The Waco Scandal Just Won't Go Away

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Janet Reno is shocked, shocked to discover that the FBI has been lying for six years about the 1993 Waco debacle.

The Waco fire burned up 86 members of a religious cult called Branch Davidians (including 24 children, 17 of whom were younger than age 10), and has kept eight survivors rotting in prison ever since, serving long sentences denounced by the jury that heard the evidence. But it was a career-enhancer for Janet Reno, who at that time was President Clinton's most controversial Cabinet appointment, widely criticized by both right and left.

Immediately after the Waco fire, she starred in an Academy Award- worthy performance before a Congressional committee, defending the FBI's actions to the hilt, confidently taking personal responsibility for all of the government's actions, and asserting that she would make the same decisions if she had the chance to do it all over again. Suddenly, the same people who were criticizing her began to praise her.

Now, after six years of categorical denials that the FBI fired potentially flammable tear gas canisters at the Branch Davidians on their final day, Janet Reno has ordered the FBI to investigate itself. That's like asking the Clinton White House staff to investigate Bill Clinton's lies about Monica Lewinski.

Will the FBI investigate whether Janet Reno was lying for six years or was negligent and incompetent in not extracting the truth from the FBI before she went public to defend all their actions? Contrary to her 1993 assertions, she did not take responsibility for Waco; she only said she did, thereby facilitating the coverup.

Why did the Clinton Administration attack a small and pitiful religious cult with a full-scale military offensive, using 700 men, machine guns, army tanks, and the secret, highly-trained U.S. Delta military

force created for use against dangerous terrorists? Why did the FBI spend six hours pouring into the compound the gas known as CS, which is banned for use in war by the Chemical Weapons Treaty?

This came after a 51-day siege of their compound, during which the government cut off the Davidians' water and electricity, and tormented them with recordings of animal screams played at a deafening high pitch.

All the excuses that Janet Reno proffered in her original defense of the FBI have been proven to be false. The cult wasn't any threat to others, it wasn't peddling illegal drugs, it wasn't engaged in unlawful child abuse, and its members had fewer guns per person than the average gun ownership of Texans.

Did the Clinton Administration simply decide to murder the Branch Davidians to avenge the deaths of the four BATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) agents a few weeks before the fatal final day? There is said to be a tradition among federal law enforcement personnel that, if one of their agents is killed, his buddies go after the killers and gun them down in speedy capital retribution, without waiting for such niceties as a trial, due process, or conviction.

Of course, that isn't written in any law or rules of procedure; it just happens. Some will justify that behavior as appropriate retaliation after an agent is gunned down in cold blood, but that wasn't what happened at Waco. The Branch Davidians were arguably acting in self-defense against the surprise invasion of their home by BATF agents who fired wildly and killed ten cult members.

On the day of the final assault, the FBI kept newsmen and television cameras on the side of the building where they couldn't see the real military offensive. Fortunately a plane overhead took pictures that millions of Americans have seen in the film "Waco: Rules of Engagement."

The FBI lies have just become front-page news because of a statement by the civilian overseer of the Texas Rangers. However, the plaintiffs in the wrongful death civil suits brought by the relatives of the Branch Davidians still haven't been allowed to do the kind of discovery that federal rules allow, so much more is still hidden by the FBI-Reno cover up.

As in other scandals of recent years, the government's coverup has compounded its original errors. The Democrats closed ranks to protect Clinton's appointees in the Justice Department and the FBI, and the Republicans dropped the ball because of their traditional mindset in favor of law enforcement.

The danger America faces today is not from tiny, misguided religious cults. The greater danger to our lives and liberties comes primarily from arrogant, irresponsible, unaccountable law enforcement agencies such as the FBI and the BATF, especially when using the military for domestic law enforcement.

The FBI lied to the American people and clearly wasn't to be trusted about Waco, or about the killing of Mrs. Randy Weaver at Ruby Ridge, or about delivering 900 FBI files to Clinton's political hatchetmen. We cannot afford to trust the FBI with the new powers it is demanding to read our encrypted computer files and messages and to know our whereabouts when we make cell phone calls.