

MAR 3 0 2010

TWENTY-SEV

VOODOO HISTORIES

THE ROLE OF THE CONSPIRACY THEORY
IN SHAPING MODERN HISTORY

David Aaronovitch

909
A113

RIVERHEAD BOOKS

a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. New York 2010



RIVERHEAD BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA • Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario M4P 2Y3, Canada (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.) • Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England • Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd) • Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd) • Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi-110 017, India • Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd) • Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Copyright © 2010 by David Aaronovitch

Originally published in Great Britain in 2009 by Jonathan Cape.

First American edition published in 2010 by Riverhead Books.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic form without permission. Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions. Published simultaneously in Canada

Grateful acknowledgment is made for permission to reprint from "Sympathy for the Devil," words and music by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. © 1968 (renewed) Abkco Music, Inc., 85 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Aaronovitch, David.

Voodoo histories : the role of the conspiracy theory in shaping modern history / David Aaronovitch.—1st American ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-59448-895-5

1. Conspiracies. 2. Conspiracies—History. I. Title.

HV6275.A27 2010 2009037018

909.08—dc22

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

BOOK DESIGN BY MEIGHAN CAVANAUGH

While the author has made every effort to provide accurate telephone numbers and Internet addresses at the time of publication, neither the publisher nor the author assumes any responsibility for errors, or for changes that occur after publication. Further, the publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

For Sarah, Rosa, Lily, Eve, and Ruby. My girls.

DIANA: I'd like to be a queen of people's hearts, in people's hearts, but I don't see myself being queen of this country. I don't think many people will want me to be queen. Actually, when I say many people I mean the Establishment that I married into, because they have decided that I'm a non-starter . . . I just don't think I have as many supporters in that environment as I did.

BASHIR: You mean within the royal household?

DIANA: Uh-huh. They see me as a threat of some kind, and I'm here to do good. I'm not a destructive person.

BASHIR: Why do they see you as a threat?

DIANA: I think every strong woman in history has had to walk down a similar path, and I think it's the strength that causes the confusion and the fear. Why is she strong? Where does she get it from? Where is she taking it? Where is she going to use it? Why do the public still support her?

When Diana died, one obvious and common question was "What exactly happened?" The answer to this question seemed apparent enough. But if one were to ask "Who stood to gain?" then the answer might lead the questioner in a very different direction. Every week thousands of people are killed in car crashes: a truck drives into the back of a stationary car, a bus goes through a median, a hatchback full of teenagers fails to negotiate a sudden bend. It is rare for the immediate reaction to be "Who gets the insurance money?" This is just as well, because it is always a short step from a suggested motive to a suggested crime.

Princesses are not immune to the malign coincidences of poor high-speed driving, impulsive decision-making, and bad luck. In an abrupt change to an earlier plan, Diana, leaving the Paris Ritz, was put in the back of a Mercedes and driven recklessly fast by a man who had been drinking into a tunnel with a disguised ramp. Since nobody, it seemed, could have had advance notice of the journey or its timing, the idea that an elaborate and well-planned conspiracy ended the princess's life seemed, almost intuitively, more than usually difficult to support.

Even so, in the decade following the accident, a steady fifth to just under a third of British people, and a similar proportion of Americans, continued to believe that Diana was murdered. Even higher numbers could be found supporting the notion that aspects of Diana's death had been covered up.* Less reliably, self-selecting phone polls conducted by pro-conspiracy newspapers invariably tripled or quadrupled the numbers of those backing the conspiracy theory. In the meantime, more than \$13.4 million and countless hours of police and juridical time were spent investigating whether or not the princess was the victim of an implausible murder plot. It was a lengthy process, but finally, on April 7, 2008, ten years, seven months, and eight days after the Paris crash, a jury gave the verdict that Diana, Princess of Wales, died by accident: the fatal Paris car crash had been caused not by malicious conspirators but by the gross negligence of the dead driver, Henri Paul, and the actions of the infamous paparazzi.

How had this absurdly elongated investigation come about?

Executive Intelligence

The persistence of Diana conspiracy stories after August 31, 1997, owed much to the work of two men: the first, Harrods owner and father of Dodi, Mohamed Al Fayed; the second, the lesser-known Lyndon LaRouche. A former Trotskyist and prison inmate (he was sentenced for mail fraud and tax evasion), LaRouche has been a presidential candidate in most U.S. elections for the last thirty years, and his adherents continually attempt—with little success—to infiltrate the Democratic Party. According to LaRouche, the world is dominated by a financial oligarchy centered on the City of London and partly directed by the British Establishment, headed, naturally, by the British royal family. The queen, among her other duties, is behind the world trade in narcotics, and not only did her retainers murder

*For example, in a poll carried out for the *Daily Express* in August 2003, 49 percent of respondents said they believed there had been a "cover-up" of the circumstances of her death, while 34 percent disagreed.

the People's Princess, but they have also planned to assassinate Lyndon LaRouche. This would be bad for the world because LaRouche is, according to his own publications, "the world's foremost economic forecaster, who has inspired a worldwide political movement to reverse the depression collapse and bring about a new classical renaissance."³⁸

Of course, such an ideology makes great demands on those encountering it for the first time. Too great, in fact. But most people coming across a LaRouche-initiated campaign will not be inducted into the full program. Instead they may see a TV documentary or visit a website featuring Jeffrey Steinberg, the "counterintelligence" editor of the *Executive Intelligence Review*, where it is revealed that his research indicates this or that hypothesis or suggests this or that conclusion. It was in *Executive Intelligence Review* that LaRouche's Diana conspiracy theories were given their most substantial airing. Brushed with a patina of scholarship, as a forger of old manuscripts applies egg white to give the effect of age, the LaRouchian view of the Paris accident was sold to a largely unsuspecting world as "disturbing questions" or "troubling anomalies" in the official version.

From the beginning, Jeffrey Steinberg acknowledged that without Mohamed Al Fayed, the Diana conspiracy theories would probably never have taken off. It was, he told readers, Al Fayed who "brought the whole tempo of developments around the case to a kind of a fevered pitch when he . . . said he's 99.9 percent certain it was murder.

"And, I frankly happen to agree with him, and I'm privy to less evidence than he has." In the reflexive world of conspiracy, such evidence can be circular. On Al Fayed's own, rather impressive website, the Harrods millionaire revealed, "One of the world's leading magazines, *Executive Intelligence Review*, is supporting my campaign to shed light on the truth surrounding the crash."

In the years after the crash, Al Fayed's website would display a plethora of newspaper articles and speculation about who was responsible for Diana's death. Set against such memorabilia as portraits of Dodi and Di framed by interlinked D's, adorned with Mediterranean foliage and supported by a bronze fountain, "which plays into reflecting pools of water—the symbol

of eternal life," the message was clear: it was the secret services or the royal family rather than a series of unfortunate decisions leading to the princess being chauffeured by an inebriated and incompetent Al Fayed employee that were responsible for the deaths. Al Fayed related, for example, how Annie Machon, a former employee of MI5 and the partner of another former MI5 officer, David Shayler, had written a book, *Spies, Lies and Whistleblowers*, in which she speculated that the accident was planned by British intelligence but not supposed to be fatal. Al Fayed quoted Machon as saying, "The vast majority of the British people, of course, now believe that the crash was no accident. Although the British media continues to call the matter a 'conspiracy theory,' we feel there is compelling information to indicate that events were anything but accidental."

Al Fayed's tone has always been impressively committed: agreement represents confirmation of his views concerning a plot, but so does disagreement. When one journalist questioned his assertion that Princess Diana had been pregnant with Dodi's child, he wrote that the reporter and his cronies were "the very worst kind of establishment and Royal family arse-lickers," claiming that the article could "only have been prompted by the Security Services who are clearly very nervous about the positive findings the investigation is uncovering." And, for years, many of the stories suggesting that Diana's death was not accidental had their origin in activities carried out by employees or agents of Mr. Al Fayed. One interesting example of this process came in a story in the *Sunday Express* from June 23, 2002. Billed as an "exclusive" with the byline Gordon Thomas, the piece began: "Explosive tapes on the secret life of Princess Diana will prove that she was pregnant and intended to marry Dodi Al Fayed, it was claimed last night," and continued:

American secret agents regularly monitored Diana's conversations and collated 1,000 secret documents using its [*sic*] "spy in the sky," the National Security Agency. They were obtained by its Echelon satellite surveillance system and contain highly sensitive material including her marriage plans, her views on Prince Philip, who was known to be highly critical of her,

and new details of her love affair with James Hewitt. Now, lawyers acting for Mohamed Al Fayed are trying to obtain the tapes through America's Freedom of Information Act.³⁹

The source of the claims, in other words, was Al Fayed. The suggestion that these tapes monitoring Diana existed at all also came from Al Fayed. But Thomas is himself a major player in the conspiracy business. He is the author of several dozen books ranging from *The Jesus Conspiracy* to *The Assassination of Robert Maxwell* and, important for the particular conspiracy theory under discussion here, an account of the history of Mossad, *Gideon's Spies*—which, worryingly, is often quoted by mainstream journalists as a respectable and reliable source of information about Israel's intelligence agency.

The 2000 edition of *Gideon's Spies* begins with these words: "When the red light blinked on the bedside telephone, a sophisticated recording device was automatically activated in the Paris apartment near the Pompidou Center in the lively Fourth Arrondissement."⁴⁰ This supposedly happened on the night Diana died, and was connected to the fact that Henri Paul, variously asserted by other theorists to be an employee of French and British intelligence, was, actually, according to Thomas, a Mossad asset. Mossad it was, said Thomas, who also helped bring down Jonathan Aitken, the pro-Saudi British Cabinet minister, following his famous and ultimately disastrous stay at the Ritz.

Thomas got both stories from one of his most fertile sources, Ari Ben Menashe, who, he claimed, had been a major figure in Mossad for many years. Menashe had also advised Thomas on how Mossad had done away with its own agent, the tycoon Robert Maxwell, making his fall from his yacht look like an accident. Thomas, by his own account, put Menashe in direct contact with Al Fayed, and the Israeli told the Egyptian that, yes, there was a chance of Mossad involvement and that he, Menashe, would hunt it down in return for a retainer of \$750,000 a year.⁴¹ The impatient Al Fayed, however, wanted some material up front and Menashe refused—being, in Thomas's words, "more used to dealing with governments than 'a man with the manner of a souk trader.'" Interestingly, the government

for which Menashe worked as a consultant was the Zimbabwean regime of Robert Mugabe—until, that is, Menashe was involved in trying to trap the leader of the Zimbabwean opposition into a taped act of treason against Mugabe. Unfortunately, the Zimbabwean court preferred to believe Morgan Tsvangirai rather than Menashe, and threw the case out.⁴² But despite Menashe's failure to strike a deal with the Harrods owner, the Al Fayed–Thomas combination was still able to create a newspaper headline in the middle of 2002. Al Fayed got his coverage; what Thomas got by way of payment we don't know.

The death of Diana, though nothing like as lucrative as the life of Diana, has always been seen as financially exploitable. There have been books on Diana's loves, Diana's dresses, Diana's boys, Diana's mother; there have been memoirs of her butler Paul Burrell, of her housekeeper, of her bodyguards, of her "spiritual adviser," and of her "dream analyst." And there have been the conspiracy theories.

Landmines

Almost all conspiracy theories about Diana start with the same basic "doubts" about the accident: the mysterious white Fiat Uno that was struck by Henri Paul's Mercedes and then disappeared, the disputed blood tests on the dead driver, the mysterious money that Henri Paul may have earned . . . They then add speculative motives, possible additional facts, and purported culprits.

Some of the conjecture has been easily dealt with. For example, according to both Diana's closest friend and to those who examined her body, she was not pregnant, which removes the satisfyingly straightforward theory that action was taken to prevent the birth of a Muslim who would be a half brother or sister of the heir to the throne. But the loss of one piece of supposed evidence or motivation for murder did not seem to diminish the life force of the conspiracy creature itself. For example, nine years after her death, a former *Mirror* journalist, Nicholas Davies, in his book *Diana: Secrets and Lies*, speculated that Diana was killed because of her plans to