

# Conspiracy theories: not all barmy?

by Martin Hanson (Nelson)

IT'S disappointing to learn that an intelligent person such as Lara Meyer, in her May 21 comment on Patrick Cooper's May 20 letter, seems to imply that all "conspiracy theories" are to be disregarded.

To be sure, many conspiracy theories (to quote "Nanogirl") "arise because they provide people with simple explanations for complex and frightening events". But in implying that powerful people resist the temptation to maintain and extend their power by secret agreements is naive in the extreme. Such people are not morally superior to the rest of us, as Lara's comment would seem to imply.

A considerable number of "conspiracy theories" are on their face, nonsense, and can be dismissed out of hand. As "Nanogirl" says, many "conspiracy theories" reflect subconscious needs and inadequacies of their followers rather than result from evidence-based thinking.

To be effective, secret agreements need to be kept secret. In some cases this simply involves not telling anyone, as was the case of the Jekyll Island conspiracy to establish the Federal Reserve system in the United States in 1910.

But conspiracies with consequences that



explode into the public consciousness, such as the assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1962, and the destruction of the World Trade Center and the attack on the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, are altogether more difficult to keep secret. This is where the "conspiracy theory" tool comes into play.

It will come as a surprise to most people that in the early 1950s, the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) began "Operation Mockingbird" (Google it), a programme to recruit leading media and journalists for propaganda purposes. And in 1967, in response to growing public scepticism about the findings of the Warren Commission into the assassination of President Kennedy, the media began an active campaign to discredit such ideas, labelling them "conspiracy theories". Such tactics are described in detail in Professor Lance deHaven Smith's book "Conspiracy Theory in America".

The JFK assassination and 9/11 were deeply shocking, but the implications of "conspiratorial" explanations were even more so. Scarcely to be wondered then, that many people were reassured by the media's "conspiracy theory" dismissal.

But not everyone accepted that Osama bin Laden could plan such a sophisticated operation from a cave in Afghanistan. Among those who thought for themselves and examined the evidence were scientists such as physics teacher

David Chandler, who did a detailed analysis of the collapse of World Trade Center 7. This was not hit by a plane and had only small fires, but collapsed at 5.20 that afternoon. Chandler proved by video analysis that for 2.25 seconds the building was in free-fall, meaning that all support must have been instantaneously removed. This can only have been achieved by the use of explosives, ie by controlled demolition.

Chandler's analysis, which can be seen on YouTube ("WTC7 Freefall"), forced the National Institute for Standards and Technology to admit in its 2008 final report that part of WTC7's collapse was indeed in free-fall, but significantly they didn't mention the implications, despite dozens of eye-witness reports of explosions.

Another, very short (5:31) video by Chandler called "North Tower Exploding" can also be seen on YouTube.

It is deeply ironic, then, that the willingness of so many people to suspend thought and accept the official explanation for 9/11 arose, in Nanogirl's words, "because they provide people with simple explanations for complex and frightening events" and "reflect subconscious needs and inadequacies rather than the result of evidence-based thinking".

As Mark Twain is thought by some to have said, "It is easier to deceive people than to convince them that they have been deceived."