



Part 18: American Exceptionalism and Nationalist Faith

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“I wouldn’t want to live in a country where such a thing could be true!” exclaimed an acquaintance upon hearing some facts about 9/11 — facts that cause skeptics like me to dispute the official account of that infamous day.

She was not only horrified that I and a growing number of people around the world are convinced that 9/11 may have been an “inside job,” but she also found it *inconceivable* that any leaders of *America*

could have participated in such an atrocity.

After reading an [article](#)¹ in a local newspaper addressing my reasons for not being silent about 9/11, a reader sent me a lengthy letter in which he wrote:

I am 65 and grew up in Washington, D.C., and spent 7 years on active duty in the Air Force. Even though I knew about all the lies we were told about Vietnam (I was stationed there for a year), Watergate, COINTELPRO, the CIA's operations in the U.S., etc., I could not bring myself to believe that anyone in the *United States* government could be callous — or crazy — enough to do something like this. I felt this way for years, but something was always nagging at the back of my mind, especially as I read more of what these people were saying.



Then I read that David Ray Griffin was coming to speak here [at the University of Colorado, Boulder] in October 2007. I knew that he was one of the leading researchers and determined that I would definitely hear him. His presentation² convinced me hands down....

I am reminded of the journalist I met at a street action who said, "I am aware that our government does bad things, but not *this!* Not those towers! They would not be *that* evil." (See [Part 1: Preface and Introduction](#).)

One of the core beliefs that American culture inculcates in us is that our history, values, and political system are uniquely good. Because of this perceived exceptional character of our nation, citizens, by and large, believe the United States of America is entitled and destined to play a positive role on the world stage. Therefore, whatever the U.S. does on the world stage is, in the final analysis, good for humankind. For example, this belief gave support to the concept of Manifest Destiny, an American attitude of the 19th century that the United States had a nearly divine mission to expand across the continent and, in later years, into the rest of the world.³

"American Exceptionalism" is the term used to describe this belief — another "sacred myth" of our culture.⁴

According to theologian and scholar David Ray Griffin, most citizens of the U.S. believe that America is "a fundamentally good nation . . . never deliberately doing anything terribly evil." If citizens also deem it a *sacrilege* to question the belief of American exceptionalism, then their belief has taken on a



greater level of conviction and can rightly be called “nationalist faith.”⁵ “From the point of view of this faith, the claim that 9/11 was an inside job simply cannot be true,” explains Griffin.⁶

To further clarify this blinding faith, Dr. Griffin quotes preeminent theologian John B. Cobb, Jr.:

The response of most Americans [upon hearing the recitation of facts that indicate 9/11 was an inside job] shows how powerful is the hold upon them of their nationalistic “faith.” They do not want to hear that members of their government may have deceived them on a matter of such importance. They do not want to examine the evidence. They “know” in advance that the questioner is out of line. They “know” this because the alternative does not fit with their “faith.”⁷

But, Griffin asks, most Americans “know that the Bush-Cheney administration lied us into the war in Iraq,” so why is it such a leap to consider that 9/11 was a false flag operation?

Dr. Cobb offers this insight:

The answer may be that deception about matters of who has what weapons can be tolerated. We can understand that the real motives for fighting a war are often different from the announced reason. But to believe that high officials in an American administration of whatever party or affiliation would organize a massive attack killing thousands of American citizens would deeply wound the American sense of the basic goodness of the nation, a conviction which belongs to the depths of our national faith.⁸

Good Intentions?

A deep-rooted American belief is that even though actions of our government leaders may cause harm, their *intentions* are, nevertheless, always noble. It is extremely difficult to shift this entrenched core belief, even with the clearest of evidence to the contrary. This is an emotional phenomenon, not an

intellectual one. The 9/11 evidence that contradicts the official storyline is easy to grasp, but the emotional attachment to the essential goodness of America and, in particular, to the *good intentions* of her leaders creates the obstacle to hearing these facts open-mindedly and understanding their implications.

For example, a physicist I met at the Denver People's Fair has bravely taken a stand for an unrelated controversial issue. He also understands well the characteristics of controlled demolition. Yet he expressed his nationalist faith and trust in our officials by saying to me, "I just cannot go where you have gone, to believe that even *some* people within our government would be that *deliberate*, that inimical to their fellow citizens, to commit such mass murder!"

Nationalist Faith and Christian Faith

A clear-cut example of nationalist faith replacing Christian faith is illustrated by the publication of *Christian Faith and the Truth behind 9/11: A Call to Reflection and Action*, by Dr. David Ray Griffin. Previously, Westminster John Knox Press had published books by Dr. Griffin that strongly criticized core tenets of the Christian faith, and even of the Presbyterian Church, which owns the press. Yet there had been no repercussions from within that denomination. However, when Westminster released Griffin's book on 9/11, which questioned the official account of that day, the two publishers directly responsible for its publication lost their jobs.

Reflecting on this incident, Griffin remarks poignantly:

So what is the message to publishers at church presses? It is that they can publish books that are highly critical of traditional Christian doctrines without losing their jobs. But they had better not publish anything that challenges the idea that America is fundamentally good, the exceptional nation, because this is the one religious belief that cannot be challenged.

Do we not here have a clear illustration of the fact that all too often, Christian faith is less important to Christians in America than their American faith? The evidence that 9/11 was an inside job, I have argued, is overwhelming to anyone with eyes to see, and Christian faith at its best serves to open people's eyes to this evidence. When Christian faith [in God] is subordinated to faith in American goodness, however, it becomes a blinding faith, producing Christians with eyes wide shut.

In working so long to expose the truth about 9/11, one of my central hopes has been that this exposure will lead American Christians to repent of this idolatrous subordination. And once Christians in our country see 9/11 for what it was — a pretext to extend the American empire in predominantly Muslim countries — I hope that they will realize that to be loyal to Jesus, who preached an anti-imperial gospel, they will need to oppose American imperialism as strongly as they have opposed other forms of imperialism.⁹

According to John B. Cobb, in past centuries the primary "faith" and identity of most Europeans was Christian. A transition to Cartesian¹⁰ and nationalist faiths began to take hold during the Renaissance, which extended from the 14th century to the 17th century. Around the end of the 18th century, this

transition was complete, so that most citizens of Europe and the U.S. were adhering to the Cartesian and nationalist “faiths.” Clothed with these modern identities, as they had been with their previous Christian primary identity, these citizens could not tolerate challenges to the fundamental principles of these new “faiths.” As Dr. Griffin discovered with his book publisher, notes Dr. Cobb, “In many Christian congregations, going against the nationalist ‘faith’ antagonizes more members than critiquing inherited forms of the Christian ‘faith.’”¹¹

Empire, exceptionalism, and blindness

It is patently true that many other societies, past and present, have subscribed to their own brand of exceptionalism, as well as their own brand of nationalist faith. If these societies are imperialist nations, the citizens within them have, for the most part, become blind to the suffering of those who have been subjected to their nation’s arrogant ambitions. Unfortunately, the United States has fallen in line with this unenlightened historical course of empire, exceptionalism, and blindness.

Since critical thinking skills are largely absent in American homes, churches, social clubs, and educational system — from elementary school through college — the vast majority of Americans have given little thought to the historical precedent for their country’s hegemonic behavior. Much less have they been taught to question the creed of American exceptionalism.



Stephen M. Walt, a professor of international affairs at Harvard University, lists five beliefs that most of us have internalized:

- There is something exceptional about American exceptionalism.
- The United States behaves better than other nations do.
- America’s success is due to its special genius.
- The United States is responsible for most of the good in the world.

- God is on our side.¹²

Having imbibed these beliefs throughout our developing years, few Americans have broken free of them, yet there is an abundance of evidence that the sacred myth comprising them is, for the most part, simply not true. Dr. Stephen Walt concludes his essay, “The Myth of American Exceptionalism,” with this advice: “If Americans want to be truly exceptional, they might start by viewing the whole idea of ‘American exceptionalism’ with a much more skeptical eye.”¹³

One way we each can view this American sacred myth with a more skeptical eye is to become a student of the subject. We can read one or more of the wealth of books that detail how far we have veered from our democratic ideals and principles,¹⁴ and we can view one or more of the many documentary films available on DVD.¹⁵

When faced with evidence that contradicts our worldview, we will inevitably experience cognitive dissonance, that disturbing feeling of losing our emotional equilibrium. (See [Part 5: Denial and Cognitive Dissonance](#).) This emotional discomfort motivates us to do whatever is needed to regain our composure. If we are psychologically secure individuals, we will exhibit the traits of open-mindedness *and* keen discernment, along with the ability to process difficult emotional reactions. These are the traits of a mature human being. This intellectual and emotional process results in a new view of reality — in this case, a new view of our nation that fits the facts. Undoubtedly, many people who now understand that 9/11 did not occur as our government has told us have persevered through this difficult process.

Social status and false pride

On the other hand, those who have been thoroughly indoctrinated by the dogma that America is exceptional — even if they are otherwise evidence-based in their thinking — are seriously challenged by the facts that point to the false-flag nature of 9/11. If they do not possess a strong sense of self, and if they identify excessively with the core belief of America’s unequivocal goodness (see [Part 17](#)), they will predictably resist, or at least minimize, whatever contradictory information they hear. Their rejection of this new evidence often arises from false pride — in this case, an excessive pride in their country that is not only unsubstantiated, but is also contradicted by the facts.

David Ray Griffin puts it this way:

The observation that pride is one of the basic human flaws is absolutely correct.... The feature of American history that makes us particularly liable to this pride is the notion — it’s called exceptionalism — that America is the *exceptional* nation, and . . . [this belief] began . . . [when] this country was formed. People would say, “There’s so much evil in the European countries, so much cheating, so much lying, so much using the people for the rulers’ purposes, but *not* in America. *We* have leaders that are free from those sins.” So I think this has made 9/11 particularly difficult for Americans.¹⁶

The 9/11 Truth Movement includes many highly educated and prominent people.¹⁷ Nonetheless, 9/11 Truth activists have observed — and have been validated by the results of a scientific poll¹⁸ — that

social status is often characteristic of people who are *less* open to evidence that contradicts the official account of 9/11. Policy analyst, poet, and former diplomat Peter Dale Scott offers an explanation for this paradox:

To ask questions about 9/11 risks raising questions about the legitimacy of our government. Above all, it raises questions about the radical restrictions of basic freedoms that have been introduced since September 2001. The more status someone has in society, the harder it is for them to listen to suggestions that there is something illegitimate about the power structure in which they have that status. Thus the paradox—that ordinary people are more likely to disbelieve the official theories of 9/11 than are people with higher education and greater access to information.¹⁹

"But you are *white*!"

A riveting illustration of Scott's thesis occurred at the 2011 Denver People's Fair, when a Hispanic man approached our 9/11 Truth booth. After quietly scrutinizing the banners, DVDs, and books we had on display, he announced with great puzzlement, "We talk about this in *my* neighborhood. But *you*! You're *white*!"

I was taken aback, but managed to stumble through an explanation as we chatted awhile. Nonetheless, he continued to be baffled, and upon taking his leave, with his head still shaking in disbelief, he repeated: "But you are *white*!"

An Afro-American woman practically duplicated this scene minutes later. Stopping by the booth, she exclaimed, "Honey, in my neighborhood...we *all* know about this. But we only talk about it among *ourselves*."

Indeed, we activists often find that those who benefit most from our economic and political system are also the most likely to become dismissive, ridiculing, or angry when we tell them that elements within our government could have orchestrated the devastating attacks of 9/11. Their reaction illustrates novelist Upton Sinclair's succinct observation: "It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends on his not understanding it!"²⁰

Sinclair's pungent point can be extended to *any* conflict of interest, not just economic. As we learned in [Part 11: Systems Justification Theory](#), most people want to feel good about the system in which they live and with which they identify. Nonetheless, we can postulate that the well-off may especially want to defend the image of their country. Being sincerely open-minded to the shocking information presented by 9/11 skeptics drastically conflicts with their experience of a system that has provided them with economic and social privilege. I say "sincerely open-minded" because some highly educated people can rather skillfully *feign* openness, but their body language and voice tone reveal their pretense.

How interesting that the disenfranchised and those who carry memories or family stories of brutal abuse and oppression by authorities have no trouble imagining monstrous acts by the power structure of the dominant culture. Likewise, these people would surely have an easier time seeing through the myth of American exceptionalism.

It is plausible, therefore, that, in general, those who have benefited the most from our society, even with their greater education, are most inclined to turn a blind eye to evidence that does not justify our system and its leaders. Therefore, these are the very people who will likely be the most invested in the belief of American exceptionalism, if not in nationalist faith.

One of the many countries that claimed to be exceptional and superior was Germany, under the influence of the National Socialist German Workers' Party. In the next installment of this series, we will explore how the Nazi Party manipulated and lied to their citizens, with devastating and monstrous results.

Endnotes

¹ Susan Dugan, Washington Park Profile, "Fran Shure: A Spiritual Issue Not To Be Silent About 9/11" (January 2015).

² David Ray Griffin, *9/11 Contradictions: A Guide for Congress and the Press*, lecture delivered October 21, 2007, at the University of Colorado, Boulder, can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GeTv4O_64E. The book on which this lecture is based is *9/11 Contradictions: An Open Letter to Congress and the Press* (Interlink Publishing Group, 2008).

³ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifest_destiny.

⁴ A "sacred myth" is a special story, found in every culture, whether true, untrue, or partially true, that tells us who we are and why we are doing what we are doing. The other sacred myth discussed in this series of essays is the official story of 9/11. See [Part 1: Preface and Introduction](#). See David Ray Griffin, Ph.D., "9/11: The Myth and the Reality," at <http://www.amazon.com/9-11-The-Myth-Reality/dp/B000O0YV7O> and <http://davidraygriffin.com/articles/911-the-myth-and-the-reality>.

⁵ See MSNBC's Tucker Carlson heatedly tell David Ray Griffin, "It is wrong, blasphemous, and sinful to suggest or imply that [9/11 was an inside job]": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxKW3EqbfRE>.

⁶ David Ray Griffin, "9/11 and Nationalist Faith: How Faith Can Be Illuminating or Blinding." These quotes are from a lecture he delivered on October 19, 2007, at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. The lecture's text can be found at <http://davidraygriffin.com/lectures/911-and-nationalist-faith>.

⁷ Matthew J. Morgan, ed., *The Impact of 9-11 on Religion and Philosophy: The Day that Changed Everything?* John B. Cobb, Jr., "Truth, 'Faith,' and 9/11" (Palgrave Macmillan, November 15, 2009) 151 – 168. This chapter from the anthology can be found on the Religious Leaders for 9/11 Truth website: http://rl911truth.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=65:cobb-john-b-truth-faith-and-911&catid=37:911-articles&Itemid=69.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Griffin, “9/11 and Nationalist Faith.”

¹⁰ French philosopher René Descartes was a key figure in the scientific revolution of that era. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/René_Descartes.

¹¹ Cobb, “Truth, ‘Faith,’ and 9/11.”

¹² Stephen M. Walt, “The Myth of American Exceptionalism,” *Foreign Policy*, November 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/the_myth_of_american_exceptionalism.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ I probably cannot overstate how grateful I am to live in a country in which I can still, so far, speak my mind without danger to the well-being of myself or my family. Nevertheless, while it is doubtful that any country perfectly adheres to its core principles, the U.S. has veered light years from her core values. I want my country to become coherent with its ideals, so this is one of the reasons I speak out about 9/11 and other issues. Those of us who refuse to remain silent about the many issues that belie our American core principles are attempting to raise consciousness. We hope to be heard. We hope for real and fundamental change in our society, and we hope for a better world. Here are a few of many examples of books that detail how the sacred myth of American exceptionalism is, for the most part, simply untrue:

- Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States*, (First Harper Perennial edition, 1990).
- John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. 2004).
- William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and C.I.A. Interventions Since World War II – Updated Edition* (Zed Books Ltd; 2 edition, September 11, 2014).
- Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (Metropolitan Books; 1st ed. Jan. 2005).

To discover how far the U.S. has descended from a democratic republic into fascism, read Naomi Wolf’s *The End of America: Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot* (Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2007).

¹⁵ The following films provide a very few examples of the many available that detail how the sacred myth of American exceptionalism is, for the most part, simply untrue. Many of these films emphasize how the growing power of corporations is key to the descent from a democratic republic to a fascist state. These documentaries can all be found through a word search on the Internet: *Superpower*; *The Power of Nightmares*; *Psywar and Counter-Intelligence* (metanoia-films.org); *The Corporation*; *Ethos*; *Unprecedented: The 2000 Presidential Election*; *Global Village or Global Pillage?*; *America: Freedom to Fascism*; *Why We Fight*; and *The New American Century*.

¹⁶ “Psychologists on Coping with 9/11 Truth,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ju5gV8wAbpM>. Also found in the DVD *9/11: Explosive Evidence – Experts Speak Out*, found at http://www.shop.ae911truth.org/DVDs-and-CDs_c4.htm.

¹⁷ See <http://patriotsquestion911.com>.

¹⁸ See <http://www.911truth.org/article.php?story=20060522022041421> and [http://www.rawstory.com/news/2006/Less than half of Americans satisfied 0523.html](http://www.rawstory.com/news/2006/Less_than_half_of_Americans_satisfied_0523.html).

¹⁹ Peter Dale Scott, Ph.D., lecture at the Arizona 9/11 Accountability Conference, February 25, 2007: <http://911blogger.com/node/8771>.

²⁰ See http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Upton_Sinclair.

Note: Electronic sources in the endnotes have been archived. If they can no longer be found by a search on the Internet, readers desiring a copy may contact Frances Shure [[here](#)].