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Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order

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the US constitution [sic] will not adjust their outrage to the gravity of the offense" (1992: 160).

Peter Dale Scott sees in academic resistance to theories of a conspiracy to assassinate Kennedy "the legacy of the Enlightenment that has left us in this century with the unattractive choices of academic social science and scientific socialism," which he calls *rationalistic structuralism* (1996: 10). He argues that Kennedy's assassination most likely altered the course of American involvement in Vietnam, deepening it, a position adopted in Stone's *JFK*. The assassination, then, would constitute, he argues, a coup d'état. Scott contends that this proposition troubles historians and social scientists, who find it impossible within the positivist tradition to accept that an important historical outcome could have been contingent on an assassination.

Scott contends that a conspiracy to kill Kennedy was hatched in an opaque area of political life "where the processes openly acknowledged are not always securely in control, precisely because of their accommodation to unsanctioned sources of violence, through arrangements not openly acknowledged and reviewed" (1996: xiii). In his analysis of dark events in the post-World War II history of the United States, Scott finds a common thread in traumas like the Kennedy and King assassinations, Watergate, and Iran-Contra. He argues that understanding these episodes will take us, not to a handful of malevolent people, but to "deep politics," defined as "institutional and parapolitical arrangements which constitute the way we are systematically governed. The conspiracies I see as operative, in other words, are part of our political structure, not exceptions to it" (1996: 11). More than just "parapolitics," deep politics includes the shadowy conspiratorial undertakings of national security agencies escaping institutional accountability. "What is really operating here," according to Scott, "is a widely disseminated willingness, not to be blamed on any single individual or agency, private or public, to resort to fraud, violence, or murder to be done." Instead, we have developed a deeply rooted "system of accommodations, one of which is characterized by alliances or symbiosis with lawless forces, such as drug traffickers" (1996: 311-12).

The views of Stone and Scott were specifically addressed in Gerald Posner's *Case Closed* (1994), which defended the Warren Commission's conclusion that Kennedy was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald acting as a "lone gunman." *Case Closed* was enthusiastically praised by critics and heavily promoted by its author in numerous appearances on television and radio shows. The book quickly rose to best-seller status. The *New York Times*

Book Review (Ward 1993) proclaimed, "The Most Durable Assassination Theory: Oswald Did It Alone." Its reviewer dismissed Scott's book as the "opaque" meanderings of a literature professor; Posner, by contrast, was validated as a "former Wall Street lawyer." One reviewer contended, "The range and depth of Posner's research is awesome. Nothing essential escaped him." Scott, however, was dismissed as "a longtime leftist critic" who has written just "another conspiracy book" (Reeves 1994: 1378-79).⁵

In its zeal to disparage a particular conspiracy theory, *Case Closed* unintentionally builds an impressive case for the existence of "deep politics."⁶ For example, Posner (1994: chap. 3) presents a chilling account of the brutal treatment meted out by Jim Angleton, the CIA official charged with verifying the credentials of defectors, to Yuri Nosenko, a KGB defector who was familiar with Oswald's activities in Russia. Posner (1994: 34-45) claims Nosenko would otherwise have helped corroborate the lone gunman thesis. Posner portrays Angleton and the operations division of the CIA as a dark, violent part of the state, a world of covert activities, obsessed with their own grand conspiracy theory (anti-Communism) and ruthlessness in acting on it.

Posner is a messiah to those refusing to entertain conspiracy theory as an explanation for the assassination, a pariah to those who see no other possible explanation. In reality, *Case Closed* falls somewhere between the logically argued, impeccably researched study seen by his admirers and the distorted apology portrayed by his critics.⁷ Posner demonstrates that the evidence and some testimony *can be interpreted* consistently with the Warren Commission, but he does not prove that Kennedy could *only* have been killed by a lone gunman or that the case is closed. Like most conspiracy theorists, whom he disdains, Posner takes what *could* have happened as proof of what *did* happen, and he substitutes a more complex explanation for a more parsimonious one.

The Posner book was part of an elite effort to respond to widespread and persistent public skepticism about the Kennedy assassination. There is little doubt that, from the first, the Warren Commission's charge was to allay public concerns that a conspiracy (foreign or domestic) was behind the assassination, and the persistence of conspiracy theory has been the primary force behind the acceleration of the release of classified materials related to the president's murder. Stone's *JFK*, like Webb's *Dark Alliance*, forced elites to reopen episodes that they would rather remain closed.

In contrast to the Kennedy assassination (an event) or Iran-Contra (a scandal), globalization is a broad, impersonal tendency that seems evolutionary, beyond agency, and impervious to the contingency associated with conspiracism. However, globalization is not merely “happening,” any more than American hegemony merely “happened.” Its most fervent defenders are liberal internationalists in intellectual and diplomatic circles. William Appleman Williams argues that, beginning with the administration of Woodrow Wilson (1912–20), elites have been aware of the need to plan and seek their goals consciously:

They very seldom blundered into either success or failure. . . . They were simply powerful and influential men of this world who had concluded, from hard experience and close observation, that all of the truth all of the time was almost always dangerous. Hence they did not use all of the truth all of the time. . . . They thought about economics in a *national* sense; as an absolutely crucial variable in the functioning of the system *per se*, and as the foundation for constitutional government and a moral society. And all of them viewed overseas economic expansion as essential to the continued successful operation of the American free-enterprise system. (Williams 1967: 31)

The liberal internationalist outlook described by Williams has been fodder for right-wing conspiracy theorists with a large following. Television evangelist and power broker Pat Robertson (1991) equates the *New World Order*, a term coined by President George Bush in 1991 after the Persian Gulf War, with the work of Satan. Even more remarkable is the popularity of the outlandish theories of Lyndon LaRouche Jr., who sees the notorious hand of the Illuminati behind globalization (LaRouche 1998). The network of organizations controlled by LaRouche constitutes the most influential movement espousing a world conspiracy theory unapologetically at the center of its worldview.⁸ LaRouche organizations have attracted talent from intelligence agencies and other branches of the military-industrial complex, connections that LaRouche has parlayed at times into access to right-wing governments, including the Reagan administration and the (former) apartheid regime in South Africa (King and Radosh 1984). LaRouche’s conspiracy theory envisions a sinister cabal of the strangest bedfellows. For example, in a speech made on the eve of the 1976 presidential election to a national television audi-

ence, LaRouche contended that the Soviets, the Rockefeller, and the British monarchy are behind the international drug trade (Berlet 1986).

The post-Cold War philosophy of LaRouche is expressed in the *Executive Intelligence Review*, in which hyperbole is in no short supply. In the 9 October 1998 issue of the *Review*, LaRouche proclaimed that political authority must be wrested from the “over-reaching powers assumed by supra-national agencies” and restored to “a perfectly sovereign nation-state republic.” If not, a world economic meltdown and a “collapse into a global ‘new dark age’” are inevitable. The failure of the meltdown to occur within weeks, as predicted, did not deter LaRouche a few months later (in the 15 January 1999 issue of the *Review*) from interpreting impeachment proceedings against President Clinton as a struggle “triggered by what is about to become generally recognized as the worst world depression of the century.” The plot, said LaRouche, involved replacing Clinton with Vice President Al Gore, an “act of treason in our nation’s political establishment” orchestrated “by President Clinton’s foreign (London-centered) and domestic (Wall Street-centered) enemies, such as the circles of Richard Mellon Scaife, Conrad Black’s Hollinger corporation, and London’s Lord William Rees-Mogg.” Various other coconspirators are named, all employing “increasing use of lunatic ‘free trade’ and ‘globalization’ ideologies to destroy the economic and other essential functions of the sovereign nation-state.”

Despite these outlandish views, LaRouche’s following numbers in the hundreds of thousands. His most important cadre organization is the National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC). The NCLC participates in elections through a front group, the National Democratic Policy Committee (NDPC). Operating on the fringes of the Democratic Party, the NDPC fielded two thousand candidates in thirty states in 1984. In 1986, the NDPC scored its most significant electoral victory when two of its candidates won statewide nominations: for lieutenant governor and secretary of state in the Illinois Democratic Party primary. In a press conference after their victory, the NDPC candidates accused the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta of withholding evidence on the ease of transmitting the AIDS virus. They promised to set up “Nuremberg tribunals” to try big business profiteers in the international drug trade. One candidate said that the disappearances and murders of young African Americans in Atlanta a few years before were the work of witches who kidnapped the children and made pornographic movies, a revelation bottled up by connivance between (former) Mayor Andrew Young and Queen Elizabeth II (Oxnevad 1986).

LaRouche's electoral success in Illinois constituted a stealth attack on a slumbering Democratic establishment in an election with an extremely low turnout (22 percent). The victory proved ephemeral, but this should not obscure the fact that his organization garnered over 370,000 votes in the secretary of state race. The appeal of the LaRouche candidates in the 1986 primary must be understood in the context of a decade-long, serious farm-bankruptcy crisis and persistent high unemployment in smaller cities with uncompetitive manufacturing economies. Michael McKeon, a local pollster who had noted growing LaRouche support well before the election, attributed the vote to a rising fear among farmers and workers in small cities that their skills and roles were being marginalized and their economic plight not likely to be remedied by traditional methods. "Hard work just doesn't guarantee success anymore," said McKeon (Oxnevad 1986: AI). An organizer from the rural advocacy organization Prairiefire, often attacked by LaRouche supporters, commented, "I think you can draw a connecting line between the LaRouches' limited election success and the broad rural atmosphere of despair as well as general right-wing activity in some of these areas" (Malcolm 1986). This line was drawn for rural voters by NDPC volunteers who went house to house, down lonely farm roads, setting up thousands of information tables at fairs and picnics in depressed urban and rural areas.

Who found NDPC most persuasive is suggested by the geographical distribution of support for Robert D. Hart, its candidate for state treasurer in the primary. Hart made no attempt to hide his views, telling the *Granite City Press Record/Journal*, "I have spent the last 11 years mastering the political economy of the American system in association with the world's foremost economist Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr." (unpublished *Granite City Press Record/Journal* candidate survey). Although losing, he polled a respectable 14 percent (108,452 votes) of votes cast in a four-way race against three well-known Democratic candidates. The Hart vote was concentrated in rural regions in the southern half of the state, where the agricultural crisis of the 1980s hit hardest, and in smaller cities, where traditional manufacturing industries had shed the greatest number of workers from their payrolls. Hart received only 10 percent of the vote in the Chicago metropolitan area but 22 percent of the vote elsewhere. He finished first in 32 and second in 19 of the state's 102 counties, running strongest in the southern and western agricultural regions and in the counties around Rock Island-Moline, where forces associated with the agricultural crisis and manufacturing unemployment converged. He also ran well in the rural counties near East St. Louis, the cradle of right-wing movements such as Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum

and the John Birch Society, and in parts of southern Illinois hospitable in the past to nativist movements, such as the Ku Klux Klan.

In a period of hardship and declining confidence in politicians and institutions, it seems that the LaRouche movement found its most secure basis in those areas where voters have felt both politically and economically marginalized in the past, much as Hofstadter depicted them. White voters in depressed urban and rural areas had little trouble fitting the world conspiracy viewpoint of LaRouche into their political cosmology, informed by abandonment and distrust of the Democratic Party establishment. The vote for NDPC candidates may not have much advanced the long-run fortunes of their mentor, but it attracted national alarm and shook the political establishment. It was an early manifestation of the potential of globalization to arouse popular resistance to increasingly concentrated economic power and the loss of national sovereignty.

In the post-Cold War era, conscious and secret economic planning remains a necessity for elites. A series of important international economic treaties on a global and regional scale have been negotiated behind closed doors, then, to the dismay of opponents, passed with relatively little opportunity for public debate. The most recent effort to proceed this way concerns efforts to negotiate the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). The MAI would limit government regulation of foreign capital by requiring equal treatment for foreign and domestic investors, banning, for example, "performance requirements" in areas of employment, reinvestment, or other conditions (Mayne 1997). So sensitive have been negotiations over the MAI that representatives of the nations negotiating in Paris attempted (unsuccessfully) to prevent the drafts from reaching the public eye. The MAI negotiations might be considered authorized diplomatic meetings requiring confidentiality; however, secrecy in this case is also being used to avoid popular resistance and input through democratic processes.

In 1978, Stanley Hoffmann predicted that such tactics would give rise to populist resistance: "A trilateral policy that would appeal only to the skills of the professional in diplomacy, academia, business, and the media would deepen the gap that, in all the advanced countries, exists between an indifferent or indignant 'next generation,' and the interconnected managers of what Pèguy once called the established disorder" (Hoffmann 1978: 249). Although Bilderberg, the Trilateral Commission, and the Council on Foreign Relations carry out many public functions, they also provide forums where economic elites meet behind closed doors to strategize and coordinate efforts to shape global economics and politics (Shoup 1975; Shoup and Minter 1977). Given

the secrecy surrounding these meetings, it requires no great leap of the imagination to see fertile ground for operational conspiracies. The opaqueness of these associations suggests at least a hidden agenda. Parenti points out, "A ruling class [that] tries to direct the system for its own interests is, by definition, considered a conspiracy fantasy in mainstream political discourse" (1994: 161). Even if economic globalization is explained less by deep politics than by structural and historical factors, radicals might just as well embrace conspiracism, says Parenti, because "one is likely to be called a conspiracy theorist, not only if one believes that ruling-class leaders sometimes use conspiratorial methods, but if one thinks there is even such a thing as a ruling class that seeks to maintain hegemony" (1994: 160).

Steffen Hantke contends, "Conspiracy theory has demonstrated its enduring usefulness in a climate of shifting ideological alliances. In an ironic reversal of priorities, conspiratorial anxieties based on an ominous threat emanating from a monolithic 'Evil Empire' during the Reagan years have given way to a more broadly defined concern with the U.S.'s own sense of intrinsic coherence." The danger of terrorism "is so firmly rooted in essentialisms and the belief in its own universality that American intervention in the international political arena has never been forced to account for its blatant violation of other countries' sovereignty, the transgressions against international law, or the resistance from those to whose rescue it had supposedly come" (Hantke 1996: 215). With the attacks on Washington and New York of 11 September 2001, for the first time since the Cold War America's principal adversary could be defined again primarily in conspiratorial terms.

Conclusion

Scott (1996: xiii-xiv) contends that social scientists resist conspiracy theories because they cannot be easily reconciled with the underlying assumptions of rationality essential to modern positivism. "The notion that unreason as well as reason rules us from above is psychologically painful" (1996: 12), he says. The studies presented in this collection do not dismiss conspiracy theories as merely delusional; rather, they consider them to be valid for particular communities. Several contributions point out how conspiracy theories may be empowering to those feeling otherwise victimized. By contrast, most historians and political scientists find conspiracy theories wholly pathological and disempowering.

I have argued that the "paranoid style" of American politics is the result of conflating operational conspiracies and world conspiracies, but this does not necessarily render those who share conspiracy theory powerless. World conspiracy thinking in its many variations may be paranoid in many manifestations, but it can also be empowering, even rational, within an interpretative community whom elites would otherwise ignore. Furthermore, recurring scandals born of operational conspiracies lend credence to some theories that social scientists and establishment journalists would rather dismiss. Contemporary conspiracy theories retain credibility because, the further globalization proceeds, the more the promise of democracy seems to recede. The more we are told that power is "transparent" and open, the more people feel the need to say that it is not. Conspiracy theories link structural and historical forces to subjective political action by elites who prefer to confer and operate out of the glare of transparent daylight, in the opaque twilight of deep politics.

Notes

I would like to thank Professor Art Sandler and Professor Britt-Marie Schiller of Webster University, the editors of this volume, and the anonymous reviewers for Duke University Press for their useful suggestions.

- 1 For all that he derides conspiracism, Pipes describes Leninism as a "powerful conspiracy ideology" (1997: 81) that, like fascism, actually came to power. Indeed, conspiracy is a relevant issue within the thought and practice of Bolshevism, but Pipes has little interest in, and even less respect for, Lenin's views on the limits and potential of conspiracy as a political tool.
- 2 Pipes dismisses virtually all left-of-center critiques of U.S. hegemony and its political economy as conspiracy theory and paranoia, while he sees international Communism as a genuine real-world conspiracy. Also, since he insists that conspiracy theory began with reactions to the French Revolution and resistance to modernism, he ignores witch-hunts, arguably one of the most significant episodes of world conspiracy theory.
- 3 For evidence that the Contras qualify as a terrorist paramilitary organization, dependent on the United States for political direction and funding, see Rosset and Vandermeer (1986), especially the former Contra leader Edgar Chamorro's "World Court Affidavit" (235-46) and several other government and independent sources. See also NSA (1997).
- 4 Posner himself evokes conspiracism with an Orientalist prejudice, e.g., in the preface to *Warlords of Crime*, where he states, "The same ingenuity and dedication of purpose that allowed the Chinese to develop a culture before the pharoes

and to make Hong Kong a commercial paradise are some of the same traits that have been applied by Chinese criminals, through the secret societies, to create massive underworld empires" (1988: xvii).

- 5 The *Times Literary Supplement* concluded that Posner's contribution "is to awaken us from our reveries with cold facts and sharp logic" so that we can "put the conspiracy-mongers out of business" (26 November 1993, 11). *American Heritage* (February–March 1994, 100) chimed in, "Adult Oswald simply wasn't stable enough to have played a major role in an elaborate far-reaching conspiracy."
- 6 The reliability of evidence and sources about the Kennedy assassination is difficult to assess. For a carefully compiled compendium of claims, see Assassination Web (1997).
- 7 There were exceptions. The *Christian Science Monitor* (28 September 1983, 13) praised Posner's forensic research but concluded that he left the case "far from closed." A few reviews specializing in library recommendations (*Choice* 31 [March 1994]: 1210; *Booklist* 90 [15 September 1993]: 107) said kind things about Scott's book.
- 8 Organizations with a "world conspiratorial" ideology typically have a Manichaean outlook. For example, the right-wing Christian movement of the television evangelist Pat Robertson characterizes opponents as doing the "devil's work." Organizations linked to figures like H. Ross Perot and his Reform Party and the Rainbow Coalition of Jesse Jackson may publicize conspiracies, but they do not espouse a world conspiracy ideology.

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8

Making *Wanga*: Reality Constructions and the Magical Manipulation of Power

KAREN MCCARTHY BROWN

In August 1997, Abner Louima, a thirty-two-year-old Haitian immigrant living in Brooklyn and working as a security guard, got in trouble with the New York City police. The encounter sparked what is now an infamous case of police brutality. Analyzing mainstream media coverage of the incident and comparing it to the coverage of another case of police violence in New York reveal an elaborate dance of secrecy and transparency, a contredanse if you will, in which secrecy demands transparency and transparency provokes new forms of secrecy, in spite of itself and at times in the name of justice. So it goes. When raw power and the most fundamental kinds of racism are involved, as they are in the Louima case, both victims and perpetrators are at times compelled to hide the factual truth and to keep secrets while simultaneously making claims on some of the most rudimentary of institutions created to enhance transparency, the news media and the judicial courts.

The night Louima was arrested, Phantoms, his favorite band, was playing at the Club Rendez-Vous in Brooklyn. Around four o'clock in the morning, the almost entirely Haitian crowd spilled out onto the street. As I later heard the story, two women started exchanging ritual insults about each other's clothing. Bystanders playfully urged them on; the shouting increased, and someone called the police. A Haitian friend who was there assured me that, before the police arrived, no one in the crowd had crossed the line between