

# New York Times on 9/11 observances: propaganda in the guise of reportage

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The report in the September 12 *New York Times* on the previous day's 9/11 observances is a particularly obnoxious example of the type of pseudo-journalism that characterized the US media's handling of the fifth anniversary of the terrorist attacks.

It was, for the most part, an exercise in image-making and word-spinning crafted to evoke the enduring grief and shock felt by millions about the events of that day, but in such a manner as to exclude any examination of the myriad unanswered questions and contradictions in the official version of 9/11, or even hint at the exploitation of the tragedy for utterly reactionary political ends.

The senses and intellect were bombarded by wall-to-wall coverage whose essential purpose was to stifle all critical thought and suppress, at least for the moment, the popular mood of opposition to the policies of war and repression instituted by the Bush administration, with the support of the Democrats and the media, in the name of 9/11 and the "war on terror."

The "elegiac" tone adopted by the media, often descending into bathos, served to obscure an uncritical acceptance of the basic claims of the government about the attacks on New York and Washington and the legitimacy of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, for which 9/11 served as the *casus belli*.

The *Times*'s latest contribution to this effort at what might be termed "soft" brainwashing is headlined "Nation Marks Lives Lost and Hopeful Signs of Healing," and is authored by Robert D. McFadden. The opening passages give a sense of the article's tone throughout:

"Once more the leaden bells tolled in mourning, loved ones recited the names of the dead at ground zero, and a wounded but resilient America paused yesterday to remember the calamitous day when

terrorist explosions rumbled like summer thunder and people fell from the sky."

In the course of his account of the various official observances, McFadden maintains the same reverential tone in describing President Bush's visit to a firehouse on Manhattan's Lower East Side:

"As bells tolled, Mr. Bush bowed his head in silence to mark the times when the planes hit the towers."

The most significant passage is one that purports to sum up the changes in daily life and mass consciousness, five years on, wrought by the events of September 11, 2001. McFadden writes:

"The anniversary dawned on a nation vastly changed in five years, with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, renewed fears of nuclear conflagration and security measures that have altered the ways Americans travel, do business and think about the world. Despite \$250 billion in new security measures for airports, borders and seaports, most Americans believe another major attack is inevitable, but have accepted searches, delays and inconvenience as the price of life in an age of terror."

It is remarkable how the author manages to incorporate in a single paragraph all of the premises of the Bush administration and the political establishment used to legitimize foreign wars and domestic repression, as though they were beyond dispute.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are presented uncritically, as though they were the natural and inevitable outcome of the attack on the Twin Towers. They are associated with "renewed fears of nuclear conflagration," which not only suggests a legitimate motive for these wars, but, by inference, a justification for future wars—with Iran the most likely initial target.

According to the *Times*, the "altered" way Americans "think about the world" includes a belief in the

inevitability of “another major attack,” and an acceptance of anti-democratic intrusions of privacy as “the price of life in an age of terror.”

These are bald and unsubstantiated assertions. Who, aside from the war cabal around the White House, speaks of another major terrorist attack as “inevitable?” The notion that ordinary Americans live in constant fear of Islamic terrorists is an invention of the government, assiduously promoted by the media, which contradicts the life experience of anyone who lives outside the insulated bubble of America’s wealthy elite and commingles with working people. Even the official opinion polls show that the vast majority of Americans are far more concerned with the destruction of jobs and living standards, and the war in Iraq, than with the threat of terrorism.

And despite the absence of any serious opposition from the Democrats to Bush’s police state measures, polls register widespread unease and opposition to the systematic attacks on democratic rights.

The phrase “age of terror” is a journalistic device that implicitly accepts the perverse and distorted vision of world affairs used by Bush and company to justify their so-called “war on terror” and the reactionary foreign and domestic policies associated with this phony war.

In what sense is terror a more pervasive fact of life today than in the past? Have McFadden and the *Times* forgotten the real reign of terror that prevailed over much of the world in the 1930s and 1940s, when Nazi barbarism gripped much of Europe and Stalin’s terror apparatus exterminated the socialist opponents of the Soviet bureaucracy?

There is, in fact, no evidence to suggest that terrorist acts are any more numerous today than they were 20 or 30 years ago.

McFadden conjures up a picture of the American people as cowed, frightened, and longing for reconciliation and unity with the powers-that-be. No one would suspect, judging from his skewed and dishonest presentation, that New York City, which suffered the greatest blows on 9/11, is a center of mass opposition to the war in Iraq and the policies of the Bush administration in general. Nor would they guess that, according to recent polls, fully 50 percent of New Yorkers believe the government had a hand, in one way or another, in the events of 9/11.

As for “healing,” how can one even speak of a nation

coming to terms with the trauma of 9/11 in the absence of any honest or objective account of what really happened, and without any of those in the government who are responsible for the tragedy, either by acts of commission or omission, being held accountable?

A serious and conscientious journalist, without a political axe to grind, would write a very different story about America five years after the attacks of September 11. He would speak of the countless questions that remain unanswered. He would describe a population deeply skeptical of the official version, alienated from the entire political establishment and increasingly opposed to its policies of militarism and social reaction. He would speak of a society riven by social divisions that portend political upheavals.

There is virtually no hint of any such genuine journalism within the precincts of the American mass media, and certainly not among the hand-raisers and hacks who populate the *New York Times*.



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