

BIOGRAPHY™



NAME

Janet Reno

BIRTH DATE

July 21, 1938

DEATH DATE

November 7,
2016

EDUCATION

Cornell
University,
Harvard Law
School

PLACE OF BIRTH

Miami, Florida

PLACE OF DEATH

Miami, Florida

Janet Reno Biography

(1938–2016)

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Janet Reno broke new ground in 1993 as the first woman to serve as U.S. Attorney General, serving under President Bill Clinton.

Who Was Janet Reno?

After attending Cornell University for her undergraduate degree and Harvard Law School in 1960, Janet Reno worked as an attorney in Florida for several years. Her work in Florida as an attorney and as county prosecutor from 1978 to 1993 established Reno's stern and liberal reputation. In 1993, she was appointed U.S. Attorney General by President Bill Clinton, becoming the first woman to serve as U.S. Attorney General. She soon became one of the most respected members of the Clinton administration, serving until 2001.

Early Life and Career

Janet Reno was born in Miami, Florida on July 21, 1938. After receiving her bachelor's degree in chemistry from Cornell University in 1960, she attended Harvard Law School. Reno graduated in 1963 and returned to her native Florida.

After several years in private practice, Reno ran for county prosecutor for Dade County in the late 1970s. She served in that position from 1978 to 1993, developing a reputation as tough, outspoken, unpretentious and liberal. Her cases varied greatly from political corruption to child abuse, which she skillfully handled. Reno was thrust into the national spotlight in 1993 when President [Bill Clinton](#) appointed her to become the first female U.S. attorney general.

First Female Attorney General of the United States

Waco Siege

During the early days of her tenure as U.S. attorney general, Reno faced one of her biggest challenges. In early 1993, cult leader [David Koresh](#) and his followers, known as the Branch Davidians, ended up in a 51-day standoff with agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Reno was called upon to help resolve the situation.

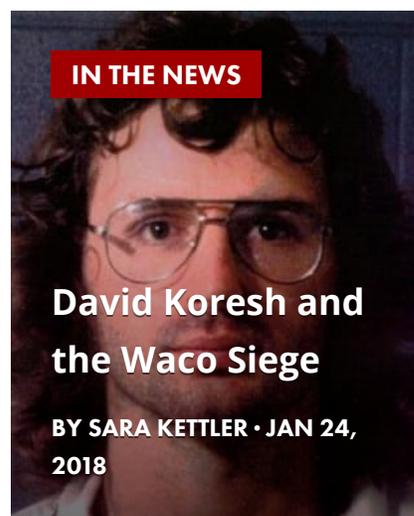
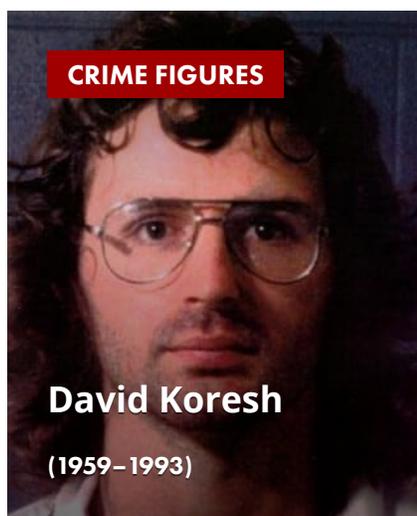
Reno approved the use of tear gas to flush the Branch Davidians from their compound outside of Waco, Texas. Unfortunately, it did not go as planned; a fire erupted and more than 70 Davidians (including Koresh and at least 20 children) died during the event. Reno publicly took responsibility for the outcome, saying on television: "I am accountable. The buck stops with me."

Accomplishments & Controversies

Despite this controversy, Reno became one of the most respected members of the Clinton administration in its first term, known for launching innovative programs designed to steer non-violent drug offenders away from jail and espousing the rights of criminal defendants.

Her readiness to nominate special prosecutors to investigate the president drew fire from the White House, but her political position was unassailable. Republicans attacked her handling of the campaign fund-raising scandal linked to the 1996 election, and there were some calls for her to step down. The anti-trust suit against Microsoft, Inc. in the late 1990s was the most publicized policy action of her tenure.

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Oklahoma City Bombing; Unabomber Ted Kaczynski

Reno was also in charge during the Justice Department's prosecution of several high-profile cases including the convictions of Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman for his role in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing; [Timothy McVeigh](#) and Terry Nichols for their deadly bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City; and [Ted Kaczynski](#), who became known as the "Unabomber" for a 17-year domestic terrorist campaign of mailing letter bombs.

"Speak out against the hatred, the bigotry and the violence in this land," [Reno said after the Oklahoma City bombing](#). "Most haters are cowards. When confronted, they back down. When we remain silent, they flourish."

Elián Gonzalez

At the latter part of her second term, Reno faced another high-profile crisis when six-year-old Cuban immigrant [Elián Gonzalez](#) was found floating on an inner tube off the coast of Fort Lauderdale in 1999. He was the only survivor of a group of Cuban migrants, including his mother, who died trying to gain entry to the United States. The young boy became the center of an international custody fight between his father in Cuba and his relatives in Florida. Reno became involved in negotiations and when they stalled in April 2000 she ordered a raid on the U.S. relatives' Miami home that would ultimately return the young refugee back to his father in Cuba. Her controversial intervention enraged the Cuban American community in Miami. "We have been to great lengths to resolve this case in the least disruptive manner possible," Reno said at a news conference after the raid.

"To be vilified for returning a boy to his father is not a pleasant circumstance," [Reno would later say about the criticism she received for her decision.](#)

Later Years and Death By Parkinson's

After leaving the post in 2001, Reno returned to Florida. She ran for governor in 2002, but failed to win the Democratic nomination. Since then, Reno largely stayed out of public life. She did, however, testify before the federal 9/11 commission in 2004 and voice her opposition to some of the nation's anti-terrorism policies through a legal brief in 2006.

Janet Reno died at her home in Miami-Dade County, Florida on November 7, 2016, at the age of 78. The cause of her death was complications from Parkinson's disease, which she had battled since 1995.

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