives in U.S. News' articles include: "satanic symmetry," "ghastly shootout," "brute horror," "bizarre psywar tactics," "irreconcilable confusions," "totalitarian world," "infuriating moments," "fateful shootout" and "spartan lair."

Despite the negative use of adjectives, there were instances of positive adjectives among the three newsmagazines. Newsweek included: "eager," "peaceful," "nonaggressive," "comfortable," "regular Joe," "savvy," "poignant," "charming" and "articulate." Time mentioned "magnetic," "charismatic," "nonviolent solution," "avid reader" and "magnetic teaching." U.S. News included: "calm," "great" and "safe."

Attribution Bias. In this study, attribution bias deals exclusively with the wording used when attributing quotes to their source. The type of attribution used could place the quote in a favorable or unfavorable light.

A single instance of attribution was found. Harrison Rainie negatively attributed a quote by David Koresh in U.S. News on May 3: "We are ready for war," he stormed. "Let's get it on. I'm going to give you an opportunity to save yourself before you get blown away."<sup>14</sup>

Contextual Bias. Contextual bias concerns the overall

meaning of a paragraph or sentence. Several instances of this type of bias were found in the magazines. U.S. News reported:

The most painful question is this: To stop insanity, do civilized people have to become insane themselves? Do they ultimately have to kill and maim in order to thwart a greater evil? Finally, in Waco, the patience broke, and the result was tragedy. would air strikes in Bosnia be the equivalent of pumping tear gas into Ranch Apocalypse? Would such actions simply harden the zealot's resolve, instead of breaking his will? Would the slaughter stop, or would the house of the Balkans burn to the ground? It is the curse of madness that there are no answers (May 3, 1993, p.9).

The author implied negatively that in order to deal with someone insane like Koresh, one had to become insane himself. The author also assumed Koresh was a zealot.

Another negatively slanted article commented on his personal life:

Inside Koresh's totalitarian world, life had become a bit more constricted because FBI vehicles patrolled the compound perimeter. But the essentials were unchanged. Despite the ill effects of his wounds, Koresh harangued cult members about the end of the world for stretches lasting up to 15 hours. He used emergency generators to power his electric guitar for rock jam sessions, according to Jesse Amen, who sneaked past the FBI into the compound in early April. And Koresh indulged liberally in sex with the women in the cult, including young teenage girls...(May 3, 1993, p.30).

These negative statements imply that Koresh led a pampered life compared to his followers and sarcastically refer to Koresh's injuries as less serious than he previously led authorities to believe.

Newsweek's examples of negative contextual bias included:

But just as Koresh had predicted, the end of the world

- at least his world - was near. A few years ago a bus was buried to serve as a bunker; in recent months stores of food and ammunition have been brought in. None of the children Koresh released after the shoot-out were his, the heirs to the House of David, ex-members believe. So all is still in place for the grand finale. The adults, says (Robin) Bunds, are probably happy to stay. "They are waiting to get zapped up to heaven where they'll be transformed and fight a war where they get to kill all their enemies... The only people that may be sorry are the parents who had to let their children be released." With the youngsters gone, they had but one life to lose for their prophet (March 15, 1993, p.58).

Another article in Newsweek tried to characterize the type of leader that Koresh was:

The cults to worry about, according to Rick Ross, an expert who advised the FBI during the confrontation in Waco, can be identified by the character of their leadership. The Branch Davidians, he says, were "totally" dependent on Koresh, who, like Jim Jones in Guyana, systematically brainwashed his followers and cut them off psychologically from the outside world. That's a danger signal in itself - a clear sign that in any confrontation with the law, the group will resist all forms of psychological pressure and close ranks around its leader (May, 3, 1993, p.31).

This is yet another negative reference to Jim Jones and the Guyana massacre. The article dealt with how to react to these "extremist" groups so that this tragedy could be averted in the future.

Time characterized Koresh in a negative light by stating:

There were occasions when David Koresh enforced discipline among his followers the hard way. One of his hand-picked lieutenants would paddle the rule breakers with an oar on which were inscribed the words **IT IS WRITTEN**. In the manner of cult leaders before him, Koresh held sway largely through means that were both more subtle and more degrading. Food was rationed in unpredictable ways. Newcomers were gradually relieved of their bank accounts and personal possessions. And while the men were subjected to an uneasy celibacy, Koresh took their wives and daughters as his concubines

(May 3, 1993, p.34).

The article went on to describe the details of day-to-day living under Koresh:

Having convinced his followers that he was the messiah, Koresh went on to persuade them that because his seed was divine, only he had the right to procreate. Even as Koresh bedded their wives and daughters - some as young as 11 - in his comfortable private bedroom on the second floor, the men were confined to their dormitory downstairs. Behind the mind games and psychological sadism lay the threat of physical force. In addition to the paddlings, administered in a utility area called the spanking room, offenders could be forced down into a pit of raw sewage, then not allowed to bathe (May 3, 1993, p.35).

Outright Opinion. This type of bias constitutes subjective opinions on the part of journalists while reporting the news. This study found several instances of opinions that were interjected.

The following are examples of opinions found in each of the three magazines that were examined for biases:

Examples from U.S. News included:

It was clear from the start that Koresh was spoiling for battle (May 3, 1993, p.27).

Apocalypse itself was his goal, so his incentive to bargain seriously was nil (May 3, 1993, p.27).

FBI negotiators quickly knew they were in trouble because Koresh couldn't decide precisely who he was (May 3, 1993, p.28).

Examples from Time included:

No amount of adulation seemed to satisfy Koresh, whose egomania apparently disguised an emptiness at his center (May 3, 1993, p.35).

Like Jim Jones, Koresh plucked sexual partners from his flock and formed an elite guard to enforce his will (May 3, 1993, p.35).



The FBI brought these (letters) to a team of experts they recruited, who drew a psychological portrait of an ever more menacing figure, one who believed himself invincible (May 3, 1993, p.35).

David Koresh wasn't a real messiah: he couldn't turn water into wine, and perhaps that's why he so valued his private stash of Scotch whisky (May 10, 1993, p.17).

But will a ninth-grade dropout who plainly relishes the glare of world publicity relinquish it all to lead his followers into prison? (April 26, 1993, p.32).

Outside Waco, Texas, a cult called the Branch Davidians, apocalyptic and armed to the teeth, played out a siege drama that owed something to Jim Jones' last hours, when he and more than 900 members of his People's Temple cult died in Guyana, and to some older religious Americana, like Elmer Gantry, darkened with touches of the Road Warrior (March 15, 1993, p.8).

Finally, examples from Newsweek included:

Who could have believed it? But there they were, dozens of devotees, lured to a lonesome place on the Texas prairie by the promise of salvation (March 15, 1993, p.56).

In addition to the weird sex... (March 15, 1993, p.58).

The Davidians didn't trust the government (May 3, 1993, p.23).

Then in a gesture of defiance, he (Koresh) picked up the phone and threw it out the front window (May 3, 1993, p.25).

Meanwhile, in their jail cells and hospital rooms, most of the survivors seemed eerily upbeat last week, convinced that their messiah's prophecies had come true - and awaiting his resurrection (May 3, 1993, p.29).

There were few instances of positive opinions concerning Koresh. Negotiators, according to U.S. News, were upbeat at times about ending the siege peacefully during the standoff. Newsweek commented that some Waco residents didn't believe that Koresh was the "macabre" portrait painted by the authorities. The magazine also quoted authorities as

being hopeful about ending the affair. Another article in Newsweek quotes family members commenting on what a bright boy Koresh was and how well he knew the Bible at such a young age.

Photographic Bias. Photographic bias was measured by the overall impression given in each photo. Time had a negative photo of Koresh looking up and laughing with a caption that read: "Praise heaven and pass the ammunition."

<sup>15</sup> The May 3 cover issue of Time used a photo of the burning compound with Koresh in the foreground with the caption: "Tragedy in Waco: 'His name was Death, and Hell followed with him.' Revelation 6:8." U.S. News had a few photos in the May 3 issue of Koresh with one of his wives and their infant son, Cyrus, as well as one with Lois Roden, Koresh's former lover and the former leader of the Branch Davidians. Newsweek devoted their May 17 cover story to the "Children of the Cult," and printed several photographs of the Davidian children, with their names and ages and whether or not they survived the fire.

Most of the photos for the three magazines portrayed the Branch Davidian compound as one under siege, surrounded by government tanks, and policed by hovering helicopters. Photos of the Davidians still inside the compound were fairly neutral or positive, except for those Davidians that were taken into custody with shackles on their feet and smiles on their faces which made them appear defiant. After the final siege, most of the photos were of the rubble

leftover from the fire, with flags marking the areas where bodies were found.

#### Summary

A review of the articles that were examined between March 15 and May 17 demonstrated no significant relationships in the extent or nature of coverage of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians among U.S. News, Newsweek and Time. After looking at content it appeared that, overall, the magazines were negatively biased against Koresh and his followers, but were also critical of the way the government handled the affair. And although Time and Newsweek had more instances of bias, positive and negative, they had a higher percentage of coverage than U.S. News.

The three magazines depicted Koresh as a fanatical and maniacal leader of a "cult" that seemed to be awaiting the very siege that ATF had planned. According to the magazines, the government's actions fulfilled all the apocalyptic prophecies that upon which Koresh had always preached. Koresh, on the other hand, confirmed the suspicions of the government that the religious group was armed and dangerous. Koresh was portrayed as a rambling, stubborn and indecisive leader of a people that truly regarded him as divine.

The magazines were sympathetic to the plight of the children who were orphaned as a result of the fire and especially those who died. All three magazines were exceptionally critical of Koresh for keeping some of

children in the compound for the duration of the siege. The magazines compared Koresh to Jim Jones, a cult leader who was accused of leading more than 900 of his followers into a methodically rehearsed suicide and insinuated that Koresh, too, used brainwashing tactics to influence the Davidians, although there is no proof of that. All of the magazines used several types of biases that mixed fact with subjective opinions.

1. Melinda Beck, "Thy Kingdom Come," Newsweek, 121 (March 15, 1993): 53.
2. Kenneth L. Woodward, "Cultic America: A tower of Babel," Newsweek, 121 (March 15, 1993): 60.
3. "In the Name of God," Time, 141 (March 15, 1993): 7.
4. Ibid., 7.
5. Ibid., 7.
6. Erica Goode, "Victims in the Company of Cults," U.S. News and World Report, 114 (March 15, 1993): 4.
7. James Popkin, "A Botched Mission in Waco, Texas," U.S. News and World Report, 114 (March 15, 1993): 24.
8. Ibid., 25.
9. Ginny Carroll, "Children of the Cult," Newsweek, 121 (May 17, 1993): 48.
10. Michael Riley, "Oh my God!, They're Killing Themselves!" Time, 141 (May 3, 1993): 36.
11. Melinda Beck, "Someone Dropped the Ball," Newsweek, 121 (May 17, 1993): 51.
12. Sophronia Scott Gregory, "Children of a Lesser God," Time, 141 (May 17, 1993): 54.
13. Michael Riley, "The End is Near?" Time 141 (April 26, 1993): 32.
14. Harrison Rainie, "The Final Days of David Koresh," U.S. News and World Report 141 (May 3, 1993): 28.
15. Jordan Bonfante, "Cult of Death," Time 141 (March 15, 1993): 37.

There were also greater proportions of coverage in the March 15 and May 3 issues of all three magazines. When categories of bias were examined by magazine, no significant relationships were found for overall positive instances of bias. (Outright opinion was the most common type of bias for all three magazines. Contextual and verbal bias were also very common. There were no significant relationships found for overall negative or positive instances of bias or overall combined instances of bias by category for each magazine. According to the instances of bias found, the magazines were generally negative in their reporting of the standoff. Addressing another research question, all seven categories of bias were used in reporting the siege. The proportion of overall negative and positive instances of bias per article was also calculated. Newsweek had the highest percentages of both positive and negative instances of bias per article. Further, when the proportion of overall negative and positive instance of bias was calculated per square inch per article there were relatively no differences among the magazines.

### Conclusions

Generally, those who read through newsmagazines such as U.S. News & World Report, Newsweek and Time may be looking for "proper perspective and serious backgrounding" concerning the quality of reporting, although what is found may be more entertainment than information.<sup>1</sup> In order for

their readers to have a true picture of what is going on, reporters and journalists must learn not to weave facts into "semi-fictionalized language patterns" or have "preferential or prejudicial treatment of news subjects."<sup>2</sup>

The author examined a lack of impartiality and objectivity in the reporting styles of these three newsmagazines. Although there were many instances of positive and negative bias found, most of the bias was negative toward Koresh and the Branch Davidians. The religious group was commonly referred to as a cult and portrayed as brainwashed and fanatical in their beliefs.

While much bias was found against the Davidians, much criticism was also directed toward the government and its handling of the event. Many reporters found it hard to justify putting so many young lives in danger for the wrongdoing of one man. Others questioned the use of non-lethal tear gas to run the Davidians out of their compound. Other questions were raised concerning the professional conduct of the ATF agents and their decision to move in on the compound in the first place.

Other criticisms were directed toward the media, mostly negative. A "Satellite City" of journalists from all over the world and multimillion-dollar state-of-the-art technology was constructed around the perimeter of the compound in order provide daily updates of the event, even when there was nothing to report. The situation presented several opportunities for reporters to fabricate rumors and

for others to report them as facts - as well as other questionable tactics used by journalists under pressure by their stations to feed information back to their viewers.

But the heart of the negative criticism was directed toward Koresh, who was seen as the rambling wacko in Waco. He was the one blamed for stalled negotiations or for going back on his word, according to the magazines. The Davidians could have been regarded as victims of an unwarranted attack by war-mongering ATF agents, but instead they were a cult armed to the teeth and waiting for their own personal Armageddon. Readers could have seen sympathetic coverage of Davidians who died in the initial standoff, instead of the haunting photographs depicting flag-draped coffins of the agents that were printed. The Davidians could have been regarded as a new religious movement following an energetic leader, instead they were cult following the apocalyptic drivel of a crazed lunatic with a sexual penchant for young girls.

Unfortunately, the image of an organization like the Branch Davidians is sometimes tarnished from the start. Many, including journalists, misunderstand religious beliefs that are different from their own. Some new religious movements are stigmatized as fanatical groups on the fringes of society - even before an incident like the one in Waco would occur. These preconceived notions are evident in the negative perceptions of the Davidians in the newsmagazines that were examined.



Because of the possible biases that could and did occur in the media coverage of the siege, a task force was organized on March 4, 1993, by the Society of Professional Journalists. The task force had been named to "examine some of the ethical questions raised by the media's performance in covering the attempted of a heavily armed religious cult leader near Waco, Texas."<sup>3</sup>

Some of the recommendations of the task force included:

- Assume that the hostage taker, gunman or terrorist has access to the reporting

- Avoid reporting that might reveal the tactics or positions of law enforcement.

- Give no information, factual or speculative, about a hostage taker's mental condition, state of mind or reasons for actions while a standoff is in progress. The value of such information to the audience is limited and the possibility of such characterizations exacerbating an already dangerous situation are quite real.<sup>4</sup>

The mission of the task force was to also analyze some substantive issues of journalism ethics. With that in mind, the recommendations stated above presented some guidelines that could prepare journalists for future controversial media events such as the one in Waco.

Overall, the author concluded that the articles examined for this content analysis were indeed biased, both positively and negatively. The responsibility to cover this event as an objective journalist was sometimes overridden by

the desire to enhance a story with hearsay and rumors without verification.

#### Recommendations

The author's content analysis only covered the time period between March 15, 1993, to May 17, 1993. Research for the literature review extended through July of 1993. The only medium studied for its content was print and that was confined to the three major newsmagazines of U.S. News & World Report, Newsweek and Time.

Future studies could extend the time period covered in the content analysis as well as for the research conducted in the literature review. Although there was not much more coverage after May concerning the standoff, several significant and newsworthy events occurred later in the year. For example, the SPJ task force's findings came out in September 1993, and the proceedings of the trials of the surviving Branch Davidians were periodically updated.

The category of newsmagazines could also be enlarged to include other magazines in a future study. Newspapers could be examined instead of magazines. Other media could be analyzed (i.e., content analysis of broadcast news coverage by the three major networks during the siege).

This study could be of value to journalism students in order to prepare themselves for responsible reporting. It is important to know reporting options in the event of a possibly controversial story. Professors of mass

communications can teach their students to recognize the types of biases that can appear in stories and prevent these mistakes from occurring. This study also provides examples to readers of such newsmagazines that what they read is not always objective reporting of the news.

Although the journalists for these magazines make no pretense about being objective, it is helpful for them to realize that blatant examples of bias in reporting can portray situations in a positive or negative light to readers.

Finally, much responsibility falls on the shoulders of journalists who must report on a potentially explosive situation like the Branch Davidian standoff. It is up to them to report fairly in order to minimize the possible harm in such circumstances while still maintaining their independence from those they report on.

1. John C. Merrill, "How Time Stereotyped Three U.S. Presidents," Journalism Quarterly 42 (1965): 569.

2. Ibid., 569.

3. Report of the Waco Task Force, (Greencastle, IN: Society of Professional Journalists, 1993), 1.

4. Mark Fitzgerald, "Newspaper Exonerated," Editor & Publisher 126 (September 11, 1993): 44.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF JOURNALS USED FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS

	<u>U.S. News</u>	<u>Newsweek</u>	<u>Time</u>
March 15, 1993	v.114:10	v.121:11	v.141:11
March 22, 1993	v.114:11	v.121:12	v.141:12
March 29, 1993	v.114:12	v.121:13	v.141:13
April 5/6, 1993	v.114:13	v.121:14	v.141:14
April 12/13, 1993	v.114:14	v.121:15	v.141:15
April 19/20, 1993	v.114:15	v.121:16	v.141:16
April 26,27, 1993	v.114:16	v.121:17	v.141:17
May 3, 1993	v.114:17	v.121:18	v.141:18
May 10, 1993	v.114:18	v.121:19	v.141:19
May 17, 1993	v.114:19	v.121:20	v.141:20

VITA <sup>2</sup>

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