

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

Plots Thicken Conspiracy Theories Just Roll-On

By JIM WRIGHT
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A NEW YORK physician, recognized as an authority on both the John Kennedy assassination and on gunshot wounds, was allowed to examine the post-mortem pictures and X rays of the murdered president. He found that the conspiracy theories just do not fit the evidence.

According to Dr. John K. Latimer of Columbia University medical school, the pictures "eliminate any doubt completely" on the validity of the Warren Commission's judgment that Lee Harvey Oswald fired all of the shots that struck President Kennedy.

I'd bet, however, that the latest findings, conclusive as they may be, will not even slow down the conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theorists are not interested in evidence that fails to support their own particular theory.

THOUGH THERE have been as many versions as there are stars in the sky, the basic theory is that the 1963 shooting was done by more than one man.

The Warren Commission's findings to the contrary did not lay this theory to rest. Far from it. By 1966 at the height of the conspiracy chase, a sizable shelf of anti-Commission books had hit the market. Furthermore, these found a ready audience among the public. A



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poll by Louis Harris in October, 1966, indicated that the American people rejected the Commission's 1-assassin conclusion by a margin of 3-2.

In order to believe in the white-wash point of view with truly fierce dedication it was necessary to accept the assumption that the chief justice of the Supreme Court, leaders of both major parties, highly respected physicians, the FBI, the CIA and the White House all worked together in the most devious and intricate plot of all time to cover up the "real truth."

The conspiracy explanation that always comes up when disaster or misfortune occurs seems to be popular because of two reasons: The theory that evil plotting in high places causes things to go wrong is not only dramatic, but it's a simple explanation, requiring little or no thought.

CONSPIRACY stories are used by adults the way ghost stories are used by youngsters—we can scare ourselves without really having to do any hard thinking about causes and factors.

The readiness to accept conspiracy as the explanation for any violent event is not limited to any century, any party or any income group. Geniuses can leap to unsupported conclusions with just as much agility and foolishness as any dunce.

In their eagerness to believe the worst, conspiracy-chasers have managed to overlook the absence of evidence to support their theories. Some are just as likely to ignore or deny evidence that is directly contrary to their several theories.

That being the case, I don't seriously think that Dr. John Latimer's report on the Kennedy evidence is going to convince

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many of the people who have made a career out of conspiracy theories.

There was a time, not so long ago, when conservatives were said—chiefly by liberals—to be eternally eager to believe in conspiracies as the explanation for all doleful events.

In recent years, though, it has seemed to this not particularly objective judge that progressives have taken all the prizes at finding a conspiracy under every headline.

In addition to all of the feverish activity surrounding the allegations of assassination conspiracy, the more hyperthyroid liberals got a considerable amount of mileage out of "the military-industrial complex."

A very popular conspiracy-villain during the latter half of the 1960s, the MIC (as conspiracy fans affectionately call it) was seen as the secret cause of everything from locusts in Ghana to Junior's trauma in basic training.

Blamed, of course, for all wars, past, present and future, the villains conspiring in the military-industrial plotting rooms were often dramatized in film and novel as would-be traitors, assassins, world conquerors or worse.

Though the military-industrial conspiracy fad took the prize for width and depth during the 1960s, I think the most remarkable conspiracy fashion was the alleged plot of the nation's police to commit "genocide" against the Black Panthers.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, the Washington Post and other national publications carried the story—stating it as an established fact—that 28 Black Panthers had been killed by police in 1968 and 1969. This figure "fact" was in turn picked up by many supposedly responsible liberal spokesmen and civil-rights leaders and the police conspiracy deplored at great length. Speeches about "the series of gun battles," "the lethal, undeclared war," "the open season on Panthers" abounded. Columnist Carl Rowan decried "this nationally orchestrated police campaign to turn the guns on the Panthers and wipe them out."

Finally, after more than a year of this sort of thing, New Yorker magazine sent writer Edward Jay Epstein to track down the truth about the 28. It turned out that the number had come from the Panthers' lawyer, who had given it to newsmen because, as he told Epstein, it "seemed to be a safe number," adding that he believed "the actual number of Panthers murdered by the police is many times that figure."

There simply was nothing there to support the "genocide conspiracy" story. Yet it was trumpeted from coast to coast by the national media for more than a year. Those who used it without questioning it were apparently so eager to believe in the lawyer's story of "a national scheme . . . to destroy and commit genocide" that they shut off all doubts.

Personally, I don't think much of intricate, devilishly clever and hitherto-undisclosed plots in high places as an all-purpose explanation. It isn't that I doubt human capacity for evil and mischief, it's just that I have never seen any humans with the skill and effectiveness to pull off the Satanic conspiracies featured in most of these stories.

WHAT THESE stories ask us to believe is that (1) some evil genius has come up with a perfect plot, taking all contingencies into account, (2) that the organizers have then managed to recruit and train operatives who are able to understand the plot and execute it perfectly and (3) that everybody concerned has kept his mouth shut about it before, during and after.

Requirement (1) is tough, (2) is tougher and (3) is humanly impossible.

It's hard to believe that a species that is all thumbs at making its plans work is suddenly going to turn clever in carrying out its plots and machinations.