

On Ricard Jewell  
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Richard Jewell (1962-2007) was a security guard suspected, falsely it turned out, of setting off a bomb at the site of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta. At this writing, a new book has just come out about him and the case—Kent Alexander and Kevin Salwen, *The Suspect: An Olympic Bombing, the Media, and Richard Jewell, the Man Caught in the Middle* (Abrams Press, 2019). I remember the Jewell case well from back then, it was a huge national story for weeks, and I eagerly purchased a Kindle from Amazon the day the book came out. I'm sure not sorry I did.

I couldn't put *The Suspect* down. It gets a big positive recommendation from me. Superb story-telling by these two writers: when I experienced the need to know something, there it was. While it must have been tempting to do it, Alexander and Salwen didn't preach the standard simple story of the Richard Jewell case that has become the accepted wisdom: the villainous FBI and media did this poor sap in. They set out a vast array of particulars in a reader-friendly way and gave me room to come to my own conclusions; and, indeed, it became evident to me that there is not just one arguable way to look at what went on here.

The book superbly integrates the private and public dimensions of this episode. There's the story of Richard Jewell, as well as those of his mother and the FBI agents and journalists involved, and there is how law enforcement and the media operate and how an innocent man suspected of a crime can deal with that circumstance (I've decided that Jewell's response to the suspicions surrounding him compounded his problems).

Reading *The Suspect* brought me back to 1996, which is getting to be a long time ago, and triggered "that's what it was like back then, and that's what I was like back then" memories and ponderings. Not only did I have a good time reading this book, I came away clearer about matters big and small, social and personal

(including how I uncritically bought whatever uncomplicated, high-sounding notion the people talking at me—mainstream media, celebrities, academics--put out).

Reading this book prompted me to read a book about the person who really did plant the bomb, Eric Rudolph—Maryanne Vollers, *Lone Wolf: Eric Rudolph: Murder, Myth, and the Pursuit of an American Outlaw* (Harper/Collins, 2006). When I checked Amazon for the bibliographical information on the Rudolph to use in checking whether my local library had it in its collection (it did), the site listing for the book said I purchased a copy of it from Amazon when it came out in 2006. Reading it again this time, it hit me that I got so much more out of it this time. Of course, the book hasn't changed I have; I'm different, better. The Vollers book on Rudolph was well worth my time these last couple days, though it didn't evoke the "wow" response in me that the Alexander and Salwen book did.