

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT WYNTON MARSALIS PARES TO SHAPE A BILL WITH JAZZ GREATS MORTON AND MONK

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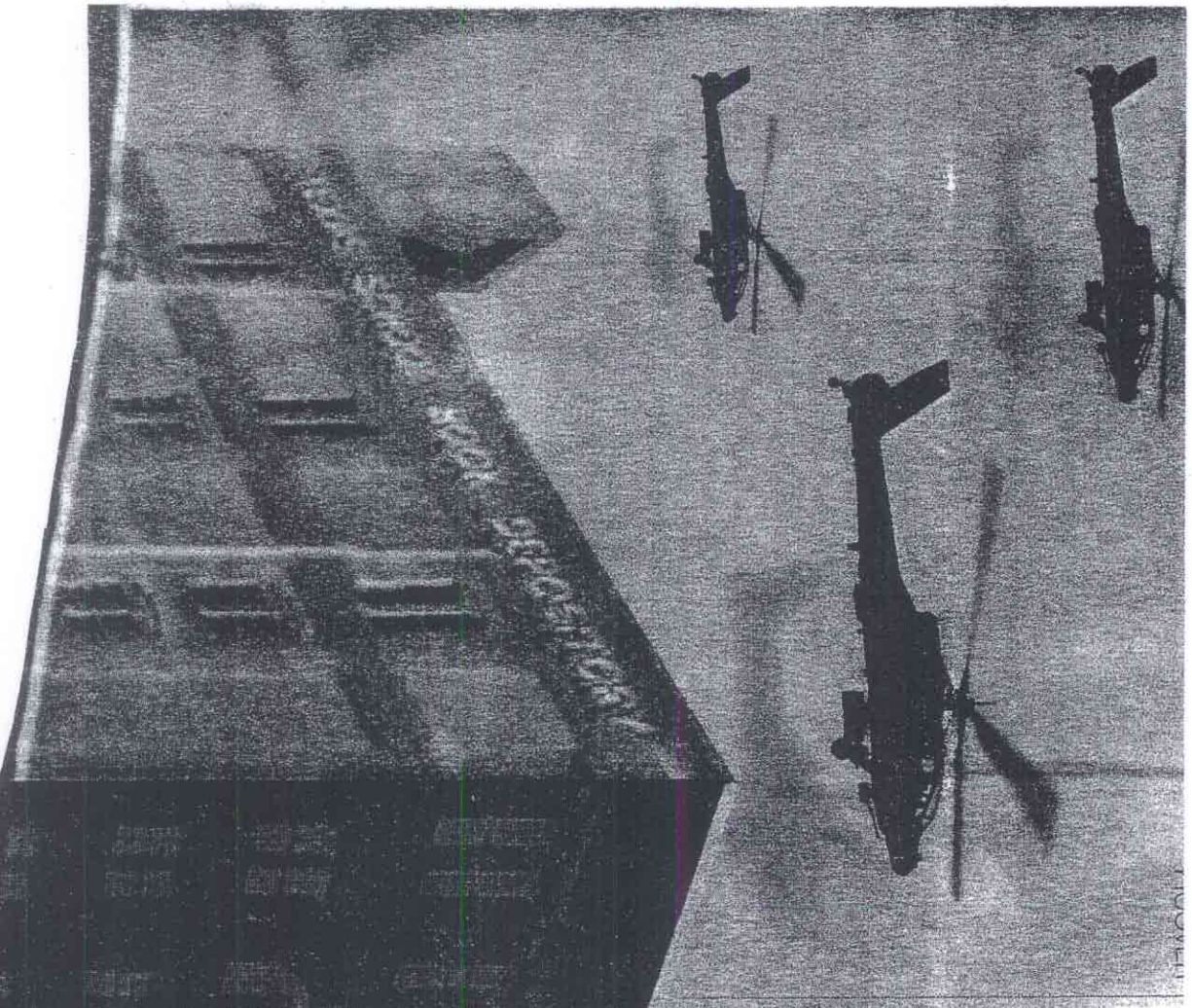
Even

our heroes  
have

# enemies

By  
BOB  
HOOVER

**C**hristopher Marlowe, popular playwright, was stabbed to death in an altercation in 1593. Lee Oswald, accused killer of President Kennedy, was shot to death while in police custody in 1963. Vincent Foster, deputy counsel to President Clinton, was found dead of a self-inflicted gunshot in 1993. Each death was investi-



CHRISTOPHER MERVIS

gated by authorities and the cases closed ... or so it appeared. Yet, these incidents and a host of other seemingly routine events, refuse to be explained away by official findings. They continue to feed America's insatiable appetite to believe it lives in constant threat from one conspiracy or another.

**Continued on Page C-10**

**Conspiracy and  
America's appetite  
for  
paranoia**

# COVER STORY

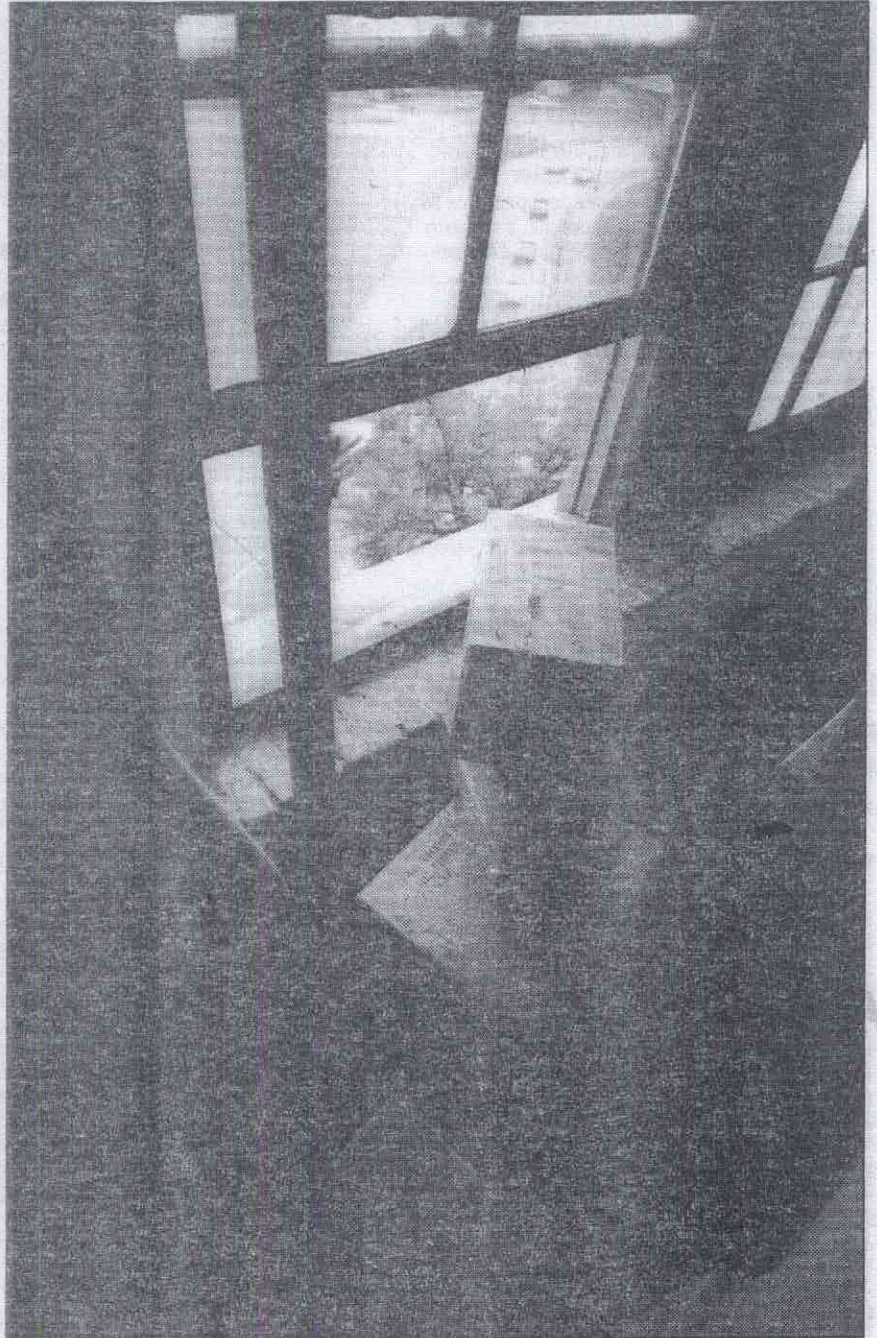
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Associated Press



Martha Rial/Post-Gazette



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**Clockwise from top:** Vincent Foster Jr., when he was still an attorney in Little Rock, Ark., with his wife, Lisa. Foster's suicide in 1993 has fueled speculation and rumors of conspiracy. A photo of the inside of the Texas School Book Depository, taken on Nov. 22, 1963, after the assassination of President Kennedy, shows the view from where Lee Harvey Oswald had the president in his sights. Author Harold Weisberg, 82, who has written 10 books on the Kennedy assassination so far.

**CONTINUED** FROM PAGE G-1

Conspiracy and the fear it breeds bloom in profusion today, in the skies from black helicopters carrying troops of occupation to the medical world, where AIDS is thought to be a plot to destroy one segment of the population or another.

The deaths of Marlowe, Oswald and Foster are a timeline in which this growth can be charted.

Marlowe's assailant, Ingram Frizer, was cleared when it was ruled he attacked Marlowe in self-defense.

Jack Ruby, who shot Oswald on national TV in front of a cadre of police, drew the death sentence for the crime, but died in prison in 1967 awaiting a new trial following a successful appeal.

Foster's death is officially a suicide, but the manner of his death remains a focus in the congressional investigations of the Whitewater and White House travel office controversies.

None of the dead men has been allowed to rest in peace. Marlowe's killing has been the subject of articles, histories and fiction, with the most recent one by the late novelist Anthony Burgess.

Oswald has drawn even more attention, from such sources as novelist Don DeLillo to filmmaker Oliver Stone. His body was exhumed to verify that he was indeed dead, but despite positive identification by medical records, some still insist the body is not the "real Oswald."

Foster's death is the subject of a continuing investigation led by Christopher Ruddy, a writer whom the Greensburg Tribune-Review hired specifically for that purpose. Others involved include a U.S. Senate committee and an organization called the Western Journalism Center. No less than the London Times is requesting a "proper investigation" despite examinations of the case by the FBI, federal park police and Virginia authorities.

These unrelated deaths, separated by 400 years, are really small parts of that enduring cultural phenomenon called conspiracy. Popular perceptions that secret plots were obscuring the truth took shape in 16th-century Europe, says Curt Breight, who teaches English at the University of Pittsburgh and whose new book, "Surveillance: Militarism and Drama in The Elizabethan Era," will be published in Britain later this year.

"The Renaissance period saw the rise of the state, causing the rise in military and naval expansion," Breight said. "And that means, you're going to need an intelligence arm — spies. These intelligence operations created a competitive atmosphere that nourished a sense of conspiracy on a global

scale."

Adding to that atmosphere was the 1513 book "The Prince" by Niccolo Machiavelli, a Renaissance handbook on acquiring and wielding political power.

"There's still a debate if 'The Prince' is about creating covert forms of rule" rather than only statecraft, said Breight.

Finally, events in 16th-century England served to make conspiracy a familiar presence in society. The government's campaign to take power away from the Catholic Church in the mid-1500s created an "us vs. them" atmosphere. "The government began to institute treason laws, quashing the opposition through the legal apparatus," said Breight. "Conspiracy became bound up with activities against the state." But, added Breight, once groups were identified as challenging "the authority of the hierarchy, it made all other signs of authority look suspect."

Even Protestant religious groups such as the Anabaptists and Quakers (who "supported violence" in their first years, Breight said) were both the proponents and targets of conspiracy charges.

Contemporary historians link Marlowe's death to the cloak-and-dagger times of Elizabethan England. The Cambridge-educated writer and Shakespeare contemporary was best known for "Dr. Faustus" and other popular dramas, but his skills were apparently used for less public endeavors.

"He was an agent for the government, most likely recruited at Cambridge," said Breight. "Like a lot of writers then, he was broke and needed the money. Much of this stuff [about Renaissance spying] didn't come to light until the 20th century, and now there are some really interesting things coming out of the research."

Breight cited the 1994 history of the case, "The Reckoning," by British writer Charles Nicholl, who speculates that Marlowe was killed to silence his knowledge of secret dealings in the Netherlands by Sir Robert Cecil, a leading figure in the English hierarchy.

It was in a Deptford "safehouse," frequented by agents, where Marlowe was stabbed above the right eye and killed.

From this environment later came the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, marked in England today on Nov. 5 as Guy Fawkes Night (or Day), after the conspirator who was executed for his role in an attempt to blow up the houses of Parliament and assassinate King James I.

"From what we know today, the Gunpowder Plot has all the earmarks of a covert government operation with Cecil at the heart of it," Breight said. The exposure of an alleged conspiracy by Catholics would give the government an excuse for more re-

pression of the Catholic opposition.

**W**e now appear to be in a new age of conspiracy as the 20th century nears its end, but, in truth, we are heirs to the British penchant for intrigue.

America has been a hothouse of conspiracy and paranoia since the first settlers.

"Belief in conspiracies was at the heart of the European founding of America," said Breight, "and was part of the need to gain internal order."

The New World attracted the Quakers and other outsider movements because of its promise of freedom. But, because the state (in this case the colonial representatives of the British hierarchy) has little tolerance for fringe groups, which can challenge that internal control, governments will cast those groups as subversive as a reason to move against them.

The conspiracy soon changed to brand Catholics in mainly Protestant America as threats, particularly after the Revolutionary War, when immigration from Catholic countries increased.

Historians such as Richard Hofstadter and David Bennett cite the growth of the "nativist" movement in the United States during the early 1800s as an example of the "paranoid style" of politics that blames outsiders or "aliens" as threats to the American way of life.

Protests and violence against Catholics and other minorities occurred, spurred by such groups as the Know-Nothings, the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner and, after the Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan.

Other conspiracies involved an international cabal of bankers, usually Jewish, who sought to control the nation's currency and a group of European atheists, called the Illuminati, who plotted to destroy Christian America by removing the right to private property. This theory first surfaced in 1798 and was espoused by even the president of Yale.

By the 20th century, all the longstanding conspirators had been joined by anarchists and other foreigners as outside threats, gradually giving way to communism and the "Red raids" of the 1920s, McCarthyism after World War II and its role in the paranoia of the Cold War.

**W**hile plotters and their deeds have long been common in Western culture, the public's perception of who these plotters are has changed.

Today's enemy is the government itself, at times in league with other henchmen for the "New World Order."

This turnabout is reflected in two major

events of the 1990s — the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City last year and the '94 congressional elections, in which the Republican Party pledged to reduce or eliminate major elements of the federal government once elected. But it began much earlier.

For Harold Weisberg, the weather vane began its turn on a Friday afternoon in the fall of 1963 — Nov. 22, a date many Americans know by heart.

"I was out in the henhouse, and I had one of those new transistor radios. That's how I heard about Kennedy," he said. The news would eventually lead him to become one of the pioneers in the greatest conspiracy hunt in American history.

A former newspaper reporter and investigator for the U.S. Senate, Weisberg took up poultry raising in suburban Washington in

the late 1950s, building it into a prize-winning, successful business with such customers as former first lady Mamie Eisenhower.

But, the arrival of a military helicopter base next door forced him out of business. Aided by a damage settlement with the U.S. Defense Department, Weisberg was phasing out his flock and mulling a return to writing when JFK was shot.

"I listened to the radio and watched TV for the rest of the weekend. The reports coming out of Dallas convinced me immediately that it would be impossible for Oswald to get a fair trial because of so much loose talk by the Dallas cops."

What made Weisberg skeptical at first was how quickly the case against Oswald was built. Barely 15 minutes after the shooting, a description fitting the former defector to the Soviet Union was broadcast. Then a chain of curious events, sparked by the slaying of a Dallas police officer about 40 minutes after the assassination, led police to arrest Oswald in a movie theater.

By 5 p.m., 4½ hours after the shooting, J. Edgar Hoover radioed President Johnson in Air Force One en route to Washington that Oswald was the shooter. From Friday night, to Sunday morning, Americans had frequent glimpses of the suspect on TV answering reporters' questions as he was moved around Dallas police headquarters, including the one reply, "I'm just a patsy."

Oswald had no legal representation and Dallas police made no record of their interrogations. He was first charged with killing the patrolman, then, early Saturday morning, with Kennedy's slaying.

By midday Sunday, he was dead, dying in the same hospital where Kennedy was taken. It was troubling enough that Oswald was gunned down in a basement full of cops by a strip-club owner. What really jolted the nation was that it happened on live TV.

The weekend's events deeply disturbed

Weisberg, who had come to admire Kennedy, when, as a presidential candidate, he defended his religion before skeptical Protestant ministers.

Studying the assassination became Weisberg's project and eventually his mission. At first, he collected what little data there was during 1964, amid the investigation by the presidential commission on the assassination chaired by Chief Justice Earl Warren.

Weisberg was ready by the time the Warren Commission Report was released late in 1964. He published his first book, "Whitewash," in February 1965, after a publisher reneged on a deal, he said. "Finally, I didn't have any choice. I had to publish it myself, at my own expense," said Weisberg.

It was among the first criticisms of the government's report and the first to challenge the evidence against Oswald. It's now known that President Johnson and others intended the prestigious commission to quell conspiracy suspicions, particularly because of Oswald's connection to the Soviet Union.

Weisberg's 10th book, "Never Again," was released last year by Carroll and Graff. It followed soon after Weisberg wrote his indignant rebuttal, "Case Open," to the 1993 best seller "Case Closed," by Gerald Posner, which endorsed the Warren Report.

He's 82 today, plagued by circulatory problems that force him to elevate his feet for long periods during the day and avoid the steep stairs to his basement, where his chief work for 32 years is carefully filed in four rows of metal cabinets in a bright, clean room.

"I can't go down there anymore, but you can go. Anybody — within reason — is free to go and use my files." Even Posner spent several days in Weisberg's basement, using the files and his copying machine.

More files are stored at nearby Hood College in archives it established for Weisberg's research. The college will get everything after he dies.

Weisberg's not sure of the number of papers, mostly on the letterheads of various federal agencies, but he estimates the count at 300,000 pages.

He obtained most of this material by filing requests and then 13 lawsuits against the federal government. His efforts were strengthened by the Freedom of Information Act, first passed in the late 1960s. But the government was uncooperative, despite the law, he said.

He and his wife live modestly in a one-story '50s style house. An unused swimming pool filled with rainwater and leaves and a hilly, overgrown lot added to the sense that his Kennedy efforts have drained much of his resources for a comfortable old age.

For a brief moment, his usual cheeriness

was replaced by resignation and fatigue. "Sometimes, I can't take the strain. It gets to me," he said. "There are lots of nights when I got less than two hours sleep working."

"It's been a burden, but it helps to believe that my work has given strength to those who were afraid to take this thing on. ... Now, I just want to be left alone to do my work."

**W**hat distinguishes Weisberg from "the assassination industry" — as Posner has described the continuing output of conspiracy theories and their newsletters, groups, books and

even two national conferences, last year's chaired by Dr. Cyril Wecht — is that "he really works hard to maintain his independence," said James Lesar.

An attorney who worked with the author on several suits since the 1970s, Lesar is now president of the Assassination Archives and Research Center in Washington, D.C. "He's more careful about the facts than most researchers, and he's objective."

Lesar's center, located near Ford's Theater, where Lincoln was shot, is a reflection of how deeply the JFK conspiracy has taken hold in our culture, partly because of Weisberg. Founded in 1984 by the late Bud Fensterwald, a pioneer attorney in the FOIA wars, it is a prime repository of released documents which, 33 years after the assassination, continue to pour from government files.

What really opened the floodgates was the 1991 JFK Assassination Records Collection Act, which established a review board to handle document requests. By last year, more than 250,000 pages of CIA files were sent to the archives; it anticipates another 300,000 from the FBI.

It's a belated tribute, of sorts, to Weisberg, who for nearly 30 years fought federal bureaucracy with a typewriter. Reams of data, enough to fill his basement archives to overflowing, await researchers. Is the answer to Kennedy's death "out there" in a file cabinet waiting to be discovered?

Does the federal government hold among its own papers proof that it conspired to kill the president?

"No, I don't think so," Weisberg said. "I have never said that Kennedy was killed by the government. What I have discovered on my own is that that the government conspired to stop any real investigation of the crime and they did it right from the beginning."

"Any hope of knowing who killed Kennedy is slender and improbable now," agrees Lesar, "and the public is angry because it believes the government got away with something. It no longer trusts what the government tells it, even though the news

media continues to prop up anyone who supports the government's version of Kennedy's death."

An example of Lesar's criticism is this conclusion by Evan Thomas, chief of Newsweek's Washington bureau and author of "The Very Best Men," a profile of the pioneers in the early days of the CIA:

"In the end, the Warren Commission was probably right: Kennedy was killed by a lone nut, who in turn was killed by another lone nut. But conspiracy theories die hard: More people believe the wackiest conspiracy theory of all — the CIA-LBJ-Pentagon plot cooked up by movie producer Oliver Stone — than they do the Warren Commission, the combined effort of senators, statesmen and Supreme Court justices.

"The irony, of course, is that in their desire to reassure the public that the institutions of government would persevere, the worthies of the Washington establishment produced the opposite effect. The rush to judgment left many Americans wondering if their government was telling the truth."

Kevin Phillips is an author who writes about political trends in society. In his 1994 book "Arrogant Capital," he dates the beginning of the public's mistrust in government to Nov. 22, 1963.

He said that polls taken before that date showed that nearly 80 percent of the country believed the U.S. government was trustworthy. By '94, the rate was 19 percent.

Of course, there was much beside the JFK assassination to damage the government's reputation in those years — the conduct of the Vietnam War, the exposures of the Watergate scandal and resignation of President Nixon, revelations of domestic spying by the CIA and the illegal activities of Hoover's FBI.

The willingness to accept conspiracy as a fact of everyday life was nurtured and grew.

Remember the "October Surprise?" A congressional panel investigated charges that the Reagan-Bush campaign of 1980 made a deal with Iran to delay release of American hostages until after the presidential election in exchange for special deals later. Those claims were rejected.

The charges surfaced again when President Bush ran for re-election in '92 but weren't the only conspiracy allegations he faced. Such commentators as William Safire also accused him of deceiving Congress and obstructing justice by secretly aiding Iraq's Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran in a plot using billions of federal dollars that passed through an Italian bank.

None of those charges were proved.

The effect, however, was a continued crumbling of the credibility of the federal government, which now is suspected of everything from storing the bodies of dead space aliens to being the willing partner in a United Nations plan to dominate the globe.

That fear, which links the Illuminati of

1798, the aims of a Roman Catholic pope and the power of Jewish banking conspiracy with an enduring isolationist view of the United Nations can be seen in full flower in the 1991 book "The New World Order," by the Rev. Pat Robertson, televangelist, sometime presidential candidate and key figure in the Christian Coalition. Robertson includes the assassination of Abraham Lincoln as part of this international conspiracy by bankers.

He believes that "a single thread runs from the White House to the State Department to the Council on Foreign Relations to the Trilateral Commission to secret societies to extreme New Agers" in a giant plot to rule the world.

Robertson is restating the same fear that worried the early republic and continued into the 1950s to become a cornerstone of the John Birch Society, some of whose former members are active in today's militia movement.

A 1963 New York Times story reported that Birch Society literature claimed that 35,000 Communist Chinese troops were hiding in Mexico ready to attack San Diego; that the federal government agreed to turn over to a Soviet Army officer complete control of U.S. forces; and that a U.S. Army training exercise in Georgia was a cover for

SEE **PARANOIA**, PAGE G-12

#### **PARANOIA** FROM PAGE G-10

a U.N. operation to take over America.

Birchers gradually faded, but it took the flash of a bomb — the terrorist blast in Oklahoma City April 19, 1995 — to reveal their progeny. The explosion was blamed on sympathizers of an underground of armed groups using various names — Posse Comitatus, Aryan Nation, the Order, the Militia of Montana.

Described by Kenneth Stern in his new book about the militia movement, "A Force Upon the Plain (Simon & Schuster) as a "mass social movement," these groups contain all of the elements that made up earlier American reactionaries — racism, religious intolerance and nativism.

All of these elements can be found in a 1978 paperback novel, "The Turner Diaries," a favorite of Timothy McVeigh's, a suspect in the Oklahoma City bombing.

Written by white supremacist William Pierce using the pen name



Andrew MacDonald, the book describes the "Great Revolution" when white Americans overturn "the System," take over the country and proceed to kill blacks, Jews and Asians worldwide with nuclear weapons.

In the 1990s, material from the Militia of Montana cites the existence of such international groups as the World Constitution and Parliament Association and the World Federalists as proof of international takeover plots recycled from the Birch Society.

One of the symbols that new world order troops are in the country is a black helicopter. Militias report hundreds of sightings and the copters are the subject of a book from a right-wing publisher, IllumiNet Press, "Black Helicopters Over America: Strikeforce for the New World Order" by Jim Keith.

The Birch Society had the threat of communism as a source for its paranoia; now, as Stern writes, when the Soviet Union collapsed, "America had no 'logical enemy.' The paranoia became internally focused. Washington . . . became the new manifestation of evil."

Vincent Foster's death July 20, 1993 in a federal park across the Potomac from Washington, D.C., was initially viewed as a suicide by local police until an aide to first lady Hillary Clinton admitted removing documents from Foster's White House office shortly after his death. The file involved the Whitewater investment scheme of the Clinton's, now the focus of a special investigation.

Once that fact was disclosed, Foster's death instantly became more fuel for the country's conspiracy mill. Published accounts of the case discuss bullet trajectories, blood, missing witnesses, intimidation by police, forged notes, missing evidence, carpet fibers.

The stories read eerily like those skeptical accounts of the JFK assassination. The Foster death is being studied by the Whitewater special prosecutor, who has ordered new medical tests. It's not farfetched to believe that the body of the onetime special counsel to the president will be exhumed, like Oswald's.

The rhythm of conspiracy, once background noise, is now a dominant theme of everyday life.

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*Bob Hoover is the Post-Gazette book editor.*