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Tuesday, Feb 07, 2006

Columnists

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Posted on Wed, Feb. 01, 2006

9/11 ATTACKS **Avoiding the hard questions**

ROBERT STEINBACK

I was 8 years old when President John Kennedy was shot to death in Dallas in 1963. If grace favors me, I'll be 62 when documents related to the assassination are released to the public, and 84 when the Warren Commission's investigative files into the tragedy are finally opened.

That's a long time to wait for a chance to evaluate the purported truth.

It's a blot on the presumed sophistication of the people of the United States that any aspect of an event so dramatic and shocking should be kept from us. Perhaps it's true, to abuse the line from *A Few Good Men* yet again, that we can't handle the truth. But there cannot be genuine resolution as long as such critical information remains concealed.

Transformed by 9/11

Since Kennedy's assassination, Americans have lurched between demanding to know and plugging their ears: The Pentagon Papers, My Lai, the King assassination, Watergate, Iran-contra, the savings-and-loan debacle, Monicagate. Lately, however, it would seem the public's verdict is in: Don't tell us. Keep us in the dark. We don't want to know.

This is the worst possible time for probe-ophobia to grip us. Our nation was irrevocably transformed by 9/11 -- and yet there remain troubling questions about what really happened before, during and after that day. Rather than demanding a full and fearless vetting to hone in on the truth and silence the conjecture about 9/11, many Americans remain unwilling to peer into the microscope.

An online cottage industry of theorists, theory debunkers and debunker debunkers has flourished since 9/11. Sometimes the flimsy theories are easy to spot -- come on, if the four

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passenger jets *didn't* crash where it appears they did, where did they go? More often, though, the cases aren't so obvious.

A group of experts and academicians "devoted to applying the principles of scientific reasoning to the available evidence, 'letting the chips fall where they may,'" last week accused the government of covering up evidence that the three destroyed New York City buildings were brought down that day by controlled demolition rather than structural failure. The group, called Scholars for 9/11 Truth, has a website, www.st911.org.

Unanswered questions

The reflexive first reaction is incredulity -- how, one asks, could anyone even contemplate, never mind actually do such a barbaric thing? But before you shut your mind, check the resumés -- these aren't Generation X geeks subsisting on potato chips and PlayStation. Then look at the case they present.

"I am a professional philosopher who has spent 35 years teaching logic, critical thinking and scientific reasoning," group co-founder and University of Minnesota professor James H. Fetzer told me. "When I come to 9/11, it's not hard for me to determine what is going on. This is a scientific question. And it is so elementary that I don't think you can find a single physicist who could disagree with the idea that this was a controlled demolition."

The group asks, for example,

- **How** did a fire fed by jet fuel, which at most burns at 1,700 degrees Fahrenheit, cause the collapse of the Twin Towers, built of steel that melts at 2,800 degrees? (Most experts agree that the impact of airliners, made mostly of lightweight aluminum, should not have been enough alone to cause structural failure.) How could a single planeload of burning jet fuel -- most of which flared off in the initial fireball -- cause the South World Trade Center tower to collapse in just 56 minutes?
- **Why** did building WTC-7 fall, though no aircraft struck it? Fire alone had never before caused a steel skyscraper to collapse.
- **Why** did all three buildings collapse largely into their own footprints -- in the style of a controlled demolition?
- **Why** did no U.S. military jet intercept the wayward aircraft?
- **Why** has there been no investigation of BBC reports that five of the alleged 9/11 hijackers were alive and accounted for after the event?

Our current probe-ophobia is due in part to the political landscape: When one party holds all the cards, any call to investigate an alleged abuse of power or cover-up -- no matter how valid -- will look like a partisan vendetta. Those in power never want to investigate themselves.

Maybe that's politics; he who holds the hammer drives the nails. But the outrage of 9/11 transcends party affiliation.

We need all the outstanding questions answered -- wherever the chips may fall.

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