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Roaming Charges: the Great Trump Conspiracy?

By Jeffrey St. Clair
August 5, 2016

I resist conspiracy “thinking” with every still-myelinated fibre of my brain. Every morning our inbox here at CounterPunch is flooded with “important alerts” about crisis actors, CIA mucous experiments, the staging of the Newtown massacre, the staging of the Orlando massacre, the staging of the Nice truck massacre, and the Pokemon Go coordinates for the vat holding JFK’s still functioning brain.

There are real conspiracies, of course, like the CIA’s plots to kill Fidel Castro or the successful scheme to have Nelson Mandela arrested on terrorism charges. But most conspiracy theorists function to obscure and invalidate *real* conspiracies. Cockburn and I used to joke that the 9/11 conspiracists were, in fact, themselves a conspiracy seeded by the CIA to distract the Left from challenging the real objectives of the War of Terror. But that worked out much too well to have been a real CIA plot.

Now, however, I feel myself slipping into the grip of a fever dream featuring Donald Trump as some kind of Manchurian Candidate designed to destroy the GOP and secure the election of the otherwise unelectable Mrs. Clinton.

Remember Jimmy Breslin’s fabulous comic novel on the mobster Joey Gallo, *The Gang That Couldn’t Shoot Straight*? That’s the Trump campaign in action. Only what if they weren’t meant to shoot straight?

Case in point. Yesterday, Trump was handed an October Surprise in August: the paying of a ransom to Iran for the release of American hostages (not technically true, but close enough for politics). An opportunity that he blew 5 minutes after it was given to him on a platter by the WSJ by focusing on the bogus B-Roll footage, which he doubled down on after his own campaign told him it didn't exist.

Can anyone be this incompetent every day of the week and not be run over by an Uber driver at a crosswalk on Park Avenue? So the blunders have to be strategic, doesn't it? (For the preternaturally credulous among you, I'm joking. I think.)

Let me say, I'm all *for* paying ransom for hostages. It's the way the Middle East has worked for 2,000 years. The Israelis do it every couple of months and they can do no wrong, right?

Question: Did Trump University offer degrees from the Jayson Blair/Judith Miller School of Journalism?

Obama's Drug War in Indian Country

Federal prosecutors have charged a 19-year-old boy from the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon with federal charges for possession of less than a gram of marijuana, even though the state of Oregon has LEGALIZED marijuana possession and use. Devontre Thomas could face a year in prison and a \$1,000 fine, as well as the loss of student loans, federal housing and any other kind of government aid FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE.

"It Was 50 Years Ago Today..."

That the Beatles' *Revolver* came out for play ... and changed the world (or mine and I suspect many of yours too, even if you weren't born until the 70s or 80s). There are two ways to look at this milestone: a. It makes some of us feel old. b. the music still sounds as fresh and young as ever. *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver* were the sounds of the English Revolution. the exquisite perfection of *Sgt. Pepper's* was Mannerism. Not that I've got anything against Mannerism (cf., Tintoretto or Winton Marsalis). Check out this video on The Making of *Revolver*.

The CIA: "We're With Her"

In Friday's edition of the *New York Times*, Michael J. Morrell, a 33 year veteran of the CIA who served as deputy director of the Agency, came out the latest member of the military-intelligence elite to endorse Hillary Clinton. Morrell lauded Hillary's "commitment to our nation's security; her belief that America is an exceptional nation that must lead in the world for the country to remain secure and prosperous; her understanding that diplomacy can be effective only if the country is perceived as willing and able to use force if necessary; and, most important, her capacity to make the most difficult decision of all — whether to put young American women and men in harm's way." Morrell added that "During the early debates about how we should respond to the Syrian civil war, she was a strong proponent of a more aggressive approach, one that might have prevented the Islamic State from gaining a foothold in Syria." Look out, Assad!

Watch for this endorsement by a former leader of an agency of spies and government assassins to be hailed as a triumph on MS-DNC.

Who will be next? Richard Perle? Elliott Abrams? Michael Ledeen?

Memo to *NYT* headline writers: shouldn't your headline for Morrell's op-ed read: "I ran the CIA. Now I run Hillary Clinton?"

Shoot Us From Our Good Side, Please

The ACLU has extracted from the FBI footage from an agency spy plane filming protesters during the Baltimore uprising over the police murder of Freddie Gray. Another example of your government at work...against you. The least they could do is film us from the Right Profile.

Every Hour in America

"He's saying I crossed over a solid line and I did not. I got out of the car to ask him what the offense was. He raised his voice at me and threatened to arrest me. So I'm really confused. And I would like another officer to come out here. My heart is racing. I'm really afraid."

Those are the terrified words spoken by Earledreka White last March to a 9/11 dispatcher in Houston. Ms. White is a 28-year-old black social worker, who rightfully feared for her life after the death of Sandra Bland. As newly released video documents, White had every reason to be fearful. After making her call to 9/11, the police officer threw her against her car, cuffed her and arrested her for resisting arrest over a minor traffic infraction. White spent two nights in jail. This kind of police violence and intimidation happens every hour in America.

Don't Worry Melania

Melania, we've heard that you may have some troubling issues with your immigration status. Don't fret. There's a sanctuary city here in Oregon which will welcome you with open arms and hide you from the Deportation Police.

The Meaning of Sacrifice

With all the debate about whether or not Donald Trump ever made any real sacrifices in his life, here comes Gary Johnson, the Libertarian candidate, who has announced his own major sacrifice in his run for the 'highest' office: "I promise not to smoke any dope between now and the election." Not sure whether that makes me more or *less* likely to vote for him.

Hazards of Empire

There comes news this week, sponsored by Big Pharma and the pesticide industry, that at least 41 US military personnel have tested positive for the Zika virus, a disease which is a perfect symbol of our times. With 800 military bases overseas, many in the tropics, what do you expect? Time to cut back? Nah...

Belated Kudos to The Boss

Those of you familiar my musical tastes (or lack thereof) know that I have a unnatural resistance to the music of Bruce Springsteen. However, I want to commend Mr. Springsteen for not appearing on stage at HillaryFest in Philly to perform “Adam Raised a Kaine.”

Two Books, Worth the Wait

From our friends at Monthly Review Press come two hotly anticipated books by CounterPunch contributors: *The American War in Vietnam: Crime or Commemoration?*, John Marciano’s searing indictment of cherished America myth of the “noble cause” driving interventionist wars and *Studs Terkel: Politics, Culture, But Mostly Conversation* Alan Weider’s fascinating portrait of the Chicago icon of the working-class left drawn from hundreds of interviews with people who knew and worked with Terkel over his long and turbulent life. Both highly recommended.

A Warning to White Amerika, from James Baldwin

James Baldwin: “I remember what an old negro woman told me once down South. She said, ‘Jimmy, what the white man will someday learn is that there’s no remission for his sins.’ That I never forgot, because you see it’s perfectly possible the whites will not be forgiven, not for a single cut or whipping or lynch mob or rape of a black woman.” (From Norman Mailer’s still relevant, if not prescient, essay, “In the Red Light: a History of the Republican Convention of 1964” collected in *Cannibals and Christians*.)