

Conspiracy! Fact and fiction are closer than we think

Conspiracy theories which claim to shed more light on the 2001 twin towers disaster in New York are often closer to official versions than first thought - according to new research.

Dr Peter Knight from The University of Manchester who conducted the first academic study of 9/11 conspiracy theories says they are more popular today than ever before.

He also lists all major existing conspiracy theories in his report 'Outrageous Conspiracy Theories: Popular and Official Responses to 9/11 in Germany and the United States'.

The findings come as the "final cut" of Loose Change - the internet video which has been the most influential source of 9/11 conspiracy theories - is now having its first screenings at 9/11 events in the UK.

He said: "Official explanations see America as an innocent victim of a catastrophic event that came out of the blue, explained by an all-powerful conspiracy motivated by Bin Laden's evil lust for power.

"The problem is, this has strong similarities to the conspiracy theories which argue that Bush is himself head of an all-powerful conspiracy.

"The Bush administration also claimed that a highly organized and centrally controlled conspiracy of terrorists carried out 9/11.

"But that too bears strong resemblance to the highly organized and centrally controlled cabal of government and intelligence agents featuring in many conspiracy theories.

"In fact, the above is a reworking of a CIA disinformation campaign developed during President Reagan's administration about the role of the Soviets as puppet masters behind a vast, conspiratorial terror network."

He added: "All 9/11 conspiracy theories are an inevitable counter-reaction - however misguided - to distorted official explanations which seek to find a direct connection between al Qaeda and the Axis of Evil.

"By insisting on a black-and-white version of events, the Bush administration from the outset forcefully rejected any suggestion of the culpability- even through negligence -of his own or even Clinton's administration.

"The lack of transparency and honesty in official explanations also induces counter-reaction: they draw on the rhetoric of paranoia.

"But we are more likely to die by being kicked by a donkey than die in a terrorist atrocity."

Dr Knight lists the most popular conspiracy theories and classifies them into 'Letting it Happen on Purpose' (LIHOP) and 'Making it Happen on Purpose' (MIHOP).

LIHOP argues the Bush administration allowed 9/11 to happen despite warnings whereas MIHOP claims that elements of the US government and its intelligence agencies conspired proactively to make the events happen.

Dr Knight said: "There are many reasons why conspiracy theories in general are more popular now than ever before - and polls in America and the UK back this up.

"Depicted usually as a form of popular paranoia, they give an insight into how we make sense of the world - which is why we take them more seriously.

"The internet which is a rumour mill has played a major role in promoting a lot of weird and wonderful ideas.

"But also, we are a lot less likely to believe in authority than in times gone by.

"Especially as some contemporary theories such as Watergate, and the absence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq have turned out to be true."

Major conspiracy theories outlined in 'Outrageous Conspiracy Theories: Popular and Official Responses to 9/11 in Germany and the United States' by Dr Peter Knight:

1. The Bush administration and/or oil corporations had much to gain from the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and were looking for - perhaps even willing to engineer - a modern-day Pearl Harbor in order to gain support for their pre-existing war plans.
2. Plans for an Afghanistan invasion were laid in advance.
3. Small but troubling inconsistencies, such as lampposts which appear to be intact in photos of the Pentagon crash site, despite the plane supposedly flying just above the ground.
4. Mobile phones seemed to have worked on board some of the planes at an altitude that official reports deem impossible.
5. Jet fuel burns at a temperature lower than the melting point of steel leaving many puzzled about the cause of the Twin Towers collapse.
6. The crash hole in the Pentagon was not big enough to have been caused by a Boeing 757. It was more likely to be a missile rather than a plane and consequently that the actual plane and its passengers must have been secretly taken away.
7. The Twin Towers were not brought down by the planes crashing into them but by controlled demolition.
8. The military could have shot down the planes once it was known that they had been hijacked.
9. The hijackers' flying skills were not good enough to fly a plane into the twin towers.
10. The hijackers had connections with the Pakistani intelligence services.
11. Some of the hijackers are still alive.

Source: University of Manchester

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