

April 26, 2021: Zoom #1

Mark Dery (MD) interviews Mark Crispin Miller (MCM)

### **MARK DERY**

I thought we'd begin by picking the low hanging fruit first. My editor and the Chronicle Higher Ed lawyers are of course concerned that you not be misrepresented in any way. So to give a sense of the topography of your thought in my article I enumerate a number of the truth claims you made both intramurally (inside the classroom) and extramurally in your public facing statements, podcast interviews, social media and so forth. Humor me while we slog through this epic catalogue of claims you have either recirculated or articulated on your own. Please nuance them if you'd like, expand on them, defend them, walk them back, whatever you like, whatever your moved to do. I simply want to be absolutely certain that I'm accurately representing some of the things it's my understanding you believe.

So, on Facebook and Twitter and in your blog, you have promoted – I use the word promoted to mean merely posted or tweeted or recirculated anti-vaccination arguments -- what is colloquially known as 911 truther claims, speculations about whether the Parkland shooting which 17 were dead and 17 were wounded was a hoax staged with quote “crisis actors” to provide the pretext for outlawing assault weapons and more stricter gun laws. Please take all the time you'd like to clarify your time on these issues.

And I'm especially interested in the Parkland shooting question because I notice that got quite a bit of play on your Facebook page where, unless I misunderstood you, you seem to credence this claim which has gotten considerable traction on the Right. And specifically there was a long thread that unspooled from your post of an AP story that itself was merely a recirculation of a Fox story about the demolition of the school where the shooting took place. And you appended to that post for the story “Building Where Florida School Shooting Took Place Likely to Be Demolished” you quipped “out of sight, out of mind. What shooting?” And then in the thread, Joseph Green wrote, “It worked for the Ambassador Hotel” and you wrote “And JFK's limo in Dallas and the ruins of the World Trade Center.”

So I would just be very curious to have you expand – you seem to be implying, unless I misunderstand you – that like the JFK assassination, like the attack on Trade Towers, the shooting at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas School was some sort of simulacrum, some sort of propaganda drive, some sort of media hoax, some sort of false flag. So walk me through your thinking on that and any of the other issues I touched on.

**00:04:41 MARK CRISPIN MILLER**

Let's go back to the beginning of your question. Allow me to point out, in using your term, "anti-vaccination," and the term "911 Truth" you are already characterizing material that I've shared or questioned, or the questions that I have raised in a faintly negative or pejorative way. If I could just speak to all these questions in a general way,

"My view is, first of all, that any official narrative is open to question, and I see absolutely nothing wrong with circulating reasonable questions, raising reasonable questions, about incidents, the official story of which is, everywhere we turn we hear the same story, all the media are all together, broadcasting, printing, airing the same narrative. Having studied things like the Kennedy assassination in great depth and the activities of intelligence agencies worldwide and the utility of constructing certain narratives for propaganda purposes and to certain ends, I guess I could say I don't see anything *right* with simply accepting at face value the claims the media has made about these things. So I'm unapologetically willing to note oddities about these narratives and to circulate similar observations by others. Whenever I'm corrected, when I get something wrong, I'm very quick to correct myself.

I mean, I see my online work as part of an ongoing conversation. Just to be clear, actually I have never personally posted anything on Twitter; the stuff that appears on Twitter under my name is stuff that I've sent to my listserv and my assistant has posted it on Twitter. (We've left because of all the censorship.) And I was on Facebook for quite a while, and naturally one ends up in a circle of like-minded people.

But all of your questions are similar in that they confront me with instances of my skepticism about official narratives and I'm perfectly willing to discuss any one of those. I mean, you intimate that the story about Parkland School demolition was untrue. I don't know if that was false. It came from Fox News, I don't know.

**MARK DERY**

I wasn't intimating that the fact of the demolition of the school was untrue. Nor was I actually engaging you in debate about your putative opinions about the true motivations for that demolition.

I was simply noting my understanding, based on the Facebook exchange, and a few others related to David Hogg, that you seemed –

**MCM** I stressed seemed –

**MD** to be credentialing the notion that the demolition had taken place as a way ~~means~~ of quite literally burying the evidence. And your comment in the comment thread — “And JFK’s limo in Dallas, and the ruins of the World Trade Center,” in response to the gentleman who wrote, “It worked for the Ambassador Hotel” —I can’t imagine any other way to interpret that comment other than the cast that I’m putting on it. I’ll happily be corrected by you right here and now —

**MCM** No, no, no, Mark, there’s no need for that because I think that demolition *is* comparable to those prior demolitions. I mean, if we were dealing with a mundane crime none of us would hesitate to wonder why significant evidence was destroyed after the fact. It did happen with the limo that JFK was killed in, and it did happen with the ruins of the World Trade Center, and it appears to have happened with that school. I believe that’s worth noting. You know, there are a lot of things about the Parkland shooting that don’t add up. David Hogg has told different stories, and so on.

Looking at it from the standpoint of a student of propaganda, the instantaneous glowing publicity that the Parkland kids received, you know, with a cover photo on *Time* magazine and the very swift arrangement of a massive rally that we are told the teens themselves organized. I mean, I can tell you as someone who organized big protests around NYU’s real-estate expansion plan, that kind of thing, it’s impossible that a bunch of teens could’ve pulled that off. It was a really slickly produced event, produced for maximum media exposure.

You know, I used to scoff that claims on the right that some of these things are intended to enable confiscation of firearms. I used to laugh that off; I was a good liberal-slash-progressive and thought that was paranoid. But I no longer do; I think it’s a reasonable suspicion. To those of us who live in cities and are academics, that seems like yahoo paranoia, but looking at it from the standpoint of simply an observer of economics, we’re living in a time of unprecedented income inequality and growing dissatisfaction nationwide with the way things are arranged and I simply don’t think it’s unreasonable to wonder whether or not it would be in certain interests to disarm the population. So, you know, I’ve reconsidered various of my prior positions; I think everybody should do that. I hope that’s an adequate answer to your question.

**00:12:49 MD**

It is an adequate answer, and let me go meta for a second, as the millennials like to sake. I’m at pains here, as I said in my email to you, not to wander off into the weeds of your rationale for believing any given truth claim. In other words, I don’t want to engage you in debate about a concept like “mask mouth,” or whether or not the virus originated in a Chinese lab as a bioweapon.

My interest is largely if not entirely in your epistemological posture, that's what interested me most, that's what really tickled my brain about this story and about your evolution as a thinker and as a public intellectual. So in this case you've at long last given me what I was curious to know, which is not the empirical evidence in support of the notion that the demolition of the Parkland school was to literally bury the truth in the rubble, but you have laid out a theory about why vested interests would want to demolish the school. That's what interests me, here.

So let's return to a few of the points you raised in articulating this. You began by touching on that – and don't this as pejorative in any way, and I myself am a late boomer, you're an early boomer – the phrase, [Your statement that] you don't believe any official narrative should not be subject to question that's a paraphrase of what you said...reminded me of the '60s shibboleth, 'Question Authority.' And yet in point of fact we don't question all authorities and I dare say you don't question all authorities, My guess is and I'll happily stand corrected on this, but my guess is ...that you're a believer in, say, Darwinian evolution, a believer in Einsteinian theory, perhaps not all of its fringy implications (the multiverse is still open to debate) but some of the keystones of post-Enlightenment thought I suspect you subscribe to.

So one thing that occurs to me, listening to you, is: Is there no such thing as an unreasonable question? You went straight to the JFK assassination, which for many Boomers seems to be the primal scene, the beginning of a kind of collapse of faith in not only governmental mouthpieces and official media narratives but credentialed experts respected by peer-reviewed journals in their fields. And yet when you go to your dental hygienist or your pulmonary specialist or your ...gastroenterologist, my gut sense (pun intended) is that you trust, having been turnstiled through the official bodies in their field, they know what they're talking about. I suspect that if you were to turn your analytic powers on yourself, you would find that in point of fact there are some questions you deem unreasonable. You don't question gravity, you don't question the laws of thermodynamics, and so forth. So is it really true that everything is up for grabs? Or are you simply being selective? ...

And obviously I've chosen low hanging fruit. I've chosen things that can be resolved on an empirical basis. But even politically I've combed through your social media feeds. One notable – and you'll forgive the term -- conspiracy theory – and let's just agree that I'm going to use that term for what the normative establishment mainstream deems to be beyond the pale. You don't like the term "anti-vaxxer."

MCM Right

**MD** You don't like the term "911 Truther." I understand that. We can finesse that later. But there's no denying official voices deem those to be conspiracy theories, a term I'm well aware you shrink from. All of that being said, there are certainly quote/unquote "conspiracy theories" you seem not to embrace—say, David Ickes's notion that the power elite is in fact interdimensional shapeshifting twelve feet reptiliodes or that the moon landing is a hoax...Holocaust denial, right?

**00:17:34 MCM**

Wait a second. I mean there's so much to say in response to what you've already said that I want to take us back. First of all, you've slid from my claim of official narratives in the media to established scientific theses about physical reality and evolution; those are really two different things. In other words, I'm talking about media spectacle, I'm talking about media stories.

But I'm gonna be perfectly honest with you and note that as it happens I've lately been looking a little more deeply into Darwinian theory and I think that it is not really adequate to explain evolution and there are problems with the theory that even Darwin acknowledged privately. I mean, the nature of science is precisely its open-endedness, its tentativeness, we know this from Thomas Kuhn and so on. So I don't see those, the theories, as necessarily gospel truth. I also see some significant weaknesses in Freud's theory of childhood sexual development, and so on.

As for my feeling tremendously confident when I go to the doctor or the dentist, I've been misdiagnosed and improperly treated and injured enough times in the epic history of my lyme disease, which I've had for the last 10 years, and have been sufficiently bereaved by the death of a grand-nephew who was killed by a barrage of vaccinations, not to feel any such confidence in the expertise of the medical establishment because it's very deeply compromised by financial interests. That's why I object to the term 'anti-vaxxer.' That's a slur; I am a believer in vaccine safety, there are some vaccinations that I think are necessary.

**MD** Mark, I'm sorry to interrupt, but is that the term you prefer – believer in vaccine safety?

**MCM** Yeah, I would say vaccine safety advocate. You mentioned the moon landing. I'm going to tell you a story, and I think my own history here is entirely relevant to your article, I've been lecturing on conspiracy theory for a long time as you probably know and have always talked about the genesis of that term and its weaponization in 1967 by the CIA for the purpose of discrediting critics of the Warren Report and in

talking about ‘conspiracy theory,’ I would always say — and I’ll still say and I’ll say to you — that some so-called conspiracy theories are insane, and the example that I always used to give was [the belief] that the moon landing was a hoax. I’d toss that off and get an appreciative chuckle from the audience. The last time I did that someone from the audience came up afterwards and asked me politely if I had actually looked into it, and I was embarrassed: I had *not*. It was just one of those things I took for granted. So I did start looking into it and now I can’t see, I can’t -- I think it was impossible, I don’t think it happened —

**MD** Just to clarify: you don’t think the moon landing happened.

**MCM** I don’t think the Apollo mission made it to the moon, no.

**MD** Did any mission make it to the moon?

**MCM** I doubt it. But I haven’t looked at any others; I’ve looked at this one.

**MD** Forgive me for interrupting your flow of thought but I feel it’s important we nail this down: you’re a scholar of propaganda, and you well know that when you’re claiming we’re witnessing a propaganda drive, a media spectacle, it’s never just Dada, it’s not anarcho-comedic street theater, it’s in the service of a hidden agenda. What would the agenda have been, in that instance?

**MCM** The agenda was a propaganda war with the Soviet Union over the space race, you know, when Yuri Gagarin went into space, the first cosmonaut, he was the first human being to get up there, this caught the U.S. government flatfooted and I think they undertook to convey this mirage of a moon landing as a kind of counterblow and it was really quite successful. It also had the advantage of distracting people from how badly the war in Viet Nam was going. It had really hurt American prestige by 1969.

But it’s a good question to raise: what is the end of any given propaganda drive or incident and that’s perfectly understandable in the context of that years long back and forth between the two superpowers. There’s a terrific documentary that was made -- I think it came out a year ago or so -- that focuses primarily on the photos that the astronauts allegedly took on the surface of the moon. This Italian documentarist interviewed I think it was six photography experts some of whom were agnostic about the moon landing per se but they demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that those pictures were taken in a studio. There’s much else that’s extremely odd and suspicious and scientifically impossible. (*American Moon* by Massimo Mazzucco

<https://www.amazon.com/American-Moon-Massimo-Mazzucco/dp/B07HB4XC1S>)

[MD included the link in his original transcription]

Mark, the point here is that I was too quick to assume that that was crazy, so when I now lecture on the subject I'll mention the flat earth, I mean, the flat earth [theory] strikes me as *insane*. And David Ickes's theory about reptilian shapeshifters, I mean, seriously? I wish he wouldn't do that because much of his other work is quite sound.

**00:25:26 MD** What of his other work is 'quite sound,' in your opinion?

**MCM** Well, he's done a lot of stuff on COVID, I've heard him lecture and give interviews where he doesn't get into reptiles, you know.

**MD** So what you would call his 'vaccine safety advocacy' is what you deem to be his quote unquote good work?

**MCM** Yeah, I would include that in that category.

**MD** You see where I'm going with this Mark. I mean you said a moment again, I mean seconds ago, you said twelve foot reptilian people-oids, you know, who are shapeshifting, morphing into the House of Windsor, the Queen and her family and slipping through interdimensional worm holes are beyond the pale. And in all seriousness, it's not mere devil's advocacy, I am at a loss . . . I mean gun to head I would be at a loss to say, Why in your epistemological framework, that is beyond the pale. Because if you were willing to question anything, if there is no discursive domain within which you, or one, is willing to concede that one is out of one's depth – whether it is evolutionary biology, virology, epidemiology and it's not some craven, abject desire to bend a knee to authority.

It's the simple recognition that if I were a molecular biologist, I wouldn't feel on an equal footing with you when it came to media studies. Similarly as a cultural critic and a sort of autodidact critical theory junkie, I would feel out of my depth when it came to quantum physics. There's a reason Deepak Chopra ends up with egg all over his face every time he tries to debate physicist. He simply – for all the autodidactic brilliance for the most careful scholar in the world, yourself and myself very much included, we can't and shouldn't think we can go toe to toe with people who devoted their entire life to discourse.

And more to the point, been subjected to peer review and evaluated by others in their field and have been upvoted so to speak socially as not infallible but simply among the

best and most fluent exponents of a given discourse. Obviously, not all discourses are identical, some are more empirical than others. Some like ours are more loosey-goosey, and squishy. Right? In other words, ...Why is David Ickes [‘s reptilian theory] off the table? Maybe he knows something we don’t know.

**00:28:49 MCM**

Well, that’s possible. I mean, *anything’s* possible. I note the reptilian shapeshifting thing simply because I don’t see that it’s necessary for him to go there when it’s, you know, convincing enough that the House of Windsor has an enormous amount of wealth and power and they can just be human.

But to get back to the thrust of your question, I have never represented myself as an expert in any of those scientific fields

**MD** Right.

**MCM** But I wanna say that I *don’t* think we should simply accept the claims of any representative of that field because the medical establishment is deeply compromised now by mighty financial interests. Let’s take something that I’ve rarely said anything about or weighed in on, and that’s climate change. I’ve gotten into arguments about this with people all over the place online, back when I was wasting time there, I was simply pointing out that the hockey-stick graph and the claim about the polar bears, these are two key themes in the whole narrative, I had come across compelling evidence that they were both false and I was sharing that evidence.

**MD** Mark, specifically what was false about the polar bears and the hockey stick graph?

**MCM** The hockey-stick graph has been debunked now, I think four times, by different mathematicians, a team at MIT, I can’t recall exactly what their names are now. I did share this stuff earlier. It’s grossly oversimplified and just doesn’t add up and the guy, when he was challenged in court, couldn’t produce the data that he used to come up with that graph, which has been extremely influential. And the world’s leading authority on polar bears came out with a book, this woman, who was a professor somewhere, came out with a book demonstrating that polar bears are actually doing fine, and she was fired for this, and I called attention to that fact. So I would revise what I said about the polar bears to say there is significant reason to believe they’re doing fine; that this woman was just shut down, right?

**MD** I am going to interrupt to tell you to be more granular. 'Doing fine' is a colloquial phrase; by 'doing fine,' do you mean that their population has not dropped precipitously; that their numbers are as robust as ever, unaffected by what [scientific] authorities would call climate change? Is that what you mean/

**MCM** That's what this woman was arguing, yes.

**MD** And you subscribe to that?

**MCM** Well, no, not necessarily, I'm simply saying—look, I wanna stress the fact that I never represent myself as an expert in any of these fields that I was not trained in my focus is always on the media spectacle, and if there is a consensus that is hammered repeatedly within that spectacle and then someone credible and credentialed makes a credible counterclaim, I think that that counterclaim should get a hearing and that the person who advanced it shouldn't be fired. So what I'm saying to you is that I believe in debate, I believe in an open discussion.

What I was about to tell you is when I would share these counterclaims or share the articles about the debunking of that graph, people would come back at me with an argument similar to yours and say, 'Well, every climate scientist agrees with the theory of climate change.' I think that's true. But astrophysicists, for example, you know, Freeman Dyson, don't subscribe to the theory; they have a different way of looking at the same data, you see? That's completely missing from the climate change narrative that has now been absorbed by the World Economic Forum, sustainability is a key feature of the Great Reset, and they're talking about eliminating automobiles and Bill Gates is talking about doing away with animal agriculture, all in the name of saving the planet. So I really think it's a matter of some urgency that we open these subjects up to vigorous debate between different experts. I've never debated a virologist. I wouldn't do that but I do give a hearing to the consensus of those virologists whose views are *not* included in the media spectacle.

Let me give you another example: Go back to 9/11. Right after 9/11, all we were hearing here in the United States was that this was an act of war and that was unquestioned. Outside the country, there was a consensus of security experts that this was not an act of war and should not be treated as an act of war, it should be treated as a crime. Well, you wouldn't know that from reading *The New York Times* or watching CNN. You just wouldn't know and I think it's something people should've known.

These emergencies, whether it's the destruction of the World Trade Center or the COVID crisis, these emergencies override the democratic process because people are

terrified and furious. So it seems to me to be a matter of considerable urgency that we keep our heads just sufficiently to listen to those who have a different take on things. Propaganda does not want that; it has a unitary message and it wants nothing *but* that message to be hammered home. You know, I've learned, really through hard experience, to be as careful as I can. I don't rule anything out completely. For all we know, someday we'll find out that the Windsors *are* reptiles. I have no idea. I don't really care.

**MD** Well, I need no convincing of that point actually.

**MCM** Right.

**MD** If I may I would like to respond to the whole cloud of points you raise. There are a number of points of entry here. You talk about not jousting with or locking horns with epidemiologists. You would never represent yourself as such. You would never go toe to toe with them in debate. But of course you do make assertions, at least in your public facing statements, or at least your recirculate assertions made by others about virological science and epidemiological science. And I wonder if you wouldn't consider the following, and this is really a point of logic, it's not a point of epistemology.

The Rumsfeld image is helpful here, right? There are known knowns. There are known unknowns and there are unknown unknowns. Neil DeGrasse Tyson has been amusingly thoughtful on this point, that one of the most epistemological blind spots we *all* have as actors in the public sphere is when we know just enough to think we know more than we do, but don't know enough to know what we don't know. And that seems to me the danger of wading into the deep end of the swimming pool when it comes to discourses that are rarefied, that are really arcane, that involve many moving parts epistemologically, that require an argot or taxonomy or vernacular that is really recondite and requires years to dive into.

Let's take something silly and non-scientific like medieval mythology. I wouldn't want to debate JR Tolkien on the older Edda and younger Edda, Norse mythology. I would be way out of my depth. Not only would I be way out of my depth. I wouldn't know what I didn't know. What's interesting is that you – unless I mistake you – you do not seem to shrink from or at least do not wholeheartedly embrace QAnon.

**00:38:59**

One of the salients of QAnon that I find really interesting is just as someone thinking about culture is, it's very much an epiphenomenon of the Web Age, and one thing that all QAnon-ers believe is, "I can do this; I don't need an expert elite to tell me what to

think. I can do the thinking on my own.” Now, in fact that is very game like and it involves communities much like Reddit and 4Chan and 8Chan, interpretive subcultures that are doing Talmudic analysis collectively but regardless there is this feeling and it almost relates to the Reformation, you have the Gutenberg press, you have the ability to read the Bible in the vulgate for the first time, you don’t need an intercessor, you don’t need a hieratic intermediary; you’ve got this.

Forgive me, I know I’m going on a bit, but I want to prime the pump. It’s like the anti-federalist militias; they believe they can read the Constitution better than constitutional law professors. I wonder if there isn’t a danger in not knowing what you don’t know. All of us who think we are smart is, given enough time and enough reading, that we can figure this out without an expert elite. Is there a danger of ‘unknown unknowns’ when it comes to discourses like virology or epidemiology or Darwinian evolution, climate science, you pick the field?

**MCM** Are you likening me to QAnon?

**MD** No, I’m saying that there is a shared epistemological overlap in the Venn diagram in the assumption that no discourse is too complicated and requires so much study that we’re well advised to yield to the experts. You advise that with enough close study you can be sufficiently literate in an area to be able to sort out competing truth claims in that area.

**00:41:34 MCM**

All I’ve done is share the work of recognized experts; that’s all I’ve done. I’ve never taken it upon myself to make any pronouncements on virology or vaccinology; everything I’ve shared on the subject is work like people like **John Ioannidis [John Unitas?] and Knut Wittkowski [Newt Wickowski?] and Bhakdi [Bakhti?] [MD’s original transcription in brackets of these names]** and other medical authorities. I wouldn’t hazard a theory of my own on those disciplines so I don’t understand the invocation of QAnon.

Let me say something about QAnon. I never really followed it, I’ve glanced at it from time to time and I noticed that it suddenly emerged **this** last year as a bogey sufficiently menacing to warrant congressional condemnation, right, and I do know people who go there and are conversant with it and know some of the people who participate and they feel that these two guys whose names escape me, who kind of took it over, they think that those guys deliberately steered it in the direction of crazier and more seditious statements, mixing sensible comments with lunatic comments, which is actually a kind of disinformation technique.

The ferocity with which QAnon was suddenly condemned as a quasi-terrorist organization, that to me is a good example of how the state will use something like that as a pretext for censorship and tighter surveillance and so I think that we have to be very careful when we talk about QAnon because, see, I see nothing wrong, in fact I see something admirable about grassroots attempts to get to the bottom of child trafficking, and that kind of thing, which is a kind of a third rail and the media doesn't ever really go there.

You know, I studied the Franklin scandal in depth, I'm friends with Nick Bryant, who wrote the best book on it (*The Franklin Scandal: A Story of Powerbrokers, Child Abuse & Betrayal*), there are such networks, it does exist, there is quite a considerable traffic in children and young women and the media doesn't ever go there. These QAnon people are very exercised about that and I understand why. So that you know when someone steers it in a direction that is more patently disreputable and crazy, I think one has to ask oneself: Why are they taking this turn? And then when they're suddenly defined as a threat to the republic, and there's a looming specter of tighter laws to illegalize this kind of thing, I think we have to recognize the possibility that it was manipulated to that end. I mean, these are all tactics in the imperial playbook, the British did very similar things for a long time, and I think it happens here.

#### **00:45:55 MD**

If I may jump in. How do we distinguish between legitimate condemnation and illegitimate and suspicious, condemnation? Condemnation that is so ferocious and so univocal from the parapets of power, from the establishment media that arouses your suspicions. For example, Holocaust denial rightly inspires universal abhorrence and ferocious rhetorical retaliation as well it ought. David Irving is a pariah in academic circles. Unpublished and little loved. So how do we distinguish between ferocious univocal condemnation that is adequately earned and the more suspicious variety that arouses your skepticism.

**MCM** I don't know that I can answer that question in the abstract as you pose it but I think it's worth noting. I have no tolerance or patience for Holocaust denial. And I occasionally hear from somebody who makes that move with me and not just because I'm Jewish myself. I've really studied the Holocaust in depth and there's no grounds whatsoever for denying it. ... and I'm appalled to see that some people on the left go there. What's important about the point you raise is that Holocaust denial is often lumped together with things like the Kennedy assassination and 911. In fact, Deborah Lipstadt in her book on all this, early on in the book, actually compares skepticism

about the official story of Dallas with Holocaust denial, which I find outrageous, it's crazy, but it tells us something about the utility of things like that.

I believe as someone who thinks there's much to be revealed about 911 and who has emceed events by 911 Architects and Engineers and all that, although I've written very little about it myself, I think the very loud participation of certain anti-semitic truthers in the movement, I wouldn't be the least bit surprised if that was a deliberate move specifically to warn Jews away from the whole subject, if you know what I mean. And now one of them has just come out with, or last year or so, with a book arguing that the Jews killed JFK. I give these people a wide berth. Not just because I find their position repellant, but also because I wonder if it is authentic, or if it is not a propaganda measure to get people not to think about the subject at all. Same is the case with QAnon. I want to reconfirm a point you've raised.

**MD** Please.

**MCM** Since you sifted through my work you must know my own experience of being tagged as a conspiracy theorist when that happened. Are you familiar . . . ?

**MD** My presumption is that it began with your inquiry into 911. Am I mistaken on that point?

**MCM** Yes, you are. This is important.

**00:49:50 MCM**

I'll tell you parenthetically a very interesting story about that.

**MD** Mark before you go on, giving me a sense of how much more time I have with you.

**MCM** Well, I'm willing to do this again with you. I have a blood test at 2:30 so I'd say we have another half hour.

**MD** That's great. That's very generous of you to offer another session. I think I can cover all the ground I need to cover by 2:30 but I simply was anxious about getting to the 2:00 mark and whether ---

**MCM** We can go to 2:15. It's important that you understand this.

**MD** Yeah

**MCM** It's to let everybody know where I'm coming from . It was the publication of *Fooled Again* in 2005

**MD** oh yes, actually I'm sorry, I do know that whole affair and I have watched your exchange with Mark Hertsgaard on Amy Goodman and I have read the two reviews that so incensed you by Farhad Manjoo in Salon and Hertsgaard's own review in, was it, Mother Jones? And I have read excerpts from the book. So I'm fairly well briefed on that, but go on if you'd like to.

**MCM** Yes. It wasn't only, I wasn't the one who was sort of staggered by the response to the book, but the publisher of Basic Books was also surprised. I hired an independent publicist on my own dime, a woman who was the publicist for Bob Herbert and what's the name of the liberal economist who writes for the New York Times op ed page? Krugman, Paul Krugman. And she had never seen anything like the black out that she encountered from the mainstream media. There was indeed a kind of a black out on that book, but to my amazement it was the Left that attacked it as conspiracy theory and called me a conspiracy theorist. Mark Hertsgaard, he was an old friend of mine and I knew a lot of these people. When I got over the shock of that attack from my own side, I felt moved to investigate the provenance of the phrase "conspiracy theory." I asked myself, When did that become a thing?

So it didn't take long. I just looked into the archives of the Washington Post, New York Times and Time magazine and did searches on "conspiracy theory" and "conspiracy theorists." The former had been used in a kind of off hand way, the latter never. But it was 1967 when it started to be used more and more and more. That led me to the CIA memo in question 1035-960. And then I found out my friend Lance DeHave Smith, a professor of public policy at Florida Atlantic and who had done work on election theft as well and had made the same discover on his own. So I asked him to write his book *Conspiracy Theory in America*" his book, to tell that story for this series I was editing at the University of Texas Press, and he did and I'm delighted that he did because I'm always plugging the book.

It really helps people understand that the phrase is a slur intended to shut down discussion and inquiry. As to my own views on 911, I was way too busy throughout the mid-years of the first decade of the century with the voting issue and trying to break through with that. I had no bandwidth for 911. And people were badgering me about it. Why don't you look into it. I only have two hands [chuckles]. But I was on my book tour for *Fooled Again*. This is very interesting. I did a lot of local media and I think it was in San Francisco, I was doing a radio interview and they took questions. Some guy

called in and started yelling about what a dangerous figure I was, saying that I had co-authored a book that 911 was an inside job. This was obviously a deliberate take down attempt because I had never written a word about 911.

So it's interesting to me that the first thing that came to your mind when I raised this question as to when I was first tagged a conspiracy theorist that you thought it was because of my views on 911. I was a talking head in this documentary called *The True Cost* which is about the fashion industry. A woman who reviewed the film for I think *Slate*, or one of those – no it was *HuffPost* – complained vehemently that they had included me as a talking head on that subject because of my work on 911 which should put me beyond the pale. So that has stuck to me weirdly enough because I've only been kind of an advocate for 9/11 research.

Other than a section of my book *Cruel and Unusual* in which doesn't even get into the question of the US running the operation or any of that, I hadn't written on it. It's just one of those subjects that has been dismissed out of hand by the media as conspiracy theory and so I am willing to go to bat for the people who've done solid research on it.

I want to say in general that I go where the evidence takes me, you know? I don't simply embrace a conspiracy theory just because it is a conspiracy theory.

**00:56:15** One of the most important points that Lance makes in his book *Conspiracy Theory in America* that I urge you to look at is that ... We have to look at these incidents each as having possibly been what he calls State Crimes Against Democracy, SCAD, he has an acronym for it. We have to look at each one on its own merits, this is what I tell my students, you dig deep into it, you try to be as impartial as possible, and even if you find that the discoveries you make are very troubling to you, you have to stick with it unflinchingly until you come to something like an understanding of the truth.

Or let me put that less absolutely: until you are confident that what we've all been told by the media is either false or half-true or distorted. I feel very strongly about the necessity for this kind of inquiry. I mean, here you are, talking to me on the basis of my apparent trajectory from having been an edgy but still permissible media critic who wrote *Times* op-eds and was always on NPR, to this sort of loony who has ventured out into the weeds of reptilian shapeshifters and flat earth and all this. Sometimes I hear the kind of thing Woody Allen used to hear when they'd say, 'Why don't you make your funny movies again?' People will say, 'Why don't you go back to that thing **you did** where you wrote the essays in *Boxed In*, you know?'

**MD** I thought you were going somewhere else with the Woody Allen reference.

**MCM** Well, sure. I have yet to watch that documentary. I'm eager to do it. I lost my thread.

What happened was, in the '90s I became alarmed by media concentration and I veered away **somewhat** from these close readings of media texts, which I loved doing, to more of an activist mode where I was trying to call attention to the danger of intensifying media consolidation and I did this **really** at the invitation of Katrina Vanden Heuvel at *The Nation*, who asked me to edit these special issues of the magazine. It was her idea to call it the National Entertainment State, which I thought was very clever, so that got me into the issue I started a little thing called the Project for Media Ownership. I got funding to try and get this issue on to the radar screen. You can see how successful I was with that... and from there I was moved to focus on election theft after 2000 and 2004.

The point is, I've always believed that media criticism should be part of a larger project to preserve or maybe the better word is realize American democracy. I believe that deeply, and I think that that necessarily entails a healthy and robust skepticism toward official claims when they are parroted and parroted and parroted by a captive press that is in the pocket of its advertisers and too close to the state and what I'm dealing with now, even as we speak—and we're all really dealing with it; that includes you—is a moment when what they call conspiracy theory will actually be illegal because they've equated it with domestic terrorism. We're hearing this explicitly now.

So what began in 1967 as a very clever tactic for discrediting people like **Mark Lane** [*MD had transcribed the name as Layne*] has now snowballed into something much more menacing. It first reared its head in 2014 when David Cameron gave a speech at the UN, saying that conspiracy theorists were more dangerous than ISIS, there he invoked the specter of jihadis who were gonna blow up more buildings. The following year, Francois Hollande actually formally proposed legislation to outlaw conspiracy theory, and his rationale was, it's neo-Nazis who are into this; they're putting Jews at risk. It was the Holocaust-denial thing. That was six years ago. Now, since Trump and QAnon and the so-called 'attempted coup' — on January 6<sup>th</sup> we hear this all the time

**MD** Mark, you say 'so-called'; I've noticed in a number of your social-media transmissions that you frame, I mean inevitably, in many instances, you frame terms of art facetiously with ironic quotes to indicate that you don't accept them at face value. You seem to do this with the **quote unquote** insurrection. What precisely do you believe really happened on January 6? In other words, if you are claiming, as a propaganda scholar and a media theorist, that the spectacle occludes our vision of the

truth; that hidden behind those mediated events lies the machinations of vested interests—the power elite, or whoever it was—what do you believe that was really about? And what do you believe it was truly in the service of. If it wasn't what it appeared to be—an insurrection by Trumpers and right-wing elements (Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, Proud Boys, anti-federalist militias, and so forth), what in fact was it? What's the truth you know that I and the rest of us dupes don't know?

**01:03:18 MCM**

You put that very invidiously. I've never, ever suggested that you are all dupes and I'm the smartest person in the room. I don't *do* that. I *did* study as comprehensively as I could the videos of that whole day and interviewed a number of people who were at the march and [you can] see very clearly that the march was an enormous and completely peaceable gathering of people who were upset about the election outcome.

There's no relation between the incident inside the capitol and the crowds outside and indeed there is some footage of many people in the crowd outside booing when they saw whoever it was breaking windows on that balcony, and they were yelling 'Antifa!' so they knew that something was going on that would serve the purpose of discrediting the whole day.

And I've also studied very carefully the video of what happened inside, and I've done a considerable amount of reading about what coups entail. Like in Chile, for example, or South Vietnam: coups are not noisy intrusions into some official building by a bunch of yahoos who then put their feet up on desks. I mean, coups involve troops. They often involve attack jets and helicopters taking over the media. So calling that a coup is preposterous.

**MD** Not a term I used. It's one I would probably use.

**MCM** I'm answering the question. You see, we've already actually covered this ground, Mark, because you asked, well, We discussed QAnon and what use it would be to demonize them and we touched on the possibility that certain school shootings could've been hyped in order to advance a certain agenda and it's clear that the so-called coup was magnified and stigmatized really vehemently and still is—and still in many liberal and progressive minds it's still a kind of traumatic turning point when the far right tried to take over the government—that, too, is serving to advance a kind of a repressive agenda.

Remember the shot of the Black security guard [capitol hill policeman Eugene Goodman] trying to fend off the ascending multitudes? Standing behind the guy on the

landing, It's a very poignant image of this lone Black guy fighting off these Nazi hordes. Right next to him is some guy filming the whole thing, right? Not to mention the fact that the footage we're watching is taken by somebody who's standing on a landing. I mean, it was pure theater: the capitol police are an enormous and extremely efficient force; they would never have allowed that to happen. And indeed, there's maybe six videos showing the capitol hill police pulling the barricades aside and ushering these people into the building, you know? But when this kind of thing pushes your buttons, as it has pushed the buttons of countless people on the Left, you know, I can show those examples till the cows come home and they will *not* take it in.

**MD** But again, not to debate the falsifying empirical assertions you are making, but to cut to the heart of the matter, let me reflect back to what I think I'm hearing and you affirm or disaffirm my perception. You seem to be saying that essentially they were Fifth Columnists that it was a staged event to delegitimize MAGA Nation or Trump Americans or...conservatives, [but] help me connect the dots of how this would serve the ends of power. What is the endgame, here?

**MCM** Well, I think the endgame is the Great Reset, a kind of a biofascist regime that's global, rather than national. Those people, many of them, were I think deludedly following Trump in the belief that he was some kind of opponent of the Deep State, which I think is preposterous. If you know anything about him, you know that that's preposterous, but they fell for it. So him aside, a lot of the people who believed in him and voted for him represent the likeliest holdouts against forcible vaccination, mandatory masking, what they see as a kind of indoctrination to social-justice ideology in the schools and so on.

Some of these concerns are legitimate, but leaving them aside, the fact is that that is a large population of Americans who are likely to say no, likely to resist, likely to have guns **and so on**. I think that the so-called coup attempt was a very effective way of casting them as dangerous, right? Again, what we're witnessing now, what we have witnessed since the start of the COVID crisis, is an attempt to override the democratic process, to get around democracy. [knocking on wall. "That's my son sleeping"]. I think we're going to have to stop.

**MD** Well perhaps I'll take you up on your offer of a Round 2 because unfortunately there are some key questions about the classroom and Julia Jackson, but not specifically about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of her allegations but rather about some of the epistemological claims you made intramurally. Are you willing to do another Round 2.

**MCM** Sure.

**MD** Good OK. Name a time and ill happily make myself available.

**MCM** Let me think. I may be able to do it tomorrow.

**MD** OK

**MCM** If not, I can definitely do it this week.

**MD** OK.

**MCM** Let me consult my book and I'll email you later today.

**MD** Great that's fabulous because we have momentum I would hate for you to slip through my fingers, so tomorrow would be marvelous but if not tomorrow at your earliest convenience.

**MCM** Indeed OK, thanks a lot.

**MD** Thank you Mark. Goodbye.

**MCM** Bye.