

## 1. Forgotten Precedents

*No people can be both ignorant and free.*

— Thomas Jefferson

**Tough Times for American Democracy** As many of us have sensed for some time, American democracy remains in serious, even critical condition. More than most of us have acknowledged, the cumulative expressions of the malaise are deeply disturbing. These include a bloated military-industrial complex, torture, “extraordinary renditions,” secret prisons, military tribunals, detainment without legal recourse, increasing concentration of media ownership, invalid or stolen elections, faulty voting machines—plus attacks on personal privacy, political expression, and other civil liberties. Many have violated our Constitution and all have degraded our democracy, corroding trust in all public institutions. If a new administration is serious about reversing this decline, it will need to keep its promises and devote significant resources to repairing the damage.

While most politicians and pundits seem in denial about the seriousness of the crisis, some of our most perceptive voices have spoken out. Legendary defender of democracy Bill Moyers has addressed these problems in his weekly “Journal” and elsewhere; in response, the PBS pulled the show off the air for several months (PBS “NewsHour” 6/21/05). Public intellectual and radio host Thom Hartmann also points to the historical fragility of democracy and how easy it is to lose it ([www.commondreams.org/views03/0316-08.htm](http://www.commondreams.org/views03/0316-08.htm)). And, similarly troubled with what’s gone on since 9/11, social critic Naomi Wolf has turned to neglected history for meaning and guidance: “I could no longer ignore the echoes between events of the past and forces at work today” (Wolf *End of America* p. xi). A newcomer to the serious study of history, Wolf models how to “connect the dots” along a steep learning curve. Responding to troubling trends, these and other concerned, patriotic citizens are making significant sacrifices to draw attention to the dangers we face. Many others, including millions of activists who contributed to the grassroots Obama campaign, did so in hopes of “getting their country back again.”

## 1. Forgotten Precedents

2.

**Why Pay Attention to Historical Precedents?** Responding to these threats to American democracy, we'll examine precedents from its history. Though not well known, these precedents have everything to do with understanding our present predicament. How many of us learned in school, for instance, that in 1950 Congress approved a plan, developed by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, to jail up to 12,000 American citizens, disregarding their legal rights, to "protect the country against treason, espionage and sabotage" (*New York Times* 12/23/07). Among those few who know today, how many perceive parallels to the suspensions of Constitutional rights that followed 9/11? How many see similarities to long-existing plans, such as Continuity of Government, for mass incarcerations of American citizens during a "national emergency"? (P. D. Scott *Road to 9/11* pp. 184-87, 214, 236-38).

As Mark Twain sagely noted, "history doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme" ([www.quotedb.com/quotes/3038](http://www.quotedb.com/quotes/3038)). In these first three chapters, we'll look at patterns among historical precedents, at the crucial functions served by an awareness of history in a democracy, and at the role of media in the mythmaking that often follows traumatic events. As we'll see, historical ignorance and amnesia inhibit critical thinking, jeopardize democracy, and facilitate going to war. It's a sure way for citizens to give away their power ([www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/btw/watch.html](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/btw/watch.html)).

Fellow citizens often remark, "Hey, forget the history; it's a thing of the past. I've got all the info I need." When they do so, they're showing a naïveté that must amuse those in government who understand that knowledge is power and who may prefer that citizens don't have much of either. The National Security Agency (NSA), for instance, has long resisted any declassification of materials on the Gulf of Tonkin "Incident" of 1964, which led the US directly into the Vietnam War. Despite repeated requests by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for declassification, senior NSA officials continued, fully 40 years after the hoax occurred, to block release of key documents. Why should they be so stubborn? Reporting on the blockage, *New York Times* reporter Scott Shane revealed that NSA higher-ups were "fearful that [declassification] might prompt uncomfortable comparisons with the flawed intelligence used to justify the war in Iraq" (*NYT*

## 1. Forgotten Precedents

3.

10/31/05). History is threatening to those who don't want us making meaningful connections between past and present; that's probably one reason history is so often trivialized into lists of dates, kings, and battles.

*Information and Empowerment* Now that concern might seem overblown, given that most Americans are already aware of the bogus justifications for the attack on Iraq. But if we look to more direct parallels, NSA's fears become more understandable. If we recall that the Gulf of Tonkin incident involved supposed attacks by North Vietnamese torpedo boats on US Navy vessels, we get a bingo. What if, when Iranian swift boats supposedly buzzed Navy ships in the Persian Gulf early in 2008, citizens (and even the news media) were empowered to ask, Is this another Gulf of Tonkin? Now, *that's* a question the Pentagon doesn't want us asking. However uncomfortable these precedents may make those in power, informed comparisons are crucial: they allow an informed citizenry much greater participation in the democratic process.

What if, while Washington and the mass media are flooding the airwaves with reports of events that never happened and weapons that didn't exist, more of us could draw on the many relevant precedents within American experience? Would a fully informed American public have been so easily suckered into the Vietnam quagmire or the Iraq fiasco? What if more of us were able to say, "hey, that's war propaganda, just like . . ."?

To catch up on our relevant but forgotten history, let's take a brief look at some schemes that weren't highlighted in our history textbooks. Let's examine how the US precipitated its involvement in five major conflicts: the Mexican-American War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, and Vietnam. As we discover how and why we got into these wars, the historical rhymes will ring loud and clear. This won't be pop history, full of bubbles and sweeteners. But armed with greater insight, wiser in the ways of the world, we'll become more empowered as American citizens.

• **1846: The Mexican-American War: Provocation Enables Major Land Grab** After annexing the Lone Star Republic of Texas, which pushed the US border with Mexico

## 1. Forgotten Precedents

4.

southward, President James Polk turned his sights toward Mexico's vast lands in the West. These included California, which Polk, an expansionist, had long wanted to "appropriate" (H. Zinn *People's History of the United States* p. 150). To justify an invasion of Mexico, the president needed a pretext, an incident enabling the US to invade a far weaker country and seize much of its land. To generate such an incident, he sent an army led by Gen. Zachary Taylor on maneuvers below the Rio Grande. Gen. Taylor's troops built a fort and aimed their cannons at the Mexican city of Matamoras. This provocation drew a predictable response: as the Mexicans tried to repel the foreign troops, they killed or captured American soldiers. Once the Mexicans had fired the first shots, the war was on. Taylor wrote to Polk that "hostilities may now be considered as commenced." After claiming that an enemy had launched an aggressive attack that had to be avenged, the president waged the war he'd wanted (Zinn *People's History* pp. 150-51).

Although Polk was the one who'd initiated the deception, he nonetheless sent an indignant message to Congress demanding a declaration of war. (This was back when presidents still observed such Constitutional niceties.) The war found ready supporters among Southerners propelled by a popular belief in Manifest Destiny—and especially from slave owners hoping to increase the number of slave states ([www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article\\_display.cfm?HHID=324](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=324)). The war itself was short, but the gains were huge. As a price for halting its drive southward, the US forced Mexico to sign over a vast area, including all of what is now New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, California, and part of Colorado (E. Foner *Give Me Liberty!* Vol. 1 pp. 402-405).

Extending the American tradition of protest, men of conscience dissented. Henry David Thoreau went to jail rather than pay his War Tax (Thoreau "Civil Disobedience"). A young Congressman Abraham Lincoln endured ridicule and political disfavor with his "spot" resolutions demanding that Polk disclose the exact "spot" where the confrontation with the Mexicans supposedly took place (R. Basler *Abraham Lincoln* pp. 199-201).

Just a half century after its founding, the young Republic was heading down a path of repeated provocations and pretexts for war.

• **1898: *Maine* Sinking Triggers Spanish-American War** On the night of February 15, 1898, the US Battleship *Maine* rested at anchor in Havana harbor, its white hull

gleaming above the blackness of the water. A month before, as Cuban rebels renewed their fight for independence from Spain, President McKinley sent the warship on a “friendly visit” to demonstrate the American desire for order in Cuba and to “protect American interests” (D. M. Kennedy et al *Brief American Pageant* p. 382). To the Spanish, struggling to retain their colonies, the ship signified American support. To the independence-minded Cubans, however, it was a floating fortress intruding into their affairs.

As “taps” approached, all was calm on the *Maine*. Wisps of coal smoke rose from the battleship’s tall stacks; lights beamed from its bridge. Inside, Captain Charles Sigsbee was writing a letter to his wife. The rebellion in Cuba, he told her, will soon be over; the tough new Spanish governor was getting the situation under control. As Capt. Sigsbee slipped his letter into an envelope, an explosion shattered the silence: “It was a bursting, rending, and crashing roar of immense volume,” he would recall, “a trembling and lurching motion of the vessel, a list to port. . . . Then there was intense blackness and smoke” (Qtd. in [www.smplanet.com/imperialism/remember.html](http://www.smplanet.com/imperialism/remember.html)).

The *Maine* was sinking fast. Fires engulfed the vessel, casting an eerie glow on the rippled water. Trapped in their berths, most of the crew were shouting for help, gasping for air. As their cries subsided, explosions rocked what remained of the *Maine*. In the morning, only the twisted, burnt wreckage of the *Maine*’s stern and bridge protruded above the oily surface. Though nearby Spanish ships had rescued some survivors, 266 American seamen were dead, 59 more wounded ([www.smplanet.com/imperialism/remember.html](http://www.smplanet.com/imperialism/remember.html)).

All four major inquiries into the cause for the disaster have concluded that an explosion in the forward six-inch ammunition magazines caused the sinking. Exactly why those magazines exploded, no one has determined conclusively. From these inquiries, two hypotheses have emerged: “one, that a mine in Havana Harbor had exploded underneath the battleship, causing the explosion of the magazines; and two, that spontaneous combustion of the coal . . . created a fire that detonated the nearby magazines” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remember\\_the\\_maine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remember_the_maine)). Little evidence supports the widely trumpeted allegation of sabotage by the Spanish.

***First Journalists, Then Politicians Fan the Flames of War*** Back home, both big-city and small-town newspapers were indulging in an unprecedented orgy of instant mythmaking and media manipulation. For over two years, backed by bankers, the “yellow” press had been beating the

drums of war. The spectacular sinking of the *Maine* provided a new opportunity to wave the bloody shirt.

Historian Jerald Combs describes the unprecedented media blitz aimed at increasing profits: “In their battle for circulation in New York, the Pulitzer and Hearst newspapers tried to outdo one another with sensational horror stories about the war in Cuba. One account featured a Hearst reporter’s rescue of an upper-class Cubana from her Spanish jail cell (Combs *History of American Foreign Policy* p. 142). (The “damsel in distress” of Victorian melodrama now starred in press propaganda.) With war fever rising, a battle cry resounded: “Remember the Maine! To hell with Spain!” The sinking was immediately blamed on a mine set by the Spanish; it became unpatriotic to even question whether something else might have caused the explosion ([hnn.us/articles/1009.html](http://hnn.us/articles/1009.html)).

***“I’ll Furnish the War”*** Beginning in 1896, two years before the *Maine* exploded, newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst had employed an illustrator to supply drawings favorable to the Cuban insurrection. After a year on assignment in Cuba, the illustrator reported back that “there is no trouble here. There will be no war. I wish to return.” Hearst shot back with a now-famous telegram: “You furnish the pictures, and I’ll furnish the war” (<http://chrisberg.org/?s=hearst>).

Movie buffs may recall a reprise of this famous line in Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane* when Charlie Kane, based closely on the newspaper tycoon, commanded his correspondent in Havana: “You provide the prose poems; I’ll provide the war.” Jed Leland, Kane’s best friend, protested: “You’re dragging your country into a war. Do you know what a war is, Charlie?” (Qtd. in P. Kael *Citizen Kane Book* p. 184). In 1941, just months before Pearl Harbor, Welles likely intended to inform Americans about their history. But since most viewers knew little about either Hearst’s remark or the history surrounding the *Maine* sinking, his attempts to point out parallels were doomed to fail. Because of public ignorance, the warning was overlooked, and Welles’s now-classic film was widely castigated as “anti-American.”

***The Interventionists Prevail*** To its credit, official Washington didn’t initially jump at the prospect of the war. Though public sentiment increasingly ran in favor of the Cuban rebels, the administrations of Grover Cleveland and William McKinley remained steadfast in wanting to see the war in Cuba end. It had hurt trade and jeopardized American investments on the island (J. Combs

## 1. Forgotten Precedents

7.

*History of American Foreign Policy* p. 142). Despite hesitation at the White House, powerful interests combined to thrust the country into war—and into empire. Sensing Spain’s weakness, expansionist banking, business, and military interests became increasingly keen to access additional resources ([http://library.thinkquest.org/18355/the\\_sinking\\_of\\_the\\_uss\\_maine.html](http://library.thinkquest.org/18355/the_sinking_of_the_uss_maine.html)). Serving these interests, Sen. Redfield Proctor echoed the howls of the yellow journalists as he condemned the horrendous deaths of Cubans in Spanish detention camps (*Combs History of American Foreign Policy* pp. 144-45).

With war fever rising, the sinking of the *Maine* stirred passions that swept a republic toward empire. Major commercial interests intended to instigate a war that would allow the US to seize Spain’s empire. In *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism*, prominent historian Philip S. Foner argues that from the outset Washington’s intention was to control the Philippines, which promised cheap labor, markets for manufactured goods, a rich array of resources, and an ideal location for a naval base. These amenities became available only after a long and bloody occupation.

But the *Maine* would hardly be the last time that an accidental, contrived, or staged event would serve to justify a major military action.

• **1915: The *Lusitania* Sinking: Another “Trigger Incident”** Because Americans remained largely ignorant of how its government had manipulated events to start wars with Mexico and Spain, few questioned official accounts about why their country entered World War I. If more Americans had understood how pretexts trigger military campaigns, more could have raised questions about the sinking of the British luxury liner, the *Lusitania*.

Once again, let’s start with the standard version. In May of 1915, before the US entered World War I, the *Lusitania* set out from New York for Ireland. When a German U-boat, “lurking beneath the surface,” sank the great Cunard liner, 1195 passengers and crew were lost. These included 112 Americans, “mostly women and children.” In the ensuing months public outrage at the German atrocity mounted, effectively propelling the US into World War I. Unbeknownst to its passengers, however, the liner was “secretly carrying munitions in its hold” (T. DiBacco et al. *History of the United States* p. 486).

***Sanitized History*** Although the official narrative mentions that the *Lusitania* carried

munitions, the emphasis usually falls on how the “barbaric Huns” attacked and sank a defenseless passenger liner. What most histories don’t say is that the British Admiralty had secretly installed several six-inch guns on the passenger ship as part of its plans to commission her for military service. Nor do they inform readers that the Germans had learned, unbeknownst to passengers, that the *Lusitania* would sail with 4200 cases of Remington rifle cartridges (at a thousand rounds to a box) plus 1250 cases of shrapnel shells (K. Allen *Lusitania Controversy* Pt. 4). Nor do the histories mention that these stowaway munitions—hundreds of tons of them—were expressly intended for English forces fighting the Germans (Zinn *People’s History* p. 362).

Contrary to the official narrative, the stowaway cargo revealed a major effort to support the British, an attempt to deliver militarily significant quantities of munitions under cover of a passenger ship. When the German Embassy learned of this huge shipment, it attempted to place 50 newspaper ads warning passengers not to book passage on the *Lusitania*. However, the State Department blocked all the ads except for one that appeared in the *Des Moines Register*. And when members of Congress tried to issue a public warning to avoid ships carrying military cargo, President Woodrow Wilson quickly quashed their plan. Since only one warning slipped by the government agents, hundreds of uninformed passengers proceeded to book passage on the doomed liner.

These developments illustrate the power of government to suppress information that doesn’t suit its purposes. It’s still little known that to make sure the *Lusitania* would be a floating duck crossing an area infested with U-boats, Lord of the British Admiralty Winston Churchill ordered the escort ship *Juno* back to port (J. Kenworthy and G. Young *Freedom of the Seas* p. 211). It’s hardly common knowledge that American and British officials falsified the ship’s packing list, omitting the secret munitions aboard. Their intent, it would appear, was both to establish “plausible deniability” when, predictably, the liner was torpedoed—and, by fomenting public outrage, to kindle the fiery passions of war. Although the US didn’t immediately enter the conflict, the deliberate German sinking of a British ocean liner created a political climate that made war inevitable.

Above all, the official story doesn’t let on that the British and American governments planned and helped to orchestrate the *Lusitania* operation, which was financed by major banking houses, or that Wilson and Churchill personally arranged for the luxury liner to carry weapons



([www.teachpeace.com/teachpeacemoment9.htm](http://www.teachpeace.com/teachpeacemoment9.htm)).

***History Aptly Applied, But Lost to Posterity*** The US entry into World War I also provides an example of how insightful historical accounts are sometimes developed and applied to the present, only to eventually slip down the memory hole. During the 1930s, the (Gerald P.) Nye Committee (or Senate Munitions Investigating Committee) studied the causes of US involvement in World War I. After holding 93 hearings and questioning more than 200 witnesses, including J. P. Morgan and Pierre Du Pont, the Committee found that bankers had pressured President Wilson to protect their loans abroad ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nye\\_Committee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nye_Committee)). The Committee reported that between 1915 and April 1917, the US banks loaned Germany \$27 million dollars while, during this same period, the US loaned the UK and its allies \$2.3 *billion* dollars, about 85 times as much. Besides engaging in price fixing, the munitions industry exerted “excessive influence on American foreign policy leading up to and during World War I.” In short, the Committee concluded that the US entered the war largely because it was in its bankers’ and munitions makers’ interests for the Western allies not to lose.

Although the Nye Committee didn’t achieve its goal of nationalizing the arms industry, it did apply history in a proactive way. It inspired Congressional neutrality acts in the mid-1930s that signaled profound American opposition to overseas involvement, especially when driven by banking and industrial interests. Thus the *Lusitania* sinking exposed a pattern of “politically motivated, government-assisted attacks prompted by powerful economic interests”

([www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/merchants\\_of\\_death.htm](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/merchants_of_death.htm)). Even if governments planning “set-up” or “stand-down” events don’t actually stage them or plant a false flag, their consequences can be just as deadly. World War I cost America 53,000 battle deaths plus countless additional casualties, physical and psychological. The costs to the other combatant nations ran immeasurably higher. The death toll approached nine million. In England, France, and Germany, a whole generation of men was notably missing (P. Fussell *Great War and Modern Memory* pp. 8, 18).

• **1934: The “Business Plot” to Overthrow FDR** In 1934, as President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal got under way, prominent banking and industrial interests sought to topple and oust the popular leader. The plotters represented some of the most famous firms and families, the owners of DuPont, Heinz, Birds Eye, and Maxwell House, plus prominent industrial tycoons,

including J. P. Morgan and George W. Bush's grandfather, Prescott Bush. Threatened by FDR's "socialism" and "betrayal of his class," the cabal believed that the US must adopt the policies of Hitler and Mussolini. Drawing on the Nazis' success with mobilizing unemployed soldiers, the conspirators planned to enlist the support of 500,000 war veterans as American "brown shirts." In short, their aim was to install a fascist oligarchy dominated by the country's most powerful business and banking leaders—themselves (J. Bakan *The Corporation* pp. 85-95).

Marine Gen. Smedley Butler, the most decorated military officer of his day, was selected to lead the coup and take control of the White House. Although Gen. Butler had led many interventions in Latin America (in one infamous instance crushing a worker rebellion to protect the interests of United Fruit Co.), he'd also shocked an American Legion audience by describing himself as "a racketeer for capitalism." To make amends for his earlier misdeeds, perhaps, this time Gen. Butler thwarted the capitalists whose interests he'd served. Butler exposed the conspiracy he'd been chosen to lead, informing a Congressional Committee that the plotters felt confident of success because "we have got the newspapers . . . . And the dumb American people will fall for it in a second" (J. Archer *Plot to Seize the White House* pp. 118-19).

Few American historians have discussed this shameful plot. And despite the numerous campaigns run by G.H.W., G.W. and Jeb Bush, neither the Democrats nor the news media have mentioned the complicity of Prescott Bush—even though he continued to express his support for fascist powers, even helping to finance Nazi Germany. This was all forgotten when Prescott Bush was later elected to the Senate ([www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/document/document\\_20070723.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/document/document_20070723.shtml)).

• **1941: The "Sneak" Attack on Pearl Harbor** For most Americans, Pearl Harbor remains an emotionally sensitive issue. Because of Japan's "Black Sunday" attack, 2403 Americans lost their lives and another 1,178 were wounded. Moreover, Japan's pre-*kamikaze* gamble triggered "the Good War," which was fought to victory by "the Greatest Generation" and led by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, often revered as the greatest president of the 20th century. Though layers of hallowed mythology have obscured many key facts, when they're finally presented, even in short form like they appear here, they're very persuasive.

In his impressively documented study, *Day of Deceit: The Truth About FDR and Pearl*

*Harbor*, noted historian Robert Stinnett demonstrated that President Roosevelt provoked war with Japan. By enforcing an embargo against Japan, FDR ensured that Japan would attack the US. In the run-up to the attack, explained sociologist/historian James Petras, “FDR ordered “eight specific measures which amounted to acts of war, including an embargo on trade with Japan, the shipment of arms to Japan’s adversaries, the prevention of Tokyo from securing raw materials essential for its economy, and the denial of port access, thus provoking a military confrontation” ([www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=9063](http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=9063)).

- *May, 1940-January, 1941*: Seeking a “secret entrance” into a war a wary public doesn’t want, Roosevelt projects American naval power 5000 miles westward. As the first of several provocations, he personally orders that Pearl Harbor become the new home port for the US Pacific Fleet. By January, 1941, the Japanese have taken the bait; the US learns of their plans to attack its huge new base in Hawaii. Over the next eleven months, the White House devises additional provocations, monitors Japan’s reactions to them, and tracks its attack plans through intercepted diplomatic and military communications ([www.lewrockwell.com/orig/stinnett1.html](http://www.lewrockwell.com/orig/stinnett1.html)).

- *June 26, 1941*: The Roosevelt administration freezes all Japanese assets in the US, effectively cutting off the island nation’s principal supply of steel and oil. This made war virtually inevitable (Kennedy *Brief American Pageant* p. 496). FDR’s advisor Harold Ickes assures the president that the embargo could “make it not only possible but easy to get into this war” (Qtd. in W. Thomas *Days of Deception* pp. 2, 4).

- *August 14, 1941*: At the Atlantic Conference, Prime Minister Winston Churchill notes the “astonishing depth of President Roosevelt’s intense desire for war.” Churchill cables London that “(FDR) obviously was very determined that they [the Americans] should come in” ([www.geocities.com/Pentagon/6315/pearl.html](http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/6315/pearl.html)).

- *September 24, 1941*: Having “cracked” the top-secret Japanese naval code, US intelligence knows that Japan has opted for war (Kennedy *Brief American Pageant* p. 496). It intercepts a message from Japan’s Naval Intelligence to its consul in Honolulu requesting the precise coordinates for all US warships in port at Pearl Harbor. However, top brass at the Pentagon order that the decoded warnings be withheld from Rear Admiral Husband Kimmel, Commander of the Pacific Fleet

## 1. Forgotten Precedents

12.

(Thomas *Days of Deception* p. 4).

- *October 16, 1941*: To conceal its sinister intentions, Tokyo enters into prolonged negotiations with Washington (Kennedy *Brief American Pageant* p. 496). However, FDR deliberately humiliates Japan's Ambassador and refuses to meet with its premier, enflaming public opinion in Japan. These diplomatic slights helped General Hideki Tojo's war party to seize power ([www.geocities.com/Pentagon/6315/pearl.html](http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/6315/pearl.html)). Washington rightly understands this development as meaning that war could be imminent.
- *October 20, 1941*: When a top Soviet spy informs the Kremlin that Japan will attack Pearl Harbor within 60 days, Moscow passes this information on to Washington. However, all references to Pearl Harbor in the War Department's copy of the spy's confession will be deleted (*New York Daily News* 5/17/51).
- *November 13, 1941*: William "Wild Bill" Donovan, head of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS, the predecessor of the CIA) describes to FDR the bind in which Japan apparently finds itself: "If Japan waits, it will be comparatively easy for the United States to strangle Japan. Japan is therefore forced to strike now, whether she wishes to or not" (*NYT* 12/7/08). If "Wild Bill" has it right, the where is obvious and it's just a matter of when. One is inevitably reminded of the moments in the summer of 2001 when CIA director George Tenet will report that "the system is flashing red."
- *November 19, 1941*: After a Dutch submarine spots Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto's mighty flotilla, the Dutch alert American intelligence. However, a newly-re-elected Roosevelt administration never relays the sighting report to the Pacific Fleet command in Hawaii (Thomas *Days of Deception* p. 1).
- *November 21, 1941*: Adm. Kimmel, the Commander in Honolulu, becomes frantic to locate Japanese aircraft carriers known to be heading east. When he launches a task force to locate and possibly engage the Japanese fleet, he receives orders to terminate the mission. On several occasions Adm. Kimmel is misinformed or otherwise prevented from taking action that could thwart the Japanese attack ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Husband\\_E.\\_Kimmel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Husband_E._Kimmel)).
- *November 25, 2001*: Exploiting their access to Japan's naval code, American cryptographers intercept and decipher Adm. Yamamoto's cable to another commander, which they interpret to

imply an imminent attack on Pearl Harbor. When British intelligence come to the same conclusion, Churchill telexes an urgent warning to Roosevelt, who cables back: “Negotiations off. Services expect [military] action within two weeks” (Qtd. in Thomas *Days of Deception* p. 2).

- *November 26, 1941*: After a Cabinet meeting that deals mainly with the Japanese, Secretary of War Henry Stimson remarks in his diary that “the question was how we should maneuver them [the Japanese] into the position of firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves” (Qtd. in *Journal of Historical Review* [www.ihr.org/jhr/v11/v11p431\\_Lutton.html](http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v11/v11p431_Lutton.html)).

- *November 27, 1941*: Intelligence operative (later CIA Director) William Casey learns “that a Japanese fleet was steaming east toward Hawaii” (W. Casey *Secret War Against Hitler* p. 7). The next day, Washington removes its prime military assets: it orders the *Enterprise* and the *Lexington*, the new aircraft carriers anchored at Pearl Harbor, out to sea. While the departure of these carriers strips Pearl Harbor of 40 percent of its already inadequate fighter protection, it also preserves them for the war that’s sure to follow ([www.geocities.com/Pentagon/6315/pearl.html](http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/6315/pearl.html)).

- *November 28, 1941*: After Roosevelt authorizes a warning, Rear Admiral Royal Ingersoll, Assistant Chief of Naval Operations, sends a Priority dispatch to Naval commanders:

HOSTILE [Japanese] ACTION POSSIBLE AT ANY MOMENT X IF HOSTILITIES CANNOT REPEAT CANNOT BE AVOIDED THE UNITED STATES DESIRES THAT JAPAN COMMIT THE FIRST OVERT ACT X THIS POLICY SHOULD NOT REPEAT *NOT* BE CONSTRUED AS RESTRICTING YOU TO A COURSE OF ACTION THAT MIGHT JEOPARDIZE YOUR DEFENSE .

However, the dispatch limits the defensive moves that commanders can make:

[YOU SHOULD] UNDERTAKE SUCH RECONNAISSANCE AND OTHER MEASURES . . . BUT THESE MEASURES SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT SO AS NOT REPEAT *NOT* TO ALARM CIVIL POPULATION OR DISCLOSE INTENT . . . .

If this warning reaches Adm. Kimmel at Pearl Harbor, it leaves him with few options because, as Stinnett observes, “there was no way to hide the troop movements or fighters and bombers engaged in a massive air search” (Stinnett *Day of Deceit* p. 171ff).

- *December 1, 1941*: The Office of Naval Intelligence in San Francisco also locates the missing

Japanese fleet by correlating reports from the four wireless news services and several shipping companies that they are getting strange signals west of Hawaii. The Soviets ask the Japanese to let one of their ships pass; they, too, have obviously determined the location of the massive Japanese fleet (E. Layton *And I Was There* p. 261).

- *December 4, 1941*: From Dutch Java, US Chief of Counterintelligence Gen. Elliott Thorpe sends four messages about an imminent attack on Pearl Harbor: not only does Washington fail to heed his warnings, but it even orders him to stop sending them (*NYT* 6/29/89). In the last ten days before the Day of Infamy, radio intercept stations continue to decode Japanese communications: seven of these confirm the plans to attack Pearl Harbor (Stinnett *Day of Deceit* p. 203).

- *Dec. 5, 1941*: At a Cabinet meeting, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox remarks, “Well, you know Mr. President, [that] we know where the Japanese fleet is?” “Yes, I know,” replies FDR. “Well, we have very secret information that the Japanese fleet is out at sea. Our information is. . . .” A scowling FDR cuts him off, mid-sentence, and changes the subject” (J. Toland *Infamy: Pearl Harbor and Its Aftermath* Ch. 14 Sec. 5).

- *December 7, 1941*: Roosevelt’s wife Eleanor later recalls that after learning of the attack, the president became “in a way more serene” (E. Roosevelt *This I Remember* p. 233). When, later in the day, FDR meets with CBS reporter Edward R. Murrow, the newsman is also surprised at FDR’s calm reaction. After chatting about London, they speak about the tragic news from Pearl Harbor. Then, apparently testing or taunting the press, FDR asks “Did this surprise you?” After Murrow nods in the affirmative, the president asks, “Maybe you think it didn’t surprise *us*?” Seeming to tout his competency, the president leaves the impression that the attack was neither a surprise nor unwelcome ([www.geocities.com/Pentagon/6315/pearl.html](http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/6315/pearl.html)).

- *Fall, 1944*: A US Army Board of Inquiry confirms that, because of American access to the code, “everything that the Japanese were planning to do was known to the United States” (Qtd. in Thomas *Days of Deception* p. 1). In response—and while her husband was running for reelection—the First Lady will later admit that for them “December 7 was . . . far from the shock it proved to the country in general. We had expected something of the sort for a long time” (*NYT Magazine* 10/8/44).

*Coming to Grips with Pearl Harbor* Damning as all this might seem, some historians

believe that subsequent events vindicate FDR's tough decisions and devious scheming. Some point out that US involvement in World War II did, after all, pull the country out of the Depression. Others contend that Roosevelt, foreseeing the enormous threats posed by Hitler and Mussolini, understood that the public and Congress nevertheless remained overwhelmingly against entering a war in Europe. The president, these apologists argue, believed that events required the US to provoke an attack that appeared sufficiently debilitating to entice European dictators into declaring war on the US. This is an easier argument to make if a loved one wasn't sacrificed at Pearl Harbor—or killed in the ensuing War. However worthy the ends, they probably didn't justify the means.

Responding to these disclosures, some historically conscious readers will object: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, after all, was arguably the greatest president of modern times—the one who instituted enduring federal programs such as Social Security, led the country out of the Depression, and guided it toward victory in World War II. These shining achievements are apt to blind us to the darker sides. Prominent establishment historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., author of a definitive history of the FDR administration, played the other side of the record: he concluded that Roosevelt “could be, and often was, devious, guileful, manipulative, evasive, dissembling, underhanded, and even ruthless” (*Time* 4/13/98). This said, we need to ask whether there were other players, such as bankers or munitions makers, who might have pulled strings from behind the curtain.

As we'll see, the many forewarnings in the lead-up to Pearl Harbor parallel those received before the 9/11 attacks. Historians have posited three common hypotheses about the more recent tragedy: that elements of the federal government “had foreknowledge, but let it happen” vs. “had foreknowledge, and helped make it happen.” The third “take” is less sanguine. Historian Mark Emerson Willey, whose massive research informs *Pearl Harbor: Mother of All Conspiracies*, takes the helped-it-happen position: he concludes that the Roosevelt administration provoked the attack, knew about it well in advance, blocked appropriate responses to the Japanese threat, and used American warships as floating ducks ([www.onlinejournal.com/artman/publish/article\\_117.shtml](http://www.onlinejournal.com/artman/publish/article_117.shtml)). The evidence we've examined here, especially the economic acts of aggression approved by Roosevelt and his standdown of Pacific defenses, suggest that the most accurate analysis would be “provoked the attack and then made sure it happened.”

Whether FDR's decision is viewed as tactical or treasonous, it certainly extended an American tradition of using deception to foment public outrage and garner support for wars. Could the 9/11 attacks have extended this tradition?

• **1962: Operation Northwoods: A “False-Flag” Operation Against Cuba** As we've seen, the history reveals instances in which Washington either treated an accident as a provocation or generated events intended to provoke public indignation. However, American history has also involved the deliberate staging of “false-flag” attacks in order to justify military actions. A “false flag” attack is perpetrated by one party but cleverly designed to be blamed on another.

First let's look at the background; then we'll examine Operation Northwoods—as told by the Pentagon plotters themselves. In April of 1961, a new Kennedy administration had sponsored and supported an abortive invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. This plan, secretly authorized by President Dwight Eisenhower and implemented by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), called for arming and training of anti-Castro Cuban exiles. Though Kennedy had reservations and was hesitant to commit American forces, he did approve the use of unmarked Navy warplanes. The plan was for the exiles to land and kindle a general uprising, but the Castro regime proved more popular than calculated. It defeated the CIA-trained Cuban exiles in just three days (*Zinn People's History of the United States* p. 440).

Ultraconservative hawks at the Pentagon and CIA were hardly chastened, however. In 1962, not long after the Bay of Pigs debacle, the Joint Chiefs of Staff came up with Operation Northwoods, a much more ambitious scheme against Castro's Cuba. This new plan, which again involved the CIA, called for a staged attack that would “justify” a US invasion of Cuba. A “false-flag” operation, it featured several alternative schemes. As we'll soon see, the schemes ranged from having boatloads of Cuban émigrés “ruthlessly” sunk by “communist Cubans” to having a decoy passenger plane shot down by “Russian-made Mig fighters” and then telling the world that the empty drone had been full of “civilian victims” (*J. Bamford Body of Secrets* pp. 82-89).

***The Pentagon's Devious Scheme*** In 1962 the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the generals commanding the entire US military, secretly decided that if the US couldn't incite a revolt within



Cuba, they'd have to create a Cuban "provocation" to justify an attack. The Joint Chiefs' ingenious plan for "provocations," which they send to the Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, reads like the script for a low-tech *Dr. Strangelove*. Its objective, as rendered in unusually clear Pentagonese, was "to camouflage the ultimate objective and create the necessary impression of Cuban rashness and irresponsibility . . . to place the United States in the apparent position of suffering defensible grievances . . . and to develop an international image of a Cuban threat to peace in the Western Hemisphere" (Joint Chiefs of Staff *Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense* 3/13/62 pp. 12, 3, 5). The intent, then, was to use a series of outrageous deceptions to generate a pretext for an unprovoked war on Cuba.

Operation Northwoods was plotted down to the minute details. In one scenario, attacks led by the Cuban expatriates were to be staged "around Guantánamo to give genuine appearance of being done by hostile Cuban forces." Provocations were to "include starting rumors by clandestine radio, landing allied Cuban expatriates (in Cuban military uniform) . . . , starting riots, blowing up ammunition, and burning aircraft inside the base . . . . A 'Remember the Maine' incident could be arranged . . . . We could blow up a US ship in Guantánamo Bay and blame Cuba" (*Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense* pp. 7-8). This initial "cover and deception plan" was to "provoke Cuban reactions." Then, at this very moment, American forces would be conducting "war games" in the same area; if the Cubans fought back, these exercises would be changed into actual attacks: "Our military posture throughout execution of the plan will allow a rapid change from exercise to intervention if Cuban response justifies" (*Memorandum* pp. 7-8).

***Reading the Playbook, Getting the Plan*** Knowing what we do about the *Maine*, the plan to "blow up a ship" is particularly intriguing. On the one hand, it suggests that military planners, unlike the general public, do recall the events that launched earlier campaigns. On the other, the plan illustrates a principle that informs much of this analysis: that tactics which have worked tend to stay in the bag of tricks, ready for Pentagon tricksters to use again. Informed citizens need to have some idea what they're likely hiding in that bag. As coaches have long known, it's savvy to study films of your opponents to infer their probable game plan; then you'll be looking for that bootleg play that caught defenders flat-footed the week before.

It's too facile to quip that "the generals are always fighting the *last* war," to dismiss all

military planners as unimaginative. This was hardly the case in 1962.

***Staged Events at Home and Abroad*** Beyond the staged events on foreign shores, the Joint Chiefs planned additional provocations on US soil:

We could develop a Communist Cuban terror campaign in the Miami area, in other Florida cities and even in Washington. . . . We could foster attempts on lives of Cuban refugees in the United States even to the extent of wounding in instances to be widely publicized.

Exploding a few plastic bombs in carefully chosen spots, the arrest of Cuban agents and the release of prepared documents substantiating Cuban involvement also would be helpful

. . . . (*Memorandum* pp. 7-8).

It's instructive to note that the Joint Chiefs apparently anticipated no problems with getting the news media to cooperate. Before Washington pundits, right, left, and center, make sweeping dismissals of "conspiracy nuts" who dream up fantastic and sinister government plots, they might take a closer look at those hatched just across the Potomac.

***Remote-Controlled Destruction*** When all this stagecraft called for an electronic *coup de theatre*, the generals' script delivered it. The Joint Chiefs discussed deceptions in the Wild Blue Yonder that involved substituting a drone aircraft for a commercial flight and then destroying it through remote control.

The generals' plan called for staging "an incident which will demonstrate convincingly that a Cuban aircraft has attacked and shot down a chartered civil airliner. . . ." With CIA agents posing as "passengers," an airliner was to head for Cuba. But the plane will secretly land at a CIA airfield; here it would receive a new tail number, making it seem like a different airliner. Then it was to take off, ready to veer off when a duplicate but unmanned airliner took its place in midair. The substitute drone airliner was to fly by remote control toward Cuba, sending back prerecorded calls for help and even identifications for fighters sent up to defend Cuban air space.

Then comes the *coup de theatre*, the climatic blowout of the plot. "When over Cuba," the generals propose, "the drone will begin transmitting on the international distress frequency a 'MAY DAY' message stating he is under attack by Cuban MIG aircraft. The transmission will be interrupted by destruction of the aircraft which will be triggered by radio signal. This will allow Latin American radio stations to tell the US what's happened to the aircraft instead of the US trying

to ‘sell’ the incident” (*Memorandum* pp. 9ff). Having blamed Havana for the atrocity, Washington could proceed with the invasion it had longed to execute (*Harper’s* 7/1/01).

Grappling with persistent questions about how Hani Hanjour, a completely inexperienced, apparently incompetent pilot could have flown a Boeing 757 into the Pentagon, responsible researchers have entertained the possibility that Flight 77 was controlled remotely. Drones aside, it’s worth noting that the Northwood schemes reveal how seriously, nearly 40 years before 9/11, Pentagon planners had considered relying on remote control.

*Civilians Assert Control, Planners Plot On* Admiral Lyman Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the main proponent of the Northwoods plot, presented it to Defense Secretary McNamara and President Kennedy. After both rejected the scheme, Adm. Lemnitzer sought to destroy all evidence of the Northwoods plan (*Baltimore Sun* 4/24/01). Undeterred, the Pentagon continued to plan other “false flag” or “staged pretext” (*causus belli*) operations through 1963, when JFK was assassinated, and in 1964, when its Gulf of Tonkin scheme deceived nearly everyone and “justified” a massive escalation of US bombing.

*A Possible Preview of KAL 007* The Northwoods plan for shooting down a drone airliner, simulating mass casualties, provides one classic example of a false-flag operation, a type of state-sponsored terrorism. It also reveals interesting parallels to the actual downing of Korean Airlines Flight 007 in 1983. In this case, an airliner strayed hundreds of miles off course into Soviet air space, flying over a highly sensitive submarine base. Soviet interceptor jets trailed the airliner for several hours and eventually shot it down, killing all 269 people aboard. It was never adequately explained how the pilots could have flown so far off course for so long, ignoring directions from air controllers and signals from fighter jets ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean\\_Air\\_Lines\\_Flight\\_007](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007)).

While the Reagan administration didn’t make a military response, it shamelessly exploited the incident to score propaganda points. Alvin Snyder, former Director of Television for the US Information Agency and author of *Warriors of Disinformation*, has taken a closer look at the shootdown incident. Snyder discovered not only that American military radar had tracked both flight KAL 007 and the Soviet interceptors, but that Soviet air commanders had believed the airliner was the American spy plane that had been circling over the area. After learning this, Snyder had to admit that “I told the world the Soviets shot it down in cold blood, but I was wrong” (*Washington*

*Post 9/1/96*). In light of Operation Northwoods, then, we have to wonder, did Flight 007 really “stray”? Or, much like the drone in the Northwoods plan, did it slip into the flight path of the spy plane as the latter veered away, thereby confusing Soviet air defenders?

• **1964: The Gulf of Tonkin “Incident” that Never Happened** Whereas the Mexicans had taken the bait and struck back at an American incursion, the North Vietnamese—whose leader, Ho Chi Minh, had studied American history—were more savvy: they didn’t respond to provocative American attacks along their coast. As a result, notes James Petras, “Washington had to fabricate a Vietnamese response and then use it as the pretext for war” (<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=9063>).

Today most historians believe that by the last few months of his life President Kennedy had decided to phase or pull out of Vietnam. In October, 1963, Kennedy seemed to lean toward withdrawing US troops from Vietnam, a plan he didn’t intend to implement until after the 1964 elections. That November, Kennedy made his fateful visit to Dallas. While President Johnson initially assured a stunned nation that he intended to carry out his predecessor’s agenda, only four days after Kennedy’s death Johnson ordered a drastic shift in policy: he authorized plans to bomb North Vietnam (*J. Galbraith Boston Review Oct./Nov. 03*). Whether these new plans were entirely Johnson’s doing, however, remains unclear (*G. Porter Perils of Dominance p. 193*).

***Ginning Up a Full-Scale War in Vietnam*** Trying to ready the public for war in Vietnam, American planners executed several raids along the North Vietnamese coast. They became frustrated when American ships took no return fire. Johnson, McNamara, and other top officials concluded that some flashpoint, some incident beyond just “stopping communism,” would be needed to trigger public outrage. If the North Vietnamese wouldn’t deliver a counterattack, then one must be contrived ([www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=9063](http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=9063)).

Soon the nonevents flashed across the airwaves. On August 2, 1964, the destroyer *Maddox* was supposedly attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats but drove them off, sustaining only the slightest damage: “The destroyer maneuvered to avoid torpedoes and used her guns against her fast-moving opponents, hitting them all. In turn, she was struck . . . by a single 14.5-millimeter machine gun bullet” (US Naval Historical Center *USS Maddox, 1944-1972 Actions in Gulf of Tonkin, Aug.*

1964). Two days later, the Pentagon announced that the North Vietnamese had attacked a second American ship. Although the Pentagon insisted that its warships were on “routine patrol,” personnel aboard the vessels reported that they’d entered the Gulf of Tonkin to spy on North Vietnam.

***Peering Through the Fog of War*** From the outset, however, on-the-scene observers raised serious doubts about the official account. Despite the politically supercharged atmosphere, many military professionals sensed something fishy. Captain John J. Herrick, the task force commander in the Gulf, spoke of bad visibility and an “over-eager sonar man” who’d been “hearing the ship’s own propellor beat.” Capt. Herrick concluded that “torpedoes fired appear doubtful” and advised “complete evaluation before any further action.” Years later, Herrick recalled that “our destroyers were just shooting at phantom targets—there were no PT boats there” (D. Halin *The “Uncensored War”: The Media and Vietnam* pp. 16-17).

Washington heard what it wanted, and it didn’t want to hear the facts. Using the rhetoric of the victim, Johnson claimed that the US had to “retaliate” against communist aggression. McNamara rushed to Congress, charging that he had “unequivocal proof” of an “unprovoked attack.” Risking retribution from his superiors, an officer at the Pentagon told Sen. Wayne Morse (D-Ore.) about the hoax, but Morse couldn’t persuade his colleagues in Congress to slow the rush to war (S. Karnow *Vietnam: A History* p. 375). Within hours, Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, plunging the United States into a disastrous “police action” that lasted for a decade ([www.TheHistoryNet.com/Vietnam/articles/1997/08972\\_text.htm](http://www.TheHistoryNet.com/Vietnam/articles/1997/08972_text.htm)).

Both the war’s tactics and their effects proved genocidal. Even McNamara, architect of the massive “carpet” bombing campaigns, would place the figure at two million Vietnamese killed, most of them noncombatants (Film by E. Morris: *The Fog of War*). The actual toll probably ran closer to *three* million dead, including 57,000 Americans but excluding hundreds of thousands of additional Asians, most of them killed by US bombs in Laos and Cambodia (D. Model *Lying for Empire* p. 138).

***A Pre-Planned War*** Greatly amplified by the news media, the White House, and the Congress, these nonevents marked a major escalation in the war against the Vietcong guerrillas and

North Vietnamese regular forces. Were the results not so terribly tragic, it might seem comic for a superpower to make so much ado about so little—to launch a war over a single bullet, assuming there actually was one—unless LBJ, like FDR, was looking for a pretext to justify a war (Bamford *Puzzle Palace* p. 294).

Over the years, as more information has emerged from the shadows, it's become clear that Washington had made plans for an expanded war well before the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Hawkish military planner McGeorge Bundy had been promoting the escalation months before the "incidents." Independent journalist I. F. Stone characterized the Gulf of Tonkin incident as a "question not just of decision-making in a crisis, but of crisis-making to support a secretly prearranged decision . . ." (*NY Review of Books* 3/28/68). *The Pentagon Papers*, the secret Pentagon study that Daniel Ellsberg leaked to the press, became one of the first full revelations of this deceit, among so many others.

***Resistance to Unfamiliar History*** Although this chronology of US foreign-policy malfeasance rests on solid historical facts, some readers may find it stunning, even outrageous, and simply difficult to accept as true. It's unsettling to realize that, with the exception of the Civil and Korean Wars, deception and trickery have helped the US to launch or enter every major war in its history. This isn't what we read about in study hall, it's not what they teach in ROTC, and it doesn't puff up our national pride. In fact, awareness of this systematic deceit may tend to undercut our pride in being Americans.

It's natural, therefore, to not want to look at the historical evidence, or to brush it off as exaggerations and distortions created by extremists who don't share our love for America. But the fact is that some of America's sharpest critics do so from a deep belief in the essential American values and from a desire to help us embody those values more fully. A good example of this is the well-respected, widely published theologian David Ray Griffin, who offers a similar historical overview in his *Christian Faith and the Truth Behind 9/11* (pp. 3-15).

Now, to extend our survey of historical precedents and parallels, let's take a fresh look at several earlier traumas that, still unresolved, fester as open wounds in the body politic. Even more of concern, however, are their uncanny parallels to several facets of 9/11.

• **1968: The Still-Unsolved Murder of Martin Luther King** In 1967 William

Pepper, a young British-born journalist who had marched with Dr. King, wrote an article featuring photos he had taken in Vietnam (*Ramparts* 1/1/67). Later, when Pepper showed Dr. King even more graphic photos, the civil rights leader wept. Shocked by the genocidal atrocities, King came strongly out against the War. In his Riverside Church address, he lamented that his native land had become the world's leading purveyor of violence ([www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/contents.htm](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/contents.htm)).

Dr. King's indictment of a major American military intervention and those promoting it meant that he was no longer challenging only racism and poverty, huge as these problems were. He was now confronting the power of the federal government plus the military, political and economic interests supporting the war. King understood the risks he took in challenging these powerful forces; during his last year of life, he sensed that his end was near. Close associate Andy Young recalled that "he talked about death all the time" (Qtd. in D. Garrow *Bearing the Cross* pp. 602-03). Our greatest advocate for nonviolence was gunned down on April 4, 1968, exactly a year after the speech that marked his full emergence as another prominent voice for peace in Vietnam. More than others, however, King posed a threat: the Army relied heavily on black recruits, and King's opposition was hardly good for recruitment.

Like 9/11, King's assassination remains an unsolved mystery, one that also casts a shadow on federal authority and institutions.

***Characteristic Official Responses*** Just days after King was assassinated, the FBI named James Earl Ray, supposedly a lone gunman motivated by racism, as the prime suspect. Faced with the death penalty, Ray pled guilty. Like Lee Harvey Oswald, he was quickly "out of the way," never to be examined in an open courtroom. To this day it remains little known that the King family had long proclaimed their belief that other conspirators, including the federal government, had helped to kill Dr. King—and that Ray was likely just a "patsy" who was first framed and then offered a plea bargain. Nor is it at all widely known that in 1978 a special congressional inquiry found a "likelihood" that James Earl Ray didn't act alone ([www.cnn.com/US/9804/23/ray.obit](http://www.cnn.com/US/9804/23/ray.obit)).

After Ray's conviction, William Pepper, now an attorney, became convinced of Ray's innocence and spent years trying to get him a new trial ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_F.\\_Pepper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_F._Pepper)). Pepper exposed the official falsehoods in *Orders to Kill* and *An Act of State: The Execution of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Though these books were very well researched and often well reviewed in

foreign countries ([www.amazon.com/Act-State-Execution-Martin-Luther/dp/1859846955](http://www.amazon.com/Act-State-Execution-Martin-Luther/dp/1859846955)), they were largely ignored in the US. Repeatedly denied a trial to evaluate the evidence against him, Ray spent nearly three decades in prison for a crime he in all probability didn't commit.

It didn't help his case that James Earl Ray had every opportunity and motive to inform on others involved yet didn't do so ([www.cnn.com/US/9804/23/ray.obit](http://www.cnn.com/US/9804/23/ray.obit)). Except for a shadowy figure, an alleged shooter named "Raoul," he never named the others involved—probably because he couldn't. Ray's reticence responds to a common objection to allegations of conspiracy: "Over time, surely *someone* involved in that crime would have come forth." It's well to recall that those active in conspiracies, even those located in the building from which the shots rang out, often don't know who else is involved. Plotters commonly share information on a "need-to-know" basis, and they don't circulate organizational flow charts.

***Stunning Court Verdict Goes Underreported*** It's even less widely known that in 1999, after Ray's death in prison, the King family won a wrongful death lawsuit against Lloyd Jowers (owner of the café in the rooming house from which the fatal shot was apparently fired) and "other unknown coconspirators," the likely perpetrators of the assassination. Providing reams of evidence ignored in the original hearing, attorney Pepper proved direct complicity in King's murder by the Memphis police, the Mafia, the FBI, the CIA, and military intelligence. After deliberating less than an hour, the jury found that a conspiracy to kill Dr. King *did* exist, and that "governmental agencies were parties" to the plot ([www.thekingcenter.org/news/trial.html](http://www.thekingcenter.org/news/trial.html)). Coretta Scott King stated that the extensive evidence presented during the trial demonstrated that "in addition to Mr. Jowers, a conspiracy of the Mafia, [plus] local, state, and federal government agencies, was deeply involved in the assassination of my husband." The King family concluded that Ray was "not the shooter and, in fact, was an unknowing patsy" ([www.thekingcenter.com/tkc/trial/PressConf.html](http://www.thekingcenter.com/tkc/trial/PressConf.html)). A "patsy" is someone involved with a plot, possibly even as a gunman, but unaware that he or she is being used by other actors and set up to take the blame.

This was a story the news media didn't want to touch. Despite the importance of the case and the prominence of the King family, this historic verdict has been rarely mentioned in the media, not even by an alternative media that reveres Martin Luther King and sometimes exposes



government coverups. When this media blackout is contrasted with the massive amounts of air time devoted, say, to various O. J. Simpson trials, the disproportion boggles the mind. The TV set may be high-definition plasma, but there's something wrong with this picture. Absent media coverage, Justice Department and Congressional follow-ups have also done little to question whether James Earl Ray committed the crime alone ([www.usdoj.gov/crt/crim/mlk/part6.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/crim/mlk/part6.htm)).

Once again, those who control information, historical or contemporary, hardly encourage public interest, let alone involvement in "sensitive" political issues. Nor have Americans shown much interest in learning the full story about the murder of one their greatest compatriots. How much longer will this toxic mix of suppression, secrecy, and ignorance continue?

**Other Traumas with Uncanny Parallels** Let's look at three striking similarities between two additional American traumas: the JFK assassination and the 9/11 attacks. Connecting the dots, political analyst Peter Dale Scott articulates uncanny similarities between these two tragedies: in both, the alleged perpetrators die while committing the crime or in the immediate aftermath; the suspects are identified with uncanny rapidity; and the traumas occasion shifts in public opinion that enable pre-planned wars.

***Instant Identifications of Single Perpetrators*** The JFK assassination, the RFK assassination, and the 9/11 attacks were each characterized by near-instant identification of the alleged perpetrators. Only fifteen minutes after the shooting of JFK, the Dallas Police broadcast a description of the assassin: 5'10" and 165 lbs (*Warren Comm. Report* pp. 614, 5). While these measurements didn't square with the height and weight of the suspect apprehended in the movie theater, they did match the description of Lee Harvey Oswald in both CIA documents and his FBI file (J. Newman *Oswald and the CIA* p. 512). This doesn't prove that Oswald was innocent, of course. But it does appear, notes Scott, as though "someone had already determined that Oswald would be the *designated culprit* before there was any evidence to connect him to the crime"

([www.peterdalescott.net](http://www.peterdalescott.net)).

Similar oddities surround the assassination of Bobby Kennedy in 1968. Again a national tragedy involved a rush to judgment. Although several eyewitnesses saw a woman in a polka-dot dress running out of the Ambassador Hotel, Sirhan Sirhan alone was apprehended and charged with the crime. In a telling parallel to 9/11, one of the eyewitnesses has indicated that law

enforcement pressured her to change her recollection of the fleeing woman (Film: “RFK Must Die”). And although acoustic analysis has revealed that thirteen shots were fired (Sirhan’s revolver could only fire eight), the official narrative somehow states that Sirhan was a sole gunman acting solely from a personal grievance. Sirhan, who has consistently claimed amnesia about his involvement in the killing, did recall the woman in the polka-dot dress. When journalist Michael Taylor indicated that “40 years after RFK’s death, questions linger,” he probably understated the matter (*San Fran. Chron.* 6/3/08).

Here we note a pattern, also manifest after 9/11, in which an official narrative is constructed by ignoring evidence and quashing personal testimonials that challenge it.

***Instant Identifications of Perpetrators on 9/11*** On 9/11, the speedy identifications were even more remarkable because the FBI fingered nineteen perpetrators, not just one, and because it identified them so quickly, scarcely before the attacks were over (R. Clarke *Against All Enemies* p. 2). If 9/11 was a surprise attack done by perpetrators whose bodies were blown to smithereens, how could the FBI so *very* quickly determine who was responsible? Both the timing and the content of these accusations stirred suspicions within the ranks. “I don’t buy the idea that we didn’t know what was coming,” remarked William Norman Grigg, a former FBI official with years of experience in counterterrorism. “Within 24 hours [of the attacks] the Bureau had about 20 people identified, and photos were sent out to the news media. Obviously, this information was available in the files and somebody was sitting on it” (*New American* 3/11/02). The FBI didn’t have the photos wired in from Saudi Arabia.

Military intelligence expert Lt. Col. Anthony Shaffer, who had tracked al Qaeda operatives himself, had a similar reaction: “We were amazed at how quickly the FBI produced the names and photos of all nineteen hijackers. But then again, we were surprised at how quickly they’d made the arrests after the first [1993] World Trade Center bombing. Only later did we find out that the FBI had been watching some of these people for months prior to both incidents” (Qtd. in P. Lance *Triple Cross* p. 383). In point of fact, the FBI had been tracking many of these *very same* operatives over the eight years between 1993 and 2001 (P. Thompson *Terror Timeline* pp. 169-71, 186-87).

***Evidence, Genuine or Planted?*** Even more bizarre is the government’s claim that the perpetrators left easily traceable evidence. In all three of these traumatic events, similarly “obvious”

paper trails supposedly left by Oswald, the 1993 WTC bombers, and the 2001 perpetrators ostensibly allowed for rapid identification of the alleged perpetrators. In the latter instance, some of the alleged hijackers' IDs and passports supposedly survived each of the fiery crashes as well as those at the Trade Towers and the conflagrations that ensued.

The FBI and the 9/11 Commission both claim, for instance, that three of the hijackers' IDs were found in the rubble at the Pentagon. These include a "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" identification card for Majed Moqed which forensic examination later indicated may have been fraudulent "planted evidence." Other items include US-issued IDs for Nawaf al Hazmi and Salem al Hazmi (*Report* pp. 44, 27, 42). However, since the Commission also stated that Salem al Hazmi was unable to produce a photo ID when checking in for Flight 77, it's odd that this document would turn up at the Pentagon. In addition, these discoveries included charred passports issued to Ziad Jarrah and Saeed al Ghamdi (R. Morgan *Flight 93* p. 115) found in Pennsylvania—plus another passport, also remarkably intact, issued to Satam al Suqami which was discovered a few blocks from Ground Zero (ABC 9/12/01).

When paper endures blazes which supposedly weakened thick, fireproofed columns of steel, probability issues do arise. While similar paper-based objects have reportedly also survived these crashes, the sheer number of these alleged findings also push the laws of probability. One passport surviving in situations where little else came through intact might be credible, if miraculous. But *six* of them, and found at all three of the crash sites? As one British paper would later note, the notion that a "passport had escaped from that [WTC] inferno unsinged [tests] the credulity of the staunchest supporter of the FBI's crackdown on terrorism" (*Guardian* [UK] 3/19/02). Equally puzzling is Mohamed Atta's unclaimed luggage, intended for the fated Flight 11, which was allegedly found at Boston Logan Airport. Along with items relevant to flying large airliners, Atta's bags allegedly contained a note to the other hijackers (listing all of their names) and, most oddly, a letter saying that "he planned to kill himself and go to heaven as a martyr" (*Washington Post* 9/16/01). This advanced the official conclusion that the suicide bombers were fanatic believers seeking martyrdom, but conflicted with repeated reports of the Ringleader's lifestyle. Living with a stripper, Atta exhibited a fondness for alcohol, cocaine, and sex clubs, not mosques. In the week just prior to 9/11, Atta was observed drinking heavily (D. Hopsicker *Welcome To Terrorland* pp. 90-92, 101, 98,

283, 64). Do these indulgences square with a martyr's faith in fundamentalist Islam?

The 9/11 Commission made no attempt to resolve such contradictions. Trying to understand such curious evidence, veteran journalist Seymour Hersh quoted a former intelligence official: "whatever trail was left was left deliberately—for the FBI to chase" (Hersh *Chain of Command* p. 75). If so, who might have planted the clues? Was the FBI possibly chasing its *own trail*? Just as it had come up with nineteen names in world-record time, the FBI was astoundingly quick to respond to the attacks: agents seized video footage from surveillance cameras near the Pentagon, started pounding on doors near the World Trade Center, and told eyewitnesses at the crash site in Pennsylvania not to talk with the news media. Agents also showed up in a matter of *minutes* to impound the tape from a Citgo station across from the Pentagon (*Richmond Times-Dispatch* 12/11/01). That does strike most of us as odd. These and other oddities will receive full coverage later.

The incongruities should make us skeptical about accepting instant attributions of responsibility in the wake of assassinations or other political crimes. In particular, those in power may exploit the public's emotional need to reduce anxiety by "knowing" who committed a terrorist act. Instant mythmaking by government and media will become our main focus in Chapter 3.

**The JFK Assassination and 9/11: Springboards into Wars** Mainstream accounts have noted that both pivotal events led directly to military actions (Vietnam in 1964-65, Afghanistan in 2001, and Iraq in 2003) sought by prominent pressure groups.

Earlier, in our discussion of the Gulf of Tonkin hoax, we noted that just after Kennedy's death, Johnson ordered a dramatic shift in policy toward Vietnam. Whereas JFK was planning to scale back US involvement in Vietnam, LBJ immediately began planning for a much-escalated war. After the fabricated Tonkin Gulf "attacks," Johnson began to bomb North Vietnam, something Kennedy had resisted for over two years (D. Kaiser *American Tragedy* p. 211). Here we see another illustration of two important principles. One is Naomi Klein's Shock Doctrine, which explains that political and economic interests push through major changes while populations remain in a state of shock (Klein *Shock Doctrine* pp. 8-9). The other is what I've called the Priorities Principle," which states, logically enough, that politicians often display their priorities by what they do *first*, once they've come to power.

Yet despite ample evidence, historians and the public have largely failed to connect Dallas with Saigon. As Scott points out, most Americans resist “the idea, made popular by Oliver Stone’s movie *JFK*, that the Kennedy assassination had [any] more than accidental relevance to Vietnam” ([www.peterdalescott.net](http://www.peterdalescott.net)). Most haven’t wanted to ponder the full consequences of this assassination, the costs that have run immeasurably higher than the life of a dynamic young president—and well into millions of lives and billions of dollars.

Similar resistance has impeded public understanding of the relationship between the events of 9/11 and the wars that followed it.

**Neocons Call for a “New Pearl Harbor”** Research has revealed a similar pattern of discussion and planning for an attack on Iraq years before 9/11. In 1997, 25 prominent neoconservatives formed the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). Founders included Cheney, Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Donald Kagan, “Scooter” Libby, Bill Kristol, Jeb Bush, Francis Fukayama, and Steve Forbes ([www.newamericancentury.org/aboutpnac.htm](http://www.newamericancentury.org/aboutpnac.htm)). In 1998, in an open letter to President Clinton, the neoconservative think tank called for “regime change” in Iraq, where a militarily weak tyrant sat on vast reserves of high-quality, easily accessible oil.

The problem, these neocons believed, was that the public wouldn’t be willing to pay the costs in dollars and lives. New enemies and new shocks would be necessary; in 2000, these militaristic conservatives spoke about the need for “some catastrophic, catalyzing event like a new Pearl Harbor” (*Rebuilding America’s Defenses* p. 31). Most of the group’s leading members, including Cheney, Rumsfeld, Perle, and Wolfowitz, would soon enough become primary proponents for Operation Iraqi Liberation (OIL). For reasons no too difficult to discern, they later changed the name to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Of PNAC’s 25 founding neocons, a dozen rose to power in January of 2001, eight months before 9/11. The obvious question—and one that’s too seldom asked—is, Did the catalyzing, catastrophic events of 9/11 realize the neocons’ wishes for “a new Pearl Harbor”?

**Present Applications for “Long-Lost” History** It’s not only important to examine this information, but to ask why it’s been kept from most of us. Because knowledge of the past creates citizen empowerment, one has to wonder whether key institutions in our society have enforced a conspiracy of silence about our history. Once we grasp this pattern of provo-

cations, pretexts, and false-flag operations, we're empowered: we can frame events differently. Viewed through informed eyes, the alternative hypotheses about 9/11 aren't strange anomalies; rather, they *fit a pattern* of government deceptions designed to manipulate public opinion, enabling domestic repression and foreign wars. And the Official Story becomes the anomaly. While this re-framing doesn't prove anything outright about 9/11, it opens our minds to a fresh look at the evidence.

As philosopher Francis Bacon famously remarked, "knowledge is power." The converse is not that "ignorance is bliss," as Friedrich Nietzsche, tongue in his cheek, equally famously remarked, but that "ignorance is impotence." If we regard lack of knowledge about our history as a cultural shortfall and recognize that an educated, critical-thinking populace drives a vibrant democracy, we'd probably wonder how this deficit itself might have influenced our history. In 1915, if more Americans had known the truth about the sinking of the *Maine* in 1898, would Wilson have so easily deceived the public about the *Lusitania* sinking? If, in 1964 more Americans had understood the full story of the *Maine* and *Lusitania* sinkings, about Pearl Harbor, or about Operation Northwoods, would they have allowed McNamara and Johnson to sell them a "police action" based on a bogus "incident"? (Bamford *Puzzle Palace* p. 294). And if, in the sad days following 9/11, more Americans had known about how planned provocations have been exploited, would they so passively have accepted what they were told?

***Looking Critically at Press and Power*** After these foreign-policy adventures are safely over, some Americans have examined the news media they've trusted too uncritically, the reasons for its betrayal of public trust, and, less commonly, their own shortcomings as consumers of information. Two decades after the Gulf of Tonkin, troubled by the press coverage of the Gulf War, veteran war correspondent Sydney Schanberg cautioned other journalists about "our unquestioning chorus of agreeability when Lyndon Johnson bamboozled us." In addition—and equally importantly—Schanberg pointed to "the apparent amnesia of the American public," noting that "we Americans are the ultimate innocents. We are forever desperate to believe that *this* time the government is telling us the truth" (*Newsday* 2/8/91). Is this desperate desire to believe an expression of apathy, naive optimism, or an avoidance of truths that, once accepted, would demand serious citizen involvement?

Especially today, after 9/11 and all that's followed it, this overview of Washington's false-flag operations, contrived provocations, and staged events should raise questions in the minds of thoughtful Americans. We know that presidents Wilson, Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Johnson—each of whom demonstrated moral character in other actions—were also capable of deadly deceptions. We also know that the G.W. Bush administration has become notorious for its “ten thousand whoppers told.” If the Bush administration could lie so egregiously to take the country into disastrous wars, why would we rule out lies about, and possible involvement in, 9/11?

**Why an Accurate Accounting for 9/11 Matters** Some citizens of conscience ask, “After several years, what's the big deal about getting it right?” Those resisting an inquiry often believe that “there's nothing we could do even if we learned the truth, so let's move on.”

Two rebuttals address this objection. One mostly about the mind, the other mostly about the heart. One response to such objections is that what we believe about the past shapes how we see things today; it affects what we do in the present and what we'll do in the future. The past is a prelude to the future. So much of what's happened since 9/11, including two wars, the never-ending War on Terror, and the USA PATRIOT Act, has been possible only because the Official Story is still widely accepted as true. But what allowed its half-truths and outright falsehoods to gain such wide acceptance?

***Precedents That Provide a Meaningful Paradigm*** When American citizens received false information, most lacked a meaningful frame of reference; they couldn't compare it with the historical precedents we've established here. PBS trotted out its “historians in residence” like Doris Kearns Goodwin and Michael Beschloss, but both failed to present any of the relevant precedents that we've examined here. In 2001, Goodwin had published a book on Roosevelt, but never revealed that historians have long doubted the official narrative of Pearl Harbor; Beschloss had written a book on Johnson, but made no mention of an event that never happened in the Gulf of Tonkin.

It's important to get the history right because it's *safer* to know the truth. We need to know what really happened if we are to reverse our current disastrous foreign policy and regain our diminished freedoms at home. Regardless of their eventual outcomes, the debacle in both Iraq and Afghanistan illustrates the dangers of flying on bad information. Before we proceed any farther into

strange terrain, wouldn't it be wise to locate an accurate map? When we talk about outmoded maps, we have to include myths.

*Surmounting a Crisis of Confidence* When we consider the more emotional factor of public trust, historical precedent is once again instructive. Outstanding researcher Peter Dale Scott observes that “at least once before a major political crime was allowed to remain unsolved: the assassination of John F. Kennedy.” Since that time, Scott observes, several studies have shown increasing mistrust of democratic institutions: “To leave 9/11 in the same state of unresolved suspicion would be an even greater shock to the conditions of democratic government” (Scott *Road To 9/11* p. 232). In a famous proverb, Confucius wisely noted that the first step to solving any problem is “to call things by their right names.” We need to know what really happened not only to help reverse the decline in public institutions, thereby avoiding further disillusionment and disbelief, but, more importantly, to help *revitalize* them. It would be magical thinking to assume that one leader, however intelligent, competent and promising, could effect all the necessary changes. Truth telling remains an essential step toward the nation building that begins at home.

Vietnam, Watergate, Iran/Contra, unresolved assassinations, two highly suspect presidential elections, the disasters in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the massive mendacity of the Bush administration have all contributed to a well-documented decline in public confidence and trust. Along with declining stature on the world stage, gnawing doubts about the Official Story of 9/11 no doubt contribute to our national crisis of confidence. Sociologist Pamela Paxton and writer/editor Jeremy Adam Smith articulated an essential relationship: “trust is essential to democracy, where people must be willing to place political power in the hands of their elected representatives and fellow citizens. Without trust, individuals . . . do not believe that others will follow the rules and procedures of governance, or voluntarily hand over power after losing an election” (P. Paxton and J. A. Smith *Greater Good* Fall 2008).

*Is the Best is Yet to Come?* Alert readers may wonder, “How can a fuller understanding of 9/11, which could intensify distrust or disenchantment with our institutions, offer us a way out? If a new investigation unearths a cover-up of 9/11, and rogue government or industry actors are exposed, wouldn't this exacerbate public disillusionment?” The candid answer is that, in the short run, cynicism and distrust could temporarily increase, but we're now, as a society, resilient enough



to rebound from some dips in the graph.

The upward trajectory that's followed the election and inauguration of Barack Obama will flatten, of course, but we've arisen from the deep trough of despair. Millions of citizens of citizens have started to feel like Americans again, sensing an identity with their country they haven't experienced in a long time. Millions of others, though, remain more hesitant, skeptical. This smaller group is still doubtful whether the country can face its dark sides and make more fundamental changes. Full disclosure about 9/11 and the deeper reforms in social institutions and the political culture would help to bring some of these skeptics back into the democratic process.

In a society still awash in illusion, falsehood, and deceit, strong truth serum may be indicated. Much as many addicts need to hit rock bottom before they deal with their problem, things may need to get worse before they get better. It took a governor's blatant corruption to get the people of Illinois to grasp just how bad things had gotten in Chicago (*NYT* 12/10/08). Similarly, it may take shocking revelations to jolt Americans into seeing just how bad things got in Washington—and how far, even today, their country has strayed from its democratic traditions.

Let's also note the *illusion* in “disillusionment”; when we're talking about dispelling illusion, about seeing the world for what it is so we can change it. True, facing reality is often painful, but it's always safer. Much as a society needs economic confidence builders, so it needs *political* confidence builders. Like an individual who musters the courage to face his or her shadow side, a society which deals with its darker impulses emerges stronger. Its confidence grows from a sense that “we've faced the music together; now we're ready to pull together to make the necessary changes.”

Whatever its shortcomings, the Obama administration has restored some public confidence, and the economic malaise has occasioned a long-overdue introspection. So the time is right to reopen 9/11. It's hard to imagine any better way to illustrate, for fellow citizens around the world, the abuses of contrived, false-flag or government-enhanced provocations.

To do that, first we'll need to examine the evidence. . . .