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Conspiracy in our midst

It isn't necessary, as a rule, to blame conspiracy for major developments in the society. The tenacious existence say, of a military-industrial complex is no conspiracy; neither is the exploitation of black people, nor is the oppression of women.

The way in which a system of political and economic institutions operates, and the nature of its ruling class, goes far toward explaining why things happen or don't happen. In other words, the system itself is the conspiracy, and one particular form that the conspiracy might take is a conspiracy of silence in which a communality of interest dictates a command not to upset the established order.

Control has been institutionalized, and as long as control can be effectively exercised through the institutions it isn't necessary to oppress through planned treachery. Thus, we know that attempts to cause profound social change have been invariably co-opted. In line with this, attempts by sincere people to change their personal behavior are made difficult by the institutional roadblocks which are designed to maintain existing values.

We get psychological hangups.

We get personal contradictions analogous to the contradictions we find in the political economy: Not only does the society have, say, unemployment and poverty, but it also has lots of paranoia and hostility.

It is said that the incidence of paranoia among black people is very high, but this is understandable in light of the systematic discrimination they are faced with. What this means is that a lot of what passes for paranoid behavior may be rational responses to a truly hostile environment. In

any case, what is real and what is manufactured aggravate each other, but it's important that the two be separated if a person is not to be made to "adjust" to what is oppressing him.

The contradictions in the society work ultimately to upset the controlling institutions.

Direct coercion may be required. Political assassinations occur, but this is not to say that all are perpetrated by the ruling class by any means: We have assassinations and confidence is shaken.

John F. Kennedy . . . Martin Luther King . . . Robert F. Kennedy . . . Medgar Evers . . . more than a score of Black Panthers . . . How can confidence be restored? By finding out the facts once and for all, by dignifying the possibility of conspiracy because conspiracy has permeated the brains of the people who are not satisfied with the answers given them.

To this end a number of computer experts have established in Washington a National Committee to Investigate Assassinations (NCTIA). A project is already underway to organize and store in computer-based form all significant factual evidence pertaining to the John F. Kennedy assassination, to make the evidence available to researchers, to index material now located in all

parts of the United States and, ultimately, to reconstruct part of the planning for the crime.

One of the principals in the project, Richard E. Sprague, president of Personal Data Services, Hartsdale, N.Y. is author of an extensive analysis in the Newtonville-based magazine *Computers and Automation*, which asserts that at least four gunmen firing from four locations, none of them Oswald, were involved in the JFK slaying.

Providing a new forum for the conspiracy theory is the *Computers and Automation* editor, Edmund C. Berkeley, a mathematician and actuary. On the basis of probability theory and tell-tale facts, Berkeley asserts conspiracy on the killings of JFK and King, and "evidence which points toward conspiracy" in the killing of Robert Kennedy.

But even if the conspiracy theory is ultimately proven wrong, the need for a NCTIA stems from the rational perception that there are too many unanswered questions, as well as a basic distrust of those who provide the answers.

"Nowhere in the United States can concerned Americans apply to have their questions about political assassinations answered reasonably," says Berkeley. "Only a few agencies, such as courts and congressional committees, have the power to issue subpoenas, compel the appearance of witnesses, and ask direct questions. The rights of the people to know are defective."

(With two garbles corrected, by means of a telephone call to Mr. Deitch.)