



Rachel Maddow Recycles Falsehoods Against the John Birch Society

MSNBC's Rachel Maddow launched an error-riddled attack against the John Birch Society in her December 18 show, nominally because the John Birch Society has become a sponsor of the upcoming February 2010 Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington, D.C.

In addition to falsely claiming the John Birch Society labeled fluoridation of water a "communist mind-control plot" (it never did), [Maddow claimed](#):



And they contended that the secret conspiracy to destroy America encompassed everything from that darned fluoride to the League of Women Voters and the Civil Rights Act. The John Birch Society was in fact so opposed to civil rights that they responded to the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to desegregate schools with billboards calling for the impeachment of the Supreme Court's Chief Justice.

But just like her erroneous claim that the JBS had opposed fluoridation as a communist mind control plot (it actually opposed fluoridation as a precedent for the socialized medicine Maddow supports and, incidentally, was part of the Soviet communist state), the other claims were false as well.

While the JBS did support the impeachment of Earl Warren for ignoring the limits of the U.S. Constitution by expanding federal powers almost without limit (not for ending discrimination against African-Americans in the South), the JBS did not call the League of Women Voters part of the communist plot.

Ironically, Maddow accused the John Birch Society of widely ruining people's reputations by unfounded accusations while doing the same herself:

I'm sure they've ruined people's lives as being sort of fueling (sic) McCarthyism and I'm sure they've had some really bad impact on American politics. But they are so conspiratorial. I mean, these are the New World Order black helicopter folks, aren't they?

Actually, no, Ms. Maddow. They aren't.

The John Birch Society was always among the responsible conservatives who checked their facts and dispelled all the wild black helicopter rumors. This author played a part in researching a 1994 John



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Birch Society article (published by its affiliate *The New American* magazine) written by William F. Jasper that [thoroughly debunked the black helicopter rumors](#).

Maddow said she's "sure" the John Birch Society has "ruined people's lives," but never bothers to name them. This is, of course, because there are none to name. She simply made the accusation without doing any research.

Responding to Maddow's question about the John Birch Society belonging to the "black helicopter" crowd, Thomas Frank, columnist for the *Wall Street Journal* and author of [The Wrecking Crew: How Conservatives Rule](#), Frank noted that the John Birch Society had brought "conspiracy" theory to the conservative movement:

That's exactly right. And that's what their sort of gift is to the mainstream conservative movement. I mean, we always talk about the John Birch Society as the fringe of the fringe, as you were saying earlier. But you have to remember that they also, that they also gave the conservative movement something very important, which is conspiracy theory. Conspiracy theory is utterly central to the conservative understanding of the world. I don't know if you have ever heard this phrase before "the liberal elite."

On this one point, Frank made a valid point. Conspiracies are less a theory than a fact of history. A conspiracy is simply an immoral plan between two or more people that is in whole or in part organized in secret. There have been lesser and greater conspiracies throughout all of human history. [Frank's book The Wrecking Crew](#) speaks about this same thing - conspiracy, though he does not call it that - with respect to no-bid contracts under the Bush administration:

"Fantastic misgovernment of the kind we have seen is not an accident, nor is it the work of a few bad individuals. It is the consequence of triumph by a particular philosophy of government, by a movement that understands the liberal state as a perversion and considers the market the ideal nexus of human society."

Ironically, Frank accuses virtually every Republican of being part of an ideological and conspiratorial plot in his book, and Maddow gets the view of conspiracies exactly backward:

They [the JBS] had the fantastically conspiratorial view of communism where communism weren't just the Soviet Union, communists were all around us. I mean, like, every other person was a communist and they were all keeping quiet about it was the amazing thing, you know.

Actually, it's the people who think that communism is a popular movement — or neoconservatism, in Frank's mind — who believe that everyone's in on the plot. The John Birch Society was always cautious in accusing people of being part of a conspiracy, because it knew that conspiracies most often involve only a handful at their core. Conspiracies are by their very nature most often secret because they represent unpopular movements, though they often try to co-opt popular movements. Maddow goes on to claim of the Birch Society:

Well, and they also thought that the government of the Soviet Union and the government of the United States were both being run by the same secret people that there was invisible government above them both, that we needed to be ferreting out. Not only in government, but among their neighbors and among every other element of power. And that sort of witch-hunting conspiratorial attitude about the world, What I'm worried about is that the John Birch Society being brought into a group like CPAC means that the right is now once again embracing the conspiracists among them.



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Much of MSNBC's recent coverage has been devoted to the congressional action (or lack thereof) on healthcare. The position of MSNBC is that Republicans are conspiring to stop the Democrat's healthcare plan. Maddow has [floated conspiracy theories herself](#) in the recent past. Of course, any other leftist but Maddow might lead me to quip that she only believes in Republican conspiracies.

But Maddow has been [praised by this writer](#) for her critique of President Obama's announced policy of indefinite preventative detention without trial as being "so good, and so dead-on, that every patriotic American should see it." And I still say they should. That video segment proved she's not in lock-step with the Democratic leadership, but it also proves that many of the same policies — in this case the Bush policy of indefinite detention without trial — continues from administration to administration despite campaign promises. The John Birch Society brings an awareness of this continuity of bad policy to the conservative movement.

Maddow made numerous factual mistakes in her video segment, but I won't use this occasion for condemnations. Maddow should simply be reminded that if the John Birch Society has occasionally made mistakes that she has done no better than it with her recent segment on the Society. Likewise, she should be reminded that the Society had joined her in criticism of the Bush administration's worst excesses, from the war in Iraq to the indefinite detention without trial to torture to surveillance without warrants.

If she wants the conservative movement to recover from the excesses of the Bush era with its attack on the Bill of Rights, she should welcome the JBS joining the CPAC conference rather than condemning it. Only JBS leadership over the conservative movement would restore the moderation of rule under the limits of the U.S. Constitution.

AUTHOR'S UPDATE (Dec. 23): Rachel Maddow [announced](#) December 22 that she'll be rebutting this article on her show tonight. I'll be watching the show, and hoping the segment surpasses the lowered expectations I now have because of her teaser. In last night's teaser, she called the JBS a "brimming kettle of kook-endery" and said I called her a "liar" — though I didn't. I still don't call her a liar. Hopefully, Maddow's segment is a more sober discussion of facts rather than the simple name-calling in the teaser. It will be interesting to see if she engages in the same guilt-by-association tactics that the Left has long condemned when the Right uses such tactics.

My recommendation for a [left-right alliance on issues of mutual agreement](#), which I made in an article on the AntiWar.com website a couple of years ago, may still seem premature, but I still hold out hope. And whatever she says about the JBS tonight, I still believe her [segment](#) on Obama's indefinite detention without trial program should be seen by every American.



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