



**Understanding Worldview Differences between the Law Enforcement and Religious
Fundamentalists: Lessons from the Waco Standoff Case**

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Abstract

This essay provides a new perspective on the Waco standoff case. Exploring the most important themes in Docherty's (2001) and Randolph's (2016) books, as well as using relevant concepts from external sources, the essay seeks to achieve the following three goals: 1) Explain why the expected outcomes of the practice theory of change in the Waco standoff case differ from the actual outcomes; 2) Reflect on the lessons learned and explain how Docherty's (2001) four proactive intervention techniques in worldview oriented conflicts would have helped to prevent the regrettably violent end of the Waco siege; 3) Propose a new theory of change that incorporates the essential mediation or negotiation elements described by Randolph's (2016) *The psychology of conflict: mediating in a diverse world*.

Keywords: worldview differences, law enforcement, religious fundamentalism, waco standoff, negotiation, mediation

Introduction

This essay is a scholarly response to a doctoral seminar discussion on *Change in Interpersonal and Organizational Relations* held in summer 2016 at the Nova Southeastern University's Department of Conflict Resolution Studies, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Analyzing this topic from the perspective of the Waco standoff case, Richard Queeney and Jane Walsh with Kathleen Watkins-Richardson (my colleagues at the Department of Conflict Resolution Studies' Ph.D. Program, Nova Southeastern University) examined two important aspects of the practice theory of change in the Waco standoff case through the lenses of Docherty's (2001) book, *Learning lessons from Waco: When the parties bring their Gods to the negotiation table*, and Randolph's (2016) *The psychology of conflict: Mediating in a diverse world*. The first aspect, which was presented by Richard Queeney, focuses on the interpersonal dimension of the intervention of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (to be called ATF in this essay) and the FBI along with other government and law enforcement agencies at the Branch Davidians' Mount Carmel in Waco, Texas, from February 28 to April 19, 1993, and the unexpected resistance and confrontation this militarized intervention encountered from the sectarian group, the Branch Davidians. Given that the parties in this conflict negotiation represent two distinct organizations – the government represented by the Attorney General's Office, ATF, FBI and state law enforcement agencies on the one hand, and the Branch Davidians on the other -, the second aspect of this case which is presented by Jane Walsh and Kathleen Watkins-Richardson explores the organizational dimension of the intervention and how the change that occurred within these organizations could be understood.

Without dwelling on the pre-Waco intervention history and sociological analysis, and without describing or reporting from a chronological perspective the entire "critical incident" (for the definition of "critical incident" see CIAG, 2000, as cited in Docherty, 2001, p. 2) that occurred at Waco beginning from the first intervention, the actions of the Attorney General's Office, ATF, to the intervention of the FBI, and then the violent confrontation and fire incident that "resulted in the deaths of almost ninety people, including twenty-three children" (Docherty, 2001, p. 9), or the legal proceedings that followed, including questions about who is right or wrong, as well as the numerous investigations that were conducted thereafter, my response essay is aimed at leveraging on the presentations of Richard, Jane and Kathleen and exploring the most important themes in Docherty's (2001) and Randolph's (2016) books as well as using relevant concepts from external sources to achieve the following three goals:

- 1) Explain why the expected outcomes of the practice theory of change in the Waco standoff case differ from the actual outcomes;
- 2) Reflect on the lessons learned and explain how Docherty's (2001) four proactive intervention processes for conflicts embedded in worldview differences would have helped to prevent the regrettably violent end of the Waco siege, had the Attorney General's office, ATF, FBI and other state law enforcement agencies known how to use them in their intervention at Mount Carmel and during the negotiations with the Branch Davidians;
- 3) Propose a new theory of change that incorporates the essential mediation or negotiation elements described by Randolph's (2016) *The psychology of conflict: mediating in a diverse world*.

Disparity between the Expected Outcomes and Actual Outcomes of the Practice Theory of Change in the Waco Standoff Case

The set of questions that comes to mind after a careful reading and analysis of the intervention at the Branch Davidians' compound – or Mount Carmel - near Waco is: why were the plans and goals of the Attorney General, ATF, FBI, and other law enforcement personnel, who participated in the Branch Davidians raid and siege not achieved as anticipated? What exactly did the law enforcement interveners experience or encounter that led them to adjust their strategies and practice theory of change and yet could not prevent the violent confrontation that resulted in many fatalities and destruction of property, as well as individual and community trauma? And why is David Koresh, the spiritual leader and prophet of the Branch Davidians, blamed by the government for the negotiation impasse or deadlock that occurred and the violent end of the siege? To be able to show how the four intervention processes proposed by Docherty (2001) would have helped in preventing the violent end of the standoff, and before recommending a new theory of change for this and similar cases, it is important to explain why the expected outcomes of the practice theory of change in the Waco standoff case differs from the actual outcomes by answering the above set of questions.

On Unachieved Anticipated Goals:

The answer to the first question – why the anticipated goals were not achieved – is that the law enforcement agents failed in their *diagnosis* or *framing* of the problem. They failed to understand the difference(s) between a conventional institution like the state and an unconventional religious (sectarian) institution like the Branch Davidians. As Docherty (2001) opines, “The Waco tragedy grew out of many federal agents using standard operating procedures in good faith, but in a situation where those procedures were doomed to fail” (p. 13). Because of this *diagnosis failure*, the law enforcement authorities, empowered by the orders or mandate given to them by the state through the Attorney General's Office, used conventional, militarized intervention strategies and methods to manage and resolve conflict in an unconventional religious environment where a different set of rules apply; where the members of the sect obey and give allegiance to a supernatural, unearthly, invisible supreme being and to their revealed holy book, and not to the state and man-made constitution; where the sect members first and foremost see themselves as citizens of a supernatural world, and not *citizens of America*; and where the only orders they adhered to come from the *presumed* last prophet of God, David Koresh, and not from the Attorney General's office or the law enforcement agents.

On the Law Enforcement's Experience and Strategy Adjustment:

After reflecting on the question about what exactly the law enforcement interveners experienced or encountered that led them to make frequent adjustments in their strategies and practice theory of change and yet could not prevent the violent end of the standoff, I discovered one concept that seems to summarize the various perspectives that emerged during the discussion on this topic. The *concept of hermeneutics* – the science and art of interpretation and understanding (Ricœur, 1967; 1970; 1974; 1991) - is very relevant here. The ATF, FBI and other law enforcement agents, even with all their expertise and training as well as past intervention experiences in *critical incident* situations, had incomparable difficulty in making good judgement of, and understanding, three important elements that constitute

the recurrent themes in Docherty's (2001) book. The elements are the two distinct and opposing 1) *worldviews*; 2) *languages*; and 3) *realities*. These opposing elements – the worldview, language, and reality of the law enforcement on the one hand, and the worldview, language, and reality of the Branch Davidians on the other hand – confronted each other on Mount Carmel at Waco, leaving the parties on both sides of the aisle with a high level of confusion and mutual suspicion, which led to an impasse or deadlock in the negotiations.

On the Attribution of Blame and Responsibility for Negotiation Deadlock and Resultant Violence:

Whenever a conflict occurs or violence erupts, parties in the conflict usually *blame* one another and argue over who should be held accountable. The same thing also happens when an attempt to resolve the conflict either through negotiation or mediation fails as a result of an impasse or deadlock. The Waco standoff case is no different. The *attribution of blame* to the Branch Davidians is an important factor that motivated Docherty's (2001) research and informed her research question: "Does the responsibility for the ultimate failure of the negotiations (i.e. the 'talking' portion of the FBI activities) rest with the Branch Davidians alone, as has been assumed in all of the official investigations conducted thus far?" (p. 10). My concern in this response essay is not to dwell on the entire members of the Branch Davidians, but to examine the symbolism of David Koresh as their spiritual leader and prophet. Therefore, to respond to the question of why David Koresh, the spiritual leader and prophet of the Branch Davidians, is blamed by the law enforcement for the impasse or deadlock they experienced during the negotiation process, two themes are worth examining. The one is *order*, the other is *power*, and the two fall within the *sphere of legitimacy*.

The law enforcement made efforts to persuade David Koresh to surrender and come out with an increased military operation or as Jane Walsh and Kathleen Watkins-Richardson put it in their presentation's theory of change, "militarized assault on compound building will cause collapse and damage forcing occupants out." However, what the law enforcement failed to realize is that David Koresh's notion of *order* and *power* was not the same as theirs. Contrary to the human and state's chain of command and power, Mr. Koresh received his *orders* directly from God and only God has the *power* to give him *orders*. This means that in his worldview, Mr. Koresh was obliged to obey only God, and not man or the state. Since he believed he was the last prophet of God to whom God has given power over his flock, he thought of himself higher and more elevated in status of power than the law enforcement. With an apocalyptic and "fundamentalist mindset" (Strozier, 2014), David Koresh and his followers (those who see him as the only access or connection to the divine) seem to have been preparing for what Strozier (2014) calls "endism – the location of self in some future narrative" (para. 2). This "future narrative" refers to a return to the creator, and the Waco standoff presumably was for them the fulfillment of this apocalyptic prophecy.

Unfortunately, the law enforcement's diagnosis of the Branch Davidians did not see this unconventional religious (sectarian) apocalyptic and endism-orientated perspectives to the conflict. From a hermeneutic point of view, the law enforcement's interpretations and understanding of the Davidians' worldview, language and reality were highly erroneous. And most importantly, their assumption of David Koresh's power status, and the belief that he will surrender when confronted with the sophisticated might of the state were proven wrong by Mr. Koresh's resistance until death. The misunderstanding of the Branch Davidians on the one hand, and David Koresh's miscomprehension of the law enforcement

during the negotiations on the other hand, are key factors that exacerbated the conflict.

The remaining sections of this essay will examine ways in which the law enforcement could have improved their intervention at the individual and organizational levels and avoided a violent end.

Four Possible Interventions for Change

This section is aimed at explaining how Docherty's (2001) four proactive intervention techniques in worldview-oriented conflicts would have helped to prevent the regrettably violent end of the Waco siege, had the FBI negotiators and other state law enforcement agencies known how to use them during their negotiations with the Branch Davidians. The four intervention processes are: "Symmetrical attention to worldviewing; learning to listen for indicators of world viewing differences; developing a practice of worldview translation; and constructing negotiation processes that accommodate worldview divergence" (Docherty, 2001, pp. 274 - 307).

The violent end of the Waco standoff, the death of "almost ninety people, including twenty-three children" (Docherty, 2001, p. 9), and the destruction of property and infliction of generational pain and trauma in the survived Davidians would have been prevented through unbiased, prejudice-free diagnosis or framing of the problem. Docherty's (2001) notion of *worldview* "symmetry" falls within the diagnosis or framing arena as I explained above. My recommendations to the FBI negotiators in this unconventional and religious case are summarized below.

1) *Develop an open mind to learn and understand the worldview of the Branch Davidians as they expressed it through their unique way of speaking in a scriptural, apocalyptic language.*

This means that the negotiators need to be mindful of their own biases and predetermined script. Active and reflective listening that includes "paraphrasing (reflecting back for clarity and understanding), inquiry (asking non-judgmental, open-ended questions), and acknowledgement (of the underlying emotions and meaning hidden in the speaker's words and reflecting them back to the speaker as accurately as possible)" (Rogers et al., 2013, pp. 360-362) would help to discern and understand the nature of reality the Davidians were communicating through their "static language (worldview)" as opposed to the FBI negotiators' "dynamic language (worldviewing or worldmaking)" (Docherty, 2001, p. 16).

2) *Refrain from using blaming language during the negotiations.*

During the negotiations, the FBI tried to bargain with the Branch Davidians by promising to play David Koresh's sermon on the radio for any child they send out. According to Docherty (2003), about 20 children were freed by their parents. However, David Koresh insisted on phone along with other community members that they were not going to let more children out because they were "special children with a special destiny, the children of the New Light Doctrine, [and] that they were supposed to play a special role during the End Time, during the Apocalypse" (Docherty, 2003, para. 10). Blaming David Koresh for this impasse or deadlock was a mistake. Saying that "David Koresh is untrustworthy. He doesn't keep his word. He's now telling us he won't send us these children" (Docherty, 2003, para. 10) was probably humiliating to the Davidians.

3) *Acknowledge and validate the Davidians' reality and the status of their leader, David Koresh.*

In my opinion, the FBI negotiators would have seen these apocalyptic messaging as indicators of a different static worldview that requires a different negotiation/intervention strategy. What was needed was the acknowledgement and validation of the Davidians' reality and the symbolism of David Koresh as the link between this reality and the community members who put their unreserved trust in him.

4) *Stop the scripted bargaining process.*

At this point of impasse or deadlock, I would recommend that the FBI stop the bargaining process because the Davidians will not play to the FBI script of trading the children as commodities. In the worldview of the Davidians, these children are part of the chosen people of God.

5) *Initiate a ceasefire and create a space for change.*

The FBI should also initiate a ceasefire because this is an unconventional, religious and spiritual matter with an apocalyptic belief. A ceasefire will send a counter message to the Davidians that the end is not yet here. Backing off from or stopping the militarized operation would create a psychological and physical space for the Davidians and the FBI negotiators to re-examine their worldviews and each other's messages (or interests). As Docherty (2003) argued in an interview, since the FBI negotiators "can't speak their (the Davidians') reality enough to persuade them to do anything. The only thing you (the FBI) can do is create the space and the environment in which they can persuade themselves to do something that will save their lives, to get them out of the situation" (para. 14).

6) *Design and implement worldview-sensitive and integrative dispute resolution system and processes.*

The last recommendation I will give to the FBI which I believe is the most crucial is to design and implement integrative dispute resolution system and processes that "accommodate worldview divergence" (Docherty, 2001). To do this, the FBI should engage external third parties or *worldview translators* who, either through their training or research on worldview sensitivity and apocalyptic and fundamentalist mindset, or through their leadership position in religious institutions, could reinject and rebuild trust on the part of the Davidians as well as translate their reality in a language that the FBI, ATF, other law enforcement agents, and the Attorney General would understand. This approach applies not only to the Waco standoff case, but also to the on-going religiously motivated and extremist violent confrontations and terrorism around the world. I strongly believe that given the divergent, static, worldviews and realities underlying these conflicts, mechanical or military intervention alone cannot resolve them. Many governments and intergovernmental bodies fighting violent extremism and terrorism have always neglected the importance of religious and faith-based leaders, scholars and theologians. I think it is high time they included faith-based leaders in countering and preventing violent extremism and terrorism in countries around the world. Conflicts involving religion are of different species and category. To resolve them, we need the help of experts in religious matters as well as negotiators or mediators who are worldview sensitive.

According to Docherty (2003), the Branch Davidians had requested that the FBI send two scholars who had previously done some research with them on the *Book of Revelation*, to come and mediate as third-party translators. But "the FBI said no" (para. 15). My recommendation is that the government and its law enforcement should designate specialized negotiators or mediators who will be trusted by

groups like the Branch Davidians to speak with them in a manner they will understand, play the role of *worldview translators*, and prepare the ground for the Davidians or other groups like them to persuade themselves to come out as they are, without throwing away their belief and god. This would have helped the Branch Davidians realize that, perhaps, it was not yet the end time, or that apocalypse was not yet here. Had the integrative and worldview sensitive negotiations by *worldview translators* been used, the “almost ninety people, including twenty-three children” (Docherty, 2001, p. 9) that perished at Waco would have been saved at least for a natural, individual future apocalypse.

Recommended Theory of Change

This response essay has succeeded in providing a new perspective to the Waco standoff case. The reader is presented with three important explanations as to why the expected outcomes of the practice theory of change in the Waco standoff case differ from the actual outcomes. First, there was a *diagnosis or framing failure* – the unconventional religious (sectarian) conflict was framed as if it occurred in a conventional, normal institution. Second, there was a *hermeneutic problem* – the interveners did not make good judgement of, and understand, the *worldviews, language, and reality* of the Branch Davidians. Third, the interveners *blamed* David Koresh and questioned his *legitimacy* as well as the Davidians’ notions of *order, power and endism*.

Based on the lessons learned and leveraging on the four intervention processes proposed by Docherty (2001), six recommendations are proposed to help the FBI negotiators in their interventions in similar settings. These include: 1) openness, bias awareness and learning to understand own biases and the other’s worldviews; 2) refraining from using blaming language during negotiations; 3) acknowledging and validating the reality and the leader of the Davidians; 4) abandoning scripted bargaining process; 5) initiating a ceasefire and creating a space for change; and 6) engaging in a worldview-sensitive and integrative negotiation process through the help of external third party intermediaries or *worldview translators*. To conclude this response essay, therefore, the reader is provided in the table below a new theory of change that incorporates the essential mediation or negotiation elements described by Randolph’s (2016) *The psychology of conflict: Mediating in a diverse world*.

The table below summarizes the step by step practice theory of change that this essay recommends. In line with Randolph (2016), the recommended practice theory of change recognizes the psychological perspective of worldview conflict and argues that the feelings and values of the Davidians need to be acknowledged and validated, and issues concerning trust or self-esteem should be addressed. Also, there is need to create a psychological and safe physical space through a ceasefire; followed by a worldview intermediary-led negotiation that incorporates the practice of active and reflective listening.

Recommended Practice Theory of Change for the Waco Standoff Case

Diagnosis/Problem Framing	Intervention Framing & Goals	Methods	How Change Happens	Intended Effects
<p>Unconventional religious / sectarian conflict situation.</p> <p>Conflict environment and stakeholders have a different set of laws and constitution, worldviews, language and reality that are based on the apocalyptic, and oriented toward endism, beliefs.</p> <p>Group feelings of rejection, persecution, and humiliation by the kingdom of the world leading to the belief in the fulfillment of the apocalypse.</p> <p>Branch Davidians and their prophet feeling misunderstood and disrespected.</p>	<p>Use unconventional and non-militarized intervention and negotiation.</p> <p>Develop an open mind to learn and understand the worldview and reality of the Branch Davidians.</p> <p>Create a psychological and safe & trusting physical space.</p> <p>Reinject and rebuild trust on the part of the Davidians as well as translate their reality.</p>	<p>Engage in a worldview-sensitive and integrative negotiation process.</p> <p>Active and reflective listening.</p> <p>Initiate a ceasefire.</p> <p>Acknowledge and validate the Davidians’ reality and the status of their leader, David Koresh.</p>	<p>Third party intermediaries or worldview translators translate the Davidians worldview/reality as well as communicate the FBI worldviewing and reality to the Davidians in the language that each group understands.</p> <p>Paraphrasing leads to clarity and understanding.</p> <p>Inquiry or open-ended questions leads to non-judgmental conversation.</p> <p>Acknowledgement helps in validating the underlying emotions and restoring self-esteem and trust.</p>	<p>Branch Davidians remain who they are and come out with their gods to the mediation table.</p> <p>Negotiation impasse or deadlock is overcome and unstuck.</p> <p>Lives are saved and properties are not destroyed.</p>

In conclusion, I invite the law enforcement and their higher authorities to pay attention to Horowitz’s (2000) assertion that “efforts to ameliorate conflict ‘must be preceded by an understanding’ of the drivers, dynamics and sources of that conflict. ‘Altogether too many policy prescriptions for ethnic harmony have been dispensed without benefit of careful diagnosis’” (as cited in Ugorji, 2016, para. 9). For this reason, and as I have stated before in another paper, this response essay recommends “a *paradigm shift* in the development of policies that are aimed at managing, resolving and preventing conflicts with ethno-religious issues and components.

This *paradigm shift* could be explained from two perspectives: first, *from retributive policy to restorative justice*, and second, *from coercive policy to mediation and dialogue*” (Ugorji, 2016, para. 76). The Waco standoff case confirms that using militarized intervention and tactics to manage religiously motivated or faith-based conflict will rather exacerbate the conflict and cause unnecessary deaths, destruction of property and generational pain, trauma and enmity. There is need for a worldview-sensitive dispute resolution system, and integrative negotiation and mediation processes.

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