

MEMORY LOSS

By Michael Ventura

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The anniversary of September 11 is days away. It is unlikely anyone has forgotten, yet we are about to be swamped by replays. Even before that day was done I could not bear to watch those planes strike those buildings again, or to see those towers fall once more. By mid-afternoon I was involuntarily averting my face from the screen every time those visions were repeated. But the towers have since fallen again and again in my memory and sometimes at night in my dreams; I am sure the same is true for many thousands of others. Respectful commemoration and rituals of grieving are owed the dead and are necessary to the living, but the plethora of footage we are about to be exposed to ... is it remembrance, or is it a collective hysterical reaction meant to erase or dilute many related events and issues that also need to be remembered?

Will the September 11 memorials remember the absence of any real-time response from the White House until 10 hours after the towers fell; or that George W. Bush, safe in Air Force One, hopped from military base to military base while the White House (as was later proven) lied to explain his behavior? (During the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Kennedys didn't retreat to a bunker. They stayed at a prime target, the White House, even when they knew several Soviet ICBMs in Cuba were operational. Those missiles could have reached Washington in minutes, making escape impossible. Still the Kennedys remained at their post. That is something to be remembered.)

Remembering September 11, we owe it to ourselves to remember what its horrors have been shamelessly manipulated to obscure.

The *Newsweek* of Aug. 12 reported that in January 2001, Clinton national security advisor Sandy Berger briefed Condoleezza Rice extensively on al Qaeda. Berger told Rice: "I believe the Bush Administration will spend more time on terrorism generally, and on al Qaeda specifically, than any other subject." Rice claims not to remember the meeting. On Feb. 7, 2001, *USA Today* reported that the CIA had identified Osama bin Laden "as the most serious threat to America's national security." The White House and the FBI weren't listening. It wasn't until May 8, 2001, that Vice-President Dick Cheney was appointed head of the Office of National Preparedness, an anti-terrorism task force. Cheney has not been held accountable for that unit's failure. *Newsweek* recently reported that his task force existed only on paper and in headlines.

Then during the summer of 2001, mere weeks before the attack, Attorney General John Ashcroft denied repeated FBI requests for additional funds to fight terrorism; his final letter of refusal arrived at the FBI on Sept. 10. Ashcroft has never explained his reasons, nor has he been held accountable for how his snubbing of the FBI's anti-terrorism efforts may have contributed to the bureau's laxity. (Government agencies don't go all-out on projects that are losing their budgets.) As FBI Director Robert S. Mueller has admitted, in the weeks before September 11 the FBI flubbed several substantial leads that might have revealed the plot.

President Bush has also never explained why, in the spring of 2001, he gave 10 million of our tax dollars to the Taliban for their supposed help in cutting opium production, trusting the Taliban to use the money for that purpose. He'd been warned about bin Laden and knew the Taliban and bin Laden were closely associated, yet he

donated money anyway. In the brouhaha about bin Laden's finances that followed the attack, no one has investigated whether Bush's donation may have found its way to al Qaeda. In fact, how the Taliban spent their American millions has never been accounted for. More recently, Bush has been silent about reports from many news organizations that Afghanistan remains the world's main source of opium, though the United States now dominates the country and our military has a substantial presence there.

The Bush administration has often rhetorically associated the attack with our economic troubles. But September 11's *Los Angeles Times* (which hit the stands hours before the attack) reported that, since January of 2001, stock values in the United States had fallen more than 17%. France and Japan's fell 26%; Germany, more than 27%. All in all, from the beginning of 2001 to September 11, the developed world lost roughly *one quarter* of its liquid wealth. This had nothing to do with terrorism. On Jan. 20, 2001, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that "fully one-third of the world's work force is effectively unemployed" -- a staggering fact that Bush has yet to address. March 1, 2001, *The New York Times* reported that among much that was hidden in Bush's budget were deep cuts in law enforcement. On March 13 the Federal Reserve stated that "the net worth of American households dropped in 2000 for the first time in 55 years." Bush addressed this with a tax cut, 40% of which benefited the wealthiest 1% of Americans; while 88% of American taxpayers would gain only \$1,600, total, the cut was structured to benefit the rich for years to come. This, though in April, 2001, American workers lost 223,000 jobs, the biggest monthly loss since 1991. In May, 2001, *USA Today* reported a "plunge" in American productivity. In July 2001, service sector jobs showed their first quarterly decline in four decades.

On Aug. 16, 2001, the White House predicted that economic growth would double in 2002. The White House has since hid behind September 11's effects when questioned about the lunacy of that estimate. Also that August, state governments reported that, due to the economic downturn and the Bush tax cut, their surpluses were disappearing; many states started planning deep cuts in services to trim their budgets. That Aug. 23, in *The New York Times*: "For the current fiscal year, the administration estimated, the government would run a surplus of about \$600 million ... an almost negligible amount in a \$1.9 trillion budget and a \$10 trillion economy. As recently as April, the White House projected a surplus of \$122 billion ... for the fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30."

Do the math. A billion is a thousand million. Eighteen days before September 11, Bush's revised surplus figure was roughly *200 times* less than his original estimate, or about half of 1% of the original. But the attack of September 11 saved Bush from having these numbers thrown in his face -- though he continues, to this day, with predictions that are as ludicrously self-congratulatory and as wrong. On Aug. 24, 2001, Bush insanely called the evaporating surplus "incredible good news" because Congress couldn't spend money on its "programs." He neglected to mention that most of those programs are for services and infrastructure that benefit a majority of Americans. The same day, he broke his pledge not to dip into Social Security to cover his shortfalls -- something he'd promised not to do unless the government was in recession or at war. But we weren't officially in recession yet, and the war on terrorism wouldn't begin for another two weeks.

That Aug. 29, *USA Today* headlined "Consumer confidence fall comes as a surprise." Surveys showed a chilling drop in consumer confidence 12 days before the attack. The same day *The New York Times* reported that 401(K) accounts had declined for

the first time since their inception. The next day Bush vowed that the economic slowdown and the disappearing surplus wouldn't stop him from increasing military spending. He also claimed to be "deeply worried" about -- though he was cutting programs for those workers at every opportunity. That week saw a drop in the Dow of 503 points.

On July 21, 2001, George W. Bush said to European leaders in Rome: "I know what I believe, and I believe what I believe is right." On Sept. 10, the arrogance and inanity of such generalities was about to catch up to him. People were beginning to notice that he *never* says anything *specific* about anything -- and that his economic statistics are often wildly and incongruously wrong. After September 11, the greatest military force in history overpowered a poorly armed medieval tribe; this was ballyhooed as a great victory, as though a giant squashing a bug could be termed a "victory." A year later, American soldiers are still frantically searching for Osama bin Laden; no one knows who mailed the anthrax; there have been hundreds of arrests (of dubious constitutionality) but no convictions; terrorist alerts are frequent; there is disintegration in the Mideast; and our economy remains, to put it mildly, precarious. A recent UN investigation showed that Bush has not even managed to hinder al Qaeda's finances. Which is to say: *nothing certain has been accomplished*. Yet these people claim glory. And plan another war.

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