

9/11: Time for a Second Look

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My lecture is called “9/11: Time for a Second Look.” In suggesting that it is time for people to take a second look at 9/11, I have in mind primarily people who decided long ago that the attacks of 9/11 happened essentially the way the Bush-Cheney administration and the official reports about 9/11 said they happened, and who therefore decided that the so-called 9/11 Truth Movement, which disputes that account, is comprised of crazy conspiracy theorists with no capacity to evaluate evidence objectively. Having formed these views long ago, such people, including most journalists, have been impervious to any arguments presented by the Truth Movement. They simply roll their eyes and move on.

However, both the Truth Movement and the available evidence have changed dramatically in the past 3 years. Because of these changes, it is not rational to reject the claims of this movement out of hand, without taking a second look. If you are a person who has had such an attitude, you cannot, in the face of these changes, simply roll your eyes without exhibiting the very irrationality of which you accuse the people you dismiss as “conspiracy theorists.”

My lecture is also addressed, albeit indirectly, to fellow members of the Truth Movement. Some members have decided that, now that Bush and Cheney are out of office and the Obama administration has reversed some of their 9/11-based policies, getting the truth about 9/11 revealed is no longer so important. Other members of the movement, seeing that the Obama administration is still presupposing that al-Qaeda attacked America on 9/11, have concluded that there is no hope that this truth will ever be revealed, so we might as well give

up. To such people, I suggest that getting the truth revealed is just as important as ever, because many 9/11-based policies, especially the war in Afghanistan, have not been reversed. I also suggest that, because of the changes in the political landscape combined with developments in the 9/11 Truth Movement, we now have, really for the first time, a realistic chance of getting a genuine investigation.

I turn now to my topic: Why official conspiracy theorists should take a second look at 9/11. I use the name “official conspiracy theorists” advisedly. Quite often, people who believe the official theory about 9/11 speak contemptuously of members of the Truth Movement as “conspiracy theorists.” But this is irrational. A conspiracy occurs whenever two or more people plan in secret to do something illegal, such as rob a bank or defraud a corporation’s customers. To hold a conspiracy theory about some event is simply to believe that it resulted from a conspiracy. According to the Bush-Cheney interpretation of 9/11, which became the official account, the attacks resulted from a conspiracy between Osama bin Laden and 19 members of al-Qaeda. This official account is, therefore, a conspiracy theory.

What this means is that everyone holds a conspiracy theory about 9/11. The debate about 9/11 is not, therefore, a debate between conspiracy theorists and anti-conspiracy theorists. It is simply a debate between those who accept the Bush-Cheney administration’s conspiracy theory and those who accept the alternative theory, according to which 9/11 resulted from a conspiracy within the Bush-Cheney administration.

Those who believe the official conspiracy

theory, therefore, cannot rationally reject the alternative theory on the grounds that it is a conspiracy theory. To be rational, they must ask: Which theory is better supported by the relevant facts?

Let me make clear that I do not use the term “official conspiracy theorist” as a term of reproach. There’s nothing wrong with believing the official conspiracy theory. I accepted it at one time myself. It is only a problem if you are a “true believer,” meaning that you are so certain that the Bush-Cheney conspiracy theory is true that you cannot look open-mindedly at evidence that may contradict it.

Reasons to be Skeptical of the Bush-Cheney Conspiracy Theory

One reason why it is irrational to keep believing the Bush-Cheney conspiracy theory, without being willing to look at new evidence, is that there are now grounds for being skeptical of that theory that did not exist at the time this theory became imprinted on most minds.

At that time, for example, it was not known that the Bush-Cheney administration would tell enormous lies that would lead to millions of deaths, including thousands of American deaths. But we now know this. Besides the lies about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the White House after 9/11 ordered the Environmental Protection Agency to lie about the air at the World Trade Center site, saying that it was safe to breathe. As a result, about 60 percent of the people who worked in the rescue and clean-up operations are ill, if they have not died already, and the number of those who will die from these illnesses will probably exceed the number of people who died on 9/11 itself. In the face of this information, it would be difficult to claim that the Bush-Cheney administration would have been morally incapable of orchestrating 9/11 and its cover-up.

We also now have reasons, not widely known at the time, to be skeptical of the official reports.

Most people have assumed that the 9/11 Commission was run by its co-chairmen, former Republican governor Thomas Kean and former Democratic Congressman Lee Hamilton. They have thought of it, therefore, as an independent, non-partisan body. But the 9/11 Commission was actually run by Philip Zelikow. He controlled the 85-person staff and was in charge of producing of The 9/11 Commission Report. And yet he was essentially a member of the Bush-Cheney White House, being especially close to Condoleezza Rice, with whom he had co-authored a book. Thanks to a book about the 9/11 Commission by New York Times reporter Philip Shenon, we now know that Zelikow, in spite of promises to the contrary, remained in contact with Rice and also with Karl Rove, the ultimate political operator in the White House. Shenon also revealed that, before his staff had even begun its work, Zelikow had already written a detailed outline of the report that would be issued, complete with “chapter headings, subheadings, and sub-subheadings.” Shenon also revealed that Kean and Hamilton conspired with Zelikow to keep the existence of this outline a secret from the staff.

In a book they wrote about the 9/11 Commission, Kean and Hamilton criticized “conspiracy theorists” because, rather than forming their theories on the basis of the facts, they start with their theories and then look for facts to support them. By contrast, Kean and Hamilton claimed, the 9/11 Commission started with the relevant facts, not with a conclusion: We were “not setting out to advocate one theory or interpretation of 9/11 versus another,” they said. And yet, they admit, Zelikow assigned “the subject of ‘al Qaeda’ to [one of the staff’s teams],” which was told to “tell the story of al Qaeda’s most successful operation---

the 9/11 attacks.” If that was not starting with a theory about 9/11, what would have been?

If the 9/11 Commission was not independent of the Bush-Cheney White House, what about NIST---the National Institute of Standards and Technology---which prepared the official reports on the destruction of the World Trade Center? NIST is an agency of the US Department of Commerce. During the years it was preparing its reports, therefore, it was an agency of the Bush-Cheney administration, run by an appointee of that administration.

Recently, a former employee of this agency has spoken out, saying that NIST had been “fully hijacked from the scientific into the political realm.” Scientists working for NIST, he says, “lost [their] scientific independence, and became little more than ‘hired guns.’”

Everything that came from the hired guns was [he added] routinely filtered through the front office, and assessed for political implications before release.

Moreover, he said, NIST’s reports on the World Trade Center also had to be approved by the National Security Agency and the Office of Management and Budget---“an arm of the Executive Office of the President”---which “had a policy person specifically delegated to provide oversight on our work.”

As a result, NIST’s reports, which say the Twin Towers and Building 7 came down without the aid of explosives, are political, not scientific, reports---as any serious examination of these reports will reveal. The authors, with their PhD’s in physics and engineering, could not possibly believe the things they have written.

The New Shape of the 9/11 Truth Movement

If reasons to take a second look at 9/11 are provided by new information about the

Bush-Cheney administration and the official reports supporting its conspiracy theory, the same is true of the new shape of the 9/11 Truth Movement. At one time, it was dismissed as “a bunch of kids on the Internet.” Then after I joined the movement by publishing *The New Pearl Harbor*, it was dismissed as “a bunch of kids on the Internet plus an ageing theologian.” George Monbiot, writing in *The Guardian*, referred to members of the movement as “morons” and “idiots.” Alexander Cockburn, writing in *Counterpunch*, *The Nation*, and *Le Monde Diplomatique*, referred to the movement’s members as the “9/11 Conspiracy Nuts,” saying that they know nothing about the “real world,” especially about military history. Lacking “any conception of evidence,” he added, they represent “the ascendancy of magic over common sense [and] reason.”

Insofar as critics of the 9/11 movement, ignoring the fact that its early leaders included a pilot, a former police officer, a political economist, and a historian, could portray me as its head---Monbiot referred to me as its “high priest,” another left-wing critic called me its “guru”---they could somewhat plausibly portray it to the general public as a religious movement, comprised of people who know nothing about the real world. As one critic put it, “Griffin, being a theologian, is not qualified to talk about anything except myths and fairy tales.” I did reply that I should, therefore, be eminently qualified to discuss the official conspiracy theory about 9/11. Nevertheless, the 9/11 Truth Movement can be easily dismissed insofar as people retain an image of it that was formed several years ago, when it could be portrayed as led by people who have no expertise in the relevant fields.

Even if that caricature, like most caricatures, contained a grain of truth then, it is now completely false. The intellectual leadership of the 9/11 Truth Movement is now exercised by scientists and other professio-

nals who definitely know something about the real world. Many of these professionals have formed organizations dedicated to discovering and publicizing the truth about 9/11.

A few years ago, some scientists formed the Scientific Panel for the Investigation of 9/11. Others, more recently, formed Scholars for 9/11 Truth and Justice, the main work of which has been carried out by physicists and chemists. Shortly thereafter, detractors of the Truth Movement said that, if there were any validity to these scientists' claims about the World Trade Center, they would be able to get papers published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. Over the past year, scientists affiliated with Scholars for 9/11 Truth and Justice have published 3 papers in peer-reviewed scientific journals. The lead author of the most recent of these papers, which appeared in the Open Chemical Physics Journal, is Niels Harrit, a chemistry professor at the University of Copenhagen. These scientists, who know something about the chemical constituents of the real world, report finding many elements in World Trade Center dust that should not be there if the official theory, according to which nothing but fire and gravity brought the buildings down, were true.

A few years ago, after some physicists and chemists had joined the movement, detractors said: "They don't really count. The question of what brought down the World Trade Center buildings is a question for engineers, and your movement doesn't have any." That was true in 2005. The following year, however, architect Richard Gage formed Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth, and by now over 600 licensed architects and engineers have signed its petition calling for a new investigation. These are people who know about that part of the real world that consists of steel-frame high-rise buildings, and they know that the official story---according to which

fires caused the Twin Towers and Building 7 to come straight down in virtual free fall---simply cannot be true. For example, Jack Keller, emeritus professor of engineering at Utah State University, who had been given special recognition by Scientific American, has said about the collapse of Building 7: "Obviously it was the result of controlled demolition." A similar judgment has been offered by two emeritus professors of structural engineering at Switzerland's Federal Institute of Technology, along with hundreds of other engineers and architects.

Firefighters also have expert knowledge that is relevant to what happened in New York City on 9/11, and this past year brought the formation of Firefighters for 9/11 Truth, who point out, on the basis of their professional expertise, why the NIST reports about the World Trade Center should not be believed.

There is now, moreover, an organization of Veterans for 9/11 Truth, with several former military officers. They probably, I would venture to say, know more about the real world of military affairs than does Alexander Cockburn.

Another professional organization with relevant expertise is Pilots for 9/11 Truth, which includes in its ranks many former commercial and military pilots, who call incredible the official story about why the 9/11 airliners were not intercepted. This organization has also devoted much attention to the Pentagon attack, pointing out many reasons why the official account of that attack cannot be true.

The latest of the professional organizations to form is Intelligence Officers for 9/11 Truth. One of the first people to join was William Christison, a former senior CIA official. If you are one of the many people who "just knows" that the position of the 9/11 Truth Movement is too implausible to be worth a few days of your time to study its evidence, listen to what he wrote in 2006:

I spent the first four and a half years since September 11 utterly unwilling to consider seriously the conspiracy theories surrounding the attacks of that day. . . . [I]n the last half year and after considerable agony, I've changed my mind. . . . I now think there is persuasive evidence that the events of September did not unfold as the Bush administration and the 9/11 Commission would have us believe.

The backbone of the 9/11 Truth Movement is now constituted by these professional organizations of scientists, architects, engineers, firefighters, military officers, pilots, and intelligence officers. And there are still more. The past year has witnessed the formation of Medical Professionals for 9/11 Truth, Lawyers for 9/11 Truth, Religious Leaders for 9/11 Truth, and, very recently, Political Leaders for 9/11 Truth, which already includes past or present members of the parliaments of Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Sweden, Europe, and the UK, and also a former United States governor. Accordingly, people who have thought of the movement as constituted by people who can be dismissed as conspiracy nuts, even morons and idiots, need to reevaluate---if they want their opinions to be based on the real world.

Here is the present situation---and if you are going to quote one sentence from my lecture, I would recommend this one: Among independent scientists and professionals in the relevant fields who have studied the evidence, the weight of scientific and professional opinion is now overwhelmingly on the side of the 9/11 Truth Movement. Whereas well over 1,000 such people have gone on record publicly questioning the official theory, there are virtually no scientists or professionals in the relevant fields who have gone on record in support of the official story---except for such people who are not independent, meaning that their whose livelihoods would be threatened if they refused to support the official

theory. This caveat is important, because, as Sinclair Lewis famously observed: "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it." Except for such people, virtually everyone who has expertise in a relevant field, and who has seriously studied the evidence, rejects the official conspiracy theory. It is time, therefore, for journalists and everyone else to take a second look.

New Evidence

Journalists often say that they cannot write about an issue that is considered "old news." They must have new evidence. Another reason why it is time for a second look at 9/11 is the existence of a wealth of new evidence. There is so much that I can mention only a small portion of it.

New Evidence from the FBI: Some of this new evidence has, amazingly, been supplied by the FBI. Although the FBI was originally the main agency creating and protecting the official account, it has recently provided several revelations that undermine this account.

One example involves one of the central pillars of the official conspiracy theory: the claim that the attacks were authorized by Osama bin Laden. That claim is still used to support the American military effort in Afghanistan, which President Obama recently encouraged Europeans to support more wholeheartedly. But if you will go to the website labeled "Most Wanted Terrorists" and turn to its page on "Usama bin Laden," you will find that, although he is wanted for various terrorist attacks, the 9/11 attacks are not mentioned. When a member of the 9/11 Truth Movement contacted FBI headquarters to ask why not, the FBI's Chief of Investigative Publicity replied: "[B]ecause the FBI has no hard evidence connecting Bin Laden to 9/11."

Another example involves the reported

telephone calls from the airliners, through which people on the ground were told that the planes had been hijacked by Middle Eastern terrorists. Some 15 people reported that they had been called by loved ones using mobile phones. United Flight 93---the plane that reportedly crashed in Pennsylvania---was by itself said to have been the source of about a dozen of these mobile phone calls. Deena Burnett alone reported having received 3 or 4 such calls from her husband, Tom Burnett. She knew he was using his mobile phone, she told the FBI, because she looked at her Caller ID and recognized his number.

Most of these calls were reportedly made when the airliners were flying at 35,000 or even 40,000 feet.

Pilots and scientists in the 9/11 Truth Movement, however, pointed out that, given the mobile phone technology available in 2001, successful calls from high-altitude airliners were not possible. Defenders of the official conspiracy, such as Popular Mechanics, argued that such calls could indeed be made. But while Popular Mechanics was making this claim, the FBI was pulling the rug out from under it.

In 2006, at the trial of Zacarias Mousaoui, the so-called 20th hijacker, the FBI was required to present evidence about the phone calls from all 4 airliners. Its report said that of the 37 phone calls from Flight 93, mobile phones had been used to make only two of them, which had occurred when the plane, being ready to crash, was at a very low altitude. The FBI, in other words, implicitly supported the Truth Movement's claim that mobile phone calls from high-altitude airliners were impossible. Popular Mechanics was left with egg on its face.

For our purposes, however, the important point is that the FBI was now saying that people such as Deena Burnett, who were certain that they had been called from mobile phones, were wrong. But how could

Deena Burnett have been wrong, given the fact that she had repeatedly recognized Tom's number on her Caller ID? The FBI, which had taken her testimony on 9/11 without disputing it, did not answer this question. The only possible answer, in any case, seems to be that the calls to Deena were faked. The technology for faking such calls did exist. There are devices with which you can fake any phone number you wish. And the technology of voice morphing had progressed to the point where it was good enough to fool even the spouse of the purported caller. By changing the official story about these phone calls, therefore, the FBI implicitly admitted that the mobile calls had been faked. And if someone was prepared to fake all the mobile calls, then surely all the reported calls were faked.

The FBI contradicted the official story even more seriously in its report on phone calls from Flight 77. The most important of all the "phone calls from the planes" were those from Barbara Olson, a well-known commentator on CNN and the wife of Ted Olson, the Solicitor General at the Department of Justice. He was the attorney who argued successfully before the Supreme Court in 2000 that the Bush-Cheney ticket should be declared the winner of the presidential election in Florida. On 9/11, Olson told CNN and the FBI that his wife, Barbara, who was on American Flight 77---the one that supposedly struck the Pentagon---had called him twice, reporting that hijackers, armed with knives and box-cutters, had hijacked the plane.

This was a very important call. It was taken as evidence that Flight 77 was still in the air, rather than, as some thought, having crashed in Ohio or a nearby state. This meant that it could have been the aircraft that damaged the Pentagon. Most of all, the idea that Muslims had killed Barbara Olson, who was a favorite with the right-wing, was instrumental in creating enthusi-

asm for the so-called war on terror.

However, the FBI report to the Mousaoui trial did not support Ted Olson's claim about these calls. In its report on phone calls from Flight 77, it did mention Barbara Olson. But it said that she "attempted" one call, that it was "unconnected," and that it, therefore, lasted "0 seconds." This is an amazing story. The FBI is part of the Department of Justice. And yet the FBI's 2006 report declared, in effect, that the two phone calls reported by the former solicitor general of the Department of Justice never happened. This leaves only two options. Either Ted Olson simply made up this story, or else he, like Deena Burnett and several others, was duped. Either way, one of the official conspiracy theory's foundational stories was based on a lie.

How many people would still believe this conspiracy theory if they knew about this and the other ways in which it has been undermined by the FBI? Not very many. This illustrates my point---that most people who continue to believe the Bush-Cheney conspiracy theory about 9/11 are unaware of the dozens of facts that contradict this theory.

Building 7 of the World Trade Center

For my final illustration of this point, I will discuss the collapse of Building 7 of the World Trade Center. The Truth Movement has long considered this collapse the official conspiracy theory's Achilles' Heel---its most vulnerable element---for several reasons: Building 7 was not hit by a plane; it had fires on only a few floors; and it came straight down in virtual free fall, looking every bit like the kind of controlled demolition known as implosion, in which the building folds in on itself and ends up as a rather compact debris pile. Defenders of the official story clearly did not want the public to focus on the collapse of this build-

ing. The 9/11 Commission did not even mention it. After the day of 9/11 itself, this collapse was seldom if ever shown on TV until 2008, when NIST finally issued its report on it. And NIST had delayed this report year after year, releasing it only when the Bush-Cheney administration was about to leave office.

My next book will be about NIST's report on Building 7. It will show that this report inadvertently reveals that a plausible defense of the official theory about this building, according to which it was brought down by fire alone, is impossible. To attempt this defense, NIST had to ignore various kinds of physical evidence in the World Trade Center dust, such as the existence of particles that could have been formed only at extremely high temperatures---several times higher than could have been caused by fire. It also includes elements that seem explainable only as the residue from nanothermite, which is classified as a high explosive. The dust even includes active thermitic material, discovered by physicist Steven Jones, which appears to be unreacted nanothermite. This is the conclusion of the new paper, which I mentioned earlier, for which the lead author is Copenhagen's Niels Harrit, who is an expert in nanochemistry.

When NIST was asked whether it had checked the dust for evidence of thermite, it said No. When a reporter asked Michael Newman, a NIST spokesman, why not, he said: "because there was no evidence of that." This circular answer led the reporter to ask: "But how can you know there's no evidence if you don't look for it first?" Newman gave another circular reply, saying: "If you're looking for something that isn't there, you're wasting your time . . . and the taxpayers' money."

NIST also ignored and distorted testimonial evidence that explosions had gone off in Building 7. The most important such testimony was given by Barry Jennings of

the New York City Housing Authority. As soon as the North Tower was struck that morning at 8:46, Jennings rushed, as he was supposed to do, to the 23rd floor of Building 7, which housed Mayor Rudy Giuliani's Office of Emergency Management. But when he and Michael Hess, Giuliani's corporation counsel, got there at about 9:00, they found that everyone had left. Calling to ask what they should do, they were told to leave the building immediately. Finding that the elevator would not work, they started running down the stairs. When they got to the 6th floor, however, a huge explosion blew the landing out from under them. Climbing back up to the 8th floor, Jennings broke a window to call for help, at which time he could see that both of the Twin Towers were still standing.

However, when Giuliani wrote about the 9/11 experience of his friend Michael Hess, he claimed that the big event, which Hess and Jennings had called an explosion, was really just some effects caused by debris from the collapse of the North Tower. It did not collapse until 10:28, so Giuliani put this big event at least an hour later than did Jennings. Giuliani's version of this event became the official story. It was defended by NIST in its 2005 report on the Twin Towers and then, in 2008, by a BBC special on Building 7.

Jennings had told his story in an interview for the producers of *Loose Change Final Cut*. But before the film was released, Jennings, fearing that it would cost him his job, asked that his interview not be included, and the producers took it out. Later, however, Jennings told his story in an interview for the BBC. But the BBC placed Jennings' story within the official timeline, making it appear as if the huge explosion he had reported was really, as the narrator put it, "just debris from a falling skyscraper." The BBC even made it seem as if Jennings was all by himself, rather than ac-

companied by Hess, even though Jennings was repeatedly heard saying "we."

This BBC program aired in July 2008. NIST, whose timeline the BBC had followed, released the first draft of its report on Building 7 the following month. Shortly before this release---evidently only two days before---Barry Jennings, who was 53 years old, died mysteriously. People who have tried to find out the details of his death have been unable to learn anything, beyond the fact that he evidently died in a hospital.

Whatever the cause of his death, it was certainly convenient. He was not around to be interviewed again, perhaps by the *Loose Change* producers, after the publication of NIST's report. And the BBC was able to put out a second version of its program on the BBC, this time including Michael Hess, who since 2002 had been the vice chairman of former Mayor Giuliani's consulting business. Hess, not surprisingly, supported the timeline defended by Giuliani, NIST, and the BBC, along with their claim that no explosions had gone off in Building 7.

To see the falsity of that timeline, however, one only has to look at the interview of Jennings by the *Loose Change* producers, which is now on the Internet as "Barry Jennings Uncut." The timely and mysterious death of Jennings, moreover, may well indicate just how threatening the truth about Building 7 is to the official conspiracy theory about 9/11.

In any case, I will point out one more way in which Building 7 has proved to be the Achilles' Heel of the Bush-Cheney administration's conspiracy theory about 9/11.

I mentioned earlier that Building 7 came down in virtual free fall. In the first draft of its report, which was issued in August 2008 for public comment, NIST claimed that the collapse took far longer than would a free-fall collapse. It also explained why, given its theory, which is a theory of "progressive

collapse," absolute free fall would have been impossible. But David Chandler, a high-school physics teacher, produced a video showing that the building came down in absolute free fall for over two seconds. Besides putting it on the Internet, Chandler confronted NIST with his evidence at a public meeting, which was broadcast live. In its Final Report, issued in November, NIST, amazingly, conceded that Building 7 had come down in free fall for over 2 seconds. But NIST had not altered its theory. Its Final Report, therefore, NIST admitted free fall as an empirical fact while articulating a theory that simply does not allow for free fall.

This contradiction can well be seen as the ultimate self-destruction of the official conspiracy theory about 9/11, which says that Muslim terrorists brought down three buildings of the World Trade Center by flying planes into two of them.

Conclusion

I will conclude by addressing members of the 9/11 Truth Movement---both old members and any new members that this lecture may have created.

Rather than letting up on our efforts to get the truth about 9/11 revealed, now is the time to work even harder. We have a new president in the White House. I suggest that the 9/11 Truth Movement's efforts should now be directed primarily at him. He has promised to base his policies on good science and good intelligence. He is also a lawyer, a politician, and a religious man, so he may well be moved by learning that these types of people have all formed organizations calling on him to authorize a new investigation. So besides carrying forward our present activities, we should also do everything we can to bring more scientists into the movement and to build up the size of Lawyers for 9/11 Truth, Religious Leaders for 9/11 Truth, Intelligence Offi-

cers for 9/11 Truth, and especially Political Leaders for 9/11 Truth---because this is now what is most needed: Pressure from political leaders around the world to authorize a new, truly independent, investigation, through which the truth about 9/11 can be revealed, so that the policies based upon the Bush-Cheney conspiracy theory can be completely abolished.