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Enough of the 9/11 Conspiracies, Already

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By Matthew Rothschild

September 11, 2006

At almost every progressive gathering where there's a question and answer period, someone or other v conspiracy theory.

If you haven't had the pleasure of enduring these rants, please let me share.

Here's what the conspiracists believe:

9/11 was an inside job.

Members of the Bush Administration ordered it, not Osama bin Laden.

Arab hijackers may not have done the deed.

On top of that, the Twin Towers fell not because of the impact of the airplanes and the ensuing fires b plant explosives at the base of those buildings.

Building 7, another high-rise at the World Trade Center that fell on 9/11, also came down by planted e

The Pentagon was not hit by American Airlines Flight 77 but by a smaller plane or a missile.

And the Pennsylvania plane did not crash as a result of the revolt by the passengers but was brought d

“Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.”

—Carl Sagan

I'm amazed at how many people give credence to these theories. Everyone's an engineer. People who n now hold forth at great length on how the buildings at the World Trade Center could not possibly hav Pentagon could not have been struck by that American Airlines jet.

Problem is, some of the best engineers in the country have studied these questions and come up with j happened.

The American Society of Civil Engineers and FEMA conducted an in-depth investigation of the Work

director of the Structural Engineering Institute of the American Society of Civil Engineers, the senior Association, professors of fire safety, and leaders of some of the top building design and engineering firms in Chicago, Skilling Ward Magnusson Barkshire in Seattle, and Greenhorne & O'Mara in Maryland.

It concluded that massive structural damage caused by the crashing of the aircrafts into the buildings, "was sufficient to induce the collapse of both structures."

The National Institute of Standards and Technology did its own forty-three volume study of the Twin Towers. It reviewed tens of thousands of documents, interviewed more than 1,000 people, reviewed 7,000 segments of video, analyzed 236 pieces of steel from the wreckage, [and] performed laboratory tests and sophisticated computer simulations.

It also concluded that a combination of the crash and the subsequent fires brought the towers down: "The damage and heat-weakened structural components contributed to the abrupt structural collapse."

Popular Mechanics, first in its March 2005 cover story and now in its expanded book, *Debunking 9/11*. In the engineering field, takes apart the most popular contentions of the conspiracists. "In every case the theories turned out to be mistaken, misinterpreted, or deliberately falsified," the book says.

I made a few calls myself, including to Gene Corley, who conducted the American Society of Civil Engineers structural engineering professor at Purdue, who was one of the principal authors of "The Pentagon Building Collapse" which was done under the auspices of the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Structural Engineering professors at MIT and other leading universities in the country, and none of them puts any stock in the theories. They are busy trying to figure out how to prevent buildings from falling.

Of course, any conspiracy theorist worth his or her salt will claim that all these people are in on the plot.

And that I am in on it, too.

Get over it.

The guru of the 9/11 conspiracy movement is David Ray Griffin, an emeritus professor not of engineering but of Claremont School of Theology. First in *The New Pearl Harbor* and then in *The 9/11 Commission Report: Causes and the Truth Behind 9/11*, Griffin has peddled his conspiracy theory.

"Never ascribe to malice that which is adequately explained by incompetence."

—Napoleon

He's not alone, of course. A myriad of websites devote themselves to this subject, and several films are being made. There's even a group called Scholars for 9/11 Truth, which insists "the World Trade Center was almost demolished." Most prominent among these is Steven E. Jones, professor of physics and astronomy at Case Western Reserve University, not engineering but cold fusion, according to *Debunking 9/11 Myths*.

The conspiracy theories are particularly popular on the left for a couple of understandable reasons. It's easy to blame 9/11 to justify his warmaking abroad and his repressive policies at home. And then there's the notorious New American Century, the fount of neoconservatism, whose members included Dick Cheney, Don Rumsfeld, and a host of other hawks who flew into the Bush Administration. That line, from the September 2000 study "The Road to 9/11: How the Bush Administration transformed the U.S. military posture into a much more aggressive one, and for expanding the Pentagon's budget," authors recognized that this transformation would be difficult to achieve quickly "absent some catastrophic event like Pearl Harbor."

Griffin and other leftwing conspiracy theorists put the two together, and voila. The attacks “were orchestrated unprovoked wars on two countries that provided no threat, whether imminent or long-term, to the people of the United States.” Griffin, in *Christian Faith and the Truth Behind 9/11*. “The Administration and its Pentagon even planned to use 9/11 as a pretext for a new war. The government was planning, therefore, to use the deaths of some 3,000 people (whom itself had killed) to maim many hundreds of thousands of people, perhaps millions.”

Before taking some of the major conspiracy claims one by one, let’s examine how outlandish the conspiracy theory is.

First, Osama bin Laden has already claimed responsibility for the attack several times and boasted of taking control of those planes. Why not take him at his word? And if bin Laden were working in cahoots with the Bush administration, why not tell us on August 6, 2001, in a Presidential daily briefing that Osama bin Laden was about to attack the United States? Or was it a conspiracy?

Second, if the Bush Administration plotters carried out 9/11 to justify attacking Iraq, why didn’t they tell us that Iraq was not a single Iraqi hijacker, and Bush propagandists had to do all sorts of gymnastics to link Iraq to the attack?

Third, for this conspiracy to have succeeded, it would have had to have been amazingly vast: not only the Bush Administration (including the head of the Secret Service, Griffin says in *Christian Faith*) and the explosion of the towers.

Griffin, in *Pearl Harbor*, for instance, alleges that Mayor Rudolph Giuliani may have been involved. Griffin says that Giuliani was operating out of there [Building 7] when we were told that the World Trade Center was gonna collapse knowing that, and concludes: “Giuliani’s statement provides, therefore, evidence someone, perhaps he was involved in the buildings did not know—which was perhaps that explosives had been placed in the buildings and were going to blow up. It is much more likely that the firefighters told the mayor to leave because the fire itself was jeopardizing the towers.”

Griffin also alleges that Larry Silverstein, who leased the World Trade Center complex, was in on the conspiracy. Griffin claims that Silverstein did not know—which he might as well have called “The Jew Cashed In”—dovetails with the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory that Mossad blew up the towers and warned the thousands of Jews who would have been working there to leave.

In *Pearl Harbor*, Griffin quotes Silverstein in a 2002 PBS documentary recalling a conversation from the documentary: “telling me that they were not sure they were gonna be able to contain the fire, and I said, ‘We’ve had to do is pull it.’ And they made that decision to pull and we watched the building collapse.” Griffin, who was worth a million in profit from the collapse of Building 7,” says by “pull it” Silverstein was recommending that the building be pulled down. Silverstein has flat-out denied that. By “pulling it,” he has said that he meant giving up on the firefighting effort.

Two books later, Griffin removes any ambiguity Silverstein’s “assertion that Building 7 was brought down by the fire explains why and how it collapsed,” Griffin writes in *Christian Faith and the Truth Behind 9/11*. But Silverstein says that Griffin to claim he did is, to say the least, a distortion.

The problems with a vast conspiracy theory are obvious. There’s the likelihood that someone along the way in the government have been engaged in far less treasonous plots (such as Bush’s designs on Iran), and whistled the news out to the likes of Seymour Hersh over at *The New Yorker*. And, on top of that, we’re supposed to believe that the government brought you Katrina, was somehow able to execute this grand conspiracy?

“The government is not sufficiently competent to pull off such conspiracies and too leaky to keep the secrets of the counterterrorism czar for Clinton and Bush, in a blurb for *Debunking 9/11 Myths*. Clarke has been a high-ranking official of John Kerry. Don’t you think Clarke would have blown the whistle had he known? And who was in on the conspiracy?”

Finally, in *Pearl Harbor*, Griffin acknowledges one enormous, unfillable hole in the conspiracists’ theory: the fact that the towers were not destroyed by a single plane.

did it go? And where did all sixty-four people on board go? Griffin pathetically answers: “One cannot researchers with limited budgets and no power to subpoena testimony, could answer all the questions doesn’t stop him from speculating, in a ghoulish way, about one piece of evidence that contradicts his conservative Barbara Olson, who was on Flight 77, to her husband, Ted Olson, Bush’s solicitor general actually happened, noting that Olson “is very close to the Bush Administration.” At least in Pearl Harbor argument. The conspiracy theorists “still need to explain, of course, what became of Barbara Olson, and would have participated in a plan with that outcome,” he writes. In his latest book, though, Griffin does continue to cast doubt on Ted Olson’s account. He has swept Barbara Olson and sixty-three other people

On to some of Griffin’s most oft-cited questions.

Why did dust clouds shoot out of the Twin Towers as they fell?

Or, as Griffin poses it in *Pearl Harbor*: “What other than explosives could turn concrete into powder and Corley, who headed up the investigation for the American Society of Civil Engineers and FEMA, gives pressure being pushed down,” he says. “Once the collapse started, then you had roughly a twenty-story acting as a very large mass to push everything down. The air pressure gets quite something, and the whiffs of puffs of smoke coming out of them.” *Debunking 9/11 Myths* offers the same explanation and cites structural expulsion of air and debris is fairly common when buildings collapse.

Why did the tower that was hit second fall first?

“All other things being equal, then, the tower that was struck first should have collapsed first. And yet, minutes later than the North Tower, it collapsed twenty-nine minutes earlier,” writes Griffin in *Pearl Harbor* concludes, “suggests that the collapse of these buildings was caused by something other than the fires.

But all things weren’t equal. “The damage done to the second building was more serious than the damage

The National Institute of Standards and Technology concurs. Its “Final Report on the Collapse of the columns were severed in the South Tower, whereas only six were severed in the North. And 20,000 more the trusses in the South Tower than the North. The report “found no corroborating evidence for alternative brought down by controlled demolition using explosives planted prior to September 11, 2001.”

What about Building 7?

This is a favorite of the conspiracy theorists, since the planes did not strike this structure. But the building Twin Towers. “On about a third of the face to the center and to the bottom—approximately ten stories was scooped out,” Shyam Sunder, the lead investigator for the National Institute of Standards and Technology

What’s more, the fire in the building lasted for about eight hours, in part because there were fuel tanks building was designed for a fire duration of no more than about three hours,” says Corley. “Eight hours designed for.” (Corley, by the way, also headed up the investigation of the Murrah Building’s collapse in

The National Institute of Standards and Technology is still studying the collapse of Building 7, but its conclusion that the collapse of WTC 7 was caused by bombs, missiles, or controlled demolition.”

What about the Pentagon?

Conspiracy theorists will bend your ear explaining that the American Airlines Boeing 757 couldn’t possibly

Pentagon. Griffin in *Pearl Harbor*. “The orifice created by the impact . . . was at most eighteen feet in diameter and then disappeared into such a small hole? . . . Can anyone seriously believe that a 125-foot hole less than twenty-feet wide?”

First of all, the hole was actually ninety feet wide, according to the “Pentagon Building Performance Research Society of Civil Engineers and the Structural Engineering Institute put out. And Professor Sozen of Purdue University gave the following explanation.

“The reinforced columns of the Pentagon destroyed the wings,” says Sozen. “That’s why the hole is so large.” In a report, Sozen has designed simulations at Purdue, and his results correspond with what happened to Flight 77. A progressive, says it is “ridiculous to deny” that the American Airlines plane hit the Pentagon. And, he asks, “what happened to the people in that plane?”

But we know what happened to them. They died at the Pentagon. “All but five of the 189 people who were on Flight 77 were later identified through DNA testing,” according to *Debunking 9/11 Myths*.

Finally, was Flight 93 shot down?

Griffin and many other conspiracists allege that Flight 93, which crashed in Pennsylvania, was brought down by hijackers but by a U.S. missile. But we know from cell phone conversations that passengers on board Flight 93 were talking to each other. And, as *Debunking 9/11 Myths* notes, “a Cleveland air traffic controller assigned to Flight 93 heard Flight 93 by screaming.”

Tapes of the conversations at the northeast regional headquarters for the North American Aerospace Defense Command. Michael Bronner has shown in his August article for *Vanity Fair* entitled “9/11 Live: The NORAD Tape” that the mission-crew commander that day, and the tapes show him frantically trying to figure what was going down.

“Gimme the call sign,” he says at 10:07. “Gimme the whole nine yards. . . . Let’s get some info, real quick.”

But, as Bronner reports, by then “everyone on board is already dead. Following the crash, the flight recorder was recovered in Pennsylvania at 10:03 a.m.”

The man who headed up the crash site investigation there was Matthew McCormick, a thirty-three-year-old former FBI agent on the Board. “From my investigation there was no pre-impact stress to the airplane,” he told the *Debunking 9/11 Myths*.

To be sure, there are discrepancies and omissions in *The 9/11 Commission Report*, and the Pentagon is forthcoming about what happened that day. Not every riddle that Griffin and other conspiracists pose is solved. Many of their major assertions are baseless. And their own theories have such gigantic holes and require such monumental leaps of faith on themselves.

At bottom, the 9/11 conspiracy theories are profoundly irrational and unscientific. It is more than passable that scientists on such issues as tobacco, stem cells, evolution, and global warming, are so willing to abandon their own science on 9/11.

The 9/11 conspiracy theories are a cul-de-sac. They lead nowhere. And they aren’t necessary to prove anything. There is plenty of that proof lying around. We don’t need to make it up.

Editors Note [9/15/2006] Here are two additional sites with useful information debunking some of the 9/11 conspiracy theories. [Site 1](#) and [Site 2](#). *Loose Change*.

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