

Great Lives from History

Notorious Lives

JOSEPH McCARTHY

U.S. senator from Wisconsin (1947-1957)

BORN: November 14, 1908; Grand Chute, near Appleton, Wisconsin

DIED: May 2, 1957; Bethesda, Maryland

ALSO KNOWN AS: Joe McCarthy; Tail Gunner Joe; Joseph Raymond McCarthy (full name)

CAUSE OF NOTORIETY: McCarthy's investigation of officials and celebrities for alleged Communist activities symbolized Cold War anticommunist hysteria and set a precedent for political activity emphasizing personal destruction of one's opponents.

ACTIVE: 1950-1954

LOCALE: Washington, D.C.

EARLY LIFE

At an early age, Joseph McCarthy (mihk-KAHR-thee) exhibited intelligence, ambition, and a penchant for risk-taking. Born the fifth of nine children on his family's farm near Green Bay, Wisconsin, McCarthy quit high school to become a farmer and grocer, returned at age twenty to earn his diploma in a year, and went on to receive undergraduate and law degrees from Marquette University while working to cover his expenses. His early career as an attorney was largely unsuccessful, prompting him to supplement his earnings through gambling and politics. He also earned a reputation for heavy drinking, which would follow him for the remainder of his life.

POLITICAL CAREER

In 1939, McCarthy was elected to his first political office, a circuit court judgeship, after switching from the Democratic to the Republican Party and receiving a reprimand from the Wisconsin Supreme Court for making false claims about his opponent during the campaign. He later served in the Marine Corps during World War II as an aerial photographer and tail gunner, earning a decoration for flying with an injury that some of his fellow soldiers claimed was not received in combat. Following the war, McCarthy ran a successful campaign

for the United States Senate by emphasizing his combat service.

During his first term in the Senate, McCarthy developed a reputation as an affable but mediocre legislator with tendencies toward drunkenness and questionable financial dealings. Seeking to divert attention from his personal conduct, McCarthy seized upon growing anti-Communist sentiments inspired by growing tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. He volunteered to join his fellow Republican legislators on the campaign trail in early 1950 and was assigned a series of obscure speaking engagements, beginning with an address before a women's club in Wheeling, West Virginia, on February 9. A recording of his speech by a local radio station was lost, but witnesses claim that McCarthy held aloft a piece of paper that he claimed contained the names of 205 Communist operatives within the State Department. McCarthy altered these figures in subsequent speeches, raising and lowering the number of alleged operatives to suit his audience.

McCarthy's claims were unverifiable, yet many Americans, fearing the rise of the Soviet Union and international communism, accepted them without question.



Joseph McCarthy. (Library of Congress)

“HAVE YOU NO SENSE OF DECENCY?”

In 1954, Senator Joseph McCarthy began to attack the U.S. Army with charges of inadequate security at a top-secret Army facility. The Army hired Boston lawyer Joseph Welch to represent it at the congressional hearings, and on June 9, 1954, McCarthy charged one of Welch’s staff with having an association with a Communist organization. The following interchange was televised and viewed by millions of Americans:

McCARTHY: Mr. Chairman, may I say that Mr. Welch talks about this being cruel and reckless. He was just baiting. He has been baiting Mr. Cohn [McCarthy’s aide Roy Cohn] here for hours, requesting that Mr. Cohn before sundown get out of any department of the government anyone who is serving the Communist cause. Now, I just give this man’s [Welch’s staff attorney] record and I want to say, Mr. Welch, that it had been labeled long before he became a member, as early as 1944—

WELCH: Senator, may we not drop this? We know he belonged to the Lawyers’ Guild.

McCARTHY: Let me finish . . .

WELCH: You’ve done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?

McCARTHY: I know this hurts you, Mr. Welch.

WELCH: I’ll say it hurts!

McCARTHY: Mr. Chairman, as point of personal privilege, I’d like to finish this.

WELCH: Senator, I think it hurts you, too, sir.

McCARTHY: I’d like to finish this. I know Mr. Cohn would rather not have me go into this. I intend to, however, and Mr. Welch talks about any “sense of decency.” I have heard you and everyone else talk so much about laying the truth upon the table. But when I heard the completely phony Mr. Welch, I’ve been listening now for a long time, he’s saying, now “before sundown” you must get these people “out of government.” So I just want you to have it very clear, very clear that you were not so serious about that when you tried to recommend this man for this Committee.

WELCH: Mr. McCarthy, I will not discuss this further with you. You have sat within six feet of me and could ask—could have asked me about Fred Fisher. You have seen fit to bring it out, and if there is a God in heaven, it will do neither you nor your cause any good. I will not discuss it further. I will not ask, Mr. Cohn, any more witnesses. You, Mr. Chairman, may, if you will, call the next witness.

Source: United States Senate, transcripts of the McCarthy-Army hearings.

His notoriety and influence continued to increase as his crusade intensified; several Democratic senators who questioned his claims were defeated in the 1950 election, and McCarthy’s allegations that Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson was “soft” on communism led to the election of Dwight D. Eisenhower to the presidency in 1952.

McCarthy also won reelection that year and was made

chairman of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Government Operations, a position that he used to broaden his investigation into alleged Communist activity in the U.S. government. He proceeded to target the Republican leadership that he had helped elect, calling numerous government employees to testify before his committee and subjecting them to hostile, intrusive questioning that was often based upon fabricated, erroneous, or nonexistent evidence. Those who refused to cooperate saw their reputations, careers, and lives destroyed as McCarthy leaked derogatory information about them to employers and the media.

He questioned the patriotism of even his mildest critics, creating an atmosphere of personal destruction and intimidation that rendered him virtually untouchable. Accused of assaulting journalist Drew Pearson in a congressional restroom, McCarthy defiantly admitted to the assault; the act went unpunished. Many Americans viewed McCarthy as a hero, and McCarthyism, as the crusade against communism came to be called, as a defense of the “American way” against an evil foe. To a growing minority, however, McCarthy and his tactics were the manifestation of an anti-American disregard for due process, civil liberties, and personal dignity.

DECLINE

McCarthy’s fortunes were soon reversed as he increasingly attacked his fellow Republicans, insinuating that even Eisenhower was soft on communism. When McCarthy’s investigation of the U.S. Army in 1954 led to televised hearings, during which McCarthy was revealed to have sought favors for a former staff member, the American public witnessed firsthand the inner workings of McCarthyism, and many were alarmed at the heavy-handed tactics of McCarthy and his chief counsel, Roy Marcus Cohn. Castigated in a verbal exchange with

Army counsel Joseph Welch, McCarthy appeared, defeated and exposed as a fraud, before a national television audience. The Senate voted to censure him in December, 1954, and he spent the remainder of his Senate career in obscurity. He died at Bethesda Naval Hospital in 1957 of liver failure precipitated by years of heavy drinking.

IMPACT

Just as his crusade against communism had brought his party to power in the early 1950's, the political demise of Joseph McCarthy contributed to Republican losses in Congress in the 1954 elections. Yet the legacy of McCarthyism continued to influence American politics and government long after the death of McCarthy. His investigations purged numerous experts on communism and communist countries from the United States government, affecting American foreign policy for decades and prompting some historians to establish links between McCarthyism and the defeat of U.S. forces in the Vietnam War. His synthesis of old-fashioned demagoguery and the fledgling medium of broadcast television created a new style of politics that emphasized skilled manipulation of information, assaults upon the patriotism and character of opponents, and appeals to emotion.

JAMES W. MCCORD, JR.**American government official and burglar**

BORN: January 26, 1824; Waurika, Oklahoma

ALSO KNOWN AS: James Walter McCord, Jr. (full name)

MAJOR OFFENSES: Conspiracy, burglary, and wiretapping

ACTIVE: 1972

LOCALE: Washington, D.C.

SENTENCE: Eighteen months' imprisonment

EARLY LIFE

James W. McCord (muh-KORD), Jr., was born in Waurika, Oklahoma, on January 26, 1924, but spent most of his youth in Texas. He went to Baylor University. After obtaining a degree from George Washington University, he worked for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) during World War II. He is widely believed to have been in counterintelligence operations, fighting German spies in the United States. He also served for a

Declassified evidence indicates that a small number of the government employees whom McCarthy investigated were indeed Communist operatives. The number, however, was sufficiently small to raise questions about the propriety and competence of his investigations.

FURTHER READING

Fried, Albert, ed. *McCarthyism, the Great American Red Scare: A Documentary History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. Collection of documents pertaining to McCarthyism from the late 1940's through the mid-1960's.

Ranville, Michael. *To Strike at a King: The Turning Point in the McCarthy Witch Hunts*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Momentum Books, 1997. Story of journalist Edward R. Murrow's defense of an Air Force officer targeted by McCarthy.

Reeves, Thomas C. *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography*. Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1997. A lengthy, detailed, and scholarly biography of McCarthy.

—Michael H. Burchett

SEE ALSO: Whittaker Chambers; Roy Cohn; Alger Hiss; J. Edgar Hoover.

time in the Army Air Force. In peacetime he returned to the FBI for a while before transferring to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1951, working in physical security. After he left the CIA in 1970, he taught security courses and started his own security firm, McCord Associates. In 1972 he became security director for the Committee to Re-elect the President (CRP).

THE WATERGATE BREAK-IN

McCord burst onto the public scene on June 17, 1972, when he and four other men were caught breaking into the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in the posh Watergate complex, across the Potomac River from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. They had come early in the morning to reposition hidden microphones ("bugs") and photograph sensitive documents, and had expected to find no one at such an hour. Instead, at 2:30 A.M. their sloppy taping of

locks attracted the attention of a building security guard, who called the police.

When they were arrested, all five men gave false names. The police noted that they neither looked nor acted like typical burglars. All were dressed in suits and ties. They wore surgical gloves to prevent their leaving fingerprints. Not only were they carrying cameras, film, and electronic spying equipment, but they also were carrying large amounts of cash, including bills with sequential serial numbers.

The burglary might have been handled routinely, had *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein not been covering the case. While researching McCord's background, the journalists discovered that he was also security coordinator for the Committee to Reelect the President (CRP), Richard M. Nixon's reelection campaign. From there, they meticulously followed leads that ultimately traced the entire network of corruption in CRP to the Oval Office.

LEGAL ACTION AND OUTCOME

Judge John Sirica found McCord guilty on eight counts of conspiracy, burglary, and wiretapping but suggested that his decades-long sentence could be reduced if he were to cooperate fully with the investigation into corruption in the White House. McCord then wrote a letter detailing the political pressures that were brought to bear by the Nixon administration to get its operatives to maintain their silence. He also accused administration officials of perjury, leading to a wave of confessions that rocked the administration. In return, he served only eighteen months in prison.

After his release, McCord wrote and published a memoir, *A Piece of Tape: The Watergate Story* (1974). He also went to work for the University of Michigan sports boosters and soon got in trouble for giving money from an illegal gambling operation to players.

IMPACT

The Watergate burglary led to an investigation that revealed systematic corruption and wrongdoing in the Nixon administration and ultimately brought to an end the presidency of Richard M. Nixon, the only president of the United States to have resigned from office. As a result of the name Watergate becoming so inextricably linked with the scandal, "-gate" has become a common suffix meaning "political scandal," as in Irangate, Iraqgate, Monicagate, and Zippergate. Even other countries have picked up "-gate" as a suffix for naming political scandals.

FURTHER READING

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A reissue of the best-known book on the Watergate investigation, by the reporters who broke the story.

Feinberg, Barbara Silberdick. *Watergate: Scandal in the White House*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1990. A brief history of the Watergate scandal.

Kutler, Stanley I. *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990. Provides a comprehensive history of the Watergate scandal.

McCord, James W., Jr. *A Piece of Tape: The Watergate Story, Fact and Fiction*. Rockville, Md.: Washington Media Services, 1974. McCord's memoir.

Schudson, Michael. *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past*. New York: Basic Books, 1992. Retrospective examination of Watergate in the popular memory.

—Leigh Husband Kimmel

SEE ALSO: Charles W. Colson; John D. Ehrlichman; H. R. Haldeman; E. Howard Hunt; G. Gordon Liddy; John Mitchell; Richard Nixon.

AIMEE SEMPLE MCPHERSON

American evangelist

BORN: October 9, 1890; Salford, near Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada

DIED: September 27, 1944; Oakland, California

ALSO KNOWN AS: Aimee Elizabeth Kennedy (birth name); Sister Aimee; Sister

CAUSE OF NOTORIETY: At the peak of her popularity, McPherson scandalized her base when she ran away with her lover, leaving everyone to think she had drowned; she explained her disappearance with a story of being kidnapped for ransom.

ACTIVE: 1926

LOCALE: Canada, California

EARLY LIFE

Aimee Semple McPherson (AY-mee SEHM-puhl muk-FURS-uhn) was the only child of Mildred Ona Pearce, a Salvation Army soldier, and James Morgan Kennedy, a farmer and devout Methodist. Mildred, known as Minnie, was hired to nurse James Kennedy's first wife, Elizabeth. After Elizabeth's death, Kennedy married the fifteen-year-old Minnie. She became a sergeant major in the Salvation Army and found joy in her service. She had taught her young daughter, Aimee, Scripture by the time she was five, considering the child a second opportunity to fulfill her own ambitions.

In December, 1907, Aimee met her first husband, Robert James Semple, a Pentecostal missionary, at a revival meeting. She converted to Pentecostalism, and after the couple married in August, 1908, they embarked on an evangelical tour of Europe and China. In Hong Kong they both contracted malaria, from which Robert died in August, 1910. Aimee, however, recovered, and her daughter, Roberta Star Semple, was born a month later. After returning to the United States with her baby, Aimee joined her mother in working for the Salvation Army. Accountant Harold Stewart McPherson became Aimee's second husband; their son, Rolf Potter Kennedy McPherson, was born in March, 1913.

RELIGIOUS CAREER

Soon after her son was born, McPherson had a near-death experience that renewed her dedication to full-time ministry. With her two children, she left her husband in 1915 and joined

her mother in Canada. At a camp meeting the day after her arrival, she prayed, spoke in tongues, and found her life's work. She soon became well known as an evangelist, receiving invitations to preach in the United States and abroad. After a successful tour through the American South in her "Gospel Car" with religious slogans painted on the sides, McPherson finally settled with her mother and children in Los Angeles and founded the Foursquare Gospel Church. The large dome built to house the church, the Angelus Temple, was finished in 1923. McPherson's flamboyance and dramatic gifts drew crowds of converts and admirers. Her husband initially followed her in her religious travels but soon filed for divorce, which was granted in 1921.

In January, 1924, Sister Aimee, as she was then known, marked the temple's first anniversary by throwing a party for fifty-five hundred people, where she de-



Aimee Semple McPherson. (Library of Congress)

FAITH AND RESOLUTION

When Aimee Semple McPherson's mother announced to a Foursquare Church congregation that her daughter was missing and feared drowned while swimming, many refused to believe it. According to a May 20, 1926, article in the *Los Angeles Times*, hundreds gathered on the beach where McPherson was last seen.

A faith as strong and deep as the ocean they watch hour after hour with aching eyes holds them there.

"She can't be dead. She can't be dead. . . ."

"God wouldn't let her die. She was too noble. Her work was too great. Her mission was not ended. She can't be dead. . . ."

The elements of tragedy and hysteria are there. They flare occasionally as some woman breaks under the vigil and sobs. Otherwise the crowd remains fixed and motionless. Few words are exchanged. . . .

But one time during the afternoon yesterday did the crowd change its position. In some manner word was spread about that promptly at 2:30 P.M. Mrs. McPherson would arise from the sea and speak to her followers. The appointed time came and many arose to look further out to sea. But it passed without the miracle which some of her followers had taken for granted.

Indeed, the story was a sensation nationwide. When McPherson surfaced five weeks later, followers and nonfollowers alike were eager to accept her story of abduction. She claimed that two men and a woman had rendered her unconscious with chloroform and spirited her away to an adobe hut in Mexico, hoping to ransom her.

Everyone loved the tale, the press above all. When inconsistencies cropped up, the scent of scandal made it even more titillating: No hut was found by police, McPherson showed no signs of the ordeal, and there was evidence that she had been in hotels with Kenneth Ormiston during the kidnap period, a man whose wife had already accused him of having an affair with McPherson.

McPherson simply ignored accusations and criticism while reveling in the publicity. "That's my story, and I'm sticking to it," she said. Legal action against her was eventually dropped, and her followers remained as faithful as ever. The Foursquare Church prospered. By 2006, its Web site claimed fifty thousand branch churches worldwide and a membership of more than five million.

Source: "Faithful Cling to Waning Hope," *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1926.

livered sermons on salvation, baptism, divine healing, and the Second Coming. Also in that year, McPherson became a pioneer in the new field of evangelical broadcasting and hired radio engineer Kenneth G. Ormiston to build a studio on the temple's third floor. Her station, KFSG, opened on February 6, 1924. She was the first woman to be granted a broadcast license by the Federal Communications Commission.

DISAPPEARANCE

On Tuesday, May 18, 1926, a crowd assembled in the Angelus Temple to watch McPherson's slide show of a recent trip to the Holy Land. Minnie Kennedy appeared in her daughter's stead to lead singing and narrate the show. At the end of the service, Kennedy officially announced that McPherson was missing and presumed drowned. The evangelist had gone to Ocean Beach with her secretary to swim earlier that day. For days, reporters and photographers vied with police to solve the mystery, and Kennedy preached to overflow crowds.

Ormiston, the engineer for KFSG, also disappeared around this time, but the connection went unobserved. A few months later, Kennedy received a ransom note signed "the Avengers," demanding \$500,000 for McPherson's return. Los Angeles district attorney Asa Keyes investigated the case. Meanwhile, Ormiston fell under suspicion, but he arrived unexpectedly at temple headquarters on May 27 and professed no knowledge of McPherson's whereabouts.

On June 23, McPherson showed up in Douglas, Arizona, claiming she had been kidnapped, held in a shack in Agua Prieta, Mexico, tortured, and drugged. She had finally escaped, she said, and walked through the desert. Reporters arrived from all over the United States, and McPherson gave them interviews, knowing they would get out her story. Suspicion arose, however, and when sheriffs, police, and ranch hands converged in Agua Prieta to find the shack, they searched in vain.

A grand jury met in the summer of 1926, reviewed testimony, and charged McPherson and her mother with ob-

struction of justice. In January, 1927, District Attorney Keyes dropped all charges, citing lack of evidence. In 1931, McPherson married again, to actor and musician David Hutton; they divorced in March, 1934. During the Depression, McPherson threw her energies into creating soup kitchens and free health care clinics. In September of 1944, she died of an overdose of prescription drugs, presumed an accident.

IMPACT

Aimee Semple McPherson thrived in the cultural ebullience of the 1920's and became a symbol of that era, which adored celebrity, pageantry, and Protestantism. She had an instinctive sense of how to use the media, recognizing the possibilities of radio at a time when it was rapidly expanding, and set a precedent for the "televangelists" who now flood the airwaves. Vaudeville and Hollywood techniques helped spread her message. She practiced generic evangelical Christianity, holding credentials in such divergent branches as Assembly of God, Methodism, and Baptism. The Pentecostal Church she established did not shut out other denominations but united them. She rejected sectarianism and preached American revival ethics based on biblical Christianity mixed with a strong sense of patriotism.

McPherson's personal problems reflect women's

struggle to find an outlet for their talents and ambitions. Her internal conflicts, troubled marriages, fierce devotion to her children, and drive for perfection reflect the stresses of a woman longing for personal fulfillment and determined to create a public presence. She exemplified many of the problems that would come to dominate public attention fifty years later, when American women in vast numbers rejected roles as housewives to find satisfaction in the public arena.

FURTHER READING

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Blumhofer, Edith L. *Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody's Sister*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1993. A carefully researched and detailed biography of the life of McPherson. Includes articles from her monthly magazine, *Bridal Call*.

Epstein, Daniel Mark. *Sister Aimee: The Life of Aimee Semple McPherson*. Florida: Harcourt Brace, 1993. An objective biography of McPherson.

—Sheila Golburgh Johnson

SEE ALSO: Jim Bakker.

TIMOTHY McVEIGH

American terrorist

BORN: April 28, 1968; Pendleton, New York

DIED: June 11, 2001; Terre Haute, Indiana

ALSO KNOWN AS: Timothy James McVeigh (full name)

MAJOR OFFENSE: Oklahoma City bombing

ACTIVE: April 19, 1995

LOCALE: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

SENTENCE: Death by lethal injection; executed June 11, 2001

EARLY LIFE

Timothy James McVeigh (mihk-VAY) was born on April 28, 1968, in Pendleton, New York, a small city near Buffalo. His parents were Bill, a worker at a local radiator plant, and Mickey McVeigh. Timothy was the middle sibling between two sisters.

His youth was largely uneventful except for the bullying he experienced in high school and the marital prob-

lems he witnessed between his parents, which included several separations. The marriage ended for good in 1986, a few months before McVeigh graduated from high school, when the couple divorced.

Once out of high school, McVeigh entered a local college but soon dropped out. Eventually, he became a security guard, a job that in part reflected his interest in guns, which had been sparked as a child through target shooting with his grandfather. McVeigh also became drawn to the extreme Right during this period. For example, he read Andrew Macdonald's *The Turner Diaries* (1980), a fictional account of an attack on a federal government building by a white supremacist.

McVeigh finally appeared to settle on a career in 1988 when he joined the United States Army. Eventually, he rose to the position of sergeant in the First Infantry Division and the operator of the main gun on a Bradley Fighting Vehicle. He saw combat in the 1991 Persian

Gulf War and would later mention to his biographers the traumatic impact of combat on him, particularly when he killed an Iraqi soldier. His shooting prowess was celebrated, however, and he was encouraged by the Army to audition for the Green Berets. McVeigh quickly found himself overwhelmed in this effort. He ended his attempt to join the Green Berets and soon quit the Army as well.

CRIMINAL CAREER

Back in the United States, McVeigh found it hard to blend back into civilian life and spent time with former military friends, including his chief accomplice for the Oklahoma City bombing, Terry Nichols. McVeigh also became increasingly radicalized over what he perceived as the excessive interference in everyday life by the U.S. government. He soon was selling antigovernment material at different venues and even traveled to Waco, Texas, to protest the U.S. government’s 1993 confrontation with Branch Davidian cult. According to McVeigh, the final straw in his path toward his crime came with the bloody April 19, 1993, ending of the standoff at Waco. His disenchantment with the U.S. government arising out of that event would lead him to conduct an act of terrorism two years later, on the anniversary of its ending.

On that date in 1995, McVeigh drove a rental truck loaded with a massive bomb made primarily out of fertilizer to the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. He had selected the federal government building for the ease of access to it and because of the publicity images the attack would generate. At 9:02 A.M., the bomb exploded, killing 168 people, including 19 children. It was the worst terrorist attack on American territory up to that time.

The hunt quickly began for those responsible. McVeigh made little effort to escape capture. His name was

quickly linked to the renting of the truck. By then he was already in custody, having been arrested fleeing the explosion because his car did not have a rear license plate on it. In due course, an accomplice, Nichols, who had helped him build the bomb, was also arrested, as was another man who had advance knowledge of the crime.

MCVEIGH’S REASONS

On April 27, 2001, Timothy McVeigh wrote a letter of explanation to several media figures and news outlets, which reads in part:

MCVEIGH: I chose to bomb a federal building because such an action served more purposes than other options. Foremost, the bombing was a retaliatory strike; a counter attack, for the cumulative raids (and subsequent violence and damage) that federal agents had participated in over the preceding years (including, but not limited to, Waco). From the formation of such units as the FBI’s “Hostage Rescue” and other assault teams amongst federal agencies during the ’80’s; culminating in the Waco incident, federal actions grew increasingly militaristic and violent, to the point where at Waco, our government—like the Chinese—was deploying tanks against its own citizens.

Knowledge of these multiple and ever-more aggressive raids across the country constituted an identifiable pattern of conduct within and by the federal government and amongst its various agencies. For all intents and purposes, federal agents had become “soldiers” . . . and they were escalating their behavior. Therefore, this bombing was also meant as a pre-emptive (or pro-active) strike against these forces and their command and control centers within the federal building. When an aggressor force continually launches attacks from a particular base of operation, it is sound military strategy to take the fight to the enemy.

Bombing the Murrah Federal Building was morally and strategically equivalent to the U.S. hitting a government building in Serbia, Iraq, or other nations. . . . From this perspective, what occurred in Oklahoma City was no different than what Americans rain on the heads of others all the time, and subsequently, my mindset was and is one of clinical detachment.

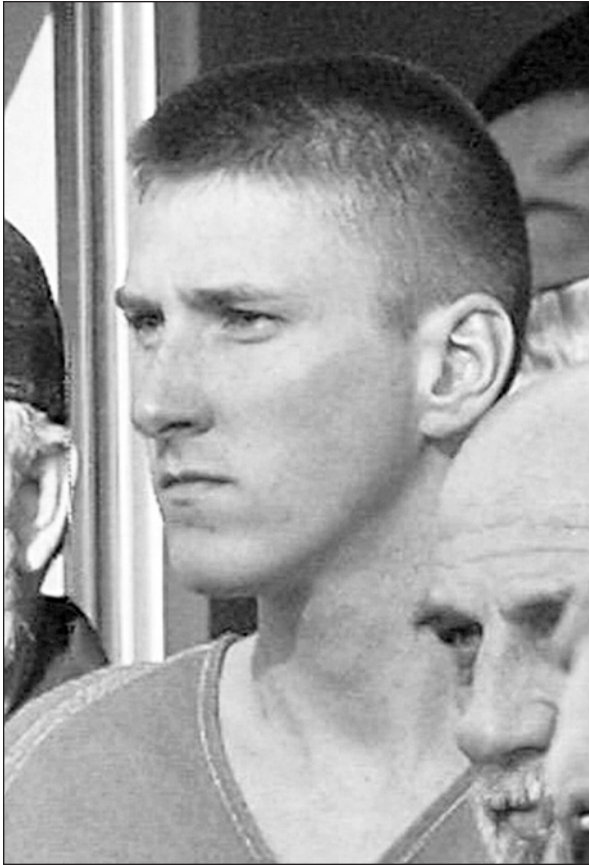
Fox News reporter Rita Cosby interviewed McVeigh regarding his motives; here is his reply to two of her questions:

COSBY: What were some other options considered besides bombing?

MCVEIGH: I waited two years from “Waco” for non-violent “checks and balances” built into our system to correct the abuse of power we were seeing in federal actions against citizens. . . . When violent action thus became an option, I considered, among other things, a campaign of individual assassination, with “eligible” targets to include: Federal Judge Walter Smith (Waco trial); Lon Horiuchi (FBI sniper at Ruby Ridge); and Janet Reno (making her accept “full responsibility” in deed, not just word).

COSBY: Lessons?

MCVEIGH: Many foreign nations and peoples hate Americans for the very reasons most Americans loathe me. Think about that.



Timothy McVeigh. (AP/Wide World Photos)

LEGAL ACTION AND OUTCOME

On April 24, 1997, McVeigh's trial in federal court began. By early June he had been convicted and sentenced to death by lethal injection. He challenged the decision, but a federal court rejected his appeal in 2000, and McVeigh announced he would accept his fate. Eventually, the date for his execution at the federal prison at Terre Haute, Indiana, was set for May 16. Five days before, Attorney General John Ashcroft stayed the execution for a month because the Federal Bureau of Investiga-

tion had discovered documents related to the case that had not been shared with McVeigh's defense lawyers. In the end, a court decided that the new evidence was not significant and refused further blocks on the execution. On June 11, 2001, McVeigh became the first federal prisoner to be executed in thirty-eight years.

IMPACT

At the time of the Oklahoma bombing, the American public largely associated terrorism with foreign perpetrators, especially Middle Easterners. The fact that the worst terrorist attack on American territory had been carried out by an American citizen and military veteran made the event doubly shocking at the time. It prompted a backlash against the American far Right and increased powers for American police forces to combat domestic terrorism. Questions remain about whether others were involved beyond those, including Timothy McVeigh, who were convicted of the crime.

FURTHER READING

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- Steve Hewitt

SEE ALSO: Theodore Kaczynski; David Koresh; Terry Nichols; Eric Rudolph; J. B. Stoner; Randy Weaver.