

Commentary

Uncommon Sense

Conspiracy and other theories

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September 24, 2004—In his eyewitness account of "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich," author William Shirer, who lived in Nazi Germany throughout most of the 1930s, described a phenomenon that will, in 2004, seem disturbingly familiar to Americans who dissent from the policies of the Bush regime.

"I myself was to experience how easily one is taken in by a lying and censored press and radio in a totalitarian state," Shirer wrote.

"Though unlike most Germans I had daily access to foreign newspapers . . . and though I listened regularly to the BBC and other foreign broadcasts, my job necessitated the spending of many hours a day in combing the German press, checking the German radio, conferring with Nazi officials and going to party meetings. It was surprising and sometimes consternating to find that notwithstanding the opportunities I had to learn the facts and despite one's inherent distrust of what one learned from Nazi sources, a steady diet over the years of falsifications and distortions made a certain impression on one's mind and often misled it."

Shirer then recounted how, in conversations with his German friends and strangers he would meet in cafes and beer halls, "I would meet with the most outlandish assertions from seemingly educated and intelligent persons. It was obvious they were parroting some piece of nonsense they had heard on the radio or read in the newspapers.

"Sometimes one was tempted to say as much, but on such occasions one was met with such a stare of incredulity, such a shock of silence, as if one had blasphemed the Almighty, that one realized how useless it was even to try to make contact with a mind which had become warped and for whom the facts of life had become what Hitler and Goebbels, with their cynical disregard for truth, said they were."

I will never forget the shock of recognition I felt when I first read those words several years ago, nor my first thought when I looked up from the page: "This happens to me all the time." It wouldn't be surprising if many of you reading this now have just had the same thought.

This would be particularly true for those among you whom the American media, with increasing frequency, describe as "conspiracy theorists:" those who suspect that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have more to do with oil than with any humanitarian or security motives; or those who question the omissions in the 9/11 Commission's report, and think that the 9/11 tragedy had more to do with the Bush/Saudi connection and neoconservative imperial ambitions than with America being "hated for its freedom"; or those who believe that American media are the finely-tuned propaganda organs of the military-industrial complex which, rather than failing their journalistic responsibilities, are doing an excellent job of keeping the American public confused and uninformed; or even the overwhelming majority of Americans who subscribe to the event that made the term "conspiracy theory" mainstream: that the CIA was directly involved in the assassination of JFK.

Among that last group, it is exceedingly rare for members of what used to be called "the establishment" to go public with their private suspicions about what happened in Dallas in November 1963. So it took a real act of courage for David Talbot, editor and publisher of the quasi-respectable website Salon.com, to stick his neck out recently by expressing his own doubts about the legitimacy of the official report of the Warren Commission.

The most valuable contribution Talbot makes in his lengthy article, "The mother of all coverups," published last week at Salon, is compiling from various sources a list of public figures who also had suspicions about the JFK assassination—a list that includes Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Dan Rather, Gary Hart, Richard Russell (a member of the Warren Commission himself), Nikita Krushchev, Charles DeGaulle, the House Select Committee on Assassinations (which produced the only other official report on JFK's death, concluding that it was "probably" the result of a conspiracy), and Jackie and Bobby Kennedy.

In fact, it is reasonable to speculate that Bobby Kennedy's indications to his closest associates that, should he become president, he intended to reopen the investigation into his brother's death, may explain his own suspicious murder.

Because it reinforces some questions I've raised in previous articles for Online Journal ("Paranoid shift" and "Secret admirers: the Bushes and the Washington Post") it's also worthwhile to reproduce in full one of Talbot's paragraphs, about another public figure who has been connected to the string of events beginning with the Bay of Pigs operation and ending in Dallas:

"Among those in Washington who were particularly curious about the revelations concerning the CIA and the Kennedy assassination was George H.W. Bush. As Kitty Kelley observes in her new book about the Bush family, while serving as CIA director in the Ford administration, Bush fired off a series of memos in fall 1976, asking subordinates various questions about Oswald, Ruby, Helms and other figures tied to the assassination. 'Years later, when [Bush] became president of the United States, he would deny making any attempt to review the agency files on the JFK assassination,' writes Kelley in *The Family: The Real Story of the Bush Dynasty*. 'When he made this claim, he did not realize that the agency would release 18 documents (under the Freedom of Information Act) that showed he had indeed, as CIA director, requested information—not once, but several times—on a wide range of questions surrounding the Kennedy assassination.'"

The dark thread of secret agendas and unspeakable acts that runs like a subterranean stream through the last half-century of American history—and which has turned into a river under this most secretive of presidential administrations—would not have been possible without the outright cooperation of the media. Despite the majority opinion that the Warren Report was a "whitewash," Talbot correctly notes that "there is one sanctuary where the Warren Report is still stubbornly upheld and where its manifold critics can expect their own rough treatment: in the towers of the media elite."

What is true of the media's treatment of Warren Commission critics can be equally applied to anyone who questions what is sometimes called the media's "metanarrative"—the official media version of events. Usually this is accomplished by what Catholic theologians call "the sin of omission." So, for example, the startling and uncomfortable fact that a Zogby poll found that half of New York City residents believe that the US government either had foreknowledge of, or was complicit in, the 9/11 attacks has been quickly stuffed into the media's "memory hole." The revelations of FBI whistleblower Sibel Edmonds about the 9/11 drug connection, and of Senator Bob Graham about the connections between the 9/11 hijackers and the Saudi government, have received similar treatment.

But the great irony in the media's rejection of "conspiracy theory" is that the metanarrative requires mainstream news consumers to subscribe to a far less credible "coincidence theory."

By this theory, it is nothing more than "coincidence" that the membership of a neoconservative think tank, whose ambitions for a global American empire depend on public opinion being swayed by "a new Pearl Harbor," stole their way into power and occupy key positions in the Bush regime. It is merely a "coincidence" that unnamed persons cashed in big time in trading United and American Airlines stocks in the week before 9/11. It's entirely "coincidental" that the FBI supervisor who blocked the investigation of Zacarias Moussaoui's computer, containing information about the hijacker's 9/11 plans, got a \$25,000 bonus.

In the media's metanarrative, the incontestable facts that Persian Gulf oil has been central to American strategic planning since World War II, and that Dick Cheney's secret energy task force generated maps of Iraq's oil fields in early 2001, have absolutely nothing to do with the invasion of Iraq. It's just a serendipitous "coincidence."

And the statement by the late CIA director William Colby that the CIA controls "everyone of major significance in the major media" is just the incoherent rambling of a guilt-burdened covert operative with too much blood on his hands. If that statement offers a better explanation of a long, consistent pattern of journalistic failings than the idea that reporters are the victims of the government's "Jedi Mind Tricks"—well, it's only a "coincidence."

Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda minister, once said, "Give me control of the German media, and I can control the German people." It is our generation's misfortune that Goebbels' ideological descendants are now in the White House. It is our generation's responsibility to remove them.

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