

Conspiracy theories and real reporters

By Carla Binion

Online Journal Contributing Editor

June 17, 2002—Editor Bev Conover discussed cowardly Ivory Tower leftists, or liberals afraid to get their hands dirty by thoroughly investigating September 11 irregularities, in her June 4 article, “Has the Establishment Left become a handmaiden for the Republican Right?” Some of these leftists have recently bashed alleged “conspiracy theorists” for implying that events surrounding September 11 might be more than a series of intelligence slip-ups and coincidences.

Conover mentioned that David Corn of *The Nation* recently trashed Michael Ruppert, who publishes *From the Wilderness*. Corn said Ruppert is not a “real” reporter. Ruppert has published a timeline of events, some of which imply the CIA may have known about the September 11 attacks in advance and that our own government may have even been complicit.

Leftist Norman Solomon, someone I admired greatly until now, has also attacked Ruppert. Solomon says Ruppert is “expert at combining facts with unreliable reports and wild leaps of logic.”

Matthew Rothschild, editor of *The Progressive*, recently said he wouldn’t impute to Bush the callousness and criminality to stand down and allow September 11 to happen. Rothschild added that we do need a governmental commission to investigate September 11 irregularities, but that “we don’t need . . . crazy conspiracy theorists coming from the left.” Do leftists such as Rothschild, Corn and Solomon have amnesia regarding our nation’s (and particularly the CIA’s) recent history?

Our own CIA and various presidents have participated in, and/or knowingly allowed, the Watergate conspiracy, the Iran-contra conspiracy, the domestic spying operation dubbed MHCHAOS, the CIA guns-for-drugs trade conspiracy, and a long list of other attacks on the American people. Does that automatically mean the CIA also participated in a September 11 conspiracy? Of course not, and no one has suggested that the CIA’s previous conspiracies against the public constitute “proof” that the agency also conspired regarding September 11. However, the previous conspiracies do show that our own CIA and government are indeed capable of conspiring against the American public.

In October 2001 issue of *The Progressive*, (apparently before the amnesia set in) editor Matthew Rothschild wrote, “The United States does not have clean hands in the world. The history of the last fifty years is the history of U. S. war and repression in one Third World country after another. It is not an exaggeration to say that the United States has acted as a terrorist from Guatemala to Iran, from El Salvador to Vietnam, from Chili to Indonesia . . . To heighten the level of terror by waging all-out war against Afghanistan or any other country Bush is aiming his

bombers at will serve no useful purpose.” Yet, today the same Matthew Rothschild says he wouldn’t impute extreme callousness to what he himself described as a terrorist-acting U. S. government, or to (in his own earlier words) the terror-heightening bomber, Bush?

Logical thinking is based on reality. Historical reality shows that it makes sense to find it easy to impute extreme callousness and criminality to our own government officials, and that it is illogical to find it hard to do so.

The leftists criticizing “conspiracy theorists” should consider the following:

- Conspiracy theory is not inherently “crazy.” Any elementary logic text teaches that it would be a fallacy to believe *all* conspiracy theories are irrational merely because *some* may be.
- The Ivory Tower leftists are not really logical or sane in their criticism. For example, they make their own illogical leap when they assume that all “conspiracy theorists” believe that any single CIA/governmental misdeed in itself constitutes absolute proof of further misconduct.
- “Real” reporting can include—in fact, has ample room for—rationally speculative commentaries and even “leap of logic” pieces that serve as art—in other words, pieces that stimulate readers to examine a list of events, think, and then draw their own conclusions. Most readers know the difference between a writer speculating and asserting a fixed and final conclusion.

When Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein first looked into the Watergate conspiracy, they had no smoking gun. They made no apologies for occasional “leaps of logic” during their process of investigation. The movie “All the President’s Men” shows Woodward and Bernstein discussing circumstantial evidence. In one scene, the reporters point out that if a person should happen to turn on a radio and hear nothing but classical music without commercials for a given length of time, that person could reasonably conclude he was listening to FM rather than AM radio. (This was a “leap of logic” that made sense at that time.)

The point of the Woodward/Bernstein illustration is that a person can draw rational conclusions from circumstantial evidence using inductive, instead of deductive, reasoning. It wasn’t until late in their investigation that Woodward and Bernstein were able to connect all the Watergate dots, but at the time no Ivory Tower leftists suggested their use of inductive reasoning and their early explorations of mere circumstantial evidence amounted to a “crazy conspiracy theory.”

Former CNN producer April Oliver once wrote that CNN came up with a new standard of journalistic proof when the network wanted to kill her story on the Pentagon’s illicit use of sarin nerve gas. Though Oliver and fellow reporter Jack Smith used solid research and cited multiple sources for the story, CNN insisted they come up with a smoking gun, or “enough airtight proof to persuade a jury in a courtroom of law,” according to Oliver.

Oliver stated that “such a smoking gun is, of course, completely counter to the intent of a so-called ‘black operation,’ the purpose of which is to cover up the truth so no one can ever ‘prove’ what happened.” Oliver pointed out that documents of the event were likely sterilized, and that a “paper trail proving the story was probably non-existent.” (From “Censored 1999: The News That Didn’t Make The News And Why” by Peter Phillips and Project Censored.)

The attempt to “connect the dots” between one aberrant news event and a long list of other similar irregularities (even minus a smoking gun) is not inherently “crazy,” but is in fact logical. What is illogical, is to suggest that all political events happen in a vacuum.

As journalist Michael Parenti has pointed out (*Land of Idols*, St. Martin’s Press, 1994) politicians and corporate leaders naturally work to further their own monetary and power interests, often in a “conspiratorial” manner. To believe otherwise is to believe in “Coincidence Theory” (the truly nutty idea that the interests of the very wealthy are magically maintained by chance, year after year); or “Aberration Theory” (the blind-to-historical-reality-notion that dirty CIA tricks are atypical departures from the norm); or “Stupidity Theory” (the irrational idea that the very wealthy and their intelligence-agency-protectors stupidly and repeatedly bumble their way into maintaining world domination, never using forethought); or “Somnambulist Theory” (the illogical view that world dominators sleepwalk through life without ever thinking of their vast wealth and how to keep it); or “Idiosyncrasy Theory” (the unthinking theory that “stuff just happens” in a way that furthers the interests of oil companies and other powerful folks—and that somehow it “just happens” the exact same way again and again over a long period of time.)

Parenti also notes that the CIA is by definition conspiratorial, “using covert actions and secret plans, many of which are of the most unsavory kind. What are covert operations if not conspiracies?” In his *“Dirty Truths”* (City Lights Books, 1996), Parenti points out that “conspiracy” can simply mean that ruling class individuals “are aware of their interests, know each other personally, meet together privately and off the record, and try to hammer out a consensus on how to anticipate and react to events and issues.”

Again, in logic, one makes pertinent leaps. For example, if you have a dog in the house, and there is no way for that dog to exit or for any other dog to enter, and you come home and find dog excrement on your floor, you can make the reasonable leap that the dog is the source of the excrement.

Are district attorneys and prosecutors “crazy conspiracy theorists” when they investigate criminal conspiracies, often based on a number of isolated incidents, absent a smoking gun? When these prosecutors argue a defendant is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, are they arguing a “crazy conspiracy theory? The misguided refusal to admit that conspiracies exist, and in fact occur often, lets governmental wrongdoers off the hook and does not serve the public.

April Oliver says when she and fellow reporter Jack Smith investigated the Pentagon’s illicit use of nerve gas, critics serving powerful interests called them “amateurs” and “left-leaning ideologues” in an attempt to “kill the messenger” and therefore stamp out the message. Surprisingly, the Ivory Tower leftists now use similar epithets (“not real reporters,” “conspiracy

theorists”) to mischaracterize and dismiss people who don’t buy the institutional spin regarding September 11.

I don’t believe the Ivory Tower leftists are motivated by a desire to serve powerful interests, but rather by the fact that they buy into the institutional propaganda regarding so-called “conspiracy theories,” and by their fear of becoming associated with that widely misunderstood term. They should consider that all actual historical conspiracies (such as Watergate and Iran-contra) were lightly substantiated “theories” in the early stages of investigation.

Internet writers, including some of Online Journal’s contributors, were ahead of the curve when it came to identifying the Clinton impeachment as a form of conspiracy, or a hunting of the president. Those same writers were on the leading edge when it came to defining the election theft as a conspiracy. Today those writers are virtually the only ones courageous enough to raise the most important questions regarding September 11. Raising the questions is not the exact same thing as postulating any “theory,” conspiracy or otherwise; and it’s a heck of a lot more ethical, gutsy, worthwhile and, yes, logical, than cowering in an Ivory Tower, hurling epithets at conspiracy investigators and (possibly inadvertently or unconsciously) currying favor with some of the most reprehensible people in the country.

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