

Freemasonry In Context

History \blacktriangle Ritual \blacktriangle Controversy

Edited by

Arturo de Hoyos and S. Brent Morris



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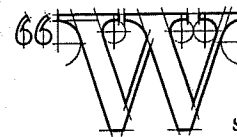
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Preface: Context and Perspective



WHY DON'T THEY APPRECIATE the importance of my research?" is the common lament of scholars. Whether it's a mathematician delving into Riemann's zeta function or a classicist studying Homer's verse structure or a physicist investigating string theory, it can be difficult to communicate the vitality and relevance of specialized topics across academic borders. It is an issue of putting the subject into a framework and of giving it a proper viewpoint. The study of Freemasonry often suffers from this lack of context and perspective.

Popular wisdom would have us believe that Freemasonry and fraternal orders in general are silly if harmless recreations of what H. L. Mencken termed the booboisie. Consider these general depictions of fraternalism in our popular culture: the "Royal and Ancient Order of Raccoons" from television's *The Honeymooners*; the "Mystic Knights of the Sea" (with 98.6 degrees of membership) from radio and television's *Amos and Andy*; the "Sons of the Desert" from Laurel and Hardy's movie of the same name; and the "Leopards' Lodge" from television's *Happy Days*.

These hardly seem the stuff of serious study, and yet Freemasonry and fraternal orders have had a considerable influence on American society, if usually just out of sight. Reaction to Freemasonry left to America's first "third party" (and the holder of the first presidential nominating convention), the Anti-Masonic Party. From the Civil War to World War II, much of America's "social safety net" was provided by the orphanages, retirement homes, and insurance programs of Freemasonry, Odd Fellowship, Knights of Pythias, Elks, Moose, Woodmen of the World, Knights of Columbus, and dozens of similar fraternal orders. At its peak membership in 1960, Freemasonry claimed 4.2 million members out of about 88 million American males—nearly one out of twenty.

R. Douglass writes the introduction, but the main article is excerpted from Ralph A. Epperson's *Masonry: Conspiracy against Christianity*, published in 1987.¹⁰⁸ The footnotes in the Epperson book cite both Robison and Barruel from the 1790s. Epperson complained in his book that de Hoyos and Morris had not criticized his previous anti-Masonic book, *The New World Order*, that Epperson observes crisply was published in 1990—prior to the Pat Robertson book of the same name.¹⁰⁹

LYNDON LAROCHE AND THE NATION OF ISLAM

On the fringes of the far right are the various groups controlled by Lyndon LaRouche, a perennial presidential candidate. In the late 1960s Lyndon LaRouche started out on the political left but migrated to the political right following the same path of the 1930s Italian fascist leader Mussolini and the national socialists who helped build Hitler's Nazi Party. In fact there is more similarity—author Dennis King tracked portions of Lyndon LaRouche's worldview back to essays written by interwar fascists.¹¹⁰

Starting in the 1990s, the LaRouche staff collaborated with Nation of Islam staff to promote the claim of a historic Judeo-Freemasonry conspiracy involving Weishaupt of the Illuminati, Civil War Confederate General Albert Pike, the Ku Klux Klan, organized crime, and the B'nai B'rith.¹¹¹ This eclectic collection nonetheless mirrors allegations from the book *Freemasonry* first published in Arabic in 1980 by the Muslim World League in Saudi Arabia, and later in an English translation.¹¹² The English edition is available in the United States from the Muslim World League offices in New York City or from commercial vendors including some Islamic and Afrocentric bookstores. This evolved into a campaign to remove the Pike statue from its pedestal in Washington, D.C.¹¹³

ENTERING THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Fred Clarkson studied how many contemporary Christian Right groups perpetuate the conspiracist charges against the Freemasons, noting that a struggle raged in the late 1990s "to oust the million or more Masons from the largest Baptist denomination."¹¹⁴ One far-right Protestant ideologue, Gary North, complained that mainstream churches helped undermine the country by "refusing to cast out Freemasons beginning 250 years ago."¹¹⁵ Some hard-right Catholics also warn of the Illuminati/Freemason conspiracy.¹¹⁶ An entire book on the subject of the Illuminati/Freemason conspiracy, written by a hard-right Catholic priest, and published by the John Birch Society, is Clarence Kelly's *Conspiracy against God and Man*.¹¹⁷ Anti-Masonic diatribes are easily located on the World Wide Web.

The lore of the Freemasons sometimes claims links to an ancient chain of revealed knowledge secretly provided to chosen followers called adepts. George Johnson charts "the myth of the esoteric tradition" claimed by some who study

the Freemasons in this sequence: Egyptian Isis Worshipers, Pythagoreans, Greek Mystery Cults, Gnostics, Cathars, Knights Templar, Rosicrucians, Freemasons.¹¹⁸ Several critical and uncritical books about Masonic lore cover similar ground. This provides another avenue for some fundamentalist Christians to scapegoat Freemasons as pagans or heretics.

As we entered the new millennium, false allegations about Freemasons continued to circulate both on the Internet and in print. In 2001 a major publisher issued a book by conspiracist Jim Marrs titled *Rule by Secrecy: The Hidden History That Connects the Trilateral Commission, The Freemasons, and the Great Pyramids*.¹¹⁹ A depressing artifact of the mainstreaming of anti-Masonic conspiracism is the fact that the online catalog for Powell's Internet Bookstore lists the Marrs book under the section on Politics: Foreign Policy.¹²⁰ The August 2002 issue of *Midnight Call: The Prophetic Voice for the Endtimes*, carries a major article titled "How Does Masonic Leadership View the Bible?"¹²¹ Next to the article is an advertisement for the book *The Masonic/Christian Conflict Explained*, by Keith Harris.¹²² The ad implies that Masonic doctrine invalidates the Bible and calls Masonry a "cult."¹²³ These and other examples indicate that anti-Masonry still is spreading in both secular and Christian Right conspiracist circles.

CONCLUSIONS

Anti-Masonic narratives are rooted in a particular form of apocalyptic belief that uses demonization to concoct conspiracy theories that are actually a narrative form of scapegoating. Apocalypse promises transformation, and the resulting changes—emerging from the fission of metaphysical expectation—produce physical social or political struggle. This can move a society toward greater liberty and equality or toward authoritarianism and genocide. Apocalyptic views that demonize by naming specific groups of people as evil pose a threat to civil society. The history of apocalyptic fervor is written by those secure in their knowledge that all previous predictions of terminal cataclysm have turned out to be false. After all, if the end of time ever arrives, it will leave behind no historians or sociologists, thus making skepticism an appealing and safe alternative.

While believers prepare for the spiritual tsunami that will wash away both sins and sinners, skeptics make the assumption that it is just another wave that will eventually collapse, seeping away through the infinite sands of time. Yet no matter what we believe, we are all destined to experience the effects of apocalyptic thinking, because it invents itself in the maelstrom of the human mind, and no logical arguments can stop the storm.¹²⁴ James Reston, Jr., looks for a way out of the dilemma by noting that God may have a different way to read the clock. "If counting time might be different, could the very nature of apocalypse, as we generally understand it, be different as well? We understand apocalypse to be sudden, but what, to a deity, is suddenness? We understand it to be total and all-encompassing,

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