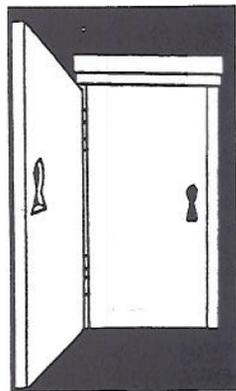


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EDITORIALS

Why Do Americans Love Conspiracies?

A SECOND INQUIRY into the death of White House lawyer Vincent Foster agrees with the first investigation: He shot himself. The probes should end the far-fetched theories about a murder and coverup by the White House. After all, the latest inquiry was conducted by special prosecutor Kenneth Starr, the stern conservative delving into the Clinton Whitewater mess, a sweeping topic that included Foster, a Clinton family friend and lawyer.



The Starr stamp of approval on a suicide verdict would seem to end the dark speculation about who-did-what-to-whom.

But don't bet on it. There is something about the national character that finds room for crackpot conspiracies that feed on cynicism, ignorance and distrust. Given true and alleged government misdeeds, the American public can form very nutty opinions. History and plain fact never conjoin. Conspiracies that can never be proven never go away. Everyone can have a private version of momentous events.

A few days before the Foster reiteration, a state grand jury in Oklahoma City began investigating a grab-bag of rumors suggesting "the government" knew in advance of the 1995 blast that killed 168 people. State authorities rightfully dismissed the stories as tall tales told by agenda-laden self-seekers. But an event as monstrous as the bombing swamped plain thinking. A total of 13,500 signatures were gathered to require a state grand jury to consider the shadowy accounts of government agents who refused to warn the innocent.

Questions remain about convicted bomber Timothy McVeigh and how he staged his deadly mission. But does it follow that an assemblage of kooks and saddened survivors of the bombing be given governmental power to investigate?

The Foster and Oklahoma City bombing theories take their place in a long tradition. The John F. Kennedy assassination was clouded for years by books, lecture-circuit theorists, and most recently a movie. The Martin Luther King killing is being re-examined with new test firings of the murder weapon. The results are inconclusive, enough to keep the doubters in business.

The endless speculation tears the country's spirit. A fixation on the far-fetched can destroy the optimism needed to work together and move forward. Common sense should be honored, not abjured, during national trauma and grief.

Editor — Why do editors love to assert that Americans love conspiracy theories? Do they think it is fun to believe that U.S. officials are lying about extra terrestrials? Or presidential assassinations? Is that why they call such critics "buffs"? Why is it necessary to call people who think there may have been a wider conspiracy in Oklahoma City "kooks"? Why is it necessary to assert that "endless speculation tears the country's spirit"?

Why has the Chron attacked the anemic rights of citizens to convene grand juries? Secrecy and a lack of accountability are the enemies of humanity, not openness and investigation.
PETE LIVINGSTON
Point Richmond

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Kooks and Buffs*