

Writer Denies Book Inspired McVeigh: But Prosecutors Peg Case to Novel Depicting 'Patriot' Bombing



The Washington Times (Washington, DC)
April 27, 1997 | Richardson, Valerie

DENVER - The author of an underground, anti-government novel is challenging the government's claim that his book, "The Turner Diaries," provided Timothy McVeigh with the blueprint for the Oklahoma City bombing.

William Pierce, who wrote "The Turner Diaries" 19 years ago under the pen name Andrew Macdonald, told The Washington Times the bombing depicted in the book bears little resemblance to the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

"Their argument is full of holes, because about the only similarity is that a truck bomb was used in both cases," said Mr. Pierce. "Maybe the bomb in Oklahoma City came from a blueprint, but it could not have come from 'The Turner Diaries.' "

Mr. Pierce's remarks came the day after prosecutors made it clear the book would figure prominently in their prosecution of the 29-year-old Desert Storm veteran. In his opening statement to the jury Thursday, U.S. Attorney Joseph Hartzler said the book gave Mr. McVeigh the idea for the bombing and instructions for how to carry it out.

"Friends, acquaintances and family members of McVeigh will testify that he carried the book with him, gave copies to them, urged them to read this book," said Mr. Hartzler. "We will show you passages from the book, and you'll see how the bombing in the book served as a blueprint for McVeigh and for his planning and execution of the bombing in Oklahoma City."

He added that Mr. McVeigh believed in the book "like the Bible." A highlighted passage from the 211-page book was found in an envelope of clippings in the trunk of

Mr. McVeigh's car at the time of his arrest.

In "The Turner Diaries," a group of patriotic, anti-government rebels constructs an ammonium-nitrate-and-fuel-oil bomb inside a delivery truck and detonates it in the underground parking lot of the J. Edgar Hoover Building in Washington, killing about 700 people.

Unlike the Oklahoma City bomber, however, the rebels were engaged in an ongoing civil war against the federal government provoked by an FBI campaign of mass citizen arrests, said Mr. Pierce. Their primary aim was not to kill innocent people, but to destroy an FBI computer designed to implement an internal passport system, he said.

The bomb used in Oklahoma City was also "much more sophisticated" than the one he described in his book, said Mr. Pierce.

Whereas Mr. Hartzler argued that Mr. McVeigh hoped the bombing would "shake up America and cause ordinary citizens, he thought, to engage in a violent revolution against their democratically elected government," Mr. Pierce said the bombing in the book was aimed only at destroying a specific target.

"The motive for the bombing of FBI headquarters is spelled out: It wasn't to wake anybody up or send a message but was to destroy a bank of computers," said Mr. Pierce. "I don't know whether the prosecutor is careless or is basing his report on what he read in the newspaper, in which case he's going to leave himself open to counterattack."

Indeed, the prosecution's interpretation of "The Turner Diaries" has already been challenged by defense attorney Stephen Jones. In his opening statement, Mr. Jones pointed to a half-dozen differences between the Oklahoma City bombing and the one depicted in the book.

Christopher Mueller, an evidence-and-procedure professor at the University of Colorado School of Law at Boulder, said Mr. Jones did a convincing job of distinguishing the two but that it may not matter to the jury.

"He's doing as much as he can to defuse this thing," said Mr. Mueller. "[But] I don't think the government has to show the crime and the book are parallel in great detail to show that this book represents that this is an appropriate response to governmental authority."

Mr. Mueller had no doubt that the book could prove crucial to the prosecution's case.

"Showing ideology and motive can overcome doubts that might arise from gaps in circumstantial proof," he said. "In that sense, 'The Turner Diaries' could be very important to the prosecution's case."

The book's portrayal of a tyrannical government and courageous patriots who fight it has made it a favorite among patriot and militia groups. Written as a newspaper serial from 1975 to 1978, the story was published by Mr. Pierce as a book at the request of readers.

A small West Virginia publishing outfit released the book shortly thereafter, and it sold 185,000 copies, mainly through gun shows and other underground venues. After the bombing, however, Barricade Books in New York picked up the rights to the novel and has sold almost 50,000 copies in the past year, said Barricade President Lyle Stuart.

Unlike Mr. Pierce, he believes the book was the inspiration for the bombing. On the cover of the latest edition, in fact, is a message printed in red letters: "This book contains racist propaganda. The FBI said it was the blueprint for the Oklahoma City bombing. Many would like it banned. It is being published to alert and warn America."

"It's very obvious he [the bomber] used it as his blueprint," said Mr. Stuart, a well-known First Amendment activist who also publishes "The Anarchist's Cookbook."

"There's no question in my mind that he [Mr. McVeigh] did it and he used the book."

Mr. Pierce's dispute with prosecutors notwithstanding, most observers expect to hear much more about "The Turner Diaries" before the trial is over.

"There's so much in both these presentations [by attorneys] on the subject that the book is clearly going to play a significant role in the trial," said Mr. Mueller.