

Dick Gregory: The Greatest Black Conspiracy Theorist of All Time

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Dick Gregory (October 12, 1932-August 19, 2017) was an outspoken civil rights activist and comedian. He was a staunch feminist and health guru; and long before Barack Obama, he made a historic run for President. (I strongly admired him and voted for him in the mock Presidential election in 1968 in my fifth grade class.)

However, Gregory rarely met a conspiracy theory he did not like. Indeed, the only ones he seemed to reject were those involving the Illuminati (based on anti-Jewish bigotry) and those involving extraterrestrial aliens (thank goodness!)

Gregory really became unhinged with the idea that the infamous Atlanta child murders from 1979-1981 were part of a massive conspiracy. My former colleague, Joe Nickell of the Council for Skeptical Inquiry did a great deal of research on that case. He found that the evidence against the convicted African American murderer Wayne Williams was overwhelming. There was an eyewitness that saw Williams holding hands with one of the victims. Furthermore, the forensic evidence was solid. There were unique carpet fibers connecting Williams to the murders, for example. Williams was convicted by a jury of eight Blacks and four Whites. (Had the jury been all White, the conspiracy theory would have raged out of control.)

After Williams was convicted, similar murders continued. However, these were discovered to be copycat killings. They in no way absolved Williams of responsibility for the murders he carried out.

The late activist also bought into the 9/11 conspiracy theory. He felt that the U.S. government had to be responsible for it, and that dynamite was used to blow up the Twin Towers. However, this is completely absurd. How could anyone deny that planes crashed into the World Trade Center? Where is the evidence substantiating the outrageous claim that dynamite was used?

Gregory also promoted the idea that astronauts never landed on the moon. It was all part of an elaborate government hoax to deceive the people. Evidently, the

moon rocks must have been faked, and all of the major television networks, most of the investigative reporters and the entire scientific establishment must have been in on it. How unlikely is all of that?

Interestingly, Gregory was photographed with famed astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, who tweeted condolences after Gregory's death. In an interview I conducted with Tyson for the Institute for Science and Human Values' journal *The Human Prospect*, a few years ago, Tyson said that he did not "debate moon hoaxers." So, it was bemusing to see a highly distinguished scientist posing with the premier Black conspiracy theorist.

The late comedian believed that Michael Jackson and Prince were murdered by conspirators. He believed that Jackson owned about half of the Sony ATV catalog and that they killed him. In fact, he specifically stated that Jackson was killed by a laser at 2:00 am. A freakin' *laser* for cryin' out loud!

The lethal dose of propofol administered to Jackson before his death had nothing to do with it. Moreover, the doctor that prescribed it, Conrad Murray, who was convicted of involuntary manslaughter and served two years in prison, must simply have been a patsy set up by the evil, murderous conspirators.

As for Prince, he was demanding greater control of his music and the bigwigs in the music industry were not going to allow him to cut into their profits. Therefore, they had to kill him.

Again, it is clear that Prince was in a lot of pain and that he abused pain killers. In large part due to the fact that he constantly wore and danced on high heels, he suffered extensive damage to his lower body. He died from an overdose of Fentanyl. There is simply no reason to suspect foul play in his death.

Fellow comedian Bill Cosby also became the subject of one of Gregory's conspiracy theories. Gregory believed that because Cosby, a powerful Black man, reportedly wanted to buy NBC in the *1990s*, powerful Whites want to bring him down on false allegations of sexual assault.

However, as one pundit wrote, when a woman accuses a man of sexual assault and there are no witnesses, that is he said she said. But in Cosby's case, it is he

said *they* said. That is to say, there are dozens of women accusing Cosby of sexual misconduct. That seems to greatly decrease Cosby's credibility. If they are all involved in this grand conspiracy to bring a strong Black man down, however, that changes everything.

Gregory also seemed to side with former basketball star Kobe Bryant when a woman accused him of sexual assault. That raises some questions. Do Black conspiracy theorists believe that President Trump is a victim of conspirators trying to bring him down with false accusations of sexual assault? While it is true that Trump was caught on videotape long ago talking about grabbing women by the vagina, the right-wing Christians that support him claim it was just "locker room talk." And was Bill Clinton being attacked by right-wing conspirators, as Hillary Clinton suggested? Do people decide which conspiracy theories to accept or reject based at least partly on race and politics? Of course, they do!

Even the relatively harmless conspiracy theories can cause much damage. They help to dumb down entire nations. They help to influence desperate, unreasoning people to make disturbing choices – like voting for someone like Trump. Indeed, Trump is a paranoid conspiracy theorist (the Obama birther myth, the idea that Obama bugged his headquarters, and so on) who came to power largely with the support of other White paranoid conspiracy theorists. Ironically, and sadly, Gregory's conspiratorial mindset helped bring Trump to power.

What is worse, as Voltaire noted, if you believe absurdities you will commit atrocities. Witness the atrocious behavior of the White conspiracy theorists during the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, which Trump failed to properly denounce.

Gregory has promoted many other conspiracy theories. But now that he has died, maybe someone will come up with a conspiracy theory surrounding *his* "untimely" death at the tender age of 84. It is always easy to find or imagine suspicious circumstances. Could it be that he was killed by the CIA because he was about to release damaging information about Trump's private life? As Gregory himself believed, anything is possible.