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THE Paranoid Style in American Politics *and Other Essays*

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THE PARANOID STYLE IN AMERICAN POLITICS

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I

ALTHOUGH American political life has rarely been touched by the most acute varieties of class conflict, it has served again and again as an arena for uncommonly angry minds. Today this fact is most evident on the extreme right wing, which has shown, particularly in the Goldwater movement, how much political leverage can be got out of the animosities and passions of a small minority. Behind such movements there is a style of mind, not always right-wing in its affiliations, that has a long and varied history. I call it the paranoid style simply because no other word adequately evokes the qualities of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy that I have in mind. In using the expression "paranoid style," I am not speaking in a clinical sense, but borrowing a clinical term for other purposes. I have neither the competence nor the desire to classify any figures

of the past or present as certifiable lunatics. In fact, the idea of the paranoid style would have little contemporary relevance or historical value if it were applied only to people with profoundly disturbed minds. It is the use of paranoid modes of expression by more or less normal people that makes the phenomenon significant.

When I speak of the paranoid style, I use the term much as a historian of art might speak of the baroque or the mannerist style. It is, above all, a way of seeing the world and of expressing oneself. Webster defines paranoia, the clinical entity, as a chronic mental disorder characterized by systematized delusions of persecution and of one's own greatness. In the paranoid style, as I conceive it, the feeling of persecution is central, and it is indeed systematized in grandiose theories of conspiracy. But there is a vital difference between the paranoid spokesman in politics and the clinical paranoiac: although they both tend to be overheated, oversuspicious, overaggressive, grandiose, and apocalyptic in expression, the clinical paranoid sees the hostile and conspiratorial world in which he feels himself to be living as directed specifically *against him;* whereas the spokesman of the paranoid style finds it directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others. Insofar as he does not usually see himself singled out as the individual victim of a personal conspiracy,[1] he is somewhat more rational and much more disinterested. His sense that his political passions are unselfish and patriotic, in fact, goes far to intensify his feeling of righteousness and his moral indignation.

[1] There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, particularly among the most outré right-wing agitators—see especially Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman: *Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator* (New York, 1949), ch. 9—but their significance is arguable. See, however, the interesting suggestions on the relation between styles of thought and patterns of psychosis in N. McConaghy: "Modes of Abstract Thinking and Psychosis," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, CXVII (August 1960), 106–10.

Of course, the term "paranoid style" is pejorative, and it is meant to be; the paranoid style has a greater affinity for bad causes than good. But nothing entirely prevents a sound program or a sound issue from being advocated in the paranoid style, and it is admittedly impossible to settle the merits of an argument because we think we hear in its presentation the characteristic paranoid accents. Style has to do with the way in which ideas are believed and advocated rather than with the truth or falsity of their content.[2]

A few simple and relatively non-controversial examples may make this distinction wholly clear. Shortly after the assassination of President Kennedy, a great deal of publicity was given to a bill, sponsored chiefly by Senator Thomas E. Dodd of Connecticut, to tighten federal controls over the sale of firearms through the mail. When hearings were being held on the measure, three men drove 2,500 miles to Washington from Bagdad, Arizona, to testify against it. Now there are arguments against the Dodd bill which, however unpersuasive one may find them, have the color of conventional political reasoning. But one of the Arizonans opposed it with what might be considered representative paranoid arguments, insisting that it was "a further attempt by a subversive power to make us part of one world socialistic government" and that it threatened to "create chaos" that would help "our enemies" to seize power.[3]

Again, it is common knowledge that the movement against the fluoridation of municipal water supplies has been catnip for cranks of all kinds, especially for those who have obsessive

[2] Milton Rokeach, in *The Open and Closed Mind* (New York, 1960), has attempted to distinguish systematically between the content of ideas and the way in which they are espoused. It is important to bear in mind, however, that while any system of beliefs can be espoused in the paranoid style, there are certain beliefs which seem to be espoused almost entirely in this way.

[3] *Interstate Shipment of Firearms*, Hearings before the Committee on Commerce, U.S. Senate, 85th Cong., 1st and 2nd sess. (1964), p. 241; cf. pp. 240–54, passim (January 30, 1964).

fear of poisoning. It is conceivable that at some time scientists may turn up conclusive evidence that this practice is, on balance, harmful; and such a discovery would prove the anti-fluoridationists quite right on the substance of their position. But it could hardly, at the same time, validate the contentions of those among them who, in characteristic paranoid fashion, have charged that fluoridation was an attempt to advance socialism under the guise of public health or to rot out the brains of the community by introducing chemicals in the water supply in order to make people more vulnerable to socialist or communist schemes.

A distorted style is, then, a possible signal that may alert us to a distorted judgment, just as in art an ugly style is a cue to fundamental defects of taste. What interests me here is the possibility of using political rhetoric to get at political pathology. One of the most impressive facts about the paranoid style, in this connection, is that it represents an old and recurrent mode of expression in our public life which has frequently been linked with movements of suspicious discontent and whose content remains much the same even when it is adopted by men of distinctly different purposes. Our experience suggests too that, while it comes in waves of different intensity, it appears to be all but ineradicable.

I choose American history to illustrate the paranoid style only because I happen to be an Americanist, and it is for me a choice of convenience. But the phenomenon is no more limited to American experience than it is to our contemporaries. Notions about an all-embracing conspiracy on the part of Jesuits or Freemasons, international capitalists, international Jews, or Communists are familiar phenomena in many countries throughout modern history.[4] One need only think of the

[4] See Franz Neumann's essay "Anxiety and Politics," in *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State* (Glencoe, Ill., 1957), pp. 270–300. For two studies in European paranoid styles in widely different settings, see Fritz Stern: *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (Berkeley, 1961), and Stanley Hoffmann: *Le Mouvement Poujade* (Paris, 1956).

response to President Kennedy's assassination in Europe to be reminded that Americans have no monopoly of the gift for paranoid improvisation.[5] More important, the single case in modern history in which one might say that the paranoid style has had a consummatory triumph occurred not in the United States but in Germany. It is a common ingredient of fascism, and of frustrated nationalisms, though it appeals to many who are hardly fascists and it can frequently be seen in the left-wing press. The famous Stalin purge trials incorporated, in a supposedly juridical form, a wildly imaginative and devastating exercise in the paranoid style. In America it has been the preferred style only of *minority* movements. It can be argued, of course, that certain features of our history have given the paranoid style more scope and force among us than it has had in many other countries of the Western world. My intention here, however, is not to make such comparative judgments but simply to establish the reality of the style and to illustrate its frequent historical recurrence.

We may begin with a few American examples. Here is Senator McCarthy, speaking in June 1951 about the parlous situation of the United States:

> How can we account for our present situation unless we believe that men high in this government are concerting to deliver us to disaster? This must be the product of a great conspiracy, a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man. A conspiracy of infamy so black that, when it is finally exposed, its principals shall be forever deserving of the maledictions of all honest men. . . . What can be made of this unbroken series of decisions and acts contribut-

[5] Conspiratorial explanations of Kennedy's assassination have a far wider currency in Europe than they do in the United States, but no European, to my knowledge, has matched the ingenuity of Professor Revilo P. Oliver of the University of Illinois, who suggests that while Kennedy had performed many services for the Communist conspiracy, he was falling behind in a schedule for the "effective capture of the United States in 1963" and was "rapidly becoming a political liability." He therefore had to be shot. *The New York Times*, February 11, 1964.

ing to the strategy of defeat? They cannot be attributed to incompetence. . . . The laws of probability would dictate that part of . . . [the] decisions would serve this country's interest.[6]

Now let us turn back fifty years to a manifesto signed in 1895 by a number of leaders of the Populist party:

> As early as 1865–66 a conspiracy was entered into between the gold gamblers of Europe and America. . . . For nearly thirty years these conspirators have kept the people quarreling over less important matters, while they have pursued with unrelenting zeal their one central purpose. . . . Every device of treachery, every resource of statecraft, and every artifice known to the secret cabals of the international gold ring are being made use of to deal a blow to the prosperity of the people and the financial and commercial independence of the country.[7]

Next, a Texas newspaper article of 1855:

> . . . It is a notorious fact that the Monarchs of Europe and the Pope of Rome are at this very moment plotting our destruction and threatening the extinction of our political, civil, and religious institutions. We have the best reasons for believing that corruption has found its way into our Executive Chamber, and that our Executive head is tainted with the infectious venom of Catholicism. . . . The Pope has recently sent his ambassador of state to this country on a secret commission, the effect of which is an extraordinary boldness of the Catholic Church throughout the United States. . . . These minions of the Pope are boldly insulting our Senators; reprimanding our Statesmen; propagating the adulterous union of Church and state; abusing with foul calumny all governments but Catholic; and spewing out the bitterest

[6] *Congressional Record*, 82nd Cong., 1st sess. (June 14, 1951), p. 6602; for a similar passage, see McCarthy's book *McCarthyism: The Fight for America* (New York, 1952), p. 2.

[7] The manifesto is reprinted in Frank McVey: "The Populist Movement," *Economic Studies*, I (August 1896), 201–2; the platform of the Populist party for 1892 asserts: "A vast conspiracy against mankind has been organized on two continents, and it is rapidly taking possession of the world. If not met and overthrown at once, it forbodes terrible social convulsions, the destruction of civilization, or the establishment of an absolute despotism."

> execrations on all Protestantism. The Catholics in the United States receive from abroad more than $200,000 annually for the propagation of their creed. Add to this the vast revenue collected here. . . .[8]

Finally, this from a sermon preached in Massachusetts in 1798:

> Secret and systematic means have been adopted and pursued, with zeal and activity, by wicked and artful men, in foreign countries, to undermine the foundations of this Religion [Christianity], and to overthrow its Altars, and thus to deprive the world of its benign influence on society. . . . These impious conspirators and philosophists have completely effected their purposes in a large portion of Europe, and boast of their means of accomplishing their plans in all parts of Christendom, glory in the certainty of their success, and set opposition at defiance. . . .[9]

These quotations, taken from intervals of half a century, give the keynote of the style of thought. In the history of the United States one finds it, for example, in the anti-Masonic movement, the nativist and anti-Catholic movement, in certain spokesmen for abolitionism who regarded the United States as being in the grip of a slaveholders' conspiracy, in many writers alarmed by Mormonism, in some Greenback and Populist writers who constructed a great conspiracy of international bankers, in the exposure of a munitions makers' conspiracy of the First World War, in the popular left-wing press, in the contemporary American right wing, and on both sides of the race controversy today, among White Citizens Councils and Black Muslims. I do not propose to try to trace the variations of the paranoid style that can be found in all

[8] Quoted by Sister Paul of the Cross McGrath: *Political Nativism in Texas, 1825–1860* (Washington, 1930), pp. 114–15, from *Texas State Times*, September 15, 1855.

[9] Jedidiah Morse: *A Sermon Preached at Charlestown, November 29, 1798* . . . (Worcester, Mass., 1799), pp. 20–1.

these movements, but will confine myself to a few leading episodes in our past history in which the style emerged in full and archetypal splendor.

II

A SUITABLE POINT of departure is the panic that broke out in some quarters at the end of the eighteenth century over the allegedly subversive activities of the Bavarian Illuminati. This panic, which came with the general Western reaction to the French Revolution, was heightened here by the response of certain reactionaries, mostly in New England and among the established clergy, to the rise of Jeffersonian democracy. Illuminism had been founded in 1776 by Adam Weishaupt, a professor of law at the University of Ingolstadt. Its teachings today seem to be no more than another version of Enlightenment rationalism, spiced with an anticlerical animus that seems an inevitable response to the reactionary-clerical atmosphere of eighteenth-century Bavaria. A somewhat naïve and utopian movement which aspired ultimately to bring the human race under the rules of reason, it made many converts after 1780 among outstanding dukes and princes of the German states, and is reported to have had the allegiance of such men as Herder, Goethe, and Pestalozzi. Although the order of the Illuminati was shattered by persecution in its native principality, its humanitarian rationalism appears to have acquired a fairly wide influence in Masonic lodges. It is very easy to believe that it was attractive to some radicals with a conspiratorial cast of mind.

Americans first learned of Illuminism in 1797, from a volume published in Edinburgh (later reprinted in New York) under the title *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, carried on in the Secret*

Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies. Its author was a well-known Scottish scientist, John Robison, who had himself been a somewhat casual adherent of Masonry in Britain, but whose imagination had been inflamed by what he considered to be the far less innocent Masonic movement on the Continent. Robison's book was a conscientious account, laboriously pieced together out of the German sources, of the origins and development of Weishaupt's movement. For the most part, Robison seems to have made his work as factual as he could, but when he came to estimating the moral character and the political influence of Illuminism, he made the characteristic paranoid leap into fantasy. The association, he thought, was formed, "for the express purpose of ROOTING OUT ALL THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS, AND OVERTURNING ALL THE EXISTING GOVERNMENTS OF EUROPE." The most active leaders of the French Revolution, he claimed, were members; it had become "one great and wicked project fermenting and working all over Europe," and to it he attributed a central role in bringing about the French Revolution. He saw it as a libertine, anti-Christian movement, given to the corruption of women, the cultivation of sensual pleasures, and the violation of property rights. Its members had plans for making a tea that caused abortion, a secret substance that "blinds or kills when spurted in the face," and a device that sounds like a stench bomb—a "method for filling a bedchamber with pestilential vapours."[1] Robison's credulity was exercised not only on these matters but also on a conviction that the Illuminati, while resolutely anti-Christian, were also heavily infiltrated by the Jesuits.

Almost simultaneously with Robison's book there appeared

[1] Robison: *Proofs of a Conspiracy* (New York, 1798), pp. 14, 376, 311. For a detailed study of the American response to Illuminism, see Vernon Stauffer: *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati* (New York, 1918).

in London a formidable four-volume work by the Abbé Barruel, a Jesuit who had been expelled from France when that order was suppressed in 1773, under the title *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme*. This work, which was translated into English and published both in England and in the United States, elaborated views similar to Robison's, and traced a "triple conspiracy" of anti-Christians, Freemasons, and Illuminati to destroy religion and order. "We shall demonstrate," wrote Barruel,

> what it is imperative for the nations and their leaders to know. We shall say to them: everything in the French Revolution, even the most dreadful of crimes, was foreseen, contemplated, contrived, resolved upon, decreed; that everything was the consequence of the most profound villainy, and was prepared and produced by those men who alone held the leading threads of conspiracies long before woven in the secret societies, and who knew how to choose and to hasten the favorable moments for their schemes. Although among the day-by-day events there were some circumstances which hardly seemed the effects of conspiracies, there existed nonetheless one cause with its secret agents, who called forth these events, who knew how to profit by circumstances or even how to bring them about, and who directed everything towards their main end. The circumstances may have served as pretext and opportunity, but the grand cause of the Revolution, of its great crimes, its huge atrocities, was always independent and self-contained, and it consisted in plots long hatched and deeply premeditated.[2]

These notions were quick to make themselves felt in America, even though it is uncertain whether any member of the

[2] *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme* (Hamburg, 1803), I, ix–x. In *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: The Struggle* (Princeton, 1964) Robert R. Palmer puts the writings of men like Robison and Barruel in the context of the general reaction to the French Revolution and does justice to the modest element of reality behind their fantasies. See esp. pp. 51–4, 141–5, 163–4, 249–55, 343–6, 429–30, 451–6, 540–3; cf. J. Droz: *L'Allemagne et la Révolution française* (Paris, 1949). On the role of the idea of conspiracy in the background of the American Revolution, see Bernard Bailyn's observations in the Introduction to *Pamphlets of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), I, 60–89.

Illuminati ever came here. In May 1798, a prominent minister of the Massachusetts Congregational establishment in Boston, Jedidiah Morse, delivered a timely sermon of great import to the young country, which was then sharply divided between Jeffersonians and Federalists, Francophiles and Anglophiles. After reading Robison, Morse was convinced that the United States too was the victim of a Jacobinical plot touched off by Illuminism, and that the country should be rallied to defend itself against the machinations of the international conspiracy. His warnings were heeded throughout New England wherever Federalists brooded about the rising tide of religious infidelity or Jeffersonian democracy. Timothy Dwight, the president of Yale, followed Morse's sermon with a Fourth of July discourse, *The Duty of Americans in the Present Crisis*, in which he held forth against the Antichrist in his own glowing rhetoric.

> The sins of these enemies of Christ, and Christians, are of numbers and degrees which mock account and description. All that the malice and atheism of the Dragon, the cruelty and rapacity of the Beast, and the fraud and deceit of the false Prophet, can generate, or accomplish, swell the list. No personal or national interest of man has been uninvaded; no impious sentiment, or action, against God has been spared. . . . Shall we, my brethren, become partakers of these sins? Shall we introduce them into our government, our schools, our families? Shall our sons become the disciples of Voltaire, and the dragoons of Marat; or our daughters the concubines of the Illuminati?[3]

This note was taken up by others, and soon the pulpits of New England were ringing with denunciations of the Illuminati, as though the country were swarming with them. The prevalence of these denunciations is more intelligible if one remembers that the United States did have, if not any Illuminati, a few Democratic-Republican societies which were widely believed to be Jacobinical and to have instigated the

[3] New Haven, 1798, pp. 20–1.

Whiskey Rebellion. It was now "generally believed," as one preacher put it,

> that the present day is unfolding a design the most extensive, flagitious, and diabolical, that human art and malice have ever invented. Its object is the total destruction of all religion and civil order. If accomplished, the earth can be nothing better than a sink of impurities, a theatre of violence and murder, and a hell of miseries.[4]

These writers illustrate the central preconception of the paranoid style—the existence of a vast, insidious, preternaturally effective international conspiratorial network designed to perpetrate acts of the most fiendish character. There are, of course, certain ancillary themes which appear less frequently. But before going on to characterize the other motifs in the paranoid style, let us look at a few more historical manifestations.

The anti-Masonic movement of the late 1820's and 1830's took up and extended the obsession with conspiracy. At first blush, this movement may seem to be no more than an extension or repetition of the anti-Masonic theme sounded in the earlier outcry against the Bavarian Illuminati—and, indeed, the works of writers like Robison and Barruel were often cited again as evidence of the sinister character of Masonry.

But whereas the panic of the 1790's was confined mainly to New England and linked to an ultra-conservative argument, the later anti-Masonic movement affected many parts of the northern United States and was altogether congenial to popular democracy and rural egalitarianism.[5] Although anti-

[4] Abiel Abbot: *A Memorial of Divine Benefits* (Haverhill, Mass., 1798), p. 18.

[5] The status of those who were opposed by these anti movements of the nineteenth century varied widely. Freemasonry was largely an affair of the upper crust of society. Catholics were preponderantly poor immigrants. Mormons drew their strength from the native rural middle class. Ironically, the victims themselves were associated with

Masonry happened to be anti-Jacksonian (Jackson was a Mason), it showed the same fear that opportunities for the common man would be closed, the same passionate dislike of aristocratic institutions that one finds in the Jacksonian crusade against the Bank of the United States.

The anti-Masonic movement, though a product of spontaneous enthusiasm, soon fell victim to the changing fortunes of party politics. It was joined and used by a great many men who did not share its original anti-Masonic feelings. It attracted, for example, the support of several reputable statesmen who had only mild sympathy with its fundamental bias, but who as politicians could not afford to ignore it. Still, it was a folk movement of considerable power, and the rural enthusiasts who provided its real impetus believed in it wholeheartedly.

There must have been some considerable suspicion of the Masonic order to begin with, perhaps a residue of the feeling against Illuminism. At any rate, the movement was precipitated by the mysterious disappearance of one William Morgan in 1826. Morgan was an ex-Mason living in western New York State who was at work on a book exposing the order. There can be no doubt that he was abducted by a small group of Masons, and it was widely and quite understandably believed that he had been murdered, though no certainly identifiable body was ever found. The details of the case need not detain us. Morgan's disappearance was followed by an outbreak of similar charges against Masons, invariably un-

similar anti sentiments. Freemasonry had strong anti-Catholic associations. Mormons were anti-Catholic, and, to a degree, anti-Masonic. Yet their detractors did not hesitate to couple staunch foes. It was sometimes said, for example, that the Jesuits had infiltrated Freemasonry, and the menace of the Catholicism was frequently compared with the menace of Mormonism. All these movements had an interest for minds obsessed with secrecy and concerned with an all-or-nothing world struggle over ultimate values. The ecumenicism of hatred is a great breaker-down of precise intellectual discriminations.

founded, of other conspiracies to kidnap or to hold in false imprisonment. Within very short order an anti-Masonic party was making itself felt in the politics of New York State, and the party soon became national. But it is its ideology not its political history that concerns us here.

As a secret society, Masonry was considered to be a standing conspiracy against republican government. It was held to be particularly liable to treason—for example, Aaron Burr's famous conspiracy was alleged to have been conducted by Masons.[6] Masonry was also accused of constituting a separate system of loyalty, a separate imperium within the framework of American and state governments, inconsistent with loyalty to them. Quite plausibly it was argued that the Masons had set up a jurisdiction of their own, with their own obligations and punishments, liable to enforcement even by the penalty of death. Anti-Masons were fascinated by the horrid oaths that Masons were said to take, invoking terrible reprisals upon themselves if they should fail in their Masonic obligations. The conflict between secrecy and democracy was felt to be so basic that other, more innocent societies, such as Phi Beta Kappa, also came under attack.

Since Masons were pledged to come to each other's aid under circumstances of distress, and to extend fraternal indulgence at all times, it was held that the order nullified the enforcement of regular law. Masonic constables, sheriffs, juries, judges, and the like would all be in league with Masonic

[6] In his *Anti-Masonic Review* Henry Dana Ward charged in September 1829 that "the private correspondence of that conspiracy was carried on in the *Royal Arch cypher*, which is a proof that the agents were exalted Freemasons. This accounts also for their escaping the vengeance of the law: the evidence of their guilt was chiefly in the mystic characters of Freemasonry, and in Royal Arch breasts, and thus closed against the search of human tribunals by the profane oath, and impious penalty of a Royal Arch Mason's obligations." Leland M. Griffin: *The Anti-Masonic Persuasion*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cornell University (1950), pp. 627–8.

criminals and fugitives. The press too was held to have been so "muzzled" by Masonic editors and proprietors that news of Masonic malfeasance could be suppressed—which was the main reason why so shocking a scandal as the Morgan case had received relatively little publicity. Finally, at a moment when practically every alleged citadel of privilege in America was under democratic assault, Masonry was held to be a fraternity of the privileged classes, closing business opportunities and nearly monopolizing political offices, thus shutting out hardy common citizens of the type the anti-Masonic movement liked to claim for its own.

There may have been certain elements of truth and reality in these views of Masonry, and many distinguished and responsible leaders accepted them, at least in part. Not all of these charges and fears need be dismissed as entirely without foundation. What must be emphasized here, however, is the apocalyptic and absolutist framework in which this hostility to Masonry was usually expressed. Anti-Masons were not content simply to say that secret societies were rather a bad idea. David Bernard, in the standard handbook of anti-Masonic materials, *Light on Masonry*, declared that Freemasonry was the most dangerous institution that ever was imposed on man, "an engine of Satan . . . dark, unfruitful, selfish, demoralizing, blasphemous, murderous, anti-republican and anti-Christian."[7] One of the many anti-Masonic pulpit orators called the order "a work of darkness because IT BEARS DECIDED MARKS OF BEING ONE OF THE CONFEDERATE

[7] *Light on Masonry* (Utica, 1829), pp. iii, x. *The Address of the United States Anti-Masonic Convention* (Philadelphia, 1830) asserted (p. 17): "The abuses of which we complain involve the highest crimes of which man can be guilty, because they indicate the deepest malice, and the most fatal aim. They bespeak the most imminent danger, because they have proceeded from a conspiracy more numerous and better organized for mischief, than any other detailed in the records of man, and yet, though exposed, maintaining itself, in all its monstrous power."

POWERS OF INIQUITY PREDICTED BY THE APOSTLE JOHN . . . WHICH WOULD COMBINE THE WORLD IN ARMS AGAINST GOD, AND BE OVERCOME AT THE BATTLE OF THE GREAT DAY JUST BEFORE THE MILLENNIUM."[8]

A further aspect of anti-Masonry that is at once arresting and puzzling to the modern mind is its obsession with the character of Masonic oaths. Oaths were considered to be blasphemous, since they were profanations of a transaction with God, and contrary to civil order, since they set up a secret pattern of loyalties inconsistent with normal civil obligations. At the first national anti-Masonic convention a committee spent a great deal of time solemnly demonstrating that such oaths were subversive and could not be regarded as binding commitments. Many anti-Masons were particularly fascinated by the penalties invoked if Masons failed to live up to their obligations, and these penalties were ingeniously and bloodily imagined. The mark master mason was alleged to call down upon himself having "my right ear smote off and my right hand chopped off as an imposter," in the event of such a failure. My own favorite is the oath attributed to a royal arch mason who invited "having my skull smote off, and my brains exposed to the scorching rays of the sun."[9] The sanguinary character of Masonry was also thought to be shown by the ritual of the lodges, which supposedly required drinking wine from human skulls—this in temperance communities where drinking wine from any kind of container was considered a sin.

[8] Griffin: op. cit., pp. 27–8.
[9] *Proceedings of the United States Anti-Masonic Convention . . .* (Philadelphia, 1830), pp. 57, 58.

III

FEAR of a Masonic plot had hardly been quieted when rumors arose of a Catholic plot against American values. One finds here again the same frame of mind, the same conviction of a conspiracy against a way of life, but now a different villain. Of course, the anti-Catholic movement converged with a growing nativism, and while they were not identical, together they cut such a wide swath in American life that they were bound to embrace many moderates to whom the paranoid style, in its full glory, did not appeal. Moreover, we need not dismiss out of hand as wholly parochial or mean-spirited the desire of Yankee Americans to maintain an ethnically and religiously homogeneous society, nor the particular Protestant commitments to individualism and freedom that were brought into play. But the movement had a large paranoid infusion, and the most influential anti-Catholic militants certainly had a strong affinity for the paranoid style.

Two books which appeared in 1835 described the new danger to the American way of life, and may be taken as expressions of the anti-Catholic mentality. One, *Foreign Conspiracy against the Liberties of the United States*, was from the hand of the celebrated painter and inventor of the telegraph, S. F. B. Morse, who was the son of Jedidiah Morse, the anti-Illuminist. "A conspiracy exists," Morse proclaimed, and "its plans are already in operation . . . we are attacked in a vulnerable quarter which cannot be defended by our ships, our forts, or our armies." In the great war going on in the Western world between political reaction and ultramontanism on one side and political and religious liberties on the other, America was a bastion of freedom, and hence an inevitable target for popes and despots. The main source of the conspiracy Morse found in Metternich's government: "*Aus-*

tria is now acting in this country. She has devised a grand scheme. She has organized a great plan for doing something here. . . . She has her Jesuit missionaries travelling through the land; she has supplied them with money, and has furnished a fountain for a regular supply."[1]

"It is an ascertained fact," wrote another Protestant militant,

> that Jesuits are prowling about all parts of the United States in every possible disguise, expressly to ascertain the advantageous situations and modes to disseminate Popery. A minister of the Gospel from Ohio has informed us that he discovered one carrying on his devices in his congregation; and he says that the western country swarms with them under the names of puppet show men, dancing masters, music teachers, peddlers of images and ornaments, barrel organ players, and similar practitioners.[2]

Were the plot successful, Morse said, it would not be long before some scion of the House of Habsburg would be installed as Emperor of the United States. Catholics, working "with the minds and the funds of all despotic Europe," were the only possible channel of this influence. Ignorant, ill-educated immigrants, incapable of understanding the institutions of the United States, would supplement the efforts of wily Jesuit agents. The danger was imminent and must be met at once. "The serpent has already commenced his coil about our limbs, and the lethargy of his poison is creeping over us. . . . Is not the enemy already organized in the land? Can we not perceive all around us the evidence of his presence? . . . We must awake, or we are lost."[3]

Lyman Beecher, the elder of a famous family and the father of Harriet Beecher Stowe, wrote in the same year his *Plea for*

[1] Morse: *Foreign Conspiracy* . . . (New York, 1835), pp. 14, 21.
[2] Quoted in Ray Allen Billington: *The Protestant Crusade* (New York, 1938), p. 120.
[3] Morse: op. cit., pp. 95–6.

the West, in which he considered the possibility that the Christian millennium might come in the American states. Everything depended, in his judgment, upon what influences dominated the great West, where the future of the country lay. There Protestantism was engaged in a life-or-death struggle with Catholicism. Time was already running out. "Whatever we do, it must be done quickly. . . ." A great tide of immigration, hostile to free institutions, was sweeping in upon the country, subsidized and sent by "the potentates of Europe," multiplying tumult and violence, filling jails, crowding poorhouses, quadrupling taxation, and sending increasing thousands of voters to "lay their inexperienced hand upon the helm of our power." Well might we believe, said Beecher, that Metternich knew that there would be a party in the United States willing to hasten the naturalization and enfranchisement of these multitudes and demagogues, a party that would "sell their country into an everlasting bondage." Even so much as a tenth of the voting population, "condensed and wielded by the Catholic powers of Europe, might decide our elections, perplex our policy, inflame and divide the nation, break the bond of our union, and throw down our free institutions."[4] Beecher did not approve violations of the civil rights of Catholics or the burning of convents, but he urged Protestants to a greater militancy and solidarity to fend off a fate that might be waiting for them in a not very distant future.

Anti-Catholicism has always been the pornography of the Puritan. Whereas the anti-Masons had imagined wild drinking bouts and had entertained themselves with fantasies about the actual enforcement of grisly Masonic oaths, the anti-Catholics developed an immense lore about libertine priests, the confessional as an opportunity for seduction, licentious convents

[4] Lyman Beecher: *Plea for the West* (Cincinnati, 1835), pp. 47, 62–3.

and monasteries, and the like. Probably the most widely read contemporary book in the United States before *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a work supposedly written by one Maria Monk, entitled *Awful Disclosures*, which appeared in 1836. The author, who purported to have escaped from the Hôtel Dieu nunnery in Montreal after a residence of five years as novice and nun, reported her convent life there in elaborate and circumstantial detail. She recalled having been told by the Mother Superior that she must "obey the priests in all things"; to her "utter astonishment and horror," she soon found what the nature of such obedience was. Infants born of convent liaisons were baptized and then killed, she said, so that they might ascend at once to heaven. A high point in the *Awful Disclosures* was Maria Monk's eyewitness account of the strangling of two babies. Her book, hotly attacked and as hotly defended, continued to be read and believed even after her mother, a Protestant living near Montreal, gave testimony that Maria had been somewhat addled ever since childhood when she had rammed a pencil into her head. It was, indeed, read and believed by a dwindling audience even when poor Maria produced a fatherless child two years after the appearance of her book. She died in prison in 1849, after having been arrested in a brothel as a pickpocket.[5]

Anti-Catholicism, like anti-Masonry, mixed its fortunes with American party politics. To trace its political career would take us too far afield, but it did become an enduring factor in American politics. The American Protective Association of the 1890's revived it with ideological variations more suitable to the times—the depression of 1893, for example, was alleged to be an intentional creation of the Catholics, who began it by starting a run on the banks. Some

[5] Maria Monk: *Awful Disclosures* (New York, 1836; facsimile ed., Hamden, Conn., 1962); see R. A. Billington's introduction to the 1962 edition and his account in *The Protestant Crusade*, pp. 99–108.

spokesmen of the movement circulated a bogus encyclical attributed to Leo XIII instructing American Catholics on a certain date in 1893 to exterminate all heretics, and a great many anti-Catholics daily expected a nation-wide uprising. The myth of an impending Catholic war of mutilation and extermination of heretics persisted into the twentieth century.[6]

IV

IF WE NOW TAKE the long jump to the contemporary right wing, we find some rather important differences from the nineteenth-century movements. The spokesman of those earlier movements felt that they stood for causes and personal types that were still in possession of their country—that they were fending off threats to a still well-established way of life in which they played an important part. But the modern right wing, as Daniel Bell has put it,[7] feels dispossessed: America has been largely taken away from them and their kind, though they are determined to try to repossess it and to prevent the final destructive act of subversion. The old American virtues have already been eaten away by cosmopolitans and intellectuals; the old competitive capitalism has been gradually undermined by socialist and communist schemers;

[6] John Higham: *Strangers in the Land* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1955), pp. 81, 85, 180. Higham, studying Henry F. Bowers, a leader of this later phase of anti-Catholicism, finds "a mind charged with constant excitement and given to rigid categorical judgments," moving "in a world of suspicion and imagined danger. Here a single hostile force explained the trivial events of daily experience, while a sense of grandeur and destiny sustained the struggle against it. Everywhere Bowers saw evidence of the machinations of a foreign ecclesiastical conspiracy endowed with immense power." "The Mind of a Nativist: Henry F. Bowers and the A.P.A.," *American Quarterly*, IV (Spring 1953), 21.

[7] "The Dispossessed," in Daniel Bell (ed.): *The Radical Right* (New York, 1963), pp. 1–38.

the old national security and independence have been destroyed by treasonous plots, having as their most powerful agents not merely outsiders and foreigners but major statesmen seated at the very centers of American power. Their predecessors discovered foreign conspiracies; the modern radical right finds that conspiracy also embraces betrayal at home.

Important changes may be traced to the effects of the mass media. The villains of the modern right are much more vivid than those of their paranoid predecessors, much better known to the public; the contemporary literature of the paranoid style is by the same token richer and more circumstantial in personal description and personal invective. For the vaguely delineated villains of the anti-Masons, for the obscure and disguised Jesuit agents, the little-known papal delegates of the anti-Catholics, for the shadowy international bankers of the monetary conspiracies, we may now substitute eminent public figures like Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower, Secretaries of State like Marshall, Acheson, and Dulles, justices of the Supreme Court like Frankfurter and Warren, and the whole battery of lesser but still famous and vivid conspirators headed by Alger Hiss.[8]

Events since 1939 have given the contemporary right-wing paranoid a vast theater for his imagination, full of rich and proliferating detail, replete with realistic clues and undeniable proofs of the validity of his views. The theater of action is now the entire world, and he can draw on not only the events of the Second World War but those of the Korean War and the cold war. Any historian of warfare knows that it is in good part a comedy of errors and a museum of incompetence; but if for every error and every act of incompetence one can

[8] The appeal of the conspiratorial conception of power is brilliantly and economically set against its historical background by Edward Shils: *The Torment of Secrecy* (Glencoe, Ill., 1956), esp. Ch. 1.

substitute an act of treason, we can see how many points of fascinating interpretation are open to the paranoid imagination: treason in high places can be found at almost every turning—and in the end the real mystery, for one who reads the primary works of paranoid scholarship, is not how the United States has been brought to its present dangerous position, but how it has managed to survive at all.

The basic elements of contemporary right-wing thought can be reduced to three: First, there has been the now familiar sustained conspiracy, running over more than a generation, and reaching its climax in Roosevelt's New Deal, to undermine free capitalism, to bring the economy under the direction of the federal government, and to pave the way for socialism or communism. Details might be open to argument among right-wingers, but many would agree with Frank Chodorov, the author of *The Income Tax: The Root of All Evil*,[9] that this campaign began with the passage of the income tax amendment to the Constitution in 1913.

The second contention is that top government officialdom has been so infiltrated by Communists that American policy,

[9] New York, 1954, esp. Ch. 5. For a good brief summary of the history of this alleged conspiracy, see Chesly Manly: *The Twenty-Year Revolution: From Roosevelt to Eisenhower* (Chicago, 1954), which traces all aspects of the "revolution" and finds in the United Nations (p. 179) "the principal instrument of a gigantic conspiracy to control the foreign and domestic policies of the United States, subvert the Constitution, and establish a totalitarian society." A more recent and much more widely read work, particularly popular in the Goldwater movement, is Phyllis Schlafly's *A Choice Not an Echo.* (Alton, Ill., 1964), which traces the work of a small group of "secret kingmakers" in New York who have controlled the affairs of the Republican party from 1936 to 1960. The author believes that Republicans have so many issues on their side that (pp. 23, 25–6) "there is no way Republicans can possibly lose *so long as we have a presidential candidate who campaigns on the issues.*" However, they have lost four major presidential campaigns because "a small group of secret kingmakers, using hidden persuaders and psychological warfare techniques, manipulated the Republican National Convention to nominate candidates who would sidestep or suppress the key issues." A more substantial con-

at least since the days leading up to Pearl Harbor, has been dominated by sinister men who were shrewdly and consistently selling out American national interests.

The final contention is that the country is infused with a network of Communist agents, just as in the old days it was infiltrated by Jesuit agents, so that the whole apparatus of education, religion, the press, and the mass media are engaged in a common effort to paralyze the resistance of loyal Americans.

The details of the modern right-wing case are beyond the scope of any brief discussion. Perhaps the most representative document of its McCarthyist phase was a long indictment of Secretary of State George C. Marshall, delivered in the Senate on June 14, 1951, by Senator McCarthy, and later published in a somewhat different form as *America's Retreat from Victory: The Story of George Catlett Marshall.* McCarthy pictured Marshall as the focal figure in a betrayal of American interests stretching in time from the strategic plans for the Second World War to the formulation of the Marshall Plan. Marshall was associated with practically every American failure or defeat, McCarthy insisted, and none of this was due to either accident or incompetence. There was a "baffling pattern" of Marshall's interventions in the war: "His decisions, maintained with great stubbornness and skill, always and invariably serv[ed] the world policy of the Kremlin." Under

temporary manual of conspiratorial views, which traces ramifications in many areas of American life, is John A. Stormer: *None Dare Call It Treason* (Florissant, Mo., 1964). The writer asks (p. 226): "Is there a conspiratorial plan to destroy the United States into which foreign aid, planned inflation, distortion of treaty-making powers and disarmament all fit?" He answers subtly that it makes no difference whether this is all planned or is merely the work of "misguided idealists. The fact is that the pieces exist. They fit the pattern whether they were planned by the communists or some other secret and mysterious revolutionary group or not. . . . Those who constructed the 'pieces' are few in number, but they exert fantastic control in government, financial circles, the press, unions, schools, etc."

his guidance there was conducted at the end of the war "what appeared to be a planned loss of the peace." Marshall's report on his mission to China cannot be understood as the product of incompetence, but appears persuasive and brilliant when it is read as "a propaganda document in behalf of other interests, another country and civilization." Marshall and Acheson were intent on delivering China to Russia. The Marshall Plan was "an evil hoax on the generosity, good will and carelessness of the American people." And, above all, the sharp decline in America's relative strength from 1945 to 1951 did not "just happen," it was "brought about, step by step, by will and intention," the consequence not of mistakes but of a treasonous conspiracy, "a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man." The ultimate aim of this conspiracy was "that we shall be contained and frustrated and finally fall victim to Soviet intrigue from within and Russian military might from without."[1]

Today the mantle of McCarthy has fallen on the retired candy manufacturer Robert H. Welch, Jr., who is less strategically placed but whose well-organized following in the John Birch Society has had a strong influence. A few years ago Welch proclaimed that "Communist influences are now in almost complete control of our Federal Government"—note the care and scrupulousness of that "almost." He has offered a full-scale interpretation of our recent history in which Communists figure at every turn: They started a run on American banks in 1933 that forced their closure; they contrived the recognition of the Soviet Union by the United States in the same year, just in time to save the Soviets from economic collapse; they have stirred up the fuss over segregation; they have taken over the Supreme Court and made it "one of the most important agencies of Communism." They

[1] Joseph R. McCarthy: *America's Retreat from Victory* (New York, 1951), pp. 54, 66, 130, 141, 156, 168, 169, 171.

are winning the struggle for control in "the press, the pulpit, the radio and television media, the labor unions, the schools, the courts, and the legislative halls of America."

Close attention to history wins for Mr. Welch an insight into affairs that is given to few of us. "For many reasons and after a lot of study," he wrote some years ago, "I personally believe [John Foster] Dulles to be a Communist agent." Other apparently innocent figures are similarly unmasked. The job of Professor Arthur F. Burns as the head of Eisenhower's Council of Economic Advisers quite probably was "merely a coverup for Burns' liaison work between Eisenhower and some of his bosses in the Establishment." Eisenhower's brother Milton was "actually [his] superior and boss within the whole Leftwing Establishment." As for Eisenhower himself, Welch characterized him, in words that have made the candy manufacturer famous, as "a dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy"—a conclusion, he added, "based on an accumulation of detailed evidence so extensive and so palpable that it seems to put this conviction beyond any reasonable doubt."[2]

The views for which Mr. Welch carefully gathers "detailed evidence" are expressed with less scholarly responsibility by a small but vocal segment of the public. Recently Republican Senator Thomas R. Kuchel, the minority whip of the Senate, revealed that of the 60,000 letters he receives each month, about 10 per cent may be classified as what he calls "fright mail"—indignant or anguished letters about "the latest *PLOT!!* to OVERTHROW America!!!" The imagination of his correspondents is feverishly at work:

[2] *The Politician* (Belmont, Mass., 1963), pp. 222, 223, 229. Quotations from Welch vary slightly because his incredible diatribe against Eisenhower was modified in later editions of this book—for example, Eisenhower was later described as (p. 291) "either a willing agent, or an integral and important part of a conspiracy of gangsters determined to rule the world at any cost." Welch's views are ably summarized by Alan Westin, from a different version of the text, in "The John Birch Society," in Daniel Bell (ed): op. cit., pp. 204–6.

> Some of the more memorable "plots" that come to mind include these: 35,000 Communist Chinese troops bearing arms and wearing deceptively dyed powder-blue uniforms, are poised on the Mexican border, about to invade San Diego; the United States has turned over—or will at any moment—its Army, Navy and Air Force to the command of a Russian colonel in the United Nations; almost every well-known American or free-world leader is, in reality, a top Communist agent; a United States Army guerilla-warfare exercise in Georgia, called Water Moccasin III, is in actuality a United Nations operation preparatory to taking over our country.[3]

V

LET US NOW ABSTRACT the basic elements in the paranoid style. The central image is that of a vast and sinister conspiracy, a gigantic and yet subtle machinery of influence set in motion to undermine and destroy a way of life. One may object that there *are* conspiratorial acts in history, and there is nothing paranoid about taking note of them. This is true. All political behavior requires strategy, many strategic acts depend for their effect upon a period of secrecy, and anything that is secret may be described, often with but little exaggeration, as conspiratorial. The distinguishing thing about the paranoid style is not that its exponents see conspiracies or plots here and there in history, but that they regard a "vast" or "gigantic" conspiracy as *the motive force* in historical events. History *is* a conspiracy, set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power, and what is felt to be needed to defeat it is not the usual methods of political give-and-take, but an all-out crusade. The paranoid spokesman sees the fate of this conspiracy in apocalyptic terms—he traffics in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values. He is always manning the

[3] *The New York Times*, July 21, 1963, VI, p. 6.

barricades of civilization. He constantly lives at a turning point: it is now or never in organizing resistance to conspiracy. Time is forever just running out. Like religious millenarians, he expresses the anxiety of those who are living through the last days and he is sometimes disposed to set a date for the apocalypse. "Time is running out," said Welch in 1951. "Evidence is piling up on many sides and from many sources that October 1952 is the fatal month when Stalin will attack."[4] The apocalypticism of the paranoid style runs dangerously near to hopeless pessimism, but usually stops short of it. Apocalyptic warnings arouse passion and militancy, and strike at susceptibility to similar themes in Christianity. Properly expressed, such warnings serve somewhat the same function as a description of the horrible consequences of sin in a revivalist sermon: they portray that which impends but which may still be avoided. They are a secular and demonic version of adventism.

As a member of the avant-garde who is capable of perceiv-

[4] *May God Forgive Us* (Chicago, 1952), p. 73. Dr. Fred C. Schwarz of the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade is more circumspect. In his lectures he sets the year 1973 as the date for the Communists to achieve control of the world, if they are not stopped. Most contemporary paranoid spokesmen speak of a "Communist timetable," of whose focal dates they often seem to have intimate knowledge.

Probably the most spectacular American instance of such adventism is the case of William Miller, who flourished in New York in the 1830's. The offspring of a line of Baptist preachers, Miller became preoccupied with millenarian prophecies, and made calculations which indicated that Christ would come at first in 1843, and then on October 22, 1844, and became the leader of an adventist sect with a considerable following. On the appointed day, Millerites gathered to pray, many abandoned their worldly occupations, and some disposed of their property. The Miller movement waned after the fatal day, but other adventists, more cautious about their use of dates, carried on.

A notable quality in Miller's work was the rigorously logical and systematic character of his demonstrations, as was his militant opposition to Masonry, Catholicism, and other seductions. His lieutenants and followers, A. Whitney Cross has remarked, "found the world beyond rescue, legislatures corrupt, and infidelity, idolatry, Romanism, sectarianism, seduction, fraud, murder, and duels all waxing stronger."

ing the conspiracy before it is fully obvious to an as yet unaroused public, the paranoid is a militant leader. He does not see social conflict as something to be mediated and compromised, in the manner of the working politician. Since what is at stake is always a conflict between absolute good and absolute evil, the quality needed is not a willingness to compromise but the will to fight things out to a finish. Nothing but complete victory will do. Since the enemy is thought of as being totally evil and totally unappeasable, he must be totally eliminated—if not from the world, at least from the theater of operations to which the paranoid directs his attention.[5] This demand for unqualified victories leads to the formulation of hopelessly demanding and unrealistic goals, and since these goals are not even remotely attainable, failure constantly heightens the paranoid's frustration. Even partial success leaves him with the same sense of powerlessness with which he began, and this in turn only strengthens his awareness of the vast and terrifying quality of the enemy he opposes.

This enemy is clearly delineated: he is a perfect model of malice, a kind of amoral superman: sinister, ubiquitous, pow-

Cross argues that the Millerite movement was not so far from the mainstream of American Protestantism as some might think: "The Millerites cannot be dismissed as ignorant farmers, libertarian frontiersmen, impoverished victims of economic change, or hypnotized followers of a maniac thrown into prominence by freak coincidences, when the whole of American Protestantism came so very close to the same beliefs. Their doctrine was the logical absolute of fundamentalist orthodoxy, as perfectionism was the extreme of revivalism. . . . All Protestants expected some grand event about 1843, and no critic from the orthodox side took any serious issue on basic principles with Miller's calculations." *The Burned-Over District* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1950), pp. 320–1; see Ch. 17 for a good account of the Millerite movement.

For the story of an interesting contemporary prophetic cult and some sober reflections on the powerful resistance of true believers to overwhelming disconfirmation, see L. Festinger, H. W. Riecken, and S. Schachter: *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis, 1956).

[5] "The systems are diametrically opposed: one must and will exterminate the other." Edward Beecher: *The Papal Conspiracy Exposed and Protestantism Defended* (Boston, 1855), p. 29.

erful, cruel, sensual, luxury-loving. Unlike the rest of us, the enemy is not caught in the toils of the vast mechanism of history, himself a victim of his past, his desires, his limitations. He is a free, active, demonic agent. He wills, indeed he manufactures, the mechanism of history himself, or deflects the normal course of history in an evil way. He makes crises, starts runs on banks, causes depressions, manufactures disasters, and then enjoys and profits from the misery he has produced. The paranoid's interpretation of history is in this sense distinctly personal: decisive events are not taken as part of the stream of history, but as the consequences of someone's will. Very often the enemy is held to possess some especially effective source of power: he controls the press; he directs the public mind through "managed news"; he has unlimited funds; he has a new secret for influencing the mind (brainwashing); he has a special technique for seduction (the Catholic confessional); he is gaining a stranglehold on the educational system.

This enemy seems to be on many counts a projection of the self: both the ideal and the unacceptable aspects of the self are attributed to him. A fundamental paradox of the paranoid style is the imitation of the enemy. The enemy, for example, may be the cosmopolitan intellectual, but the paranoid will outdo him in the apparatus of scholarship, even of pedantry. Senator McCarthy, with his heavily documented tracts and his show of information, Mr. Welch with his accumulations of irresistible evidence, John Robison with his laborious study of documents in a language he but poorly used, the anti-Masons with their endlessly painstaking discussions of Masonic ritual—all these offer a kind of implicit compliment to their opponents. Secret organizations set up to combat secret organizations give the same flattery. The Ku Klux Klan imitated Catholicism to the point of donning priestly vestments, developing an elaborate ritual and an equally elaborate hier-

archy. The John Birch Society emulates Communist cells and quasi-secret operation through "front" groups, and preaches a ruthless prosecution of the ideological war along lines very similar to those it finds in the Communist enemy. Spokesmen of the various Christian anti-Communist "crusades" openly express their admiration for the dedication, discipline, and strategic ingenuity the Communist cause calls forth.[6]

David Brion Davis, in a remarkable essay on pre-Civil War "counter-subversive" movements, has commented on the manner in which the nineteenth-century nativist unwittingly fashioned himself after his enemy:

> As the nativist searched for participation in a noble cause, for unity in a group sanctioned by tradition and authority, he professed a belief in democracy and equal rights. Yet in his very zeal for freedom he curiously assumed many of the characteristics of the imagined enemy. By condemning the subversive's fanatical allegiance to an ideology, he affirmed a similarly uncritical acceptance of a different ideology; by attacking the subversive's intolerance of dissent, he worked to eliminate dissent and diversity of opinion; by censuring the subversive for alleged licentiousness, he engaged in sensual fantasies; by criticizing the subversive's loyalty to an organization, he sought to prove his unconditional loyalty to the established order. The nativist moved even farther in the direction of his enemies when he formed tightly-knit societies and parties which were often secret and which subordinated the individual to the single purpose of the group. Though the nativists generally agreed that the worst

[6] This has now become a fashionable trend in more respectable quarters. Stephen Shadegg, known for his success in Senator Goldwater's senatorial campaigns, writes: "Mao Tse-tung . . . has written a valuable book on the tactics of infiltration. In it he says: 'Give me just two or three men in a village and I will take the village.' In the Goldwater campaigns of 1952 and 1958 and in all other campaigns where I have served as a consultant I have followed the advice of Mao Tse-tung." *How to Win an Election* (New York, 1964), p. 106. Writing about cold-war strategy, Goldwater himself declares: "I would suggest that we analyze and copy the strategy of the enemy; theirs has worked and ours has not." *Why Not Victory?* (New York, 1962), p. 24.

evil of subversives was their subordination of means to ends, they themselves recommended the most radical means to purge the nation of troublesome groups and to enforce unquestioned loyalty to the state.[7]

Much of the function of the enemy lies not in what can be imitated but in what can be wholly condemned. The sexual freedom often attributed to him, his lack of moral inhibition, his possession of especially effective techniques for fulfilling his desires, give exponents of the paranoid style an opportunity to project and freely express unacceptable aspects of their own minds. Priests and Mormon patriarchs were commonly thought to have especial attraction for women, and hence licentious privilege. Thus Catholics and Mormons—later Negroes and Jews—lent themselves to a preoccupation with illicit sex. Very often the fantasies of true believers serve as strong sado-masochistic outlets, vividly expressed, for example, in the concern of anti-Masons with the alleged cruelty of Masonic punishments. Concerning this phenomenon, Davis remarks:

> Masons disemboweled or slit the throats of their victims; Catholics cut unborn infants from their mothers' wombs and threw them to the dogs before their parents' eyes; Mormons raped and lashed recalcitrant women, or seared their mouths with red-hot irons. This obsession with details of sadism, which reached pathological proportions in much of the literature, showed a furious determination to purge the enemy of every admirable quality.[8]

Another recurring aspect of the paranoid style is the special significance that attaches to the figure of the renegade from the enemy cause. The anti-Masonic movement seemed at

[7] David Brion Davis: "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLVII (September 1960), 223.

[8] Ibid., p. 221.

times to be the creation of ex-Masons; it certainly attached the highest significance and gave the most unqualified credulity to their revelations. Similarly anti-Catholicism used the runaway nun and the apostate priest, anti-Mormonism the ex-wife from the harem of polygamy; the avant-garde anti-Communist movements of our time use the ex-Communist. In some part the special authority accorded the renegade derives from the obsession with secrecy so characteristic of such movements: the renegade is the man or woman who has been in the secret world of the enemy, and brings forth with him or her the final verification of suspicions which might otherwise have been doubted by a skeptical world. But I think there is a deeper eschatological significance attached to the person of the renegade: in the spiritual wrestling match between good and evil which is the paranoid's archetypal model of the world struggle, the renegade is living proof that all the conversions are not made by the wrong side. He brings with him the promise of redemption and victory.

In contemporary right-wing movements a particularly important part has been played by ex-Communists who have moved rapidly, though not without anguish, from the paranoid left to the paranoid right, clinging all the while to the fundamentally Manichean psychology that underlies both. Such authorities on communism remind one of those ancient converts from paganism to Christianity of whom it is told that upon their conversion they did not entirely cease to believe in their old gods but converted them into demons.

A final aspect of the paranoid style is related to that quality of pedantry to which I have already referred. One of the impressive things about paranoid literature is precisely the elaborate concern with demonstration it almost invariably shows. One should not be misled by the fantastic conclusions that are so characteristic of this political style into imagining that it is not, so to speak, argued out along factual lines. The

very fantastic character of its conclusions leads to heroic strivings for "evidence" to prove that the unbelievable is the only thing that can be believed. Of course, there are highbrow, lowbrow, and middlebrow paranoids, as there are likely to be in any political tendency, and paranoid movements from the Middle Ages onward have had a magnetic attraction for demi-intellectuals. But respectable paranoid literature not only starts from certain moral commitments that can be justified to many non-paranoids but also carefully and all but obsessively accumulates "evidence." Paranoid writing begins with certain defensible judgments. There *was* something to be said for the anti-Masons. After all, a secret society composed of influential men bound by special obligations could conceivably pose some kind of threat to the civil order in which they were suspended. There was also something to be said for the Protestant principles of individuality and freedom, as well as for the nativist desire to develop in North America a homogeneous civilization. Again, in our time innumerable decisions of the Second World War and the cold war can be faulted, and it is easy for the suspicious to believe that such decisions are not simply the mistakes of well-meaning men but the plans of traitors.

The typical procedure of the higher paranoid scholarship is to start with such defensible assumptions and with a careful accumulation of facts, or at least of what appear to be facts, and to marshal these facts toward an overwhelming "proof" of the particular conspiracy that is to be established. It is nothing if not coherent—in fact, the paranoid mentality is far more coherent than the real world, since it leaves no room for mistakes, failures, or ambiguities. It is, if not wholly rational, at least intensely rationalistic; it believes that it is up against an enemy who is as infallibly rational as he is totally evil, and it seeks to match his imputed total competence with its own, leaving nothing unexplained and comprehending all of reality

in one overreaching, consistent theory. It is nothing if not "scholarly" in technique. McCarthy's 96-page pamphlet *McCarthyism* contains no less than 313 footnote references, and Mr. Welch's fantastic assault on Eisenhower, *The Politician*, is weighed down by a hundred pages of bibliography and notes. The entire right-wing movement of our time is a parade of experts, study groups, monographs, footnotes, and bibliographies. Sometimes the right-wing striving for scholarly depth and an inclusive world view has startling consequences: Mr. Welch, for example, has charged that the popularity of Arnold Toynbee's historical work is the consequence of a plot on the part of Fabians, "Labour Party bosses in England," and various members of the Anglo-American "liberal establishment" to overshadow the much more truthful and illuminating work of Oswald Spengler.[9]

What distinguishes the paranoid style is not, then, the absence of verifiable facts (though it is occasionally true that in his extravagant passion for facts the paranoid occasionally manufactures them), but rather the curious leap in imagination that is always made at some critical point in the recital of events. John Robison's tract on the Illuminati followed a pattern that has been repeated for over a century and a half. For page after page he patiently records the details he has been able to accumulate about the history of the Illuminati. Then, suddenly, the French Revolution has taken place, and the Illuminati have brought it about. What is missing is not veracious information about the organization, but sensible judgment about what can cause a revolution. The plausibility the paranoid style has for those who find it plausible lies, in good measure, in this appearance of the most careful, conscientious, and seemingly coherent application to detail, the laborious accumulation of what can be taken as convincing evidence for the most fantastic conclusions, the careful preparation for the

[9] *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society* (n.p., 1961), pp. 42–3.

big leap from the undeniable to the unbelievable. The singular thing about all this laborious work is that the passion for factual evidence does not, as in most intellectual exchanges, have the effect of putting the paranoid spokesman into effective two-way communication with the world outside his group—least of all with those who doubt his views. He has little real hope that his evidence will convince a hostile world. His effort to amass it has rather the quality of a defensive act which shuts off his receptive apparatus and protects him from having to attend to disturbing considerations that do not fortify his ideas. He has all the evidence he needs; he is not a receiver, he is a transmitter.

Since I have drawn so heavily on American examples, I would like to emphasize again that the paranoid style is an international phenomenon. Nor is it confined to modern times. Studying the millennial sects of Europe from the eleventh to the sixteenth century, Norman Cohn finds, in his brilliant book *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, a persistent psychological complex that closely resembles what I have been considering—a style made up of certain marked preoccupations and fantasies: "the megalomanic view of oneself as the Elect, wholly good, abominably persecuted yet assured of ultimate triumph; the attribution of gigantic and demonic powers to the adversary; the refusal to accept the ineluctable limitations and imperfections of human existence, such as transience, dissention, conflict, fallibility whether intellectual or moral; the obsession with inerrable prophecies . . . systematized misinterpretations, always gross and often grotesque . . . ruthlessness directed towards an end which by its very nature cannot be realised—towards a total and final solution such as cannot be attained at any actual time or in any concrete situation, but only in the timeless and autistic realm of phantasy."[1]

[1] *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London, 1957), pp. 309–10; see also pp. 58–74. In the Middle Ages millenarianism flourished among

The recurrence of the paranoid style over a long span of time and in different places suggests that a mentality disposed to see the world in the paranoid's way may always be present in some considerable minority of the population. But the fact that movements employing the paranoid style are not constant but come in successive episodic waves suggests that the paranoid disposition is mobilized into action chiefly by social conflicts that involve ultimate schemes of values and that bring fundamental fears and hatreds, rather than negotiable interests, into political action. Catastrophe or the fear of catastrophe is most likely to elicit the syndrome of paranoid rhetoric.

In American experience, ethnic and religious conflicts, with their threat of the submergence of whole systems of values, have plainly been the major focus for militant and suspicious minds of this sort, but elsewhere class conflicts have also mobilized such energies. The paranoid tendency is aroused by a confrontation of opposed interests which are (or are felt to be) totally irreconcilable, and thus by nature not susceptible to the normal political processes of bargain and compromise. The situation becomes worse when the representatives of a particular political interest—perhaps because of the very unrealistic and unrealizable nature of their demands—cannot make themselves felt in the political process. Feeling that they have no access to political bargaining or the making of decisions, they find their original conception of the world of power as omnipotent, sinister, and malicious fully confirmed. They see only the consequences of power—and this through distorting lenses—and have little chance to observe its actual

the poor, the oppressed, and the hopeless. In Anglo-American experience, as Samuel Shepperson has observed, such movements have never been confined to these classes, but have had a more solid middle-class foundation. "The Comparative Study of Millenarian Movements," in Sylvia Thrupp (ed.): *Millennial Dreams in Action* (The Hague, 1962), pp. 49–52.

machinery. L. B. Namier once said that "the crowning attainment of historical study" is to achieve "an intuitive sense of how things do not happen."[2] It is precisely this kind of awareness that the paranoid fails to develop. He has a special resistance of his own, of course, to such awareness, but circumstances often deprive him of exposure to events that might enlighten him. We are all sufferers from history, but the paranoid is a double sufferer, since he is afflicted not only by the real world, with the rest of us, but by his fantasies as well.

[2] L. B. Namier: "History," in Fritz Stern (ed.): *The Varieties of History* (New York, 1956), p. 375.

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