

# The Devil Behind

## Conspiracy Theories in the USA

*By Leonard Zeskind IREHR & Antifa Net*

A recent meeting of the anti-immigrant vigilante group called the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps featured a speaker who spent an hour warning his audience about a secret conspiracy to take over the American Southwest. In fact, the Southwest occupies a contested place in history. Much of this territory—including the state of Texas—once was under Mexican sovereignty, and then was stolen away by the United States in a war of conquest during the 1840s. And it is true that today millions of Mexican immigrants (with and without proper documents) have been driven north by joblessness and poverty to find work and new homes. By the Minuteman account, however, these brown-skinned Spanish-speaking workers have a sinister plan to repopulate the Southwest, push out English-speaking Americans and return these lands to Mexican sovereignty. And this notion animates large swaths of the anti-immigrant movement that believe “white” control over the American culture, economy and political system is slipping away. It is a grand racial conspiracy theory they call the “Reconquista,” and it turns a grain of truth into a large myth.

In a similar fashion, after the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, militiamen created any number of elaborate conspiracy theories to explain the event. One such presumption is that the man who was convicted (and executed) in the crime, Timothy McVeigh, was a patsy for some unnamed foreign power who actually committed the crime. Since McVeigh actually admitted delivering the truck-bomb, the most popular idea in the militia world is that the whole affair was a government sting operation gone bad. According to this notion, Clinton administration officials knew about the bomb plans well in advance but did nothing to stop it. In this way

the government could blame the militia movement and crack down on it. A German national, living in Oklahoma at the time, Andreas Strassmeir, plays a big role in this theory. As in the reconquista, there are several grains of truth inside this big lie. Strassmeir was, in fact, a shadowy character with a military background living on a Christian Identity compound where many of the white nationalist underground roads did cross. And any intelligent analyst if the Oklahoma City bombing would be forced to conclude that all the perpetrators were not caught and punished. Nevertheless, this conspiracy theory is an obvious confection doctored-up to shift the burden of guilt off of the militia movement.

“Conspiracy theories” must be separated from knowledge of actual conspiracies. While the federal government did not have a hand in the Oklahoma bombing, it did eventually admit to a conspiracy against black people during the 1930s and 1940s, when doctors who looked at patients with syphilis did not treat them or even inform them of the disease. This crime has left a permanent scar, and as a result many black people do not trust white doctors even to this day.

One conspiracy theory with no kernel of truth involves the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. According to the text of this crackpot idea, no Jews died in the horror because they had all mysteriously stayed home from work that day. The subtext presumes that the Jews had all been warned in advance because the Israelis were the real masterminds of this mass murder. Unfortunately, this particular notion is popular among some sections of the so-called “left” as well as among far right anti-Semites. And it stands only as testament to the poison that “anti-Zionism” has infected itself with.

Kernel of truth or not, conspiracy theories occupy a permanent place in American culture. They explain the seemingly

unexplainable—much like the way the gods Zeus and Jupiter might have helped the ancient Greeks and Romans understand their universe. Instead of fostering knowledge of the economic, social and political forces actually at work in our society, “conspiracy theories” are theologically constructed renderings in which metaphysics replaces fact with fiction. Almost all contain some sort of unseen hand mysteriously controlling events—a devil or Satan type who does evil deeds while walking the Earth. Any culture or society in which devil theories or Satan looms large—and the United States is not alone in this regard—is thus prone to the destructive effects that conspiracy theories have on popular understandings.