

Entry by Catherine Wessinger in *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*, edited by Richard Landes (New York: Routledge, 2000), 39.

### **assaulted millennial groups**

An assaulted millennial group is assaulted by persons in mainstream society, because the members' religious views and actions are misunderstood, feared, and despised. The group is assaulted, because it is viewed as being dangerous to society. The group's members are not seen as practicing a valid religion worthy of respect. The group might be assaulted by law enforcement agents or civilians. Today, such a group is likely to be labeled with the pejorative term "cult." While some assaulted groups bear part of the responsibility for the violence that engulfs them, the primary responsibility for the violence rests upon those in mainstream society who assault them. Mormons in nineteenth-century America, the Lakota Sioux at Wounded Knee, the Israelites at Bulhoek, South Africa, and the Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas, are examples of assaulted millennial groups and movements.

Assaulted millennial groups often contribute to the violence that engulfs them by possessing arms. Also, the catastrophic millennial group's radical dualistic worldview in which stark good is seen as pitted against stark evil leads to an "us vs. them" perspective that contributes to conflictual situations. A millennial group's allegiance to God over civil authority increases the likelihood that the group will come into conflict with law enforcement agents.

The unnecessary assault of millennial groups can be avoided if law enforcement agents learn to recognize the power of religious commitment and how millennial beliefs can contribute to violent episodes. Law enforcement agents can learn to handle millennial groups more skillfully by consulting credentialed experts on religions.

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See also entries on catastrophic millennialism, progressive millennialism.

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