



*The North Texas*

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## Conspiracy Times

### Your Annual Report

By John Brandt

It's been an eventful year for political conspiracy theories.

### MIHOP

The MIHOP (made it happen on purpose) folks, like Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth, are still out there thinking up reasons why al-Qaida couldn't *possibly* have been behind the 9/11 attacks. Their latest excuse, er, explanation? "Nano-thermite,"<sup>1</sup> an experimental form of thermite made from nanoscale particles of the metal and oxidizer (usually aluminum and iron oxide). They came out with the thermite hypothesis awhile back, based on a single photo showing a fireman standing in front of a cut-off WTC girder. Their reasoning is: if a fireman was there, the photo *must* have been taken during the rescue operation, before cleanup crews began cutting down the debris. (This is wrong,<sup>2</sup> but bear with me.) Therefore, the girder *must* have been cut during the attack, causing the collapse. Presumably thermite was used for this purpose.<sup>3</sup>

The problem with this idea is that tons of thermite would have been needed to cut down the WTC, and it's hard to imagine how massive, heat-resistant canisters to hold burning thermite in place could have been installed with no one noticing. Cutting the girders at the well defined, oblique angle seen in the photo is even more problematic and would have required even more thermite. (Why would the supposed conspirators have even bothered?)



Thierry Meyssan's conspiracy book about the 9/11 attacks has been published in 28 languages.

From Amazon.com

Enter "nano-thermite," which burns much more rapidly and is more easily ignited,<sup>4</sup> so presumably, less could have been used to do the job. But nano-thermite is still in the R&D phase — yet we're to believe someone had perfected this new technology sufficiently to cut down the WTC towers back in 2001!

### LIHOP

LIHOP (the belief that Bush "let it happen on purpose") is harder to debunk than MIHOP. Many of the questions raised by MIHOPers are scientific in nature; e.g., why did WTC 7 fall? Skeptics are good at science, and we've been able to give plausible answers to these questions.<sup>5</sup>

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LIHOPers, in contrast, concede that the official story of the events of 9/11 is basically correct, but contend that the Bush administration knew about it and failed to act. Absent telepathy, how do skeptics prove what Bush did or didn't know?

Well, we don't, of course. But we can still look at the existing evidence. We can point out that there's been no proof that Bush administration officials *did* know; given the number of "not my fault" books that have been written by former administration officials, is it really credible that none – not even former anti-terrorism "czar" Richard Clarke – has corroborated the LIHOPers' theories?

Unlike MIHOPers, LIHOPers don't theorize much; they just ask lots of leading questions, most of which boil down to, "why did the government fail to stop the attacks?" They're right to point out what should've been done that day; they just seem to think the government's foresight must've been as clear as their 20/20 hindsight.

## Other Left-Wing Conspiracy Theories

A few other conspiracy theories have come from the political left: for instance, that the Bush administration purposely destroyed the New Orleans levees during Hurricane Katrina, or that AIDS, drugs, or some other scourge was deliberately inflicted on American inner cities to oppress African-Americans. But only the 9/11 conspiracy theories seem to have caught on with a significant segment of the American public. Yet you'd be hard-pressed to find a liberal politician who tolerates support of the "truthers": President Obama's "green jobs" advisor, Van Jones, was forced to resign after it was reported that he had signed a document endorsing the LIHOP theory.

In (sort of) defense of Van Jones and other signers of this silly document, I'll concede that some could have signed the document without believing all the nonsense it contains. It's possible they just wanted a second investigation into 9/11, unencumbered by the restrictions faced by the original 9/11 Commission.

## Right-Wing Conspiracy Theories

With the change in power in Washington this year, the "truthers" finally have some competition. For the next few years, the real action in conspiracy theorizing will likely be on the far right.

The right has long been in the habit of thinking up conspiracy theories about left-of-center U.S. Presidents. These theories often take the form of secret alliances with Communists: Roosevelt heard these charges from Father Coughlin, Truman from Joe McCarthy, Kennedy from the John Birch Society, and today we're hearing similar charges against Obama – despite the fact that there's no longer a Soviet Union for hypothetical administration Communists to betray state secrets to! And unlike the left, there's no shortage of mainstream conservative politicians willing to endorse right-wing conspiracy theories.

President Clinton seems somehow to have escaped the “secret Communist” conspiracy theory, but the right had no shortage of other conspiracy theories about him as well: that he secretly murdered Vince Foster and/or his political enemies, or that he secretly trafficked drugs through an airport in Mena, Arkansas, for instance.

### “Birthers”

The big new conspiracy theory this year, of course, is that President Obama wasn’t born in the U.S. and doesn’t meet the Constitution’s qualifications to be President.

I do have to give the “truthers” a little credit. The 9/11 conspiracy theories are wrong, but at least most of them aren’t *obviously* wrong. One actually has to do some research to figure out that the collision of jumbo jets and subsequent fires could indeed cause the WTC towers to collapse; and the collapse of WTC 7, which wasn’t hit by a plane, is counter-intuitive enough to make the 9/11 conspiracy theories at least superficially plausible. The “birther” conspiracy theory, in contrast, is so easily debunked that I’m amazed anyone believes it. The “evidence” for it seems to be that the Hawaiian birth certificate of President Obama released on the Internet lacks a few pieces of information that the “birthers” deem essential and therefore *must* be a forgery, and/or that one of the crude forgeries of Obama’s birth certificate purporting to show that he was born in Mombasa, Kenya, in 1961 is in fact genuine.

Here’s the 15-second debunk: Two Hawaiian newspapers carried contemporaneous birth announcements in 1961, and Mombasa was part of Zanzibar, not Kenya, in 1961. Oh, and Obama’s mother was a U.S. citizen so it doesn’t matter anyhow.

Debunked! But like all conspiracy theorists, birthers know how to respond to a successful debunking: simply enlarge the conspiracy! So the birth announcements become part of another conspiracy to let Obama’s father immigrate to the U.S., and Obama’s mother becomes a minor when he was born and therefore unable to confer U.S. citizenship to her son.

So, even ignoring the dubious legal theory that your mother’s U.S. citizenship doesn’t count if you pop out abroad before she turns 18, now they’re questioning not only the place but also the date of Obama’s birth. (His mother turned 18 on November 29, 1960. President Obama was born on August 4, 1961.) Well, why not, if the birth certificate is a forgery anyhow? As “birthism” continues to evolve, I suspect we’ll soon see a crudely forged Obama birth certificate purporting to show he was born in Mombasa, Zanzibar in 1960. It’s the inevitable result of natural selection. (Ironically, I suspect few “birthers” accept the theory of evolution.)

Still, it seems amazingly prescient that anyone would’ve had the foresight to place phony birth announcements in the local papers for an infant at least 9 months old in 1961. I played a skit at the meeting lampooning the silliness of all this. <sup>6</sup>

### Conspiracy Theories-To-Be

But enough with the “birthers.” What new conspiracy theories can we look forward to in the upcoming months and years? I suspect skeptics can answer this question without the benefit of precognition; we need only look at the debate over health care reform. Reform opponents have made many claims that, at best, appear to be wild exaggerations of, and at worst, flatly contradict, the plain language of the reform bills Congress has been considering.

President Obama addressed several of these claims in his speech to a joint session of Congress. He stated that nothing in any of the health-care reform proposals would:

1. Create “death panels” of bureaucrats with the power to decide who is and isn’t worthy of receiving medical treatment;
2. Provide abortions; or
3. Provide any new benefits to anyone who is not legally present in the U.S.

The last claim prompted an outburst from Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), who shouted, “you lie!” at the President.

Although Rep. Wilson apologized for his outburst, he continues to insist that President Obama was lying. Yet the plain language of H.R. 3200 states “no Federal payment for undocumented aliens.” <sup>7</sup> Other versions of the health-care reform bill contain similar language.

But the health-care reform bills are very complex, and it’s easy to believe (or to mislead folks into believing) that undocumented aliens might receive a benefit from a provision other than affordability credits. A common target of such claims is the “public option,” a proposal for a government-run health insurance plan similar to Medicare that some individuals could choose in lieu of a privately run plan. Political conservatives oppose this proposal intensely, and so are more likely to believe the worst about it.

But all the health reform bills that include a public option also stipulate that the public option must pay for its own expenses via premiums paid by its customers, just as a privately run plan would. Thus, even if an undocumented alien were to purchase the public plan, without the banned affordability credits, they wouldn’t be receiving any benefit from taxpayers.

Another possible explanation is that President Obama is planning an immigration reform bill, which may include a provision to allow some undocumented immigrants to become documented. They would then be eligible for health-care affordability credits. But if this comes to pass, the affected immigrants would then be legally present in the U.S., so President Obama would still be correct.

Anyhow, I’m sounding a “conspiracy theory alert”: If health reform passes, by September 2012 we’ll be debunking claims of Americans being denied care by government “death panels” while undocumented aliens get free abortions.

It's a better bet than anything in Las Vegas. □

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## End quote

by John Blanton

Last month we printed a follow-up on a submission by Jared McCormick. As we noted, McCormick took exception to me for “trying to find a way to prove DR. Patton’s credentials have been falsified.” Jared also mentioned my accusations that Don Patton has incorrectly quoted main stream scientists and writers. This month we will follow up on these objections.<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not you accept Dr. Patton’s theories and science, you cannot say that he has twisted information, or misquoted any other scientist. He has been honest, upfront, and forward with all the information he has represented. I have personally checked references of where he has quoted very reputable evolutionists, thinking myself that he must have misquoted, or used ellipses to take away from what the scientist was actually saying, thereby twisting there words. It astounded me to find out that these evolutionists actually have stated these comments in the context Dr. Patton quoted them.

I contacted Jared McCormick for clarification on the above remarks. He was not able to provide additional details, but he wrote, in part:<sup>2</sup>

It has been a while since I have looked in to this matter, and I didn’t take any notes while I researching Don’s use of quotes. I am on a full boat with my schedule and find it hard to even check my inbox. If I get some time I will try and give you

further details, but to be honest, all I did was just go to the library and look up the evolutionist quotes he used and see if he did or did not in fact use them out of context. In my opinion he did not. In a nutshell, The scientists were obviously speaking on evolution, but did mention some things that could possibly point to a creator, but also in some cases laid out a rebuttle to say this is why and how the subject matter really relates to evolution...

I have a full plate, as well, but I did take some time to re-view what we have written about creationists’ misuse of quotes and misuse by Don Patton in particular. Here is a short review.

First of all, creationists are forced to work at a disadvantage. Without a basket of truth to fall back on, so they often need to spin their stories and tweak the truth a bit. A couple of devices at their disposal are quote mining and out of context quotes.

Quote mining consists of searching about for quotes from real scientists and scholars that seem to support a point of view, all the while disregarding existing quotes that conflict.

Out-of-context quotes are words from a legitimate source that are used to imply a meaning contrary to the author’s intended meaning. Out-of-context means quoting sections of the original text without providing the full context. What gets put into the quote are phrases and even paragraphs that tell the story the creationist wants to tell. What gets left out are the parts that complete the real explanation of what the original author meant to say.

Don Patton has used both. I will illustrate with a few examples, and I will leave it to the reader to decide what these examples reveal.

In 1992 Jeff Umbarger and I attended a lecture by Don Patton. Don provided handouts of his presentation, and the text proved helpful and ultimately entertaining. We covered this presentation before, and I will recapitulate.

As a young-Earth creationist, Don wanted to demonstrate that scientific evidence for the age of the Earth is seriously flawed. To do so he presented a number of quotes from legitimate sources, and the way the quotes were presented is illustrative. Here is the background:

Radiometric dating that employs decay or uranium isotopes is often use to establish the age of ancient rocks. Don wanted to demonstrate that even real scientists are dissatisfied with the method. In 1992 I discussed a number of Patton’s abuse of quotes. Here is a clip that had the heading “DATING OF MOON SAMPLES: PITFALLS AND PARADOXES.”

What complicates things for the uranium-lead method is that non-radiogenic lead 204, 206, 207 and 208 also exist naturally, and scientists are not sure what ratios of non-radiogenic to radiogenic lead were early in the moon’s history. ... The problem of how much lead was around to begin with still remains. ... If all of the age-dating methods (rubidium-strontium, ura-

nium-lead and potassium-argon) had yielded the same ages, the picture would be neat. But they haven't.

My take is: This is supposed to emphasize that radiometric dating methods are trouble prone (and should not be trusted). The problem is, this quote has been distorted in a bizarre manner.

Note the ellipses—these represent breaks in the quote. Ellipses are a legitimate device that writers use. They are supposed to stand in place of superfluous material the writer has left out. Don had a better idea.

In Patton's text ellipses break the quote into three pieces. Apparently two sections of the quote have been omitted. Think again. Examine the original quote, which Jeff retrieved from a back issue of *Science News*.<sup>3</sup>

The first section (complicates things for the uranium-lead method) in Patton's quote actually appears second in sequence in the original text.

The second section (problem of how much lead was around to begin with still remains) in Patton's quote actually appears last in sequence in the original text.

What Patton has done is to take a piece of original material consisting of more than 678 words, pare it down to 75 words, and then rearrange the word order to make his argument.

In the original text author Everly Driscoll makes his point in the final paragraph:<sup>4</sup>

The problem of how much lead was around to begin with still remains. This could be partially solved by dating all of the soil samples from the moon, determining the over-all effects on each soil sample and getting a convergence point.

Driscoll does not seem to have a real issue with radiometric dating. In his article he merely outlines how to handle problems that often come up with radiometric dating. This is not the point Don Patton wanted to make, and he came very close to re-writing Driscoll's text to argue his case.

A few years back Don Patton and I debated geological history, and creationism on the side. I recorded some of the Don's juiciest use of quotes in the April 2002 issue of this rag.<sup>5</sup>

Here is a quote from *The Blind Watchmaker* by Richard Dawkins:

And we find many of them already in an advanced state of evolution, the very first time they appear. It is as though they were just planted there, without any evolutionary history. Needless to say, this appearance of sudden planting has delighted creationists. ...the only alternative explanation of the sudden appearance of so many complex animal types in the Cambrian era is divine creation...

The full quote from Dawkins reads as follows. I put Don's text in **bold**:

Before we come to the sort of sudden bursts that they had in mind, there are some conceivable meanings of 'sudden bursts' that they most definitely did not have in mind. These must be cleared out of the way because they have been the subject of serious misunderstandings. Eldredge and Gould certainly would agree that some very important gaps really are due to imperfections in the fossil record. Very big gaps, too. For example the Cambrian strata of rocks, vintage about 600 million years, are the oldest ones in which we find most of the major invertebrate groups. **And we find many of them already in an advanced state of evolution, the very first time they appear. It is as though they were just planted there, without any evolutionary history. Needless to say, this appearance of sudden planting has delighted creationists.** Evolutionists of all stripes believe, however, that this really does represent a very large gap in the fossil record, a gap that is simply due to the fact, for some reason, very few fossils have lasted from periods before about 600 million years ago. One good reason might be that many of these animals had only soft parts to their bodies: no shells or bones to fossilize. If you are a creationist you may think that this is special pleading. My point here is that, when we are talking about gaps of this magnitude, there is no difference whatever in the interpretations of 'punctuationists' and 'gradualists'. Both schools of thought agree that **the only alternative explanation of the sudden appearance of so many complex animals types in the Cambrian era is divine creation**, and both would reject this alternative.

Back in 2002 I wrote "Don presented this in the context of explaining that Dawkins, a real scientist, thinks the fossil record does not support evolution (so why should creationists or anybody else). I am sure Don had some reason for leaving out Dawkins' 'Evolutionists of all stripes believe, however, that this really does represent a very large gap in the fossil record, a gap that is simply due to the fact, for some reason, very few fossils have lasted from periods before about 600 million years ago.' I am sure the reader can guess why."

Don used this quote by Charles Darwin from his *The Origin of Species*.

...innumerable transitional forms must have existed but why do we not find them embedded in countless numbers in the crust of the earth? ...why is not every geological formation and every stratum full of such intermediate links? Geology assuredly does not reveal any such finely graduated organic chain, and this perhaps is the greatest objection which can be urged against my theory.

Again from 2002: "The first part of the quote is on page 125 of my copy of *Origin*. Don's quote picks up after the ellipsis on page 234. I love it! That's not a typo. That's a 109-page

gap, big enough to fit punctuated equilibria inside with room to spare for Lamarckism and cold fusion, too.”

Go back to Jared’s statement: “I have personally checked references of where he has quoted very reputable evolutionists...” Since McCormick didn’t give any examples, it’s hard to tell if he is talking about anything we printed in our newsletter or if he is talking about some stuff he read elsewhere.

Creationists provide all of us a lot of entertainment, much of it humorous. We can thank Jared McCormick for bringing back these fond memories. We will have more of these discussions in the future. □

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## EVENTS CALENDAR

### November program

Saturday, 14 November 2009  
2 p.m.

Center for Nonprofit Management  
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

**Presentation by Cladia Meek**

\* \* \* \* \*

**There will be no Social Dinner in November.**

### Future Meeting Dates

12 December 2009: Christmas Party!  
16 January 2010  
20 February 2010  
20 March 2010  
17 April 2010

## One less hoax to worry about

by Prasad Golla

On October 15th 2009, the date after the Dow Jones Index broke the 10,000 mark – again; after taking a plunge in an endless recession, the cable news channels interrupted their regular programming, dropping the live broadcast of President Obama’s speech from New Orleans to show a live drama of “balloon boy.”<sup>1</sup>

The silver, disk-shaped balloon looked like a “UFO.” The hoax as it transpired wasn’t that this was a UFO but that a 6 year old boy was trapped in the balloon. Thank goodness!

Lately we’ve been watching weather balloons by amateurs being hoisted to thousands of feet.<sup>2,3</sup> With simple off-the-shelf components like a weather balloon, a Styrofoam chest, a cheap digital camera, a GPS enabled cell phone, etc. and the indispensable tool of all, duct tape, students were rivaling NASA in cost cutting methods with a budget of less than \$200 for taking pictures of space. These flights were unmanned.

A balloon can float up to about 60,000 to 80,000 feet before the inflation, caused by less pressure in the upper atmosphere, will compromise the structural integrity, and lead to the bursting of the balloon. Another consideration is the low temperatures at those altitudes. At 70,000 feet the temperature is at minus 65 degrees centigrade – the lower range for the proper operation of most military grade equipment. Also, the FAA stipulates supplemental breathing (oxygen) equipment above 12,000 feet for manned flights.<sup>6</sup>

Now imagine a boy sent up to such an “alien world.” It would be a certain death for the boy – long before reaching such heights. Thankfully, not all balloons, because of their construction, can reach those heights.

How would one stop a free floating balloon with a child riding aboard from reaching an elevation which would kill anyone in a few minutes? Why is the child in a balloon in the first place?

Such an incident did happen. In 1964 the “original balloon boy” was an 11 year old who couldn’t let go of the balloon when his hand became entangled in the ropes and he was hoisted up to about 3,000 feet.<sup>4</sup> The pilot of the balloon landed it safely.

## Skeptic Ink — by Prasad Golla and John Blanton. © 2009. Free, non-commercial reuse permitted.



Then there was the original, original “balloon boy” whose dad used to strap him to balloons for shows he did. Back in 1933 in Cleveland Stadium the tether broke and the balloon went adrift with the 4 year old boy strapped to it. The boy, who survived because the balloon apparently landed on its own, is now 82 and lives in Florida.<sup>5</sup>

Back to our “balloon boy” in 2009. Falcon Heene – the 6-year old boy who was reportedly in this balloon – has now become a national spectacle. The cable television stations had a few thousand viewers glued to this drama, suprisingly, considering it was on a Thursday afternoon (a regular working day). “How will they rescue the boy?” was all that the viewers could think of.

Gawker reports the boy and his family were twice on the ABC show *Wife Swap*. “The boy is Falcon Heene, son of Mayumi and Richard, who is a scientist and storm chaser.”<sup>1</sup>

Richard Heene and Robert Thomas, a Web entrepreneur, perpetuated the hoax apparently to dig out of the financial mess they were in. At least the boy was always safe. He was hiding in the attic, probably at the behest of his mom or dad, when they found him.

Robert Thomas spoke freely about how they perpetuated the hoax. According to Thomas, He and Heene planned the hoax so they could make some money in this desperate economy. Thomas insisted on getting paid for his interview in which he detailed how they did it. In that he never lost track of why he and Heene planned the hoax in the first place.

Skeptics accept the countering of hoaxes as a regular undertaking, for example the “Piltdown man” hoax,<sup>7</sup> Bigfoot hoaxes, fake artifacts such as the Shroud of Turin, UFO hoaxes, creationist hoaxes such as those which claim to provide “evidence” that man and dinosaurs’ coexisted, and supernatural sighting hoaxes such as Lincoln’s ghost.

Some of these hoaxes haunt us for decades and even centuries. It wastes our resources needlessly. We could be working on solving problems such as finding a cure for cancer or determining how exactly a now extinct animal lived. We could in the least use our limited resources of time to better understand how the universe works. Even my countless hours watching reruns is better spent. The waste of time on hoaxes is regrettable, and without benefit.

So said, I feel the “balloon boy” hoax of this month is better left deflated on the desert floor. □

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