

ALTHOUSE

"FORMIDABLE LAW BLOGGER ANN ALTHOUSE." - SLATE
 "THE DIVINE MS. ALTHOUSE." - TERRY TEACHOUT

WEDNESDAY, JULY 05, 2006

Teaching 9/11 denial at the UW-Madison.

Kevin Barrett, founder of the Muslim Jewish Christian Alliance for 9/11 truth, **has made his theory part of the Introduction to Islam course** he will teach here at the University of Wisconsin.

"The physics of those collapses clearly could not have resulted from plane crashes and jet fuel fires with office materials." Barrett says jet fuel does not burn hot enough to melt steel, and says recent tests on melted steel from the building prove his theory that it was wired to collapse, by the Government.

Barrett says the Bush Administration is fooling the American public with the Adolf Hitler 'Big Lie Technique'... "Tell them a little lie and they'll wonder about it - weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was a relatively little lie - and people are getting called on it." Barrett says. "Tell em a big lie like 9/11 and they have a huge resistance to questioning it."

I have a huge resistance to believing that this will be taught at my university.

Barrett defends himself in classic academic form, saying he's presenting different interpretations and promoting debate and critical thinking and citing academic freedom.

More [here](#):

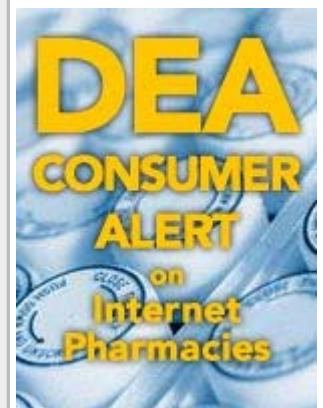
[T]he Muslim-Jewish-Christian Alliance, which claims the Bush administration planned the attacks to create a war between Muslims and Christians. He argues that members of the faiths must work together to overcome the belief that terrorists were to blame.

"The 9/11 lie was designed to sow hatred between the faiths," Barrett has written on the organization's Web site.

"Either we discuss the compelling evidence that 9/11 was an inside job, or there is precious little to talk about."

The university has issued a statement saying it is reviewing the matter "to ensure that his course content is academically appropriate, of high quality, and that his personal views are not imposed on his students."

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I'm just noticing the story this morning, but I see that it heated up last week after Barrett appeared on Jessica McBride's radio show. McBride has blogged the story: [here](#) (noting, among other things, that Barrett will be teaching "a large introductory course for undergrads and supervis[ing] several TAs" and that "Barrett says that his views are no surprise to his colleagues. In fact, he claims they are shared by many of them"), [here](#) (asking whether "the UW draw[s] any line about who it hires to teach courses when it comes to political views"), [here](#) (providing the syllabus for the course and the reading list), [here](#) (comparing the university's response to its response when the student newspaper published the Muhammad cartoons), and [here](#) (dealing with academic freedom saying "He didn't have academic freedom claims until they gave it to him. They MADE him an academic.").

UPDATE: The Capital Times -- the afternoon newspaper here in Madison -- has [this editorial](#), aimed at State Rep. Steve Nass, R-Whitewater, who "called on the UW to bar [Barrett] from teaching."

The vitriol that Nass is spewing now is similar to the language he used last year to attack another academic with whom he disagrees University of Colorado Professor Ward Churchill. Nass tried to prevent UW-Whitewater from letting Churchill speak at a student-sponsored event....

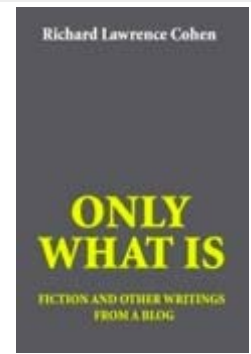
If Barrett tries to force his views about 9/11 on students, he will be called on it. But everything he has said suggests that he will be a responsible instructor. Indeed, Barrett has been very specific about the fact that he wants to try to "present all defensible sides of important issues" and "let students make up their own minds."

That sounds a lot like the values expressed on a plaque at the UW that reads: "Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere, we believe that the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found."

Steve Nass should go up to Bascom Hall and read the plaque before he starts telling this great university to fire controversial instructors.

But you don't find the truth by "sifting and winnowing" in a pile of obviously worthless ideas. And you don't learn to exercise critical thinking by reading a lot of material that is clearly wrong. And could the Capital Times learn the difference between "controversial views" and crackpot conspiracy theories? Focusing on the statements of some Republican legislator is a *very* easy route for the Madison newspaper. How about paying some attention to the interests of students who would like to be able to take a creditable introductory course on Islam? How about some consideration for Muslims who may not appreciate having their religion connected with ridiculous, unscientific, politically motivated bilge? How about a little less attention to the inflammatory question of whether a teacher should be fired and a little more attention to how he got the job in the first place?

POSTED BY ANN ALTHOUSE AT 5:52 AM



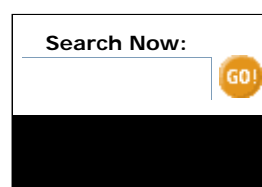
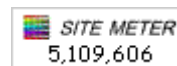
"Wow, this guy can write." -
- YARGB

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Pogo said...

An *Introduction* course on Isalm, and *this* is in the syllabus?

Are they also going to hire some creation science folks to teach about evolution ?

Nazis to teach about the holocaust?

The KKK to teach Black History?

I don't know the UW system, but are they prone to giving themselves "kick me" signs?

6:59 AM, JULY 05, 2006

dmc_in_washington said...

UW seems to be pining for its own Ward Churchill. Rush, Hannity, et al will have a field day.

Are academics -- present company excepted -- really this politically tone deaf?

7:15 AM, JULY 05, 2006

John R Henry said...

I am all for academic freedom and so on but WTF?

What does this theory of building collapse have to do with an intro to Islam?

I could *possibly* see it in a structural engineering course. At least there it would be on topic, if no less bizarre.

But what does it have to do with Islam?

John Henry

7:27 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Timothy K. Morris said...

Whoever allows this nonsense to be "taught" at a major university offers almost irrefutable proof that something is seriously wrong with higher education in this country.

For a debunking of the more common 9/11 urban legends see the article from Popular Mechanics beginning here:

<http://www.popularmechanics.com/science/defense/1227842.html>

Or, for the answer to the jet fuel can't have been the cause legend, go directly to this page:

<http://www.popularmechanics.com/science/defense/1227842.html?page=4&c=y>

You'll find the explanation about half-way down.



PREVIOUS POSTS

"You're beautiful."

Another Madison walk.

"I've lost my identity,
because I never talked
like this before."

Summer holiday.

"It's like you order a pizza
and Dylan brings you a
pile of dog food..."

Lieberman will ensure that
he can run without his
party's nomination.

"You have no idea how
happy I feel here... By
late evening, I find
myself dreading the
moment it will close for
the night."

"For most people, it's just
too complicated."

Radio.

Swarms of salps.



7:38 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Tibore said...

""The physics of those collapses clearly could not have resulted from plane crashes and jet fuel fires with office materials." Barrett says jet fuel does not burn hot enough to melt steel..."

He's kidding, right? He really believes this? This idiot actually *believes* this??

1. Steel doesn't have to melt before it loses it's ability to bear loads!
2. Has this dummy ever heard of an oven? Of insulation? When the temperature of the air outside his car in the summer is 80 degrees, how does he explain it being well above that inside? The WTC fires weren't out in the open where the heat would dissipate out into the air; it was enclosed in a giant concrete structure! Of **COURSE** it would get hot in there, much hotter than it would get if that same amount of jet fuel was burning out in the open!

Good grief...

7:39 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Mellow-Drama said...

Hey, I support academic freedom too - if there is a market for this sort of thing, then someone ought to be able to teach and write about it.

But whatever happened to the ability of academic institutions to make value judgments about subject matter? The fact that one supports academic freedom does not mean that any yahoo theory which comes along should be hired in to be taught in the classroom of any given university. How about showing a little common sense and good judgment?

7:45 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Mellow-Drama said...

In fact, the more I think about this, the more ridiculous it is. In an effort to prove just how diverse and NON-judgmental an institution is, it allows this kind of thing and then falls back on "academic freedom" when the judgments are questioned. But universities make value judgments all the time, and you can't tell me that there is no one else qualified who could have taught that course with a little sense.

7:47 AM, JULY 05, 2006

MadisonMan said...

I recall from reading in the local paper that he was hired because the normal professor was on sabbatical (or did he retire? In any event, unavailable), and this person was familiar with the course, having TAed it.

Changing around a syllabus like this is a lot of work, so I give him credit for that. Too bad he's not adding quality content (to put it mildly). Like others, I wonder what this has to do with Islam. Does the Intro to Christianity course focus on Fred Phelps?

7:48 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Simon said...

This is priceless - up there with [David Beckjam studies](#) and critical legal theory. Amusing that he cites "[t]he truth will set you free" to justify teaching a course that is almost entirely made up.

In all the outrage that will surely follow, let us not lose site of something: the real losers in all this, of course, are the students who are going to be paying tuition for the privilege of being forced to listen to this chap advance his agenda. By the time that they realize they are in "bush hatred 101", rather than "islam", it'll be too late to get their money back.

Still, at least the final will be easy: "list ten ways in which the Bush administration is destroying America."

7:54 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Ann Althouse said...

Madison Man: "a lot of work, so I give him credit for that"

I think people who are into conspiracy theories generally work hard. That's part of the wackiness.

7:54 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Simon said...

"Hey, I support academic freedom too - if there is a market for this sort of thing, then someone ought to be able to teach and write about it."

The market choice theory only operates when people are in a position to know what they're buying. You can't reliably prove that there is a strong market demand for rampant rabbits if you sell them in plain brown boxes in Walmart with "canned tomatoes" on the label, and it can't seriously be suggested that students want to listen to this chap prattle about 9/11 denial just because they signed up for a course on Islam. They signed up to learn about Islam, and might rightly wonder why they're learning about Michael Moore.

7:58 AM, JULY 05, 2006

M. Simon said...

The definitive study of the 9/11 collapse hasn't been done yet. Popular Mechanics "debunking" not withstanding.

It does seem totally out of place in a course on Islam.

7:59 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Todd said...

I'm going to go out on a limb and predict that if you're taking his course and you dissent from his views on 9/11, either in class or in the work you turn in, you do very poorly. Leaving students who disagree and want good grades in the position of

arguing from the perspective on near-insanity.

8:06 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Jim said...

Assuming the course complies with the department's and the University's standards for academic rigor, I am glad that someone is teaching the course. I am virtually certain that the most outrageous parts of the conspiracy theories that he subscribes to (e.g. planes alone could not take down the towers) cannot stand the light of critical thinking and science. I will say that he better be prepared for having his class populated by a bunch of David Horowitz acolytes who are going to be prepared to challenge their grades if he grades at all based on his subjective views of the matter.

But the main reason, for me, that this an important class to teach (setting aside academic freedom concerns) is that deniers of 9/11 will play an important role in how we teach and future generations learn about that time period. For example, more than twenty years ago when I as in high school a Holocaust survivor came and talked to us about his experiences in surviving the holocaust. I still remember details about what he said (I suppose it didn't hurt that he played the character LeBeau on Hogan's Heroes.) The reason he came and talked to us was that he and his wife had heard a Holocaust denier on the radio. He got disgusted and his wife insisted that he go out and talk to kids about his experience.

When my kids get older I will teach them that the Holocaust did happen and I will teach them that 19 men (mainly from Saudi Arabia) hijacked planes and killed more than 2,000 people. If I run accross someone in conversation who denies either of these I will challenge their arguments and I am confident that based on history and science, my arguments will prevail

8:13 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Glenn Howes said...

Unfortunately, the kind of scenario is plausible to the scientifically ignorant students our universities pump out. My own brother, who I've always thought of as being a reasonable and intelligent sort, has bought into it. As someone with a scientific background (Ph.D. Chemistry Univ. Wisconsin-Madison), I would have though only the retarded and delusional would buy into such things.

So I had to try to convince him, unsuccessfully, that it was pure madness. He'd point me at a an online petition of "scientists." I'd point out that most of were anonymous and googling the rest showed they were just random yahoos and software engineers. He'd point me to a list of "scientists" pushing the theory. I'd point out that they were composed of a pothead, an X-Files fanatic and a couple guys who give introductory survey classes in physics at BYU; nobody with any kind of academic street-cred.

He claimed that the reason no explosive residue was found was because the whole building was rigged with thermite (a chemical reaction which gets very hot and melts through things). He claimed that the building collapsed too fast, apparently thinking that structures catastrophically collapse like cliff walls in a Road Runner cartoon.

He pointed me at a video where some "MIT engineer" (engineer in what, degree in what?) introduced by Ed Bagley Jr. was claiming that a 500,000 ton building collapsing couldn't pulverize concrete because it had carpet on top of it (hey how is thermite supposed to pulverize concrete?), and therefore every floor of the building must have been filled with enough explosives to powderize all the concrete, that you could see explosions outside the building as it collapsed (really slow, flashless explosions, and what about the thermite?), that the pulverized concrete came out in a "pyroclastic flow" (he obviously did not know the meaning of that term) only seen off the continental shelf.

I would point out how stupid this was to my brother, and he chose to believe the potheads, old cranks and academic never-weres over his own software engineer/chemist brother.

8:18 AM, JULY 05, 2006

[SippicanCottage](#) said...

Three words:

Reality.

Based.

Community.

TeeHee

8:19 AM, JULY 05, 2006

[catherine](#) said...

Barrett says the Bush Administration is fooling the American public with the Adolf Hitler 'Big Lie Technique'... "Tell them a little lie and they'll wonder about it - weapons of mass destruction in iraq was a relatively little lie - and people are getting called on it."

Why don't he and the university just call the course "Moonbattery, Bushbattery and Assault & Battery on Logic and Empirical Data: or, how personal and partisan psychosis can lead to attacking one's defenders and defending one's attackers using unhinged theory and fiction as fact, and how masochistic urges to submit to extremist propaganda and religious imperialism create an existential hell for both western academic and student submitting to academic irrationality"

8:25 AM, JULY 05, 2006

[Pogo](#) said...

Re: *I am confident that based on history and science, my arguments will prevail*

I am no longer confident that this is the case. The protocols of Zion is still around, for example, as are holocaust deniers.

And how does UW Madison do quality control now? By the honor system? By assumption? Ouija board? Coin flip?

8:29 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Pogo said...

P.S. Sippican:

Remember, it's only *based on* reality, not unlike a TV movie is based on a true story. You know, fake-but-accurate, and all that.

8:30 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Dave said...

Ann, in case you or any of your colleagues wonder why we, Americans, respect academia so little, this would be one of the obvious reasons.

That our tax money is going to support this type of "education" beggars belief. You will excuse us if we condemn the academy, I'm sure.

8:41 AM, JULY 05, 2006

MarkyX said...

I think this teacher and every other muslim should look at The Usual Suspects video.

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-4220657430794722240&q=the+usual+suspects>

8:42 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Simon said...

Todd said...

"I'm going to go out on a limb and predict that if you're taking his course and you dissent from his views on 9/11, either in class or in the work you turn in, you do very poorly. Leaving students who disagree and want good grades in the position of arguing from the perspective on near-insanity."

This is a tangent, but that point was what I meant the other week when I said I'd have to do ConLaw twice because I wasn't sure Ann would pass me. What are you to do as a Professor when you believe that the Constitution protects a right to abortion, plain as the nose on your face, and you have a student who equally adamantly says that it does absolutely no such thing? What do you do when you have a student who flatly denies substantive content in the due process clause? It goes against your beliefs, and it goes against what the Supreme Court has held, but on the other hand, some of the most celebrated Justices ever to sit on the court - liberal and conservative both - have taken the same view.

8:42 AM, JULY 05, 2006

BarbO said...

There's a wonderful recent study by Drew Westen and his colleagues at Emory that shows precisely how some people think so illogically. In general, when people are

thinking about something they are not emotionally vested in, the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex is activated. This is the part of the brain that deals with rational decision-making. But when thinking about something that a person has a strong emotional interest in, the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex doesn't light up at all! Instead, emotionally related centers of the brain light up. First, a part of the brain that involves pain is activated--that seems to be during the brief period when the person is struggling with how to explain a fact that can't logically be explained away. Then, when the person figures out a way around the logical impasse, the pleasure areas of the brain light up. I'll bet folks like Cindy Sheehan have mild cognitive disorders, perhaps something along the lines of sub-clinical borderline personality disorder, that end up weighting the emotional factors too heavily in their brain, so it's sometimes difficult for them to think logically. When they're presented with facts that counter their viewpoint, it actually gives them a bit of a high as they mentally refute it--and their illogical thinking is more deeply reinforced.

8:47 AM, JULY 05, 2006

[Old Dad](#) said...

If "Academic Freedom," what ever that means, supports this nonsense, then I oppose Academic Freedom.

8:47 AM, JULY 05, 2006

[SteveR](#) said...

The criticism should not be directed at this nut, because nuts are all around but at the people who decided to hire him. Big wow, he TA'd a couple classes. That's some stout academic rigor.

Did they talk to him? Review his proposed course?

Based on the science alone he's not credible. What's next? Psychology classes based on the sun revolving around the earth or geography classes taught by the Flat Earth Society?

8:49 AM, JULY 05, 2006

[_Jon](#) said...

Regarding the "Little Lie", "Big Lie" concept and this quote:

"Tell them a little lie and they'll wonder about it - weapons of mass destruction in iraq was a relatively little lie - and people are getting called on it." Barrett says. "Tell em a big lie like 9/11 and they have a huge resistance to questioning it."

-- Didn't 9/11 happen *before* the invasion of Iraq?

-- How could Bush et. al. have used the 'Little Lie' of WMD in Iraq in order to decrease questioning of the 'Big Lie' when WMD in Iraq hadn't even been mentioned on 9/11?!?

(Setting aside the 500+ WMD already found in Iraq and the massive evacuation of something from Iraq before the invasion.)

8:52 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Dave said...

Glenn: One need not be either a scientist or engineer to see, intuitively, that (1) conspiracy theories make no sense in this instance, and (2) the issue of the heat at which jet fuel burns is a stram man, given all the other combustibles.

Anyone applying a modicum of common sense to the scene at hand will reach the same conclusion. Common sense is not the exclusive domain of scientists and engineers. It's the domain of people who can think clearly. Some will argue that scientists and/or engineers are more predisposed to this kind of thinking, but I would aver that an elementary understanding of the science involved in the destruction of the Twin Towers is all that is needed to do away with conspiracy theories.

That said, I do agree with you that American universities pump out scientific illiterates at an alarming rate. See conspiracy theories and intelligent design folk. Oh wait, they're probably one and the same....

8:52 AM, JULY 05, 2006

richard mcenroe said...

Rouse the alumni!
Stop the donations!
End the endowments!

8:53 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Stephen said...

Why don't he and the university just call the course "Moonbattery, Bushbattery and Assault & Battery on Logic and Empirical Data: or, how personal and partisan psychosis can lead to attacking one's defenders and defending one's attackers using unhinged theory and fiction as fact, and how masochistic urges to submit to extremist propaganda and religious imperialism create an existential hell for both western academic and student submitting to academic irrationality"

Because that would take up too much space on a transcript.

By the way, if the Bush administration created 9/11, why did Al Qaeda take credit for it? Was it just a convenient recruiting tool for them? Did the neocons in the Clinton administration create the USS Cole bombing, too? So many questions. Maybe I should take *Intro to Islam* for the answers.

9:00 AM, JULY 05, 2006

TallDave said...

This is perfectly reasonable material. It just needs to be taught in the proper course: "Abnormal Psychology: Paranoia and Irrational Beliefs."

9:09 AM, JULY 05, 2006

catherine said...

Because that would take up too much space on a transcript.

"Moonbattery" for short, Stephen, and it could be cross-listed in the course catalog under Astronomy/Astrology next to KosMology 101.

9:13 AM, JULY 05, 2006

ed said...

Hmmmm.

I'm thinking of going to college to get my degree.

But most definitely *not* at UW-Madison as I frankly don't have either the time, energy nor inclination to deal with this kind of silly nonsense.

If the University is incapable of managing it's own professors, then the University is simply incapable of actually offering a reasonable and worthwhile education.

Just where the heck can a middle-aged conservative look to for a good education without having to deal with mouth-foaming idiot lefty fanatics? Is there a conservative university out there? Perhaps something in either software engineering, CS or military history?

9:13 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Tantor said...

The University of Wisconsin Madison has long held a reputation as a school for radicals, a sort of cheddarhead Berkely. Student radicals bombed Sterling Hall in 1970, the home of the Army Research Center, killing a post-doc student working on an experiment in super conductivity. Another guy had his hand maimed by the blast.

When the protestor murderers were caught, the campus held spaghetti dinners and the like to raise money for their cause. When they were released from prison, they were hailed as heroes. They made no apology for their crime nor to the widow and orphans of their victim. They said they would do it again if need be.

That's the proud legacy of the University of Wisconsin at Madison. It's hardly a surprise that the tenured radicals there would indoctrinate their students in anti-American propaganda and call it education.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sterling_Hall_bombing

Tantor

9:14 AM, JULY 05, 2006

SGT Stephen Brown said...

okay, so what if the government rigged the building to collapse. it doesn't change the fact that two huge planes flew into the sides of them. the government do that, too???

9:20 AM, JULY 05, 2006

the pooka said...

From the article:

*"(Barrett) says 14 of the 16 weeks will have nothing to do with politics, but in the remaining two weeks, he will cover what he calls the "so-called war on terror".
`And I will present different interpretations of the war on terror, In I think a pretty detached way and encourage students to debate those interpretations and to support whichever one they personally find most persuasive and let them make up their own minds.' Barrett says.*

... Barrett says his students don't have to agree with his theory about 9/11. "Of course not!" Barrett says, "I certainly wouldn't expect them to... At least not all of them. On the other hand I would expect some of them would once they look at the evidence because the evidence is overwhelming."

Barrett said he is not surprised, or concerned about the UW's request to discuss the curriculum of his class.

"These people (his critics) are welcome to their opinions, but we have a tradition of academic freedom here in Wisconsin of sifting fearlessly in pursuit of truth because our motto has it - The truth will set you free. " Barrett says."

Now, the theories are crazy, no doubt. But, he seems pretty reasonable about the whole thing to me. And, jim's right: he can look forward to the entire contingent of CollegeGOPers descending like locusts on his class.

The most deliciously ironic part of this is, it'll be great PR for him and his theories once O'Reilly and Co. get hold of this and start wailing. Call it a reverse-Coulter.

Middle-aged conservative: Go [here](#) for your degree. They just cancelled their NYT subscription; they'll be sure not to tell you anything you might be uncomfortable with.

9:24 AM, JULY 05, 2006

[Simon](#) said...

SGT Stephen Brown said...

"...it doesn't change the fact that two huge planes flew into the sides of them. the government do that, too???"

So the moonbats claim.

9:25 AM, JULY 05, 2006

[Pat](#) said...

We've been blogging about these mental midgets at Screw Loose Change for a couple months; nice to get some real world perspective from folks who aren't immersed in this mania.

"Okay, so what if the government rigged the building to collapse. It doesn't change the fact that two huge planes flew into the sides of them. the government do that, too?"

That's what most of them believe; the really loony ones believe that the planes were holograms (no, I am not kidding).

You have to understand that the conspiracy theorist starts with the conclusion and works backwards from there. Bush/Cheney and Company did it in their minds and so they interpret every piece of evidence in that light. Particularly advantageous to them is the conspiracy theorist worldview that says that anything which doesn't fit the conspiracy theory is part of the coverup; this takes care of any loose ends.

9:37 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Telecomedian said...

My coworker at the cubicle across from me was in the Pentagon when the plane hit. She classifies it as the most terrifying experience of her life, and the most sickening effect was the screams and the smell.

My first trip to the Pentagon was last year. I didn't realize I was walking through a section that had been destroyed, as the rebuilding effort has been thorough. I did catch a whiff of a strange smell - it smelled like death.

I've also seen one of the survivors of the attack, a gentleman who was washed in scalding jet fuel. He's had numerous surgeries to repair his skin, ears, fingers, lungs - pick a body part, pretty much, and it was burnt. Amazingly, this man still has a sense of humor, and states that he looks pretty good for a guy who got hit by a jet. Still, his appearance, his strained walk and overall sense of physical pain is jarring, and a stunning reminder of what that day is really about.

I'd love to see Barrett and any UW faculty who supports this shaky falsehood come to the Pentagon, look this poor disfigured man in what's left of his face, and tell him it was a Big Lie.

9:38 AM, JULY 05, 2006

David said...

Steel rail, 142 lbs. per foot, can break when the temperature drops too fast from a high in the afternoon to a low in morning.

Steel warps and loses its load bearing potential. Ever notice the signs on tractors pulling trailers where it says, "DON'T WELD!" on the chassis?

This guy is warped also!

9:51 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Todd said...

Simon: Well, I can't speak for Prof. Althouse's class, but in my law school very little of the opinion of students on whether court decisions were correctly reached would ever be relevant on an exam. In the average law school exam (at least at The Q back in the 90's) and on the bar, you read a hypothetical fact pattern, identify issues, and try to answer questions about the issues you identified according to the holdings of

cases you studied in class. You need to know what the court decided and why. You can tell the professor all about why the court shouldn't have reached that holding and why the professor is wrong to agree with it, but you can't change what the court said. (Until you pass the bar and get in front of that court and change their minds.) Sure, the professor can give you bad marks on your classroom participation, but that's usually a tiny portion of any of the required law school curriculum.

Let's just say that the fact that he lends so much credence to these theories, as well as the much more inherently subjective nature of college courses, leads me to think he's not exactly going to be receptive to students who disagree with him in classroom discussions or in exams.

9:53 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Tim said...

So this dude thinks 9/11 was triggered by Bush to validate a war against Muslims?

O.k. Nuts have an uncommon ability to draw attention to themselves. But were this remotely true, wouldn't the ideal time for such a war against Muslims have been immediately following 9/11 and, with maybe deploying a maximum of three dozen nukes, couldn't the U.S. wipe out 90+% of Muslims worldwide in very short order? Why kill them at such a slow rate, and only those who attack us, if that was the aim?

10:05 AM, JULY 05, 2006

RogerA said...

Although my engineering coursework is 40 years old, I think any strength of materials text such as the one I had in my junior year, would adequately cover the issue.

10:15 AM, JULY 05, 2006

bearbee said...

NOVA's **Why The Towers Fell**

10:15 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Pogo said...

He blames Bush?

Why not the Masons? Or the Illuminati? Or perhaps the Pope?

Did he even *read* The Da Vinci Code?

10:16 AM, JULY 05, 2006

tndefender said...

"Muslim Christian Alliance"? Rather an oxymoron, don't you think?

10:29 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Hans Hecht said...

well, he claims that there is censoring going on in Madison...

anybody wishing to comment on the May 12 story?

10:29 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Stace said...

I have to put in a plug for Pat's (the commenter above) website.

<http://screwloosechange.blogspot.com/>

It's an excellent debunking site.

10:31 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Internet Ronin said...

tndefender: I think that's because you left something out: it's the Muslim-**Jewish**-Christian Alliance, you see. That makes all the difference, and perfect sense, of course ;-)

10:33 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Simon said...

"You have to understand that the conspiracy theorist starts with the conclusion and works backwards from there. Bush/Cheney and Company did it in their minds and so they interpret every piece of evidence in that light. Particularly advantageous to them is the conspiracy theorist worldview that says that anything which doesn't fit the conspiracy theory is part of the coverup; this takes care of any loose ends."

But the thing that makes the 9/11 conspiracy so ludicrous is that there isn't just an absence of evidence of the conspiracy, there aren't even any problems inherent in the real story. So, for example, you can see why the Kennedy conspiracy arose and still has some vitality decades later: the Zapruder footage clearly shows the fatal headshot as hitting Kennedy from in from of the car to its right, and the autopsy photos - reproduced ad nauseum - also show an entry wound in the *front* of Kennedy's head. A conspiracy theory when the official conclusions so blatantly fail to tally with the physical evidence is inevitable. But in the case of 9/11, it is the other way around. The Kennedy conspiracy theory was inspired by the evidence, and motives calculated from that; the 9/11 conspiracy theory assumes guilt, and interpolates motive, method and evidence.

The good news is that the 9/11 conspiracy theory will not live as long as did the Kennedy theory. As with so much of what the angry left does these days, its animating force is visceral hatred of a man who leaves office in two and a half years; the conspiracy exists purely for utility, and as soon as Bush leaves office - and thus, the purpose for which the conspiracy theory exists, which is to get rid of Bush, becomes moot - I suspect it will disappear.

10:34 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Glenn Howes said...

I don't think any of you other commenters have had to argue with people who have

been infected with this meme. Scientific knowledge, reason, Ockham's razor, all these things are completely irrelevant and useless in trying to convince the infected about the foolishness of it all.

It comforts these people to believe there are not large islamofascist groups seeking our destruction, people whose ideology demands that we in the West submit to their religion or die. On the other hand, if they can believe this is all something cooked up by Bush, it becomes simple: when Bush is gone everything will be peace and harmony. We can go about our business and it will be all a bad dream. The alternative, where we have to fight for our way of life is just too distasteful. Who wouldn't want to believe this? It's only fault is it is a delusion.

10:39 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Tibore said...

"That's what the designers of the World Trade Center were designing for—a fire that starts in a wastepaper basket, for instance. By the time it gets to the far corner of the building, it has already burned up all the fuel that was back at the point of origin. So the beams where it started have already started to cool down and regain their strength before you start to weaken the ones on the other side.

On September 11th, the whole floor was damaged all at once, and that's really the cause of the World Trade Center collapse. There was so much fuel spread so quickly that the entire floor got weakened all at once, whereas in a normal fire, people should not think that if there's a fire in a high-rise building that the building will come crashing down. This was a very unusual situation, in which someone dumped 10,000 gallons of jet fuel in an instant."

Thank you bearbee for the link.

And as a response to Barrett's claim that the "evidence is overwhelming": No. The theories are abundant. The "evidence" itself is far from overwhelming. He's confusing quantity with quality.

10:41 AM, JULY 05, 2006

DRJ said...

You aren't really surprised that this is happening at UW, are you? After all, this is the college and town that pride themselves on inhabiting "25 square miles surrounded by reality".

10:46 AM, JULY 05, 2006

jeff said...

Sigh. Liberal Arts students and professors ought to be required to take (and pass) more science classes.

10:47 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Mike said...

As a member of the UW-Madison faculty, I find this distressing.

As to who has to approve this, it starts with his department. Now that this has been brought to their attention, they are going to have to sign off on this. Has that happened yet?

At the very, very least I think the UW should require a rebuttal lecture from, you know, an *actual* engineer. That might actually be instructive for the students. First, this guy's lecture which might well sound reasonable to students without a good science background (probably every one of them), followed by the scientist who does two things; i) teaches how silly this specific claim is, and ii) by implication teaches how reasonable charlatans can sound if you're scientifically ignorant. The second lesson is vital in this day and age. They might approach the next pseudo-scientific argument with more scepticism.

10:56 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Harry said...

Middle aged conservative-

I am happy to say that my alma mater (Texas A&M University) has maintained an excellent reputation through the years in many fields while also managing to run off all the hippies, moonbats, etc.

10:57 AM, JULY 05, 2006

bearbee said...

14 min video of MIT Jeff King explaining his theory of controlled demolition. Barrett seems to have based his Bush theory on this controlled demolition theory. **MIT Engineer Breaks Down WTC Controlled Demolition**

Since every other government secret seems to find its way onto the front pages, one would think that Bush planting demolitions would have been leaked quite a while ago,

11:02 AM, JULY 05, 2006

SteveR said...

Yep Harry, they all went to Austin.

11:07 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Mike said...

Hans Hecht asked: *well, he claims that there is censoring going on in Madison...*

<http://www.madison.com/tct/opinion/column/index.php?ntid=83698>

anybody wishing to comment on the May 12 story?

What I see is a story so loony that even the Capital Times would have been embarrassed to run it.

11:08 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Ann Althouse said...

Simon: "What are you to do as a Professor when you believe that the Constitution protects a right to abortion, plain as the nose on your face, and you have a student who equally adamantly says that it does absolutely no such thing?"

I do the same thing I always do which is concentrate on understanding the court opinions and making lawyerly arguments. I don't care what students personally believe the answer should be and I don't expect them to care what I believe, but whether they can answer the questions asked in a professional way. The exam might tell you which side you have to argue or it might tell you to pick the better argument, but your grade would depend on how well you used the materials we studied in the course.

11:15 AM, JULY 05, 2006

PatCA said...

"Are academics -- present company excepted -- really this politically tone deaf?"

I would say they are exquisitely sensitive to tone. The powers that be are absolutely lost when they have to make a value judgment such as: should we have a moonbat 9/11 conspiracist teaching our children? This man used all the buzz words popular in the academic freedom debate, rendering them powerless.

And remember, freshmen are 18-19, and not as able as adults to critically judge his hogwash. I hope other faculty speak up to the deans and voice their displeasure.

11:19 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Pat said...

But the thing that makes the 9/11 conspiracy so ludicrous is that there isn't just an absence of evidence of the conspiracy, there aren't even any problems inherent in the real story.

But there are always problems inherent in any major news stories. Eyewitness accounts contradict each other on major points. Early news stories are frequently overtaken by events and never corrected.

And conspiracy theorism is an industry, which means it's getting pretty good at marketing itself, with slick MTV-style videos, books, conventions, podcasts, radio shows, etc. Yearly Kos drew about 1,000 to its convention; Alex Jones drew 1,200 (and sold out) to a 9-11 conference at \$75 a pop.

The 9-11 "Truth" movement has a real head of steam. Yes, they are not doing anywhere near as well as their ridiculous polls say. But they are getting attention and inevitably that brings converts.

The one person that seems to be holding them back, ironically, is Kos himself, who has decreed that no one may post "Truther" stuff in the diaries; I suspect he's also cracking the whip on the other liberal bloggers on the Townhouse list, because none of the major lib blogs has been willing to touch "Loose Change".

Stace, thanks for the kind comment about Screw Loose Change!

11:25 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Pyrrhros said...

Either in 2003 or '04, Popular Mechanics magazine published a detailed and extensive refutation of this and every other 9/11 conspiracy/denial proposition extant.

No-one with pretensions to rationality, let alone academic credentials, could possibly bruit such hogwash except by wilfully ignoring the volume of literature addressing such questions (as if any were needed!), that is easily available on public record over near five years.

This is not about Islamic terrorism. It is not even about the Trade Towers. Most certainly, it is about a treacherous attitude, all too familiar on the Left, that addresses any and all issues in terms of partisan sloganeering. Such absolute drivel is not just unworthy of an accredited educational institution. To maintain someone on your staff who propagates this stuff undermines every pretension. "Death eaters" are insufficient condemnation.

When Iran's first WMD lands somewhere in Western Europe about a year from now, it will obviously be a Rove/CIA reprisal for French and German stands against America in the UN. Pick your vote... have these gormless twits [Mark Steyn] no intelligence, no guts, no self-respect? This creep should be running Hillary's campaign.

11:26 AM, JULY 05, 2006

sonicfrog said...

OK. I admit it. I was one of the 50 guys who spent years drilling holes in the walls of peoples offices to place the explosives, and running miles and miles of wires throughout both towers to connect the explosives and make sure they all exploded in sequence and not leave a schred of evidence. The cool thing is that, while we were doing this massive undertaking, no one noticed a thing. In fact, we started our work in 93 when we placed the yellow truck in the parking garage. Boy it was nice having the buildings empty. We got alot of the groundwork done then.

That Bush! I tell ya. He plays dumb but look how smart he is. When he was skipping his National Guard service, he was actually planning all this and getting ready to be President.

11:26 AM, JULY 05, 2006

bearbee said...

The WTC was attacked in 1993 with moderate damage. If demolitions were planted is it just possible that those who had commercial aircraft crash into the Towers also had demolitions planted?

11:28 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Todd said...

I guess there is some science behind the theory that jet fuel didn't collapse the towers. I got this from Jonah Goldberg at the Corner, here's a Democratic Underground poster's [experiment](#) trying to show how it didn't happen that way (really, follow the link, this is priceless.)

11:32 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Thad Anderson said...

I equate people who believe the Bush administration planned 9/11 with people who claim that global warming is just a conspiracy. The facts just don't matter to these people - nothing but their ideological beliefs do - and trying to have a rational conversation with them about the facts is completely worthless. Even the most exhaustive scientific study would never be able to prove to either group that they are wrong.

Perhaps the most glaring factual mistake I've seen on 9/11 conspiracy websites is a photo of a hole in the wall of the Pentagon, which is held out as evidence that a plane could not have hit the building, because the hole is "too small." The [photo in question](#) is in fact a real photo of the Pentagon, but the wall shown is some interior wall - not the exterior wall which took most of the damage. Photographs released during the Moussaoui trial, especially [this one](#) and [this one](#), show the massive damage to the Pentagon which resulted from the jetliner's impact (and I'm pretty sure live TV footage from 9/11 shows this, too).

Sadly, the Bush administration deserves some of the blame here - **not for 9/11** - but for fueling the proliferation of these conspiracy theories. After two terms of hearing the country's leadership lie about almost everything, a certain percentage of the country is at the point where they assume that the opposite of whatever the Bush administration says is true.

One of the reasons seemingly intelligent people fall into this trap - like the brother mentioned in a previous post - is that the more you learn about something like the case for invading Iraq, the less you trust Bush. The last 5 or 6 years have been a nonstop parade of "I can't believe they did that" revelations - many of which haven't even gotten the full exposure they deserve (for example, what percentage of the American population could tell you who "Curveball" is, and what role he played in the pre-Iraq intelligence).

There's an old parable about an explorer who stops for directions and encounters two African tribesmen, one who always tells the truth, and one who always lies. In 2006, it is impossible to be more than passably knowledgeable about current events and to still trust the Bush administration.

The mistake the 9/11 conspiracy theorists make is to assume that Bush is the second tribesman, and that anything and everything he says **must** be false - which makes them just as unreasonable as the people who still trust him.

11:47 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Big D said...

At the very, very least I think the UW should require a rebuttal lecture from, you know, an actual engineer. That might actually be instructive for the students. First, this guy's lecture which might well sound reasonable to students without a good science background (probably every one of them), followed by the scientist who does two things; i) teaches how silly this specific claim is, and ii) by implication teaches how reasonable charlatans can sound if you're scientifically ignorant. The second lesson is vital in this day and age. They might approach the next pseudo-scientific argument with more scepticism.

Hell, if you want an example of how unvarnished garbage can sound reasonable just let them see the dihydrogen monoxide site at <http://www.dhmo.org/>
If you don't know what they're talking about it sounds so terrible. (Since as far as I can tell all the claims are technically true. I won't spoil it for anyone but if you can look it up on wikipedia to find out what they're really talking about.

11:49 AM, JULY 05, 2006

SippicanCottage said...

I agree with Thad. I agree with him three times. It's George Bush's fault that people think George Bush blew up The World Trade Center.

11:54 AM, JULY 05, 2006

Tibore said...

"here's a Democratic Underground poster's experiment trying to show how it didn't happen that way (really, follow the link, this is priceless.)"

OHMIGOD!!!!!!!!!!!! A chickenwire and concrete block box accurately models the per-square-inch structural stresses on the WTC?? The insulative properties? THE HEAT FROM A CUP OF KEROSENE SOMEHOW SCALES TO THE HEAT FROM 60,000+ LBS OF KEROSENE **PLUS** THE HEAT FROM ALL THE OTHER MATERIALS IN THE BUILDING?????

JesusH! The guy *was totally serious* about his modeling. I thought at first it was tongue-in-cheek sarcasm, but NO!

And the folks keep repeating

"Spooked's model is much weaker than the WTC structures, which makes the fact that it survived a similar fire highly significant."

Yes, the model was. **So was the damn fire!** There was *absolutely nothing similar* about it! No other combustion sources, no concrete insulation to absorb the thermal energy... like I said above, have these dumb (bleeps) ever heard of an oven? Do they not believe their cars get hotter inside than out in the summer? *Do they not believe in Global Warming?* It's the same damn principle in each case!

God... I'm just worn out. How do you reason with these people?

Meh... even the Word Verification is taunting me: znhwlfz. Zing Wolfowitz.

12:11 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Robert Schwartz said...

I have two kids in college (thank God not at UW) at an annual cost of almost \$100,000. This sort of story really honks me off.

First: this is a sick joke.

Second: Academic Freedom can not be given to irresponsible children.

I propose firing all of the tenured faculty in the "humanities" and rehiring them on semester to semester contracts, under which they they will teach courses on recognizable subjects like composition and American History from pre-defined syllabi and texts, subject to extensive in-class monitoring (including surveillance cameras) and to full appeals on grades and discipline to a panel of adults.

12:22 PM, JULY 05, 2006

the pooka said...

I propose firing all of the tenured faculty in the "humanities" and rehiring them on semester to semester contracts, under which they they will teach courses on recognizable subjects like composition and American History from pre-defined syllabi and texts, subject to extensive in-class monitoring (including surveillance cameras) and to full appeals on grades and discipline to a panel of adults.

Now *that* is a sick joke.

12:32 PM, JULY 05, 2006

michael a litscher said...

ed: Just where the heck can a middle-aged conservative look to for a good education without having to deal with mouth-foaming idiot lefty fanatics? Is there a conservative university out there? Perhaps something in either software engineering, CS or military history?

Milwaukee School of Engineering.

When I went there, it was so conservative that politics wasn't discussed.

12:34 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Elizabeth said...

The wild-eyed lefties of Salon.com are fairly repulsed by 9/11 conspiracy theorists. [Farhad Manjoo debunks the 9/11 deniers](#), focusing on the film *Loose Change*.

I saw this film advertised on my campus last month, sponsored by the student Green Party. When did the Greens become as loony as Lyndon LaRouche?

12:35 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Thorley said...

I saw this film advertised on my campus last month, sponsored by the student

Green Party. When did the Greens become as loony as Lyndon LaRouche?

Pretty much since day one.

12:39 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[michael a litscher](#) said...

todd: *I guess there is some science behind the theory that jet fuel didn't collapse the towers. I got this from Jonah Goldberg at the Corner, here's a Democratic Underground poster's experiment trying to show how it didn't happen that way (really, follow the link, this is priceless.)*

Had this person actually cut the outer wire frame into playing-card sized sections, stacked them end on end, and stabilized these sections from folding in or out using trusses, then the experiment might have some validity to it.

As is, it in no way replicates the structure of the WTC.

I once argued with some fool who suggested that even if the top 10 floors collapsed, the floor below should have stopped the collapse at that point, because after all, that lower floor had obviously been strong enough to support those upper floors all these years.

Uh, yea. Place a bowling ball on your foot. Can your foot support it? Yup. Now drop that same bowling ball onto the same foot from 15 feet above. Not quite the same.

12:54 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[RogerA](#) said...

Tibore--I think an earlier poster summarized accurately the problem: You can not and will not ever convince a dedicated conspiracy freak of what they believe. The fundamental rule of conspiracy theories is that any evidence to the contrary is proof of the conspiracy. And these conspiracy theories tend to cut across the political spectrum: recall the claims made by President Clinton's detractors that the Clintons were actually involved in murderous activities. WV: blweh speaks for itself

12:55 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[Elizabeth](#) said...

barbo, I've read the article you cite, or probably another one on the same study. Your description of how some people resort to rebuttal is great. I'll see you Cindy Sheehan, and raise you Michelle Malkin.

12:57 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[Tibore](#) said...

You know... I don't mind folks questioning an official narrative, whether by the government or some other source of authority. It's a valid thing to do. It's a responsible, good-citizen thing to do. It's *necessary* in an open society. If there are genuine problems in the story as it's prested - and I'm sure there are contradictions, mistakes, gaps and missing pieces of info, etc. in the WTC collapse

narrative - then a responsible citizen *should* raise questions.

But are those specific questions in regard to this specific issue being raised to get at the truth, or to satisfy some obscure need to know that the government is plotting against it's own people? Are these questions being raised to find out the real facts behind the collapse, or to fill in blanks in a pre-written story? Do some of those folks really care, and would be persuaded by a grand, overarching investigation that answers each and every one of their questions about the collapse, or is this simply lobbing accusations and seeing what sticks? If there's a real desire to discover the Truth (intentionally capitalized), then there is an equal responsibility to abide by the Truth as it's revealed. But to peck and peck and peck with digressive questions, to elevate accusations to the realm of facts, to fail to apply Occam's razor to what is being said just because it contradicts some preconstructed notion is the farthest thing from being responsible. It's deliberately being unconstructive. It's deliberately clouding the picture for no good reason. And I really want to go to some of these conspiracy sites and ask: If an investigation clearly showed that the Official Story was true, and that all your points were either valid misinterpretations or mistakes in how the official story was told to begin with, would you accept it? Or would I hear excuses about how such a thing could never happen?

1:10 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[Elizabeth](#) said...

Pat, it's not ironic at all that Kos rejects the conspiracy theories. Those theories are real fringe stuff, not at all mainstream liberal thinking.

1:14 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[telemacchus](#) said...

If ever there was an example of why we need to take back our campuses from the radical left, this is it. It is with much trepidation I am sending my daughter off to Madison at a cost of a very hard earned \$32K a year. Having just finished SOAR orientation there with her, I have to say that as a dispassionate and neutral observer, that I saw nothing but lesbians and minorities artificially placed in every single position of authority around the entire place, Deans, Counselors, Chief of Campus Police, etc. It was beyond all statistical probability. How a colony of Ex- and wannabe hippies all set up shop in the middle of the heartland surrounded by an entire state of people from hard-working German and Scandanavian stock, is beyond me. They all seemed very qualified and competent, but there was clearly a heavy and very left hand manipulating all power structures through the organization. What that heavy left hand is going to do to my daughter after 4 years makes me shudder. There is no balance in environments like this, and freedom of speech is only valued when it is the radical left freedom of speech.

1:15 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[catherine](#) said...

Sippican Cottage,

LOL 3x over your 11:54! Logic perfect. Obviously, you've had an engineering course or two in the strength and applications of structural irony.

1:17 PM, JULY 05, 2006

DaveG said...

*I equate people who believe the Bush administration planned 9/11 with people who claim that global warming is just a conspiracy. The facts just don't matter to these people - nothing but their ideological beliefs do - and trying to have a rational conversation with them about the facts is completely worthless. **Even the most exhaustive scientific study would never be able to prove to either group that they are wrong.***

I contend that there is a large difference between attempting to prove the cause of an event that has already happened and left extensive debris for forensic scientific analysis and attempting to predict the future with regards to weather when our current technology cannot even accurately predict whether it will rain or not tomorrow.

The remainder of your three postings is simply the usual "bush lied" tripe and is not worthy of response.

1:18 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Elizabeth said...

The stock response to large-scale conspiracy theories pretty much holds true again and again: for me to believe that this administration staged 9/11, I'd have to believe they have a level of competence to do so, and can command air-tight secrecy among all the players involved. Many, many things point to the contrary on both counts, and that's the case throughout history.

Of course 9/11 *was* a conspiracy. 20 guys and who knows how many planners conspired to pull it off, but that meant keeping their plans secret for a finite time, and, had some keen observers' warnings been followed up, the secret might not have held. That's a different investigation, how our gov't and its agencies did or did not fail to understand the plot. Lunatic conspiracy theories take energy and credence from the actual nuts and bolts of real events.

1:19 PM, JULY 05, 2006

The Drill SGT said...

I saw the NOVA special mentioned below and it was great.

bearbee said...

NOVA's Why The Towers Fell

As to whether kerosene can melt steel?

Anybody remember the Civil War? That was that big conflict run by another GOP President. Anyway, I've seen lots of pictures of soldiers on both sides ripping up railroad tracks.

Big fires of railroad ties with the rails laid on top and all bent and

sagging due to the heat. Looks like pretty straight forward proofs to me

Steel doesn't puddle easily, but it sure does lose it's load bearing ability and temps well under melting.

1:25 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Pogo said...

I'm not surprised there are boneheads who *believe* this junk, but I *am* surprised that this is done on the University dime.

Really, now. Does every crackpot theorist get a state-funded stage (or else violate their academic freedom?) Does UW hope to be the next Colorado U?

And can't conspiracy theorists ever get a conspiracy down that doesn't involve like 3000 people to keep there mouths shut? Criminey.

1:31 PM, JULY 05, 2006

SteveR said...

Its always a sign of a good comment thread when Sippian Cottage and Elizabeth are along and you know isn't.

1:33 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Pogo said...

I mean "their".

Bush lied; I misspelled.

1:33 PM, JULY 05, 2006

The Drill SGT said...

How about a simple rule for academia: You can rant about whatever you want from the podium of your class AFTER you win at least one Nobel prize. Till then shudd-up and teach or research.

Here's to Linus Pauling, an All American.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linus_Pauling

1:44 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Laika's Last Woof said...

The bigger picture here is that "Islam Is Peace" will be totally drowned out by "Islam = 9/11 Conspiracy Theory".

Whenever any kid who takes this class sees a Muslim he or she will walk a little faster the other way. If all Muslims think the way this professor does who knows what those crazy fanatics might be ready to do?

It is more likely that the students will judge Islam based on the kooky conspiracy

theory than that they will accept, in loving embrace of the Religion of Peace, that the conspiracy theory must be true.

By linking Islam to crazy 9/11 conspiracies this professor is turning people against his religion, and sadly against those who follow the religion and yet who are also our allies, such as the Northern Alliance and Iraqi Kurds; against patriotic American Muslims serving honorably in our armed forces and bravely fighting the War on Terror.

Just as not every Palestinian danced in the streets on 9/11, not all Muslims deserve the reputation of the John Birch Society.

But sadly there is just such a person teaching "Intro to Islam", and here's the lesson his students are really going to learn:

"Islam is a religion which leads its followers to believe wild conspiracy theories, particularly about Americans, Israelis, Jews, and Christians. This belief justifies and fuels the acts of terrible violence committed in its name."

Ironically that's just the sort of "lesson" they teach over at Little Green Footballs.

1:46 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[Simon](#) said...

bearbee said...

14 min video of MIT Jeff King explaining his theory of controlled demolition.

King's explanation seems mainly based on the theory that the only cause for the "squibs" - which we ought to call the sequential high-velocity expulsion of gas or air from the windows of the floors being impacted - is explained by explosions. I would think that the sequential pancaking of all the floors above that floor crushing down like a piston and expelling the air and anything airborne by the path of least resistance.

The problem with all of these theories is that they fail to appreciate that all that is necessary is to account for a mechanism that would cause a single floor to fail. Once a single slice of the building fails - perhaps except for the very uppermost floors - the sheer weight of the floors above it will suffice to do the hard work.

This stuff has been thoroughly debunked, and is largely held onto by no one who doesn't have an axe to grind.

2:05 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[Harry Eagar](#) said...

Well, those Civil War rails weren't steel.

But that's by the way.

However, what I wanted to point out is that 2 of 16 weeks of this course supposedly

about Islam are devoted to the Nation of Islam, which is doubtfully Muslim by the standards of most regular Muslims. Sort of like offering a course in Christianity and devoting the last couple sessions to Christian Science.

Even setting aside Barrett's ax-grinding, evidently minimal preparation, lunatic theories and inability to reason from A to B, devoting one-eighth of a course on Islam to Malcolm X seems weird.

Query: was that in the old, retired prof's syllabus, or is that a Barrett innovation, too?

2:10 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[Elizabeth](#) said...

SteveR,

Thanks! I was just about to say Hi to Sippican, too. I noticed he's been here and on another thread or two today.

Hey, Sippican! I was banging together a little wood project around the house this weekend -- a window treatment, so very la di da -- and thought, "Sippican would give me the right advice on this"; I muddled through anyway. But I'm just saying, you might have felt your ears burning.

2:12 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[Ann Althouse](#) said...

Sorry to wreck Sippican's 11:54 wisecrack by deleting Thad's accidental triple posting.

As to whether the whole University of Wisconsin-Madison is wacky. It's not. If you're worried about your kids coming here, try to help them exercise good judgment about what courses to take. Pick a realistic major! Both my sons graduated from UW-Madison and had good experiences in the departments they majored in -- and neither was in science or engineering.

Laika: Interesting perspective! I think this would be particularly effective inside the university. It's insulting to Muslims to teach the course this way -- or I'd be deeply troubled to learn that it's not.

2:17 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[Simon](#) said...

The Drill Sgt. hit the nail on the head, almost: steel may not necessarily melt under the heat from a kerosine fire, but we're not *talking* about it melting. The question isn't "at what temperature does steel melt," the question is, "at what temperature (and how quickly) does the load-bearing capacity *of the particular kind of steel used in that fixtures that were the point of failure* degrade to the point that they can no longer sustain their loading?"

2:31 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[Aggravated DocSurg](#) said...

Perhaps UW should start offering a whole range of courses with similar "theories:"

>> Alchemy 101

>> Practical witchcraft

>> N-rays and the "new physics"

>> Engineering the "200 mpg engine Detroit doesn't want you to know about"

>> Laetrile: the hidden secrets of the miracle anti-cancer drug

Seriously, these idiots take our tax money, spit in our face, "teach" this BS as truth, and tell us it is inappropriate for us to question them -- after all, their academic freedom is "at risk." Get real.

2:32 PM, JULY 05, 2006

jzee said...

I can teach again! I have a theory about the earth being flat and the center of the universe. Are ther any Univerastities out there that will accept my classes?

2:57 PM, JULY 05, 2006

SippicanCottage said...

Why this thread is a veritable garden of earthly delights for old Sippican.

You can't imagine what a fellow that went to school for architecture, holds an unrestricted Massachusetts Building License, and has worked for a company that installs jet fuel storage tanks thinks about the various theories being propounded by the literati glitterati here and there on the web, never mind the turd at MIT.

You owe it to yourselves to follow the link Todd supplied earlier and look at the "experiment," and all the enthusiastic comments after it. Gold, Jerry! Comedy gold!

I said this before in a thread about the illusory gunfire at the Capitol Building a month or so ago, but I'm always amazed at what the cubicle crowd doesn't know. That's not an insult, by the way, just an observation.

Talking about the topic gives it a hint of credence it doesn't deserve, but it's interesting to recall that those buildings were designed to withstand a direct hit from an airplane- the Empire State Building has been hit in the past for instance, by a bomber plane once, IIRC-- but the planes that hit them were larger than any plane in existence at the time of design. The terrorists deliberately used planes flying shortly after takeoff, knowing they had to have full tanks to get the desired result.

How Elizabeth knows I'm the king of the cornice, the potentate of the pelmet, and the shah of the swag, I'll never know. But that explains the ears burning.

What about the itching?

3:31 PM, JULY 05, 2006

bearbee said...

Seriously, these idiots take our tax money, spit in our face, "teach" this BS as truth, and tell us it is inappropriate for us to question them -- after all, their academic

freedom is "at risk.

But, but, but... he has a peehdee.....

3:32 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Bas-O-Matic said...

I contend that there is a large difference between attempting to prove the cause of an event that has already happened and left extensive debris for forensic scientific analysis and attempting to predict the future with regards to weather when our current technology cannot even accurately predict whether it will rain or not tomorrow.

Climate and weather are not the same thing.

3:42 PM, JULY 05, 2006

altoids1306 said...

The implosion of the academic humanities continues. Not that I care, all the more office space for us.

3:48 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Mike said...

The implosion of the academic humanities continues. Not that I care, all the more office space for us.

Yes, but we all (academicians, the UW) get tarred with the same brush. I am confident (well, optimistic (okay, hopeful)) that the University's decision in this case is that this fellow will not be allowed to "teach" a topic for which, presumably, he is unqualified (i.e. structural engineering). I don't see how the concept of academic freedom can be stretched to the point that anyone can teach anything to tuition-paying students.

4:42 PM, JULY 05, 2006

michael a litscher said...

SippicanCottage: *Three words: Reality. Based. Community.*

Yesterday evening, DURING the fireworks display, a leftie friend leaned over and opined, "War never solved anything."

To which I replied, "Do you even realize what day it is today?"

4:56 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Simon said...

Michael,

Are you suggesting that when the Declaration of Independence was presented to the British Army, they didn't just say "fair enough; come on, chaps, let's go home and invent tea and biscuits"?

Joking aside, c'mon, tell me that you're kidding. No one is *that* dense. "War never solved anything"? Historically, it's hard to think of much that was settled any other way.

5:06 PM, JULY 05, 2006

DaveG said...

Climate and weather are not the same thing.

Ok, amend to: there's a difference between forensic reconstruction of a past event and predicting the future.

Still stands.

5:09 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Pogo said...

I've often wondered if unilaterally declaring peace ever solved anything.

5:17 PM, JULY 05, 2006

The Drill SGT said...

"War never solved anything."

Sounds like my mother, the retired union school teacher.

To which I always reply, "go tell that to the city fathers of Carthage or to Holocaust survivors."

5:29 PM, JULY 05, 2006

The Drill SGT said...

and Carthage as well

5:30 PM, JULY 05, 2006

michael a litscher said...

Simon: *Joking aside, c'mon, tell me that you're kidding.*

Just before that, he was recalling the 60's era bumper sticker about fighting for peace and screwing for virginity or some such.

And after that, claiming that we're less free under the current King George than we were under the previous one.

5:35 PM, JULY 05, 2006

El Rider said...

Hey, I can also say silly things to the gullible. Things like; did you know that FDR set up the German concentration camps before he attacked Pearl Harbor? I am not willing to relocate to Madison but if the pay is good enough and the TAs are cute enough I am willing to commute from Chicago. Where do I send my resume?

5:41 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Musclemouth said...

"Obviously worthless"? Check your language. Not everything is as "obvious" as your blind patriotism would like it to be.

5:50 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Ann Althouse said...

Checking my language: it is *obviously* worthless material.

6:46 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Ann Althouse said...

That's checking "obviously." I could also check "worthless," and I do find that wanting. It's way too gentle.

6:51 PM, JULY 05, 2006

The Drill SGT said...

Turning to something that will bring a smile to most of us: enjoy!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHP2jyoyFRM>

6:57 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Elizabeth said...

I don't see how the concept of academic freedom can be stretched to the point that anyone can teach anything to tuition-paying students.

The accrediting body surely agrees with you. I doubt that one course is enough to cause an accreditation problem, but a pattern of unqualified instruction would. I like the idea of having an engineering prof come in to refute the crackpot stuff, if the university decides to allow him to go on with the course.

I teach an Intro to Women's Studies course that is meant to be interdisciplinary. I make sure to arrange guest lectures from faculty in history, anthropology, poli sci, linguistics, sociology and sometimes economics, rather than present myself as a credible expert in all those fields.

7:00 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Elizabeth said...

Sippican, try cortisone?

7:01 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Mike said...

"present all defensible sides of important issues" and "let students make up their own minds."

But there's the problem, isn't it? This stuff is not defensible. But if you let him teach

it, you're implying that it is. Seems to me it's the responsibility of the faculty to "sift and winnow" out the garbage.

7:36 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Pat said...

Pat, it's not ironic at all that Kos rejects the conspiracy theories. Those theories are real fringe stuff, not at all mainstream liberal thinking.

Elizabeth, I agree 100% about the conspiracy theories. Now we can debate whether Kos represents mainstream liberal thinking...

7:44 PM, JULY 05, 2006

ben wallace said...

One part of an explanation why he was hired is that few people with a PHD are willing to lecture for a little over \$8000 for a semester. Thus, the pool of possible applicants will be small, and in this case he was the only candidate. As for the hiring decision, the deeper problem lies with the department. Some of the faculty in that department have told people I know that the LCA department (the hiring department) is under receivership. A deeper problem is that there are a lot of interdisciplinary tenure-granting programs at UW, so there is a limited pool even for tenure-track positions, so the overall quality of the individuals hiring people is probably low relative to disciplinary departments (where most of the hiring decisions are made).

That being said, I think Barrett should be allowed to teach the course because he plans to give students both sides of the conspiracy issue. This is a course in contemporary Islam which is not part of the religious studies department, so the department and instructor have broad discretion to determine what is appropriate. This conspiracy theory may be worthless but the issue is whether or not students would benefit from a discussion of these issues. The discussion here suggests there is some value in discussing the logic of the conspiracy argument and how different evidence is evaluated by different individuals. An expert may not be necessary to get at the basic issues. For example, although there is a lot of science involved in the Kennedy assassination conspiracy, one does not need to be a scientist to form a reasonable opinion about the event based on different evidence.

In the end, there is a lot of difficulty for the public to determine what is appropriate for a course on contemporary Islam that is taught from an interdisciplinary program that emphasizes languages. Given that this course is taught, and the low pay, Barrett may have been the best candidate available. He is also a temporary replacement for faculty on sabbatical. So I don't think the taxpayers will ever have to worry about Barrett commanding a tenure-track salary here or enjoying the much stronger protection of tenure for his outlandish ideas.

7:44 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Theo Boehm said...

Remember "President Rosenfeld?" It went something like this:

"That Jew, Rosenfeld, planned Pearl Harbor. He set it up with that other Jew, Kimmel, who's playing the fall guy, to get us into this war so we could save his buddy Stalin's ass. American boys are dying to save a bunch of Commies and Jews...."

Conspiracy theories are nothing new. It's just that teaching them at the University of Wisconsin is.

8:05 PM, JULY 05, 2006

SippicanCottage said...

Hey Drill Sergeant- I had that video on my blog as the [July Fourth entry](#). It's fabulous.

I went looking around for more information about the young ladies. Turns out they're British.

Give my your poor, your hungry, your huddled masses of female trombone players, yearning to play Sousa.

Or something.

8:21 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Theo Boehm said...

Sippican and Drill Sgt,

Of course those young ladies are playing it in the key of Bb, which makes it only slightly possible on the trombone. I'd like to hear them do it in the original key ;->

I made a living for five years as a professional flute player, and I could not play that piccolo solo as fast as they do it in the last repeat. Damn those high Ab's....

8:43 PM, JULY 05, 2006

BarbO said...

Hi Elizabeth,

I guess it says something about my politics that you'll take my Cindy Sheehan and raise her with a Michelle Malkin. I don't agree with Michelle on everything, but I don't think she's at all nuts. Maybe it's because I spent a lot of time working in Communist countries--that shaped my emotional predisposition, because I kinda don't like it when millions of people get shot 'n stuff. People like Cindy Sheehan are just so naive about how horrible regimes like Iraq, the Soviet Union, Iran, and so forth can be. When far left wingers equate politics in those places to politics in the US, it drives me buggy. To me, it shows the same utter cluelessness as a holocaust denier. Call her what you like, Michelle Malkin is not naive. I think you'd actually find some of her viewpoints quite reasonable if you approached them without an emotional predisposition... :)

8:54 PM, JULY 05, 2006

tjl said...

Ben Wallace said "Barrett should be allowed to teach the course because he plans to give students both sides of the conspiracy issue."

"Both sides of the conspiracy issue" (!) Would Wallace support courses giving students both sides of astronomy vs. astrology, or chemistry vs. alchemy?

What a perfect demonstration of how academic freedom, as currently interpreted, immunizes from criticism anything, no matter how crazed, that reflects the reigning leftist orthodoxy. Academic freedom is curiously inelastic, however, when it comes to ideas that might challenge this orthodoxy, as the Harvard faculty proved to Larry Summers.

8:57 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[SippicanCottage](#) said...

Hi Theo-

Former trombone player.

Married to former flute player.

Risked divorce to bring you that video.

9:25 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[PatCA](#) said...

Hearing both sides is absurd, as tjl opines.

Why stop at the 9/11 conspiracy? If you can truly stretch that to relate to Islam, let's hear "both sides" of the "Jews are descendants of apes and pigs" theory, both sides of "homosexuals should be killed" theory. When we're done with Intro to Islam, we can apply this in every department! Every person will be heard and respected! And by the time the kids graduate, they'll be morally and intellectually paralyzed.

9:29 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[PatCA](#) said...

And what do you mean that the hiring department is in receivership? Are you sure you don't mean conservatorship?

9:31 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[dick](#) said...

I love reading about how demented Michelle Malkin is. You read that and then you see her website where she prints things like the photos of the Iraqi fishermen who were killed by Al Qaeda. Turns out that the photo the MSM used for the Haditha killing was actually the film of Iraqi fishermen killed by Al Qaeda 6 weeks earlier. Strange how the MSM wasn't able to find things like that but these shrill terrible bloggers like Michelle can find them so easily. Love her or hate her she does find a lot of good stuff and it is true. Even the BBC had to admit that they had put up the photos without checking. Same with that other set of photos of how the American servicemen were mistreating the Iraqis and stealing things. BBC had photos of that as well but Michelle was able to prove that the photos were photoshopped pics of British soldiers at their own tents instead. BBC had to admit that one as well.

And the wonderful things that Kos had shown us the media has misrepresented???
Bueller?? Anyone??

9:53 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Eli Blake said...

Barb O:

I'll bet folks like Cindy Sheehan have mild cognitive disorders,

Cindy Sheehan has never questioned the fact that terrorists destroyed the World Trade Center, she has only questioned the Iraq war, which is a separate matter entirely.

10:42 PM, JULY 05, 2006

ben wallace said...

A conspiracy theory can be analyzed by describing alternative hypotheses and the evidence proponents use. The articles in popular mechanics are an example of this type of analysis. As mentioned, this course is not in religious studies but in LCA, so it is not going to emphasize text and interpretations. Hence, it is easier to justify inclusion of the conspiracy section.

In my view, the cost imposed by Barrett is less than the cost that will be imposed on UW if politicians influence the content of courses. In an ideal world we could define precisely what constitutes an "obviously worthless." If the choice is between having the occasional Barrett and having Nass and friends determine what is obviously worthless, give me the former. Once one gives in to the demand to get rid of Barrett, there is implicit legitimation of the treatment Larry Summers received for advancing a hypothesis based on serious scientific studies of spatial reasoning in newborns and the potential effect of this on tenure patterns in the sciences. I think they both should be protected in what they say, even though I find Summers utterly more convincing than Barrett (whom I disagree with completely). Academic content should not be determined by the results of the last election. That is not what the UW stands for, regardless of whether the party in power is of the left or right.

A lesson for the legislature is that if they want someone better than Barrett, they should pay for it. Hiring a full-time visiting assistant professor for the year would probably have given the department more choices. Of course, that would cost more money.

11:43 PM, JULY 05, 2006

Elizabeth said...

I think you'd actually find some of her viewpoints quite reasonable if you approached them without an emotional predisposition... :)

Courtesy laugh - heh heh.

Dick mentions a good example of a reasonable Malkin post. But the trouble is,

focusing on the cool intellectual issue, and eschewing emotion, is that she's wrong about as often as she's right, and she takes some alarming tactics along the way. She's rarely willing to print a retraction when she is wrong, even if she's harmed someone, and that makes her a loose cannon. It's not worth the time and effort to sift through and find the rare instances where something of substance comes off her blog. I'll wait for it to rise up through the dreck, as the story dick cites eventually did.

11:43 PM, JULY 05, 2006

[Mr. Forward](#) said...

"The vitriol that Nass is spewing now is similar to the language he used last year to attack another academic with whom he disagrees University of Colorado Professor Ward Churchill. "

Maybe somebody should tell the Cap Times that Ward Churchill got fired from the University of Colorado.

12:28 AM, JULY 06, 2006

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