



## PRO CON

### Did federal agents handle the Mt. Carmel stand-off successfully?



**RICH HENDERSON**  
Columnist

As the charred remains of Waco cultists are sorted by investigators, both the media and public alike are placing the actions of federal agents under a microscope.

Most are concerned with the fate of the children, and why they had to die. While no one wanted to see the members of the Branch Davidian

cult die, federal agents could not have prevented the mass suicide.

First, the standoff need not have occurred. Cult members were initially alerted to the government raid. Without that information, cultists would have not had the time to prepare a counterattack, leaving the arrest warrant served and the operation only a footnote on the back page of a Waco paper.

Cult members remaining in the compound had murdered four U. S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms agents. Law enforcement authorities had a right to demand that cultists leave the compound; by not leaving, cult members were breaking the law.

Second, Davidians brought the stand-off to an end, not federal agents. Although some argue that the fiery conclusion was due to the tear gassing of the Davidians by ATF agents, this is ridiculous.

The compound went up in a blaze due to cultists starting a fire. In the 51 days preceding the blaze in Waco, Koresh was given ample opportunities to surrender to authorities. Even after promising that he would abandon the compound after he was allowed a radio address, he did not leave.

That is why the children died. The children did not die because of federal agents. The children died because of tear gas. The children died because Koresh failed to evacuate, even after he had promised that he would.

Firefighters also could not have been expected to attempt to put out the blaze because of the explosive nature of the compound. Recall that the reason U. S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms agents raided the compound on Feb. 28 was to serve a warrant for illegal firearms.

If the cultists had the number of explosives and other firearms as they were presumed to have, firefighters would have been in a deadly situation. If the cultists did not shoot at them — as many supposed they would — as many supposed they would — explosions from the detonating arms could have added to the number of dead federal agents.

Finally, citizens and the media must realize that the cultists were not planning on coming out, as thousands of bootleg caps and shirts attest to. Regardless of how long agents waited, Koresh and his band of followers would not have left. Long before the mediators began talks with the leader, cultists had decided that they would never be taken. With the waiving would come only more abuse to the cultists' children, and more cost to taxpayers. Under the conditions faced at the Waco site, federal agents did the best they possibly could. Their deaths were the fulfillment of their prophesy.

There is no doubt that David Koresh was responsible for the terrible deaths of the men, women and children who perished at Mount Carmel. However, a review of the standoff clearly indicates a federal operation plagued by error from beginning to end.

To begin with, why was the raid even necessary?

Koresh could have been arrested during one of his trips to town, but agents from the U. S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) complained that he rarely left the compound. Perhaps this is because the pre-raid information gathering agents — some posing as college students living in a shack across from the compound — were so obvious that the Davidians joked about them.

In the first days of the standoff, ATF officials inexplicably allowed Koresh to give interviews and negotiate with various outside news sources instead of immediately cutting off power and phone lines. This ridiculous freedom only fed Koresh's obvious desire for media attention and heightened his sense of power.

The ATF was certainly not alone in the series of miscalculations. Attorney General Janet Reno explained that tanks and tear gas on the 51st day were necessary for three reasons. The federal agencies had exhausted all their options, and negotiations had failed. FBI agents were tired, and no suitable backup existed. Finally, there were the unsubstantiated reports that children were being abused.

The idea that every option had been exhausted is absurd at best. After the devastating fire last week, a mother of one cult member lamented, "We wanted our tapes and letters to be broadcast rather than the screaming animals and music they (authorities) played. We feel we did not get the opportunity to know if our influence might have had a more positive outcome." Granted, it is not common policy to allow members of a standoff with federal agents the opportunity to communicate with family members. But, then, how common is it for them to meet extensively with their lawyers?

As to the tiring of FBI agents, there are a number of highly qualified agencies in the state of Texas, most notably the Texas Rangers, who were more than willing to provide quality relief. Backup was in no short supply.

Finally, if agents were trying to negotiate for further releases, their treatment of the first Branch Davidians to leave the compound was unfathomable. Two elderly women were paraded before the media in hand and leg irons, then held in jail after charges against them had been dropped. This well-publicized treatment was certainly a deterrent to other Branch Davidians who may have considered turning themselves over.

While federal agents are not responsible for the maniacal actions of David Koresh and his followers, they should be held accountable for obvious strategical errors. Without this accountability, mistakes will be repeated, and the list of cult related tragedies will only grow.



**TONI GARRARD**  
Columnist

## A semester's worth of work at once

### Library, Freebird's fail in last-minute study efforts

I may have to sue my professors for mental anguish, for the pain and suffering they have caused me by assigning 375,000 projects, all of which will be due in the next few days.

This may be a dumb question but: Do profs really expect us to finish all that stuff? A follow-up dumb question: Are they CRAZY? I don't know about you, but I have more than one class to worry about — don't they know that? Isn't it enough that we BUY the books? Now we have to READ them? Gimme a break. I go to class, sometimes. I pay attention when I'm awake. So what's with all the assignments and quizzes and tests all of a sudden?

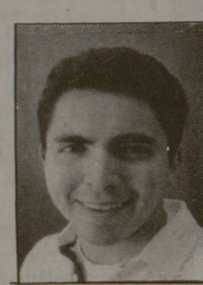
They assign papers and homework as if there were no life after class. Don't they know we have televisions? Don't they realize that summer's almost here, and we gotta lay out and work out and chill out so we can look good and fit in with all the nubile, taut bodies carousing at the pool, looking like some hedonistic scene from Greek mythology?

Who has time for 90-page papers when the sun is beckoning on 90-degree weekends?

But we press on. We labor; we struggle; we stay up — all night if we have to — just to get those assignments in.

As I prepared to tackle my pile of assignments, I realized I wouldn't get anything done in my dark storage closet that some clever landlord labeled an "efficiency." It's really not that small, but with a bed and a dresser in there, I barely have enough room to change my mind. The library, I decided, would be a great place to lighten my workload. Besides, going to the library would mean not having to touch my homework for another half hour.

Walking into the library, I felt so studious, so academic — even if it was Evans Library. Hey, it's still a library. Well, sort of. Actually, it's getting better. As I walked around, looking for a good place to sit, no one even propositioned me. Of course, I avoided the fourth floor



**ROBERT VASQUEZ**  
Columnist

restrooms, just to be safe.

Finally seated, I began to reach for my books. Yes, NOW, I told myself, I could get some things done.

No, something was wrong. Maybe the library was too quiet. Maybe I didn't bring the right books. Maybe I was just stalling. So much homework, so little time. Maybe if I ate something, I reasoned, I could muster up some motivation.

A trip to Freebird's was in order. I decided to try their "world famous" burrito, officially known as "The Super Monster." It's called "The Super Monster," not because it resembles Godzilla or the Blob, but simply because it weighs the same as Godzilla and has the same cubic volume as the Blob.

Now, I'm no food critic, but the Super Monster transcends any dining experience I have had to this day. It wasn't light; it wasn't refreshing. It was BIG. It was more food than most families eat in a year. It had enough lettuce, chicken and beef to feed "The Facts of Life" cast for an entire week. Yes, it's THAT BIG.

It was good too, but it took me a good three hours to finish the killer burrito, not including the 20 minutes taken for breathing between bites and 10 minutes for restroom breaks.

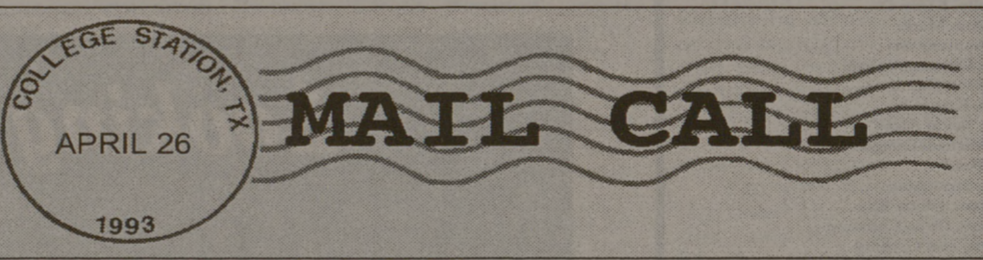
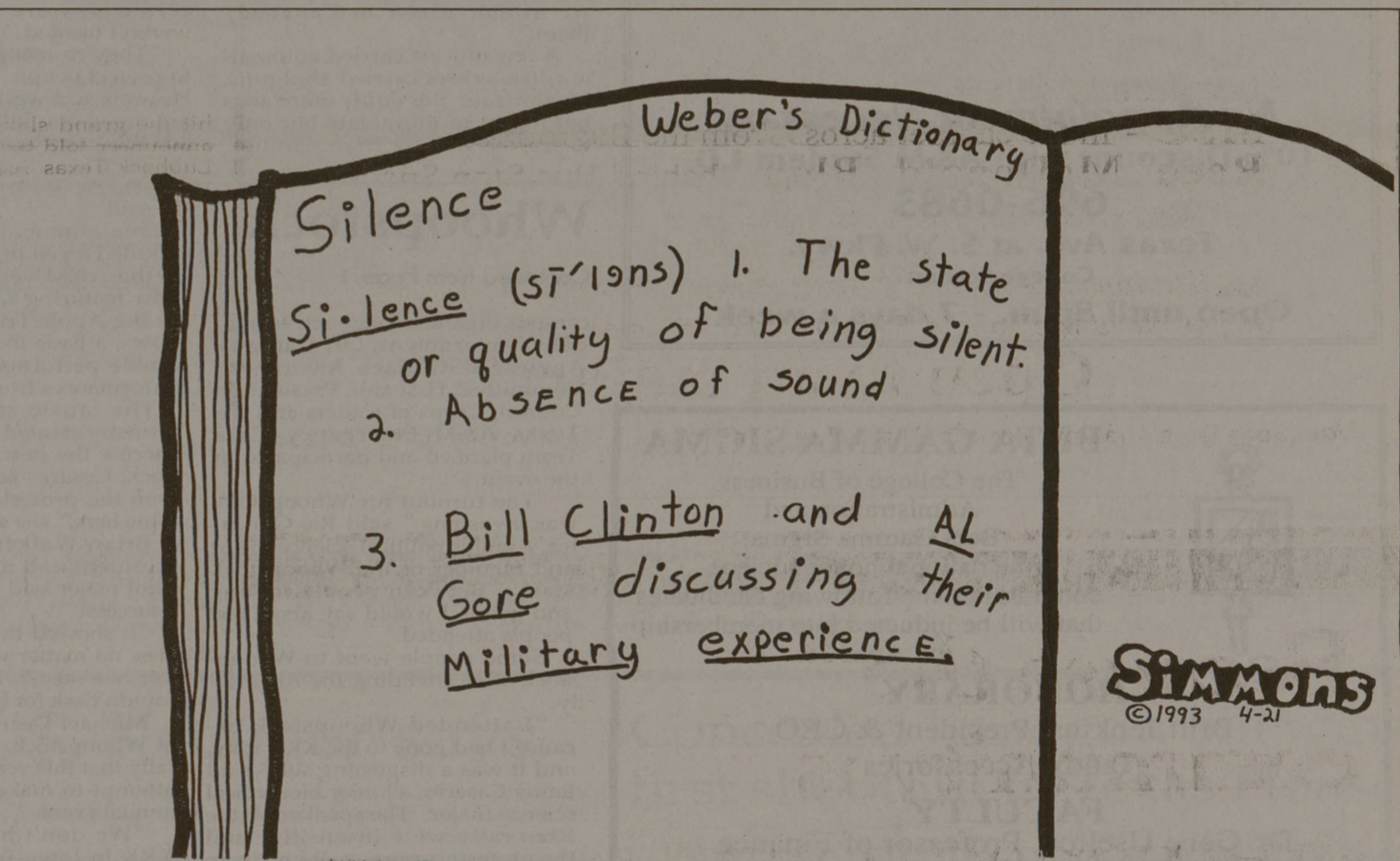
Needless to say, by the time I finished, I was in no condition for homework. I think it's a proven fact somewhere that students shouldn't study with full stomachs. It cuts off circulation to important organs or something.

Maybe I could get something done at the Batt, I thought. I think something's due there too, I thought. I'm so efficient, I thought. Finally, I could complete one assignment.

So, here I am writing a column, when I could be completing very important assignments, designed to augment my education and generally drive me insane. How's a student to get it all done? There's just not enough time in the day. Maybe I'll finish it tomorrow. It's kinda late for all that now. A student needs his rest.

I'd better go now. Letterman's coming on in a few minutes.

Vasquez is a lazy, senior journalism major.



### Standoff ends but loss of life lingers on

Last Monday, the nation was finally permitted a catharsis of a problem that had plagued it for 51 days. The nation was allowed to watch as the Branch Davidian compound burned to the ground.

As I sat glued to the television, I began to wonder if the catharsis was entirely beneficial. The television generation has in many ways become desensitized to the tragedies of human life. Because television has served primarily as a mode of entertainment, the media has learned to capitalize on the public confusion between that which is truly entertaining and that which is startlingly informative.

Where do we draw the line between that which serves to inform and that which serves to entertain? Have we become so dumb to the images on our screens that we do not see the loss of human life as something to be mourned?

Throughout Monday afternoon, discussion centered on the events surrounding the burning of the compound. Phrases like, "Did you see how cool it was

when the walls caved in?" and "Those nuts deserved to burn," lingered as if no human beings were actually involved. Even I sat captivated for about 45 minutes, until I realized that I was no longer being fed new information, but only a stream of monotonous images.

It is true that the human psyche is intrigued by the gruesome, but we must not allow those that feed us those images to capitalize on the entertainment of sorrowful death. Regardless of how each of us may feel about the events at Mt. Carmel, let us not forget that 90 human lives were needlessly lost.

We must allow ourselves to feel the pain accompanying weaknesses in society that lead to the loss of any human life by unnatural causes. We must remember that we have had no opportunity to lead any of those 90 lives, just as they had no opportunity to lead ours. I am sure that none of us would want the ways we lead our lives to be trivialized to the point where others can simply write our choices away as insignificant and implicitly sentence us to an early death.

Shea Rial  
Class of '94

### Laundry thieves must not know Code

Last Sunday, I did my laundry behind the Student Services building thinking that my clothes would still be there when I returned. I came back an hour later and found all my jeans gone! This is the sort of bad bull I would expect from t-sips, but not Aggies! I sometimes wonder what the Aggie Code of Honor really means to us, and to some it means very little. The person(s) that did this may get some thrill now, but they will never truly understand what it means to be an Aggie!

Manuel E. Ramirez, Jr.  
Class of '96

### Opinion Page needs a good dictionary

I can't stay silent any longer — I have to let loose my frustration at seeing certain words consistently misspelled on the Opinion Page. Although it may be silly to lose my cool about this, I think it's better to say something rather than feel like I'm losing my mind every time I read The Batt. Let it be an example to us all.

Patrick Edwards  
Class of '90

Editor's Note: Point taken, Patrick. We'll try to keep a better eye on those misspellings. Thanks for the constructive criticism. — SF

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