

Process Paper

The Branch Davidians illustrate the theme of rights and responsibilities through the government's handling of the group, including respecting religious freedoms while enforcing justice and protecting public safety. The Branch Davidians, a new-age religious group, challenged the government's role in determining limits of religious freedoms and the necessity of justice. I chose this topic after a discussion I had with my peers on whether Jehovah Witnesses were a cult. I argued that they are simply a religion removed from mainstream society, sparking my interest in "cultish" religions.

After I established my topic, I used encyclopedias and databases like Gale and JSTOR to identify key names and events related to the Branch Davidians. I gained broad knowledge on the topic that I used to begin identifying the chronology of events. Later on, as I delved further into the specifics of the ideology behind the religion, where I faced a problem due to my limited biblical knowledge. To overcome this, I watched a two-hour YouTube video on the synopsis of the Bible, and looked up Biblical references constantly during my research. To better understand the first person accounts of those around who witnessed the Branch Davidian from an outsider point of view, I interviewed Doctor William Pitts, an expert in the Branch Davidian history who is a professor at Baylor University. Dr. Pitt's expertise allowed me to understand the historical significance of the Branch Davidians, and how their outreach held the media and Americas attention.

In order to tell the story of the Branch Davidians, I built a website, using Canva to help organize and create the visuals. Furthermore each title image used photos from the section to help introduce what was covered in the section.

How does the Branch Davidians as a case study connect to the question of the difference and similarities between religions and cults? The Branch Davidians, a religious sect originating from the Seventh-Day Adventists, illustrates the closely knitted relationship between religions and cults, ultimately leading to the Branch Davidians' tragic end. The Branch Davidians ended in spring 1993, after a large fire consumed their compound, showcasing the importance of government control and power within society. Again, through the harmful ends met in Waco, one can assume that the only explanation is that the group was labeled as a cult, signifying the power of words. The lasting impact of Waco highlights the importance of balance between religious freedoms, public perception, and government intervention.

The events of Waco forever shaped how the government operates, including reforms in organizations such as the ATF and the FBI. Furthermore, following the Waco siege, one of the largest terrorist attacks, the Oklahoma City bombing, occurred due to Timothy McVeigh's retaliation against the federal government, where McVeigh cited government overreach during the Waco Siege as a key motive.

Word Count: 468