HOW THE PARANOID STYLE FLOURISHES AND WHERE IT COMES FROM

CONSPIRACY

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The Free Press
New York London Toronto Sydney Singapore

political; administration and negotiation will be in our hands, and as we have the power, so we shall have the responsibility before the world."[42] A self-professed half-Jew from Hungary revealed in 1905 that England and France are "very nearly" dominated by Jews while the United States is "slowly but surely yielding to that international and insidious hegemony."[43] Perhaps most revealing was the confession by a member of the American elite, Carroll Quigley of Georgetown University:

> There does exist, and has existed for a generation, an international Anglophile network which operates, to some extent, the way the Radical Right believes the Communists act. In fact, this network, which we may identify as the Round Table Groups, has no aversion to cooperating with the Communists, or any other groups, and frequently does so. I know of the operations of this network because I have studied it for twenty years and was permitted for two years, in the early 1960s, to examine its papers and secret records. I have no aversion to it or to most of its aims and have, for much of my life, been close to it and to many of its instruments. . . . [i]n general, my chief difference of opinion is that it wishes to remain unknown, and I believe its role in history is significant enough to be known.[44]

In other words, Quigley wrote, there is a conspiracy by a small, well-placed group, and he agrees with its aims.

Fourth, there is the vexing matter of what Richard Hofstadter calls the "higher paranoid scholarship."[45] This is not the legitimate scholarship produced by academics with university training, membership in professional associations, and social esteem. It is, rather, the mirror world of conspiracism, with its amateur autodidacts who lack institutional affiliation and suffer exclusion from the established institutions. Stark differences between the two might suggest that the research of scholars and the speculations of conspiracy theorists cannot be confused, but the latter often mimic the former, making it quite possible to mix them up.

Conspiracy theorists parade academic titles ("Dr.," "Professor"), earned or not. No less than conventional historians, they steep themselves in the literature of their subject and become expert in it. The difference lies in their methods; rather than piece together the past through the slow accumulation of facts, they plunder legitimate historical studies to build huge edifices out of odd and unrelated elements.

Making the truth harder to discern, conspiracist subjects draw many more pseudoscholars than real ones. A vast body of spurious studies has emerged in nearly all the languages of Europe over the past two centuries. The connection between Jews and Freemasons is the subject of only two works by legitimate scholars but dozens, if not hundreds, of books by anti-Jewish and antimasonic writers. A 1923 bibliography contains no fewer than twenty-three thousand titles on the Freemasons,[46] very few of them by disinterested researchers. In the thousands of books written on the John Kennedy assassination, only a tiny proportion argue against a conspiracy. The size of this corpus impresses some readers; "there is so much written. . . , they figure some of it must be right."[47] The many books make it possible for conspiracy theorists to cite each others' works, thereby constructing an imposing edifice of self-referential pseudoscholarship. In the case of old topics such as the Templars, they republish centuries-old books and quote them as authorities. In the case of new ones, like the John Kennedy assassination, they learnedly discuss each other's conclusions.

Conspiracist texts often come packaged as solid-looking books with introductions, forewords, acknowledgments, quotations, footnotes, bibliographies, indexes, and the other conventional trappings of learnedness. Even forgeries come wrapped in a mock academic paraphernalia. By replicating these elements of academic authority, the pseudoexpert finds it easier to convince the gullible or inexperienced reader to accept his pet theories. In addition, a profusion of references serves as a shield against criticism. When defending his book *The New World Order* from charges of antisemitism, Pat Robertson raised the irrelevancy that it "was carefully researched and contains seven single-spaced pages of bibliography from original historical sources."[48]

Conspiracy theorists tend to choose sober and flat titles, as though to disguise their anything-but-sober ideas. The most influential conspiracist book of all time goes by the pedantic title of *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism;* its forged counterpart bears an arch bureaucratic title (*Protocols of the Meetings of the Learned Elders of Zion*). *Jews in the Japanese Mind* is a serious study, while *The Japanese and the Jews*[49] is wholly fantastical; yet they sound similar and both have reputable publishers.

Conspiracy theorists also publish seemingly responsible academic journals. By its title and appearance, the *Revue internationale des sociétés secrètes* projects an appearance of sound scholarship by dignified truth seekers; in fact, it long served as the central clearinghouse for the anti-secret society crowd. The *Journal of Historical Review* sounds akin to the

American Historical Review; more than that, both quarterlies share a recognizably academic tone and list professorial boards of editors. But while the latter is a leading scholarly periodical, the former exists exclusively to disprove the reality of the Jewish Holocaust.

Nor can the reader rely on publishers to distinguish chaff from wheat; even some of the most reputable houses lend their names to conspiracist nonsense. The arch-respectable firm of Eyre and Spottiswoode published the first edition of the *Protocols* in England. Jonathan Cape in London (publisher of Samuel Butler, Len Deighton, Maksim Gorky, James Joyce, H. G. Wells, and William Carlos Williams) joined with Delacorte in New York to publish *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, a study claiming that Jesus was a Jewish prince who had a son by Mary Magdalen who founded a monarchical dynasty, the Merovingian; and that a secret society named the Prieuré de Sion has since its founding in 1099 forwarded Merovingian interests.[50] A few years later, Jonathan Cape and Henry Holt combined forces to put out a second study on the same subject, this one sketching out the Prieuré de Sion's present activities "to bring about a monarchical or imperial United States of Europe" ruled by none other than the family of Jesus.[51]

Telling genuine scholarship apart from conspiracism becomes even more of a challenge in the topsy-turvy domain of the World Wide Web. Here, conspiracist materials have a disproportionate presence, the familiar signals of authority are harder to discern, and search engines indiscriminately turn up conspiracism and true scholarship. Texts that most individuals would disallow in their houses on paper turn up unheralded on their computer screens. The vilest hatemongers most insistently present themselves as stalwarts of free speech. In addition, the technology mesmerizes, and the slow pace of clicking and waiting can lull viewers into near-hypnosis.

Finally, genuine scholars occasionally get caught up in conspiracism, showing that the person alleging a conspiracy provides no sure guide to its truth or falsehood. The Austrian Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856), an immensely erudite scholar and one of the great orientalists of his age, wrote a number of monumental studies, some of which remain in print today; also, his translation of the Persian poet Hafiz inspired Goethe's *Westöstliche Diwan*. Yet he was an arch conspiracy theorist who did much to advance the notion of the Templars as a secret society.[52]

To make matters more confusing, some anti-conspiracy theorists turn into conspiracy theorists. Gary Sick offers a recent example of this evolution. His excellent 1985 book on the collapse of the shah of Iran and the

Tehran hostage crisis, *All Fall Down*, dwelled on the mistakes of conspiracism. In it, Sick noted how Iranians "assume that a simple, forthright explanation of events is merely camouflage concealing the devious intricacies of 'reality,'" and he criticized Iranians for assuming that "[a]ny significant political, economic or social upheaval in Iran must be traceable to the manipulation of external powers."[53] These insights seemed to abandon Sick soon after. Already in 1988, he was brewing the October Surprise conspiracy theory alleging that Ronald Reagan won the presidency in 1980 by colluding with Ayatollah Khomeini.[54] Sick's trustworthiness carried so much weight that his false notion of an October Surprise launched two congressional inquiries.

If the rules of logic do not signal "conspiracy theory ahead," if the alleged conspirators provide partial confirmation, and if those with insider knowledge indicate a conspiracy does exist, how does one unmask the conspiracy theory?