

## ABSTRACT

### THE CONSPIRACY ARGUMENT AS RHETORICAL GENRE

EARL GEORGE CREPS, III

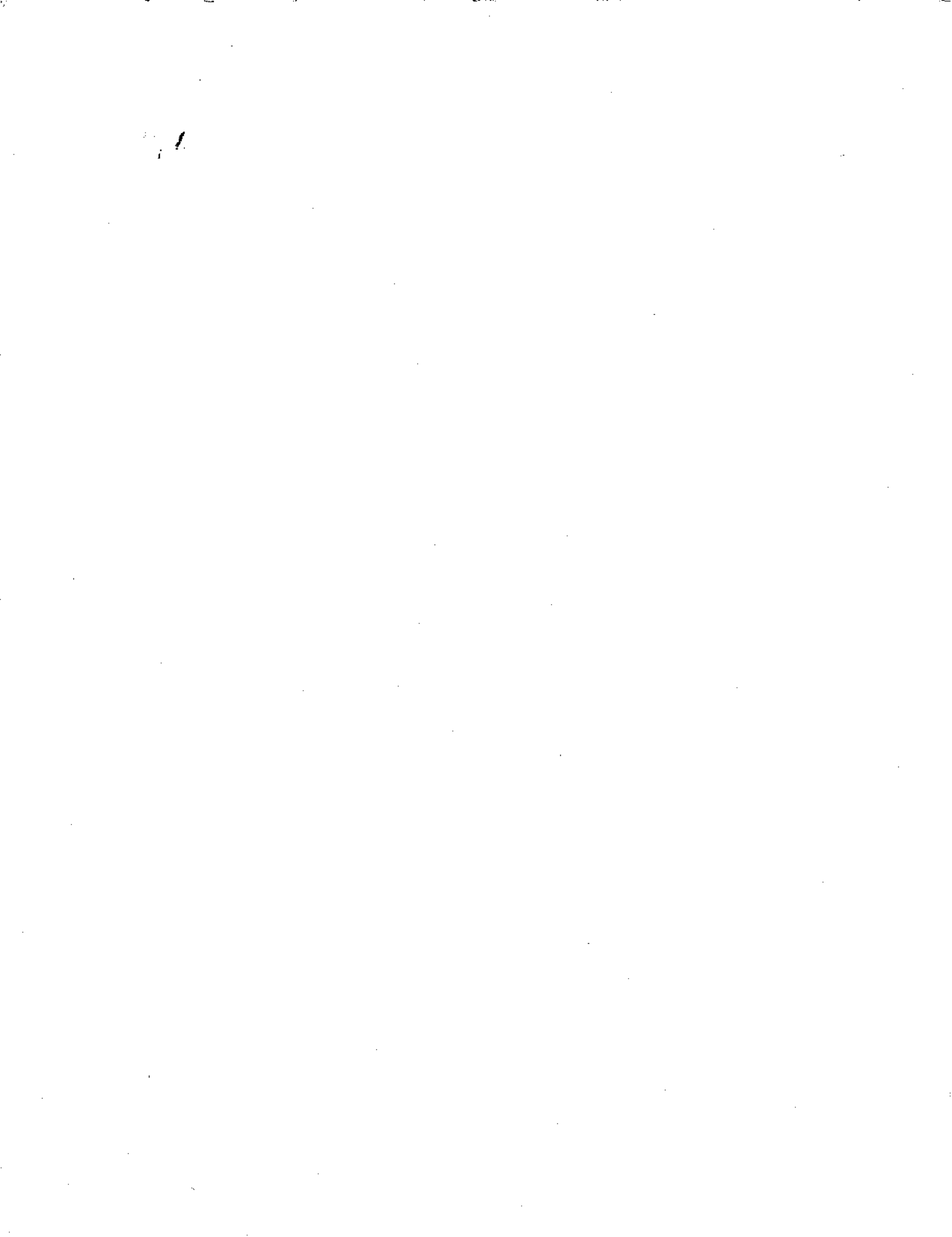
Conspiracy allegations are omnipresent in American history. This dissertation is a study of the generic aspects of the conspiratorial argument. The inquiry operates from two basic premises: (1) conspiracy discourse is an identifiable rhetorical genre, and; (2) an analysis of this genre will provide insight into the ways in which discourse operates to resolve the rhetorical problem posed by evil. Chapter I opens with a brief outline of the study and presents a justification for such an approach to conspiracy. Moreover, the concept of rhetorical "genre" to be used in the study is defined, after Campbell and Jamieson, as being composed of substantive, stylistic, and situational forms bound together by an "internal dynamic."

Chapter II argues that the rhetorical problem posed by evil is the "dynamic" that motivates and sustains the genre, that is: each form making up the genus functions to resolve (or "make sense" out of) this problem by explaining the cause of evil (the Plot) and thereby shifting blame and guilt away from the community. Chapter III is a

review of the primary and secondary literature on conspiracy. Secondary sources examined are from rhetorical, socio-political, and psychological research. This survey culminates in the formulation of tentative hypotheses designed to "map" the basic features of the genus.

Chapter IV tests the hypotheses against a sample of discourse drawn from the Red Scare era (A. Mitchell Palmer's 1920 article, "The Case Against the 'Reds'"). Chapter V tests the hypotheses against an exemplar drawn from the conspiracy interpretations of the John F. Kennedy assassination (Mark Lane's 1966 bestseller, Rush to Judgment). The propositional and strategic forms of the exemplars are reconstructed in detail and the information obtained is used to assess the validity of the definitional hypotheses.

Chapter VI presents the study's conclusions. Although certain modifications were necessary, the generic "map" of conspiracy argument remained centered on three basic forms: a deductive/causal propositional substance, a dramatic/massively documented style, and a situation of perceived social stress. Finally, the study closes with suggestions for further research on the ethos of the conspiracy advocate and the question of sub-categories (e.g., extremist vs. mainstream) within the conspiracy genre.



NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

THE CONSPIRACY ARGUMENT AS RHETORICAL GENRE

A DISSERTATION  
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for the degree

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Field of Speech

by

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The central theme of the American  
paranoid style [is] that just when  
you think you're making out, you're  
really being had!

--David Brion Davis

Just because he was paranoid does  
not mean that nobody was after him.

--Mark Lane on Rev. Jim Jones

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION:

#### THE GENERIC STUDY OF CONSPIRACY ARGUMENT

Conspiracy is as natural as breathing.  
And since the struggles for advantage  
nearly always have a rhetorical strain,  
we believe that systematic contemplation  
of them forces itself upon the student  
of rhetoric.

-- Kenneth Burke

Conspiracy allegations are omnipresent in American history. Some segments of our nation, it seems, have always been willing to accept the charge of conspiracy as an explanation for events. The rhetoric of the American revolution, for example, was grounded in a conspiratorial interpretation of British colonial policy. Similarly, later conflicts between the Federalists and the Republicans and the North and South were dominated by charges of plots and plotters. The tradition was sustained by groups such as the Know-Nothings and the Anti-Masonic Party who rallied national organizations around the need to counter "subversive" elements.<sup>1</sup> This list could be amended with more recent examples such as the assassinations of the 1960's,

our entry into the war in Viet Nam, and the Karen Silkwood case. If one adds to this collection of sincerely believed arguments those conspiracy claims made solely for political or strategic advantage, it is clear that this theme represents a major component of American discourse. Indeed, one observer has ventured that there may have been 100 alleged conspiracies for each real plot in our past.<sup>2</sup> The 1980's promise to be much the same.<sup>3</sup>

Richard Hofstadter has attempted to explain the proliferation of conspiracy theories as resulting from the fact that "anything that partakes of political strategy may need, for a time at least, an element of secrecy, and is thus vulnerable to being dubbed conspiratorial."<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Burke is even more succinct when he opines that "sovereignty itself is conspiracy."<sup>5</sup> Hence, civic life per se seems to promote allegations of collusive intrigue.

Some observers trace the historical origins of cabalist thought to Medieval demonology;<sup>6</sup> however, it is surely much older. Perhaps it is more than simply ironic that the first sin recorded in Genesis is a plot by Adam, Eve, and the Serpent to disregard their Creator's wishes. For the "conspiratorialist,"<sup>7</sup> the malevolent collusion that led to Adam's fall was a foreshadowing of all subsequent clashes between evil and good. From sources as old as recorded history, then, the conspiracy theme runs like an

underground river through the bedrock of our culture.

Americans have never been reluctant to accuse foreigners or their fellow citizens of the most heinous intrigues. The role of such accusations in igniting the American Revolution was prophetic of the conspiracy argument's continuing importance in national life. Wherever one finds significant events or eras, one is likely to encounter charges (and countercharges) of conspiracy.<sup>8</sup> John Bunzel has divided the history of such allegations into five general, and roughly chronological, categories:

(1) a fear of takeover of the government by "the people"--the uneducated, the unwashed, and the unprincipled; (2) fear of the West's becoming an all-powerful force for an un-Christian democracy; (3) fear of a Catholic coup; (4) fear of an immigrant (also Jewish, Negro) coup; (5) fear of a Communist revolution. Each succeeding phase, it appears, adopts most of the last and adds a new point of its own, which then becomes its concentrated focus.<sup>9</sup>

These categories crystallize many conspiracy theories into a deceptively simple set of historical phases. However, Buzel's scheme is sufficient to provide the broad outlines of the development of "cabalist" thinking.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the frequency of "cabalism," one is struck by the sheer staying power of some conspiracy theories. The dread of the Bavarian Illuminati, for example, was first popularized in America near the end of the 18th century and is still being nurtured today by the



John Birch Society and various concerned individuals.<sup>11</sup> For the "conspiratorialist," then, the more things change, the more they confirm his or her view of the truth. Many will live through the 1980's haunted by the looming menace of "trojan horses" and "thin entering wedges." At the heart of this vision is the nightmare of a two-level reality in which all that is obvious or simple is merely a facade, a barely opaque veneer concealing the machinations of a darkly powerful underworld.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps one reason for the longevity and frequency of cabalist allegations is that the conspiracy theorist assumes minimal argumentative burdens. While the claim of evil intrigue may be oppressive for the accused, the rhetor who launches the indictment can do so easily. All one need do is take notice of a problem, select an enemy for the attribution of guilt, define a few links between The Plot and the nation's long slide into depravity, and make the charge publicly.<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that any allegation of a plot is automatically believed but that the threshold level of plausibility for conspiracy theories is quite low. Certainly, this factor has contributed significantly to the prevalence of the conspiracy theme in our history.<sup>14</sup> The historical and contemporary prominence of the conspiracy argument make it a worthy object for critical study.

### Procedure for the Study

The central contention of the present study is two-fold: First, that the conspiracy argument constitutes an identifiable rhetorical genre, and; second, that an analysis of this genre will provide insight into the ways in which discourse operates to resolve the rhetorical problem posed by evil. The genre will be studied from the perspective of informal functionalism.<sup>15</sup> This method focuses on how conspiracy discourse works in a variety of contexts. Two functions of the theme will be analyzed: (1) External function--how does the discourse operate to resolve the problem of evil for the community? The assumption here is that different forms of evil may produce somewhat different types of conspiracy discourse, and that a comparison of several of these responses could provide useful conclusions about the nature of the genre. (2) Internal function--how do the elements of the discourse relate to each other in order to create a coherent rhetorical type? This perspective on the genre is formal and strategic rather than sociological or psychological. The procedure for inquiring into these two functions will be a comparison of the generic definition developed in Chapter III with the exemplars discussed in Chapters IV and V. The "fit" of the definition to the real-world discourse should provide insight into both the formal and social characteristics of the genre

Before proceeding, it is important to understand what this method does and doesn't do. First, functionalism as used here attempts only to assess how a genre operates rather than to determine why events (and discourse) happened as they did. One could make a case for the causal influence of conspiracy beliefs in numerous historical situations. However, such a task is not relevant to this study and would impose onerous burdens of proof. The present analysis seeks only to explicate the ways in which the conspiracy theme helps rhetors and audiences deal with their world. Causal impacts on events and eras may provide interesting tangential questions but will not be discussed in great depth. As a result, the conclusions drawn from the study will be judged according to fitness to fact, soundness of warrant, ability to withstand the challenge of competing explanations, and the degree of critical insight afforded. There will be no attempt to use functionalism in the form of the quasi-scientific, biological, (homeostatic) metaphor portrayed in its more rigorous versions.

Secondly, the notion that conspiracy discourse is a response to rhetorical problems should not be interpreted as meaning that the utterance solves the problem in any concrete way. That is, the use of the genre probably does not eliminate social evils. Rather, the conspiracy

theme provides a way of "making sense" out of the malady, i.e., a way of understanding and coping with some disruption of social expectations. The perspective adopted in the study will center on this concept of "function", as opposed to a more mechanistic, problem-solution formulation.

Following an explanation in the present chapter of the generic procedure to be used, Chapter II will develop the notion of evil as a rhetorical problem. A survey of sociological, theological, and philosophical treatments of evil will open the inquiry. A rhetorical view of the problem of evil will then be posited. The argument will be that communities use discourse to cope with violations of their norms. Conspiracy will be discussed as a significant rhetorical strategy elicited by communal maladies, and evil will be characterized as the central principle which binds the "cabalist" genus together.

Chapter III will provide a review of the primary and secondary literature on conspiracy. The secondary research will be subdivided into the categories of rhetorical studies, socio-political studies, and psychological studies. Each category represents a major field of inquiry into the sources and background of "cabalist" thought. The review will take the form of a summary of the arguments and findings of major works followed by a discussion of their uses and limitations. The final step in the review will be

a synthesis of hypotheses from the research on the defining attributes of the conspiracy theme. The historical, political, and critical aspects of this literature have sufficient commonalities to allow generalizations to be made. These working hypotheses will be examined in some detail and will be illustrated with examples from primary and secondary sources.

The descriptive statements advanced will not be final or comprehensive conclusions. Rather, they will be treated as tentative working hypotheses. The purpose of these statements is to provide a cohesive conceptual framework from which an examination of case studies in later chapters can culminate in a more definitive mapping of the conspiracy genre. As the analysis proceeds, the propositions will be subject to constant scrutiny and refinement, ultimately, the working hypotheses will be reformulated (as necessary) in light of the two exemplars critiqued in the study. A comparison of these hypotheses with the information gleaned from the case studies will allow the formation of more rigorous propositions in which a greater degree of confidence can be expressed. Should this process require the introduction of new hypotheses or the testing of conflicting explanations, such procedures will be introduced at the point in the study where it becomes apparent that modifications would advance the analysis.

Chapters IV and V will take up two samples of conspiracy argument: A Mitchell Palmer's 1920 defense of the "Palmer Raids" and Mark Lane's 1966 critique of the Warren Commission.<sup>16</sup> These exemplars were selected on the basis of their political variety and their historical importance. The focus of the critique will be upon a detailed reconstruction of the rhetorical problem (evil) confronting the rhetor, the audience implied in the discourse, and the thematic and strategic forms used to accomplish the rhetor's ends. The material obtained in this analysis will then be compared with the hypotheses produced in Chapter III to judge whether or not the exemplars afford confirmation of these tentative definitional statements.

The final chapter will correlate these findings in order to determine the uses, limitations and modifications necessary for each hypothesis. Ultimately, the hypotheses will be assembled into a coherent "map" of the conspiracy genre. The study will conclude with a summary of major arguments followed by several suggestions for further research.

#### Scope of the Study

While the propositions and questions used in this work will be rather general, the study is limited in several ways. First, the chapters dealing with actual discourse will focus

exclusively on specific rhetorical acts. No effort will be made to provide detailed discussion of all primary and secondary source materials available in the instances considered. Second, there will be no effort to determine if a conspiracy really did exist in the case studies or if the motives of the rhetors were above reproach. The conspiracy theme will be taken at face value. Also, the role of those who attempt to refute the conspiracy theorists will not be analyzed in depth. The analysis will be confined to the formal and strategic aspects of the conspiracy rhetoric used to resolve specific social evils in two historical instances.

#### Justification for the Study

The conduct of the present study is justified by the historical importance of the conspiracy argument. Moreover, the functional approach to genre criticism offers a dual benefit: First, it allows the conduct of a detailed investigation of the arguments and evidence contained in rhetorical artifacts. At the same time one is able to pursue more general critical issues, such as the ways in which rhetoric "works" to resolve the problem of evil. Thus, one can enjoy the fruits of an exacting structural and argumentative analysis without having the results trivialized by a critical "cookie-cutter". Second, a func-

tional perspective fosters a definition of the conspiracy theme that locates the genre squarely in the province of rhetoric. Perhaps the most significant feature of this theme is that it does something--it functions. Conspiracy discourse has moved audiences, shaped their reality, and defined their heroes and villains in the social drama.

However, most of the extant literature treats conspiracy simply as an historical event, an artifact of radical ideology, or the cultural analogue of clinical paranoia.<sup>17</sup>

"Cabalism" may be all of these things. Given its functional properties, however, the genre needs to be understood as rhetoric. The method employed in the present study grounds the genre in the essentially rhetorical act of responding to the world's ills through discourse. The conspiracy theme is embodied in rhetoric and draws on rhetoric's unique capacity for attributing meaning to events and facts. The functional perspective, then, should be well suited to mapping the genre so as to fix its position in the universe of discourse.

A second justification for this project is its potential contribution to rhetorical history. The conspiracy theme is a recurrent and important aspect of the American saga. The appeal is located in public discourse--the domain of the rhetorical historian. The present inquiry will contribute to rhetorical history by providing a generic



analysis of the way in which conspiracy arguments have been used in examples of American rhetoric. This functional notion of the genre will provide the historian with a perspective that could be used to understand other samples of discourse and to assess the importance of the conspiracy theme in various historical eras. Moreover, an understanding of "cabalist" rhetoric would enhance the historian's comprehension of ideological factions, such as the Know-Nothings, whose entire system of thought is grounded in a theory of plots and plotters. Thus, the present analysis could contribute to rhetorical history in a meaningful way; and future historical studies could contribute to further refinement of the generic definition offered in the course of this project.

A critique of conspiracy rhetoric is also justified by its potential contribution to rhetorical criticism. Conspiracy will be conceived as a response to the problem of evil. With the exception of George I. Mavrode's "The Problem of Evil as a Rhetorical Problem,"<sup>18</sup> little has been written on the ways in which various types of evil can elicit rhetorical responses. Since resolving evil is a major function of rhetoric in any society, it seems that developing even a partial typology of the problems and strategies associated with social maladies would be helpful to rhetorical critics. "Cabalist" discourse, then, could

be a case study or rhetors attempting to resolve a disruption of social norms through discursive artifice. Thus, a study of the conspiracy genre could provide useful insights into one of the most basic functions of the rhetorical arts, and into the ways in which rhetorical genres are constituted.

#### Conspiracy: A Presumptive Genre

If one conceives of "genre" as a class of things,<sup>19</sup> there is ample presumptive reason for regarding conspiracy argument as a rhetorical genus. The thematic consistency of "cabalist" discourse is obvious. One would not even refer to a rhetorical act as "conspiratorial" if it did not contain the claim, "There is a plot to do X." The existence of anthologies of such rhetoric and dictionary definitions of "conspiracy theory" both speak to a perception of uniformity on the part of at least some observers.<sup>20</sup> This anecdotal evidence is compatible with the observations of numerous social scientists.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, there tends to be a remarkable degree of consistency in the findings of most studies of conspiratorial thought and utterance.<sup>22</sup> It appears, then, that the available evidence would favor granting conspiracy rhetoric a priori generic status. Indeed, one would be hard pressed not to treat such discourse as a distinct category.

Unfortunately, it is easy to identify a genre; it is harder to show that the identification is not trivial. The definition of conspiracy rhetoric that can be discerned from the presumptive sources discussed here is not very valuable. It represents little more than what one could obtain from common sense or an informal "eye-balling" of a few samples of the genus.

Criticism that is to go beyond such simple typology requires a definition of "genre" that is broad enough to be flexible in its applications while being narrow enough to provide conceptual rigor and heuristic value. The present study will work toward such a conceptualization of "genre" by presenting a specific definition of this term and then demonstrating that this notion of "genre" can be operationalized as a critical procedure. The definition will be defended as meeting the criteria of rigor and heuristic value. The question to be addressed in the present study is not whether conspiracy rhetoric is an identifiable genus (for this is assumed), but what can be learned about cabalist discourse by thinking of it as a genre? Thus a massive review of the many controversial aspects of generic theory and practice is not essential to the conduct of the present inquiry.<sup>23</sup>

The genre scholar must take great care to develop a

critical posture oriented toward illuminating the intrinsic features of discourse rather than superimposing categorical schemata on rhetorical acts. Campbell and Jamieson argue in this connection that there are "certain noteworthy constraints" which should apply to all genre inquiry:

1) Classification is justified only by the critical illumination it produces not by the neatness of a classificatory schema; 2) Generic criticism is taken as a means toward a systematic, close textual analysis; 3) A genre is a complex, an amalgam, a constellation of substantive, situational, and stylistic elements; 4) Generic analysis reveals both the conventions and affinities that a work shares with others; it uncovers the unique elements in the rhetorical act, the particular means by which a genre is individuated in a given case.<sup>24</sup>

Given these "constraints," classificatory investigations should operate from a definition of "genre" which is broad enough to exclude the "pigeon hole" approach but narrow enough to provide the conceptual focus necessary to enlightening criticism.

#### Genre as Dynamic Fusion

The definition of "genre" used here is adapted from Campbell and Jamieson's discussion of the term in Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action. In sum, a rhetorical genus is made up of substantive, stylistic, and sit-

national forms united by an "internal dynamic" into a "constellation of fused elements."<sup>25</sup> This formulation mixes theoretical constructs with metaphor (e.g., "constellation"). Consequently, an effort to disassemble and analyze its conceptual components is necessary.

The first phase of this inquiry concerns the relationship between the terms "genre" and "form." The importance of form to the art of criticism per se was pointed out by Campbell and Jamieson: "forms are central to all types of criticism because they are the means through which we come to understand how an act works to achieve its end."<sup>26</sup> This notion gains even more significance in the area of genre criticism because genre, by its nature, must be rooted in patterns of practice and thus in some sort of discursive form. Therefore, when the genre critic detects regularities that distinguish a unique category of discourse, he or she is identifying the operative forms within the rhetoric, that is, those elements of the discourse that function in a specific way to give the rhetoric its effect. Form, then, is instrumental and thus is central to the notion of rhetorical genres as types of discourse designed to accomplish something. The centrality of this relationship between form and genre has long been accepted in literature and art.<sup>27</sup> However, rhetorical critics have been slow to appreciate its importance.<sup>28</sup>

Those who consider the implications of the connection between form and genre realize that the maximization of genre criticism's potential contribution requires an understanding of formal issues. Edwin Black states the relationship in these terms:

You will recall that in Plato, dialectical inquiry concerning the nature of Form led, when it was successful, to a definition composed of a Collection and Division. The terms "genre" and "form" have the same relationship to one another as do the Collection and Division of Platonic dialectic. That is, the genre of a thing is its class--a statement of its relationship to all other commensurable things. The form of that thing is its inherent structure--a statement of its constituents and their relationships to one another. Genre refers to the place of the thing in the universe and to its generation as an adaptive and relational entity. Form refers to the constitution and individuality of the thing and to its formation as an entity sufficiently autonomous to be identifiable. Taken together, the words "genre" and "form" are complementary in that "genre" refers to external relationships and "form" refers to internal relationships.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the rhetorical forms referred to in Campbell and Jamieson's definition represent intrinsic elements of a discursive act (e.g., themes, logic, audience) that, when united by an "internal dynamic," combine to constitute a genre. In sum, then, intrinsic formal characteristics cohere into extrinsic generic classification. Thus, Black's argument provides a workable notion of rhetorical forms as being the components of a rhetorical genus.

The second important aspect of the present definition

is the nature of "substance," "style," and "situation." The possibility of complicating and mystifying the definition of these terms is ominously present.<sup>30</sup> However, the conduct of a specific and rigorous genre study requires that concrete definitions be in hand. Thus, the "substance" of discourse will be defined as its propositional, thematic, logical, and evidential content; the "style" of discourse will be defined as the manner or mode in which its substantive elements are presented, and the "situation" in which discourse occurs will be defined as the motives and constraints imposed on the rhetor by events, audience, and precedent. These definitions are not intended to be breakthroughs in rhetorical theory. Rather, they are clearly rooted in conventional, contemporary concepts.

A third step in unpacking the extant notion of "genre" centers on understanding Campbell and Jamieson's notion of the "internal dynamic" that binds discursive forms together into a coherent mass. The difficulty here is that the idea of an "internal dynamic" seems somewhat mystical. How is one to define an invisible dynamis that somehow melds forms together into a genus?

One useful way of resolving this problem is to define "internal dynamic" in the same way that the physicist defines gravity--by its effects.<sup>31</sup> The first move in this process is to observe any relationship between the rhetor-

ical forms in a type of discourse (much as the physicist would record the relationship between galactic bodies). For instance, the investigator might identify key images of America in a Fourth of July oration which serve as premises for arguments on the nature of democracy and the responsibilities of citizenship. Second, the critic must assess the necessity of these relationships. Campbell and Jamieson argue persuasively that sufficient evidence of a generic "internal dynamic" has been amassed when the critic determines that removal of any element of the "dynamic fusion" would necessarily and fundamentally alter the genus. In a discussion of the papal encyclical genre, they illustrate this view:

One cannot abandon elements of a genre which are dynamically fused without undermining the genre itself. For example, classical Latin with its rigorous controlling verbs complements the deductive structure of the papal encyclical, and that structure is dictated by and consonant with the concept of papal authority on matters of dogma.<sup>32</sup>

Hence, those portions or categories of a rhetorical act which bear on the existence of such an "internal dynamic" are regarded as "evidence" of a unique category of discourse. The next chapter explains that the problem of evil is the "internal dynamic" of the conspiracy genre.

This definition of "genre" meets the criteria of rigor



and heuristic value suggested previously. The "necessity" test applied to the relationships between discursive forms would certainly exclude what earlier were termed "presumptive genres," i.e., classifications based solely on a cursory observation of similarities. Using this standard, one would deny generic status to utterances that share nothing more than a few apparent commonalities, e.g., one would deny that the existence of a black rhetor and audience is sufficient to define "Black Rhetoric." The tightening of standards for generic definition in this way should add to the rigor of the method and thus assist in its maturation from basic classification to more useful insights.

The notion of genre as "dynamic fusion" also meets the aforementioned criteria of heuristic value. This argument is premised on the belief that categorization for its own sake is both useless and potentially detrimental to real criticism. The only rationale for classification is clarification.<sup>33</sup> Through the analysis of classifying qualities, rhetorical "types" are located, the speaker's resources are analyzed, the constraints and expectations of audiences are clarified, and discourse can be appreciated or judged by comparison with other members of the genre.<sup>34</sup> As a result of this fusion of characteristics into a "synthetic core", critics have what Campbell and Jamieson call "an angle of

vision, a window that reveals the tension among these elements, the dynamic within the rhetorical acts of human beings, in different times and places, responding in similar ways as they attempt to encompass certain rhetorical problems . . .<sup>35</sup> Clearly, this perspective maximizes the critic's opportunities to illuminate both the regularities of discourse and forces that make those regularities important.

#### Conclusion

The conspiracy argument has appeared in American history with amazing regularity. The present study assumes that this argument constitutes a rhetorical genre and seeks to illuminate it by analyzing its formal generic attributes. The substantive, stylistic, and situational categories described will be used to formulate a "map" of the genre which can be tested against two exemplars. This procedure should provide substantial insight into the ways in which the conspiracy argument functions to resolve the rhetorical problem of evil.

## CHAPTER II

### RHETORIC, COMMUNITY, AND EVIL

The harvest is past, the summer  
is ended, and we are not saved.

--Jeremiah 8:20

The burden of this chapter will be an investigation of the "internal dynamic" that binds the forms constituting the conspiracy argument into a coherent genus. The central contention here is that this "dynamic fusion" revolves around the necessity of dealing with the problem of evil. Initially, the study will review major formulations of the problem of evil in the fields of theology, philosophy, and social science, and will discuss the limitations of these treatments. The analysis then proceeds to an explanation of the dramatic form in which the problem tends to be expressed and the necessity for moral communities to participate in the drama through rhetoric. Finally, the nature of the conspiracy argument as a strategy for dealing with evil is analyzed.

Evil as a Philosophical Problem

The problem of evil has been dealt with by many thinkers in the fields of theology, philosophy, and social science.<sup>1</sup> In its most basic form, this problem is a theological dilemma concerning what John Hick calls "the contradiction between the reality of evil on the one hand, and religious beliefs in the goodness and power of God or the Ultimate on the other."<sup>2</sup> The religions of the world have developed many solutions to this most fundamental quandary. These solutions range from the Hindu monistic belief that the phenomenal world (including evil) is merely illusion, through the dual deity theory of Zoroastrianism, to the Christian combination of ethical dualism within a metaphysical monism. All of these attempts to reconcile the deity's unlimited power and goodness with the fact of evil are termed "theodicies."<sup>3</sup> Hick has described four basic types of evil "distinguished in the literature of theodicy":

- (1) the evil originated by human beings (and angels), that is, moral evil or sin;
- (2) the physical sensation of pain and the mental anguish of suffering, which may be caused either by sin or by
- (3) natural evil, that is disease, tornado, earthquake, and so forth; and
- (4) the finitude, contingency, and hence imperfection of all created things which some have called metaphysical evil.<sup>4</sup>

Each of these forms of evil poses the same difficult dilemma for the theologian.

The problem of developing a tenable theodicy has occupied the theological mind since the earliest days of organized religion. Scholars such as St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas have wrestled with this quandary and have proposed a number of answers. The Augustinian tradition characterized evil as the perversion of something good, hence, man's evil was the result of his perverse fall from grace.<sup>5</sup> This aspect of Christian theodicy was the most influential for many centuries; however, the proliferation of critique of this concept attested to its inability to satisfy all investigators. Perhaps the clearest signal of religion's declining influence in this realm is the erosion of the currency of "sin" as a salient social concept. Lyman observes that "sin is a rare word these days altogether if we except the thundering warnings of religion. It is not that there are no transgressions for which we might atone, or repent, but rather that the atomization of society, the alienation characteristic of social relationships, the collectivization of guilt and pride make the designation of sinners all too difficult."<sup>6</sup>

Paralleling the theological interest in the notion of evil, philosophers have engaged in much speculation on the subject. A large portion of this thought has focused on the theological dilemma stated above and has been harshly critical of religion. Rather than confine their inquiry to the

nature of the deity, however, philosophers have also sought clues to the nature of the world itself. This tradition has produced two schools of thought: optimism and pessimism.<sup>7</sup> Optimistic philosophy includes thinkers such as Shaftesbury and Leibniz whose speculations led them to conclude that man inhabited "the best of all possible worlds": in which evil (for Shaftesbury) serves to highlight God's goodness, or (for Leibniz) is simply a manifestation of the inherent limits of any created being.<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, pessimist philosophers--generally hostile to religion--painted a much grimmer picture of human existence. Writers such as Schopenhauer, von Hartmann, and Bahnsen portray the world from a generally irrationalist and skeptical viewpoint, closely associated with the existentialism of Kierkegaard and Sartre. While the optimists' view is embodied in the hopefulness of the rational, utilitarian ethic, the pessimists see such constructs as pitifully impotent defenses against the overwhelming force of a cosmos out of control.<sup>9</sup>

Each school of thought possesses its own standards of ethical conduct and its own perspective on the feasibility of human progress. The utilitarian optimist sees humanity transcending evil with the aid of advanced technology to create a new, Edenic existence. The pessimist, however, prophesies a technological Armageddon--a second fall for

Adam--brought about by our race's inability to overcome its own limits.<sup>10</sup> As in the theological treatments, however, the wide divergence in philosophical thinking about evil makes it clear that our intellectual leaders have not produced a well-defined consensus on the nature of the world we live in or on the ethical system most appropriate to that world. In recent years, then, the study of the "real-world" implications of human conduct has been taken up by a third branch of the academy.

Modern sociology began with a near-utopian sense of mission. Founding figures such as Auguste Comte saw the "science of society" as having the potential to reform culture, to minimize evil, and to maximize all that is good about humanity. Fueled by the Social Darwinist vision of Man-as-successful-competitor, early sociologists held hopes that the product of their work would be radically improved conditions for society. However, the dark spectacle of the First World War quickly disabused the field of its utopian sentiments. The sight of perfectable men massacring each other by the legion was too much for the optimism of the sociological mind to bear. As a result, much of social science retreated into the non-ethical realm of scientific objectivism, a course which it has only recently started to reverse.<sup>11</sup> The treatment of evil was dismissed from the field's literature. As Lyman ob-

serves, "evil is a term that is rarely found in a modern sociology text. The 'science of society' seems to go about its task without the gnawing encumbrance of ethics. That subject is abandoned to a branch of moral philosophy where it also languishes, unstudied, unread. Evil seems to be too great, too impersonal, and too absurd to be a serious topic for sociological concern. . . . To the extent that sociological thought embraces the study of evil today, it does so under the embarrassing, neutered morality of 'deviance.'"<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that scholars no longer make moral judgments. Rather, the connection between academic speculation about evil and the formulation of social morality is becoming increasingly tenuous. Thus, religion, philosophy, and social science seem to offer few certain answers to individuals or communities forced to deal with the experience of evil.

The absence of any system of universally acceptable ethics makes it incumbent upon individuals and communities to choose and perpetuate those values which they feel to be appropriate. Without such standards of thought and conduct the individual lacks guidance for personal behavior and the community lacks a cohesive core around which its members can congregate. For ordinary folk, the "problem of evil" has a meaning fundamentally different from that which it has for those writing in the professional philosophical and theolog-



ical literature. Rather than being an abstruse intellectual speculation, evil is an everyday reality for the social actor. While the clash between the "is" and the "ought" may be the basis for the analysis of theodicy among the intelligensia, for the community at large it poses the more pressing problem of confronting a world that may appear extremely hostile. For ordinary folk, then, evil is no arcane, academic matter; it is very real moral and physical hazards which must be overcome (or at least endured) if life in the community is to be viable.

#### Evil as a Rhetorical Problem

Evil is omnipresent in our world. Disease, death, famine, natural catastrophe, crime, and a host of other maladies have always plagued humanity. While the philosopher or the social scientist may be able to contemplate these events simply as data in the cosmic puzzle, average people, according to Lyman, "are not in a similarly privileged situation. They must find or make meaning--moral as well as existential--in the events and happenings of their lives".<sup>13</sup> Indeed, as George I. Mavrodes appropriately observed, "it is one thing to speak of evil while sitting on an ash-heap, and quite another to discuss it in a comfortable seminar room".<sup>14</sup> If life is to have meaning, then, evil must have meaning. For it is in the interpretation of evil that one comes to grips with one's notions of the

good and the nature of the world. Therefore, for the individual, the problem of evil must be understood in some meaningful way. Those difficulties which occur in each person's life must be integrated into a belief system that explains the evil and gives the individual the cognitive resources to cope with it. While personal experiences with evil--such as the loss of a child--may be dealt with through interpersonal communication, solitary contemplation, or prayer (all of which may seek refuge in the values of philosophy or religion), many evil incidents will transcend the individual.

As a member of a community, the social actor shares with others many encounters with malevolent forces, nations, persons, etc. In the community the individual need to "make sense" out of evil becomes a collective need to reconcile the privation with the group's value system. As the source of moral standards,<sup>15</sup> the social group has a built-in incentive to deal with the reality of evil because every problem has the potential to be a challenge to the community's moral authority and perhaps even a challenge to its physical survival.<sup>16</sup> Failure to respond to evil would be to abdicate the community's legitimacy as moral arbiter and political entity. Since a culture's rhetoric will reflect that community's notion of ethics and morality,<sup>17</sup> one would expect that rhetorical discourse

would play a dominant role in "making sense" out of troubled times.

This view of the function of rhetoric finds support in Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology.<sup>18</sup> In his work, The Symbolism of Evil, Ricoeur explains that "defilement," "sin," and "guilt" are the "primary" symbols of evil which we experience. However, he goes on to point out that these concepts require discursive expression:

What is experienced as defilement, as sin, as guilt, requires the mediation of a specific language, the language of symbols. Without the help of that language, the experience would remain mute, obscure, and shut up in its implicit contradictions (thus defilement is expressed as something that infects from without, and sin as a ruptured relation and as power, etc.).<sup>19</sup>

Ricoeur argues that this primary symbolism is expressed in a typology of primordial myths. He concludes from his discussion of these mythic forms that "the narrative form is neither secondary nor accidental, but primitive and essential. The myth performs its symbolic function by specific means of narration because what it wants to express is already a drama. It is this primordial drama that opens up and discloses the hidden meaning of human experience; and so the myth that recounts it assumes the irreplaceable function of narration!"<sup>20</sup> If one can place a rhetorical perspective on Ricoeur's hermeneutic without doing too much violence to it, it appears that humanity's encounter with

evil naturally tends toward expression in a symbolic narrative--the drama.

This characterization of evil in dramatic terms is consistent with much of contemporary social criticism.<sup>21</sup> The role of rhetoric in the drama of good and evil is to be the purveyor of significant symbols which characterize evil in such a way that audiences can come to grips with it. In short, rhetoric is used to construct a secular theodicy-- a way of reconciling the fact of evil with the supposed moral and physical security that a community should afford its members. Rhetors use discourse to name villains and heroes, describe the setting of the drama, and urge audiences to action in order to reaffirm the moral hierarchy expressed in the community's significant symbols. Hugh Duncan, after Burke, explains this symbolic drama:

Symbols reach their highest state of power in struggles between good and bad principles of social order as personified in heroes and villains, Gods and devils, allies and enemies, and the like. As we say in vulgar American, the "good guys" and the "bad guys" must "shoot it out." The "bad guy" is called various things. In art he is the villain, in government, the enemy (within as well as without); in religion, the devil; in democratic debate, the "loyal opposition." But in the most profound and moving dramas of social life the "bad guy" is transformed into a victim whose suffering and death purges the social order. In art this is called "catharsis," in religion "purification." . . . In social dramas, as in art drama, we depict villains (the "bad guys") who,

like the devil among the devout,  
embody the evil principles we must  
fight.<sup>22</sup>

Through the manipulation of symbols, then, rhetoric "makes sense" out of the evil experienced by the community.

When operating in the conspiracy mode, discourse accomplishes this goal by personifying the causes of events (the villainous plot), urging action in defense of the polis' values, and providing a clear-cut enemy against whom the community can direct its ire. Events assume a specific meaning if they can be interpreted as part of a pattern, especially if the pattern is traceable to the machinations of some force believed to be both powerful and malevolent (e.g., Communism, Catholicism, the CIA, the oil industry, etc.). The social function of the conspiracy theme, then, is to attribute blame for evil experienced by the community. Such discourse locates the causes of evil and defines its nature. Audiences, therefore, are equipped with the symbolic resources necessary to name the agents of the malady and thus understand that the roots of their suffering lay outside the true community in the domain of subversive forces who do not share the values of the social group. Thus, conspiracy rhetoric operates to resolve the rhetorical problem of evil. This central principle is the "internal dynamic" that unites the forms constituting the conspiracy genus.

Evil and the Conspiracy Genre

Kenneth Burke has written that "men build their cultures by huddling together, nervously loquacious, at the edge of an abyss."<sup>23</sup> The image of the abyss is a provocative one in that it seems to embody what Lyman has called the "immensity, impersonality, and ambiguity" that are the "three moods or leitmotifs [that] dominate the modern dramas of sin and evil . . ."<sup>24</sup> Confronted with a world that frequently appears confusing and malevolent, a rhetorical community faces the problem of responding to it. Americans have often responded with conspiracy charges. Richard Hofstadter explains that:

At the so-called grass roots of American politics there is a wide and pervasive tendency to believe-- I hasten to add that a majority of Americans do not habitually succumb to this tendency--that there is some great but essentially very simple struggle going on, at the heart of which lies some single conspiratorial force, whether it be the force represented by the 'gold bugs,' the Catholic Church, big business, corrupt politicians, the liquor interests and the saloons, or the Communist Party, and that this evil is something that must not be merely limited, checked, and controlled but rather extirpated root and branch at the earliest possible moment. It is widely assumed that some technique can be found that will really do this; though there is always likely to be a good deal of argument as to what that technique is. 25

Given the power of this appeal, conspiracy rhetoric finds

prevalent use in communities attempting to define the nature, causes, scope, and impact of evil. This rhetoric imposes a dramatic order on events (through causal explanation) and provides a scheme which explains all future evils in terms of conspiracy.

This is the "internal dynamic" of conspiracy discourse: the imposition of dramatic order on an otherwise ambiguous evil in such a way that it becomes understandable to the audience. Robert Lane illustrates the importance of the conspiracy argument's explanatory function when he notes:

Few men, except as they are consumed by destructive impulses, can sustain a belief in anarchy. If they destroy in their imaginative interpretation of the world some one principle of social order, they will be forced to discover another, perhaps based upon a backstairs view of life that they do not admit into the parlor of their minds.<sup>26</sup>

When the community's ability to order its affairs seems to be breaking down (e.g., during times of social upheaval) the citizenry may turn to the conspiracy argument so that they can have at least some notion of why things are as they are.

The idea of an omnipresent plot can incorporate facts into a "theoretical construct" in which "hard grains of truth /are/ connected with a mucilage of exaggeration and fantasy."<sup>27</sup> When confronted with social ills that seem over-

whelming--assassinations, depressions, riots--the average person may not be able to assimilate all of the conflicting data available into a coherent explanation of the events. Rather than live with fear and suspicion, the citizen turns to the conspiracy hypothesis to distill random events into a form that he or she can grasp.<sup>28</sup> As Levin notes, "viewed through panic and conspiratorial eyes, isolated and disconnected minor and obscure acts can be perceived as laden with meaning and as part of a larger and planned conspiratorial whole!"<sup>29</sup> For example, Father Coughlin was able to acquire a weekly radio audience of thirty to forty-five million in the early 1930's by explaining the Depression to his listeners in extremely simple terms and by naming specific villains who were responsible for the nation's plight.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the conspiracy argument deals with the problem of evil by providing an explanation of the perfidy's cause (the plot) which makes the evil understandable to the audience.

Moreover, the conspiracy argument characterizes the evil so as to imply the essential moral goodness of the community and hint at the eventual triumph of the polis. By blaming the evil on a cabal, the conspiracy advocate shifts guilt away from the community. The plot becomes a scapegoat<sup>31</sup> for the polis' plight as the community is cleansed of guilt. This function of the conspiracy argument



implies that the community could attain a utopian future or reclaim an idyllic past if only it could rid itself of the influence of the cabal. The conspiracy argument then, accomplishes three things: First, it explains evil by locating the malady's cause in a sinister plot; second, it uses this explanation to purify the community by shifting blame from the polis to the plot and; third, it implies that, in the absence of the plot, the community would be free from evil and thus be able to pursue its noble destiny.

#### Conclusion

Evil is much more than a philosophical or theological paradox: it is a rhetorical problem. The existence of social ills motivates discourse that attempts to resolve the perfidies in some way. Conspiracy argumentation functions to create a secular theodicy which can reconcile the existence of evil with the moral claims of the community. The problem of evil, therefore, is central to the conspiracy genre. If this principle is indeed the "internal dynamic" of the genus, one would expect to find that the forms making up the genus would all be somehow related to the notion of evil, as well as being related to each other. The next chapter describes these forms by constructing hypotheses which define the major features of the conspiracy argument. An assessment of the functional inter-

dependence of these forms should help to clarify the notion of evil as "internal dynamic" of the conspiracy argument and to construct a tentative "map" of the genre.

## CHAPTER III

### MAPPING THE CONSPIRACY GENRE

the Great Conspiracy literature  
is relatively uniform in its  
approach to its problem.

--Hans Toch

The literature on conspiracy is vast and growing. It seems that there is no group, person, or topic that is immune from cabalist interpretation. The magnitude and frequency of conspiratorial thought has led academic observers into numerous attempts to understand the nature of the phenomena that surround it. This chapter begins with a review of primary sources of conspiracy theory and then proceeds to a discussion of the secondary literature. The secondary sources reviewed are subdivided into rhetorical, socio-political, and psychological studies. The major themes of the material will be summarized and its limitations noted. Hypotheses on the nature of the conspiracy argument will then be distilled from both primary and secondary literature. Finally, the relationships among the hypotheses will be described in order to assess the validity of the claim that

evil is the "internal dynamic" of the conspiracy genre.

### Primary Sources

The amount of primary source material employing the conspiracy theme is virtually unlimited. The Ancients' use of the appeal is exemplified by Cicero's "First Oration Against Cataline" in which he fulminates over the Catalinarian conspiracy against the Roman Empire.<sup>1</sup> More recent examples of this theme include the use of the cabal theory in the pamphlets and speeches that helped to incite the American Revolution,<sup>2</sup> the multitude of right-wing books and periodicals outlining a global plot by the Communists or Illuminati to control America's destiny,<sup>3</sup> and the frequent writings contending that Lee Harvey Oswald did not act alone in killing President Kennedy.<sup>4</sup> Each of these and the hundreds of other conspiracy theories in our history has been accompanied by spoken and printed discourse, often in very large quantities. An excellent, and vitually unique, collection of primary sources on the topic is David Brion Davis' The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present.<sup>5</sup> Many of the samples used for illustrative purposes in the present study are drawn from this source.

To attempt anything like a comprehensive review of this literature would be hopeless. It is sufficient to say that there will never be a shortage of primary sources upon which

scholars can draw to investigate the conspiracy theme. This study will focus on two specific examples of discourse in order to limit the scope of the inquiry. However, there are several conclusions that can be drawn from the survey of dozens of conspiracy arguments undertaken as background for the present inquiry.

(1) The conspiracy argument claims that the community is being threatened by a secret organization.<sup>6</sup> The key feature of the claim is that it integrates description and evaluation; the two become isomorphic. Richard Pratte explains that "'conspiracy' is commonly a mixed word; it serves to describe a situation involving at least two people who have come to an agreement regarding a course of action, and it may serve to evaluate that situation. In most cases the evaluation is one of disapprobation rather than approval!"<sup>7</sup> Those who plot must conspire against something. Thus, by definition, plotters are violators of the norms of any community that adheres to consensus decision-making. The conspiracy argument draws on this logic to collapse evaluation into description, therefore, making the argument rhetorically efficient. Its minimal descriptive claims are the vehicles for powerful, and often unspoken, value orientations. In this sense, the conspiracy argument evinces an essentially enthymematic nature.<sup>8</sup>

The source of the values implied by cabalist rhetoric

generally is a religious/political community. The polis is portrayed as under vicious attack by a covert assemblage of villains who desire nothing less than the total annihilation of every aspect of the community's life. The plot is the antithesis of the polis. While the community's citizens have joined together to obtain order, security, and welfare, the plotters have organized under an anti-social contract to foster chaos, bloodshed, and corruption. Fisher Ames illustrated this perception of conspiracy in a polemic on the consequences of the Jacobin plot against order and liberty in the nineteenth century:

It is not doing justice to licentiousness to compare it to a wind which ravages the surface of the earth; it is an earthquake that loosens its foundations, burying in an hour the accumulated wealth and wisdom of ages. Those who, after the calamity, would reconstruct the edifice of the public liberty, will be scarcely able to find the model of the artificers or even the ruins . . . . This is not exaggerated description. Behold France, that open hell, still ringing with agonies and blasphemies, still smoking with sufferings and crimes, in which we see their state of torment, and perhaps our future state. There we see the wretchedness and degradation of a people, who once had the offer of liberty, but have trifled it away; and there we have seen crimes so monstrous, that, even after we know they have been perpetrated, they still seem incredible.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the conspiracy claim draws a very clear contrast between the polis and the plot, the former being the complacent victim and the latter the amoral transgressor.

(2) The conspiracy argument makes a causal claim. In every case, the rhetor uses a charge of cabalism to explain why events have transpired in a certain way. This view of causation is deterministic in the extreme. Virtually any fact or event can be attributed to the secret machinations of some evil force. There is little room for ambiguity or chance in this formulation, as rightist William G. Carr illustrated in his 1956 work on the internationalist plot, Pawns in the Game:

The purpose of this book is to record the events in history which provided the "Causes" which produced the "Effects" we experience to-day. We are not concerned with the "Rights or "Wrongs" of the decisions made by individuals, except to judge for ourselves whether the decisions furthered the Devil's plan or were in accordance with the Plan of God. The only value of historical research is to obtain knowledge of how, and why, mistakes were made in the past, so we can try to avoid similar mistakes in the future.<sup>10</sup>

Carr's claim is a simple one: today's evils were directly caused by the conspiracy's ability to manipulate history. This style of argument embodies what Black terms a "telic cast of mind": the urge to locate ultimate causes behind events.<sup>11</sup> This mind-set is combined with the certain knowledge that the plotters (by definition) plan their actions in advance and are aware of the consequences. Thus, the subversives can be held morally responsible for any perfides attributable to them, just as society deems a premeditated

offense to be more heinous than an uncalculated crime.<sup>12</sup>

The causal nature of the conspiracy argument, then, reinforces the moral claims of the appeal.

(3) The evidence for the conspiracy argument is presented en masse. At times, the counter-subversive's case resembles an evidential mosaic. The rhetor fits the pieces of evidence together into a pattern that will "make sense." At other times, a huge quantity of data is assembled simply to give the impression of "overwhelming" proof for a specific contention. The underlying assumption here is that individual bits of proof may not amount to much for the uninitiated, but that a carefully constructed combination of facts can enlighten even the most naive auditor. Perhaps the epitome of this technique is Abraham Lincoln's 1858 speech on the Slave Power:

It will throw additional light . . .  
to go back and run the mind over the  
string of historical facts already  
stated. Several things will now appear  
less dark and mysterious than they did  
when they were transpiring. The people  
/in the territories, according to the  
Kansas-Nebraska Bill/ were to be left  
"perfectly free," "subject only to the  
Constitution." What the Constitution  
had to do with it outsiders could not  
then see. Plainly enough now, it was  
an exactly fitted niche for the Dred  
Scott decision to afterward come in,  
and declare the perfect freedom of the  
people to be just no freedom at all. . .  
We cannot absolutely know that all these  
exact adaptations are the result of pre-  
concert. But when we see a lot of framed  
timbers, different portions of which we



know have been gotten out at different times and places and by different workmen,--Stephen, Franklin, Roger, and James, for instance,--and we see these timbers joined together, and see they exactly make the frame of a house or a mill, all the tenons and mortises exactly fitting, and all the lengths and proportions of the different pieces exactly adapted to their respective places, and not a piece too many or too few, not omitting even scaffolding--or, if a single piece be lacking, we see the place in the frame exactly fitted and prepared yet to bring such piece in--in such a case we find it impossible not to believe that Stephen and Franklin and Roger and James all understood one another from the beginning, and all worked upon a common plan or draft drawn up before the first blow was struck.<sup>13</sup>

Lincoln thus assembles a model of the conspiratorial case. Each individual fact may be less than dispositive, but the totality of all of the evidence provides both a huge mass of probative material and a seemingly unassailable pattern of explanation.

In contemporary cabalist discourse, the footnote reference provides the source of most of the probative matter for the mosaic. American Opinion's December, 1979 issue, for example, advertises the Reverend Clarence Kelley's Conspiracy Against God and Man with this description: "Written with the compelling grace of a great detective story, this book is nonetheless carefully documented with some 800 footnotes that make the conspiracy case all but unassailable."<sup>14</sup> Hofstadter generalizes this example when

he notes that "the entire right-wing movement of our time is a parade of experts, study groups, monographs, footnotes and bibliographies."<sup>15</sup> The sense of this argument is that the persuasive force of the conspiracy case is produced not by a single portion of testimony, but by the simultaneous consideration of hundreds of pieces of evidence--much as one can be moved by the overwhelming intricacy of a great work of art.<sup>16</sup>

The irony here is that, while conspiracy offers simple causal explanations, the style of these arguments can become enormously complex. Conspiracy theory seems to motivate the rhetor to attempt to explain every fact and event. Hofstadter has noted the extraordinary pedantry of paranoid literature--the great energies expended trying to provide elaborate documentation of the links between The Plot and most of the history of civilization.<sup>17</sup> The counter-subversive is often so intent on constructing an impregnable, monolithic claim that the result is a veritable jungle of interlocking evidence and assertion. Thus, conspiracy theory provides simple arguments regarding motive and cause, defended by a mind-boggling assortment of "evidence."

(4) The logic of the conspiracy argument is deductive. While the assemblage of evidence into a massive, mosaic-like case gives the impression of an inductive

survey of the facts, the central aspects of the reasoning are deductive.<sup>18</sup> Hofstadter notes that the review of a vast corpus of evidence is only "careful preparation for the big leap from the undeniable to the unbelievable."<sup>19</sup> Ironically, this leap of faith is cloaked in the most rigorous form of syllogistic reasoning. For the believer, the self-evident nature of the evil being addressed seems to be immediately translated into the idea that the facts of one's case are also self-evident. The argument moves with the brute force of the classical syllogism.

Remington, for example, relates the style of reasoning he finds in the anti-semitic version of conspiracy theory:

"The Rothschilds are Jews; Rothschilds own the Bank of England; The Bank of England controls International Finance; International Financiers set up the Federal Reserve System; The Federal Reserve System controls the money in America; The only possible conclusion is that International Jews control America."<sup>20</sup>

Conspiracy discourse is replete with references to "clear" facts, "unassailable" logic, and "inevitable" conclusions. These are not the lessons of induction. William Goodell, one of the originators of the Slave Power thesis, provided an apt illustration in 1839:

Let it be borne in mind that southern statesmen (as shown in our last Lecture) have uniformly borne testimony that the continuance of the slave system must of

necessity involve the loss of liberty to the free, and result in the ultimate enslavement of the laboring white population. Connect this fact with the fact just ascertained, viz. that southern statesmen are successfully wielding the national government as the instrument of perpetuating the slave system, and what do we have? Is not the statement of the two documentary facts, a statement in other words that the slave power is successfully wielding the national government for the enslavement of northern freemen? What less can we make out of the known facts of the case? We speak not now of latent tendencies: We inquire after the objects and the actual operation of the slaveholding statesmen. They tell us in plain words, that continued slavery will destroy our liberties. But yet we find them at the same time wielding the vast power of the national government for the security and the extension of slavery! A child can put two facts together and understand their import.<sup>21</sup>

Goodell's reasoning is clear. Slavery must displace freedom; slaveholders control national policy; hence, slavery is being expanded "for the enslavement of northern freemen." The implication of this argument is that, for those possessing the requisite "inside information" on the plot, conclusions are logically necessary. We come full circle here: the "facts" that the conspiratorialist intuits as correct are fed through a rigorous deductive process that provides conclusions so inevitable as to be almost intuitive. Robert Welch provided a contemporary exemplar in his 1964 Chicago speech, "More Stately Mansions:"

it is worthwhile for us to take a

few paragraphs to examine some of the clearly established facts about this particular sect of Illuminati. For a mere recital of these facts will show, among other things, how inevitable is the conclusion that the present worldwide Communist conspiracy has evolved out of some such earlier organization . . .22

This is deductive reasoning reduced to its deterministic essence.<sup>23</sup> An inevitable logic gives the conspiracy rhetor the ability to subsume any fact, person, or event under the rubric of The Plot.

(5) The conspiracy argument is capable of coopting or refuting criticism. Since it is impossible to prove that one isn't a member of a clandestine agency, the charge of conspiracy is most difficult to refute in a definitive way.<sup>24</sup> While the counter-subversive may enlist mountains of facts, the accused lacks any dispositive evidence sufficient for a winning defense. For example, if Pravda charges that President Carter is in league with capitalist munitions-makers to start a profitable war in the Persian Gulf, even the cleverest Press Secretary would have difficulty proving that this was not the case (since the Federal Government does indeed award substantial munitions contracts and has identified significant military and strategic interests in the Persian Gulf). More generally, it is well accepted that one cannot prove a negative. In most instances, the accused must await vindication from what Cohen terms the public's

"conclusions from the sound and style of the debate and its brute sense of the plausible."<sup>25</sup> It would be difficult, for example, to argue the Carter-munitions conspiracy convincingly if the United States discovered an alternative energy source that made our strategic interests in the Persian Gulf moot. If such vindication is not forthcoming, however, the situation for the accused may become grim indeed. For an onerous burden of proof has been placed upon the victim of the allegations: he or she must now conclusively demonstrate the purity of his or her own motives.

Moreover, the conspiracy rhetor can coopt any attempted rebuttal in two ways. First, any argument that undercuts the facts of the case can be interpreted as proving the power and cunning of the cabal. The Dearborn Independent provided an example in its 1920 series on the danger of "The International Jew":

A recent writer in a prominent magazine has pointed out what he calls the impossibility of the Jewish ruling group being allied in one common World Program because, as he showed, there were Jews acting as the leading minds in all the divisions of present-day opinion. There were Jews at the head of the capitalists, Jews at the head of the labor unions and Jews at the head of those more radical organizations which find even the labor unions too tame. There is a Jew at the head of the judiciary of England and a Jew at the head of Sovietism in Russia. How can you say, he asked, that they are united, when they represent so many points of view? The common unity, the possible common purpose of it all, is that expressed in the Ninth Protocol /of

the Learned Elders of Zion/:  
 "People of all opinions and of all doctrines are at our service, restorers of monarchy, demagogues, Socialists, communists and other Utopians. We have put them all to work. Every one of them from his point of view is undermining the last remnant of authority, is trying to overthrow all existing order. All the governments have been tormented by these actions. But we will not give them peace until they recognize our super-government."<sup>26</sup>

Given such reasoning (especially with the aid of forged documentation), one is hard-pressed to name an argument that wouldn't support the conspiracy theory if given the "proper" interpretation.

A second cooptation strategy charges that denial of the plot by one accused of participation is clear proof of guilt. After all, wouldn't one expect the skilled subversive to be the most strident in his or her own defense? For, as Bailyn observes, "what conspirators profess is not what they believe: the ostensible is not the real; and the real is deliberately malign."<sup>27</sup> A sampling of this technique is found in Representative George A. Dondero's 1949 vilification of Red-inspired "modern art":

This glib disavowal of any relationship between communism and so-called modern art is so pat and so spontaneous a reply by advocates of the "isms" in art, from deep, Red Stalinist to pale pink publicist, as to identify it readily to the observant as the same old party-line practice. It is the party line of the left wingers, who are now in the big money, and who want above all to remain in the big money, voiced to

confuse the legitimate artist, to  
disarm the arousing academician,  
and to fool the public.<sup>28</sup>

For the conspiratorialist, then, criticism of virtually any sort can be easily refuted or transformed into a "smoking pistol." When these two factors are considered together, the power of the conspiracy appeal and the monumental burdens it imposes upon its targets become apparent.

(6) The conspiracy argument is flexible enough to be easily extrapolated or quickly shifted from one subject or enemy to another. One tendency that appeared in the primary sources was the seemingly infinite potential for expanding The Plot to cover everything and anything. This ability was demonstrated in the 1830's by Frederick Robinson's lurid portrayal of the "hydra" monster of aristocratic plotters:

Of all the contrivances of the aristocracy, next to the usurpation of the judiciary, and thus turning the most potent engine of the people's government against themselves, their unions in the shape of incorporate monopolies are the most subtle and the best calculated to promote the ends of the few, the ignorance, degradation, and slavery of the many. This hydra of the adversary has within a few years grown up around us, until the monster covers the whole land, branching out annually into new heads of different shape, each devouring the substance and destroying the rights of the people. But the most potent and deadly is the bank, a monopoly which takes everything from the people and gives them nothing in return . . . 29



Robinson takes advantage of the fact that the Aristocracy's very structure makes it a de facto conspiracy--what is a plot if not a small, secretive, powerful, self-serving, unchecked fragment of the community? The unrestrained logic of cabalism seems to gravitate naturally toward absorbing every aspect of national life. Robinson draws on this capacity as he extrapolates his fear of aristocratic domination to link up things as seemingly distinct as the National Bank and the "peculiar institution"; all are products of a wicked, plutocratic brotherhood.

Extrapolation is accompanied by an ability to shift rapidly from one point of attack to another. If critics of the Warren Commission, for instance, have one of their statements factually refuted (e.g., it is rebutted by a recently declassified document), they can switch, almost in mid-sentence, to another indictment.<sup>30</sup> Stephen Earl Bennett has confirmed the significance of this technique in his study of the John Birch Society. He found that the Society's claim of total Communist domination of the American government was suddenly confronted by the Johnson administration's decision to increase American military intervention against the Communists in Viet Nam. In November, 1966, Robert Welch formally resolved this "belief dilemma" by propounding an elaborate meta-conspiracy composed of the "Insiders" (aka Illuminati). This group was so powerful that it could man-

ipulate both Communist and Capitalist governments for its own ends.<sup>31</sup> The "Insider" conspiracy theory, then, could successfully reconcile American military action with conspiratorial control of policy.

Bennett's analysis also tends to confirm the key role of a "brute sense of the plausible" in restraining conspiracy theories. In this instance, the Birchers' theories were altered rather than vanquished. However, a shift of this magnitude in the thought of such a doctrinaire group does speak to <sup>the</sup> power of a public notion of "plausibility." Perhaps, it is the public's intuitive grasp of the "real" that produces this strategic combination of extrapolation and flexibility. For as the conspiracy theory is progressively expanded to encompass more and more reality, the chances increase of encountering harsh, countervailing facts. When a collision appears imminent, the theorist can simply rearrange the facts of the case, adjust the angle of attack, or initiate a new and grander synthesis of his or her previous positions. However, should these modifications become too extreme, as in the case of the Birchers, a loss of credibility can occur.<sup>32</sup>

The hypotheses advanced here are not intended to be comprehensive or definitive. Rather, they embody major features of the conspiracy genre derived from a review of numerous primary sources. These working-hypotheses will

eventually be integrated with statements synthesized from the secondary literature on the topic.

### Secondary Sources

For the purposes of this project, there are three categories of secondary literature: rhetorical studies, sociopolitical studies, and psychological studies. This research is broad in scope but often narrow in conception. However, the fact that so many observers have reached parallel conclusions does afford a level of confidence sufficient to synthesize tentative statements from their efforts. Hopefully, the present study will contribute to this literature by providing a useful rhetorical perspective and by offering a unique synthesis of a large body of research.

Rhetorical Studies. Rhetorical scholars have produced many studies on conspiracy-related topics but remarkably little on the nature of the argument itself. The majority of this material consists of historical case studies of various persons and groups who have used cabalist themes. These studies can be categorized as follows: (1) Analyses of the rhetoric of individual speakers, such as McCarthy, Julius Streicher, and Father Coughlin, who have used the conspiracy argument;<sup>33</sup> (2) Studies of political groups and social forces that rely on cabalist theory (e.g., the Anti-Masonic Party),<sup>34</sup> (3) Rhetorical inquiries into types of rhetors (as opposed to discourse per se), such as "fanatics," who

are prone to find plots everywhere;<sup>35</sup> (4) Historical investigations into eras, such as the Cold War, in which conspiracy appeals enjoyed wide currency;<sup>36</sup> (5) Studies of basic themes in political rhetoric that tend to be cabalist (e.g., Anti-Communism);<sup>37</sup> (6) Inquiries into the rhetoric of the radical right. The work on this last topic is fairly extensive. Most of it focuses on four features of the extreme right: its sources and background,<sup>38</sup> the propositional nature of its arguments,<sup>39</sup> the integrity of its evidence,<sup>40</sup> and the role of its imagery.<sup>41</sup> Clearly, then, most of the rhetorical scholarship related to conspiracy is indirect in its approach.

Of the few works which explicitly treat the conspiracy theme, several are studies of extremism. In his analysis of the John Birch Society, Thomas A. Hollihan identifies the conspiracy drama as central to the Society's cohesion and, ironically, to its inability to attract a following among those of non-extremist ilk.<sup>42</sup> Also, Marilyn Young has investigated writings of both the John Birch Society and the Students for a Democratic Society and found that a conspiracy theory of history is "a defining characteristic. . . . of extremism in general . . . /along with/ a decided antipathy toward the democratic political process of this country."<sup>43</sup> However, there are two studies that use more "mainstream" varieties of political rhetoric for exemplars.

John Cragan's dramatisitic perspective on conspiracy as rhetorical strategy is perhaps the closest to the beginnings of a generic inquiry.<sup>44</sup> Grounding his work in earlier theorizing by Bormann,<sup>45</sup> Cragan argues that conspiracy rhetoric can be understood as a "fantasy theme" that is shared by members of a social group. He identifies several elements of the conspiratorial vision, including a "superhero . . . of such moral stature that he can defeat the conspiracy; . . . three predictable action lines or motives for the superhero: (1) peicing together the conspiracy; (2) uncovering the secret plans or the secret hideouts of the villain; and (3) punishing the conspirator . . . One of the most exciting aspects of the conspiracy drama is the revealing of the secret documents."<sup>46</sup> These themes are exemplified in his case study of the American Indian seizure of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in the Fall of 1972. The notion of conspiracy provided the dissidents with a shared picture--a fantasy or vision-- in which their reality is defined and made comprehensible.

An alternative treatment of conspiracy is found in Thomas Farrell's argument that the theme may be understood as a Burkeian "syllogistic progression."<sup>47</sup> Having the form of a mystery story, he argues, the conspiracy theory is rooted in a "drama of discovery" that creates a Roshoman-fascination" with uncovering a plot that always

seems to elude definitive exposure.<sup>48</sup> Using the example of the John F. Kennedy assassination, Farrell outlines the basic strategic burden of the conspiracy theory as the problem of "formal re-individuation"--how to perpetuate itself.<sup>49</sup> This burden is met with a "re-doubled claim" (arguing that full complicity cannot be proven now, e.g., because the Warren Commission has classified many key documents) and "casuistic stretching" (in which "analytic radiations" and "bridging devices" are used to widen the scope of the Plot).<sup>50</sup> Finally, the important features of the cabalist's style are identified as irony and the grotesque.<sup>51</sup>

Although Cragan and Farrell are virtually alone in their treatments of the cabal theme, they do offer important insight. When combined with the material provided by more indirect studies, this research lends itself to several tentative hypotheses. However, the propositions must be viewed in the light of the limitations of the literature from which they are derived. First, this literature tends to be as limited in perspective as it is broad in scope. Most of it is single case studies or movement analyses in which the conspiracy theme is just one of many arguments examined. Little speculation is advanced on the generalizations one could make about the nature of conspiracy rhetoric per se. As a result, there has been little effort to synthesize the research into more powerful explanatory

statements. Diffusion and fragmentation are its hallmarks. Second, much of the extant writing focuses only on politically extreme persons and groups, especially on the discourse of American right-wing agitators. Little work has been done on the currency of the cabal theories appropriated by the "average person."

The conspiracy theme is not the exclusive preserve of the "lunatic fringe." While most often studied as an attribute of extremism, cabalistic rhetoric does not always fit conveniently under the rubric of "fanaticism." Much conspiracy discourse has been produced by individuals and groups in the mainstream of American politics. Curry and Brown assert that "sociological and psychological interpretations are open to the objection that they make fears of conspiracy solely the work of an extremist, usually right-wing, fringe of society. It is extremely important to note that fears of conspiracy are not confined to charlatans, crackpots, and the disaffected."<sup>52</sup> Davis amplifies the point with his observation that "in times of great internal conflict and uncertainty, such as the Civil War era or the 1960's, the line narrows between respectable ideology and what might normally be dismissed as the ravings of screwballs and nuts."<sup>53</sup> The fear of secret, diabolical covenants, then, can attend a centrist political stance (e.g., Watergate or the John F. Kennedy assassination) as well as an

extreme one.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the fear of enemy plotting has been expressed by speakers on every rung of the political and social ladder, from Presidents to shopkeepers. It is most certainly fallacious, then, to view cabalist discourse as the sole property of political splinter-groups.

The present study will offer a new dimension to the current literature by analyzing the intrinsic features of the conspiracy argument as discourse, and by constructing a generic "map" of its use in mainstream politics.<sup>55</sup> This map will incorporate several hypotheses drawn from the rhetorical scholarship summarized above. These hypotheses include:

(7) The conspiracy argument is dramatic in form. The format of a drama suggested by both Cragan and Farrell seems to be borne out by the historical studies of conspiracy-related communication. Investigations of extremist movements and individual demagogues have both found a distinct view of social problems as being produced by a clash between absolute good and absolute evil. This is very suggestive of the dramatic tensions generated by conflict between a hero and a villain.<sup>56</sup> Speaking to this issue, William C. Baum notes that "equally clear in the mind of the conspiracy theorist is the notion that the world is a stage and that everyone is acting in a gigantic morality play. In this play the forces fo good are being opposed by the



forces of evil. The underlying premise of the play clearly indicates that evil and goodness cannot mutually co-exist. The significance of this play cannot be overemphasized since, in the mind of the conspiracy theorist, this play constitutes reality. Every action, every thought--everything that we do lends support to either good or evil. . . !<sup>57</sup>

(8) The conspiracy argument is characterized by exaggeration and lurid imagery. Farrell has pointed to the presence of the grotesque in the counter-subversive argument.<sup>58</sup> Edwin Black confirms this insight in his study of the "Second Persona" of radical right discourse. He finds that cancer is a recurrent metaphor for Communism in rightist rhetoric.<sup>59</sup> This ubiquitous and drastic image, he argues, speaks to a rhetorical style seething with fear, guilt, and self-doubt. Regardless of the accuracy of Black's psychoanalysis, his description of the cancer metaphor does point to a predisposition towards dramatic, exaggerated imagery in cabalistic argument. Murray Levin confirms this observation when he writes, "The analogy of disease, epidemic, and germ is used frequently to define the conspirator. The conspirator is an infection and deadly germ. The conspirator is an insect. The conspiracy is a plague which will cause untold suffering. The micro-organism combines in extreme form almost all the vicious and deadly qualities of the conspirator. . . . The danger of infection is so great that immediate counter-measures are required."<sup>60</sup>

Primary sources clearly demonstrate the feverish tone of the counter-subversive. For instance, the New England Weekly Review stated in 1830: "all are aware that the slavery which exists in these states is a deadly and cancerous sore upon the vitals of the commonwealth--that it must be eradicated--or the nation dies!"<sup>61</sup> Again, from a 1935 radio address by Father Coughlin: "Communism is a social disease which is bred in the lurid ulcers of unjust poverty . . . fellow countrymen, I am opposed to communism as much as I am opposed to a plague. But, thanks to God, I have sufficient sagacity to realize that if I suffer stinking carcasses to rot on my doorstep I can rant and rail in vain against the plague until doomsday."<sup>62</sup> Finally, Samuel F. B. Morse asks: "Shall we watch only on the outer walls, while the sappers and miners of foreign despots are at work under our feet, and steadily advancing beneath the very citadel? . . . We may sleep, but the enemy is awake; he is straining every nerve to possess himself of our fair land. We must awake, or we are lost. Foundations are attacked, fundamental principles are threatened, interests are put in jeopardy, which throw all the questions which now agitate the councils of the country into the shade. It is Liberty itself that is in danger, not the liberty of a single state, no, nor of the United States, but the liberty of the world!"<sup>63</sup> For the conspiracy theorist, then, the important issues of

the day involve ultimate consequences and total conviction. Restraint and dignity may be the first casualties of this rhetoric.

Socio-political Studies. The fields of history, sociology, and political science have long been intrigued by the conspiracy appeal. Several major works have been devoted to chronicling the actual or perceived plots in history.<sup>64</sup> These studies are supplemented by a variety of analyses of political phenomena related to cabalist thought. Secondary works of this sort can be categorized much as were the rhetorical studies summarized earlier: (1) Investigations of the power and policies of political actors employing the conspiracy appeal (e.g., Billy James Hargis of the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade);<sup>65</sup> (2) Inquiries into the membership structure, and activities of cabal-oriented political groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan or the John Birch Society;<sup>66</sup> (3) Studies of the composition and influence of social forces, such as Anti-Communism and Anti-Catholicism, that make use of conspiracy arguments;<sup>67</sup> (4) Historical inquiries into events or eras marked by the presence of allegations of evil plotting (e.g., the Cold War);<sup>68</sup> (5) Examinations of specific political issues, such as water fluoridation, which have been debated in conspiratorial terms;<sup>69</sup> (6) Social histories of the key documents which have purported to expose world wide conspiracies (e.g., The Protocols of the Learned Elders of

Zion);<sup>70</sup> and (7) Studies of the causes and effects of political extremism. Scholars have devoted considerable effort to analyzing the nature of extremism's most ominous offspring--fascism.<sup>71</sup> Also, more specific research has focused on the techniques used by extremist agitators to transform public fears into support for their personal and organizational power.<sup>72</sup> Most of these studies, however, focus on the characteristics of the American right-wing.<sup>73</sup> The methodologies used in this research range from multi-variate analysis of survey data to participant-observation and ideological critique. The quality of the literature varies from authoritative scholarship to second-rate journalism. More importantly, though, the conspiracy theme is treated only as a "symptom" of extremism or as evidence of anti-democratic tendencies (a sort of signature characteristic of the radical right), rather than as a worthy object of study in itself.

Some members of the academy have attempted to add a different dimension to the political studies of the conspiracy appeal. These critics are concerned with the social consequences of cabalist politics. John Bunzel and Erich Fromm, for example, have both warned that political paranoia is very threatening to healthy democracies because it tends toward totalitarianism.<sup>74</sup> A second variety of this theme is exemplified by Murray Levin's Political Hysteria in America.

He contends that conspiracy theory is one of the tactics "utilized by political leaders since antiquity . . . to arouse mass anxiety and cause people to rally behind the leader."<sup>75</sup> In short, the conspiracy argument is used by elites to manipulate the emotions of the masses. Other observers have critiqued the counter-subversives because they tend to advance positions that inherently involve racism and intolerance.<sup>76</sup> Less sensitive works, such as Sidney Hook's Heresy, Yes--Conspiracy, No, argue that society has the right to defend itself against secret groups (e.g., Communists) that operate outside moral and social norms.<sup>77</sup> Finally, several authors offer an evaluation of the social implications of secrecy: Edward Shils' The Torment of Secrecy and John Cawelti's "The Cycle of Clandestinity" both aim at assessing the costs of dealing with the covert in our political and psychic lives.<sup>78</sup> All of these works try, in one way or another, to make the reader realize that conspiracy-oriented groups and ideas have very real (and often dangerous) social consequences

There are a few socio-political studies that deal directly with the conspiracy theme. The conceptual heart of this literature is Richard Hofstadter's essay, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics."<sup>79</sup> His argument is that "a distorted style is . . . 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."<sup>80</sup> While this approach smacks of the "symptom" view of conspiracy espoused in other studies, Hofstadter's inquiry is uniquely useful to the present work because of the primacy given to rhetorical factors in political life. Based on this assumption, he surveys the primary works of paranoid scholarship to "abstract the basic elements of the paranoid style."<sup>81</sup> These "basic elements: include the following: (1) The "central image" of a conspiracy intent on destroying our "way of life";<sup>82</sup> (2) This conspiracy is viewed as the "motive force" in history;<sup>83</sup> (3) "The paranoid spokesman sees the fate of this conspiracy in apocalyptic terms--he traffiks in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values";<sup>84</sup> (4) A total unwillingness to compromise or negotiate "since what is at stake is a conflict between absolute good and absolute evil. . .";<sup>85</sup> (5) The enemy "is a perfect model of malice, a kind of amoral superman: sinister, ubiquitous, powerful, cruel, sensual, luxury loving . . .";<sup>86</sup> (6) "A fundamental paradox of the paranoid style is the imitation of the enemy" for example, the political paranoid may establish a secret organization to oppose secret organizations;<sup>87</sup> (7) Special significance is attached to "the

renegade from the enemy cause . . . /because/ He brings with him the promise of redemption and victory . . . /as well as/ the final verification of suspicions which might otherwise have been doubted by a skeptical world";<sup>88</sup> (8) The political paranoid has an "obsession with secrecy,"<sup>89</sup> and; (9) Paranoid literature displays an "elaborate concern with demonstration . . . . It is nothing if not scholarly in technique . . . . What distinguished the paranoid style is not, then, the absence of verifiable facts . . . but rather the curious leap in imagination that is always made at some critical point in the recital of events . . ." <sup>90</sup> This synthesis of paranoid characteristics is consistent with many of the hypotheses already advanced: the value orientation, causal format, massive evidence presentation, deductive logic, flexibility, dramatic nature, exaggeration, and the basic structure of the argument all seem to be confirmed by Hofstadter's notion of the "paranoid style."

Other scholars have applied Hofstadter's ideas to various historical events.<sup>91</sup> Foremost among these analyses is David Brion Davis' The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style.<sup>92</sup> Davis argues that the mutual conspiracy allegations of the antebellum North and South can be understood as expressions of deep-rooted social "paranoia."

Some analysts contend that, unlike Hofstadter, Davis tends to be more concerned with psychological rather than political pathology.<sup>93</sup> However, it would be more accurate to say that, while Davis uses terminology that is at times more "psychological" than Hofstadter's, he is careful to point out that political "paranoia" may be a function of very real personal or social conflicts.<sup>94</sup> He also makes no attempt to use the term "paranoia" in its fully clinical sense or to reduce cabalist discourse to a mere symptom of disturbances in the human psyche. Thus, Hofstadter and Davis offer a varied but persuasive socio-political explanation for conspiratorial rhetoric. The essential elements of these ideas have been confirmed again and again in the "paranoid" literature surveyed for this study.

Several other important works have a bearing on the conspiracy genre. In "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Mason, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," Davis finds thematic similarities which lay much of the groundwork for the "paranoid" interpretation of such literature.<sup>95</sup> His argument is that a striking uniformity exists in the various nativist portrayals of the evil, licentious Mason, Catholic, or Mormon enemy. He concludes that "in a rootless environment shaken by bewildering social change the nativist found unity and meaning by conspiring against imaginary conspiracies."<sup>96</sup> A complemen-



tary study of several outbursts of xenophobic conspiracy theory provides an additional historical perspective.<sup>97</sup> Dwight C. Smith contends that his survey of four instances of "alien conspiracy" theory demonstrates three essential pre-conditions for such outbursts: First, a sufficiently widespread "feeling of unease over the prospect that forces beyond our borders do, or might, exercise undue influence over the scope and direction of domestic social change. . . . Second, a moral entrepreneur, in Howard Becker's words, has to take the stage to focus public attention on the condition, or values of American life that are at stake. Third, it must be possible to construct a set of facts, or assumptions of fact, that can be used by the entrepreneur as evidence supporting a conspiratorial explanation of potential changes for the worse."<sup>98</sup> Finally, several studies have offered historical surveys of the role of conspiracy in our nation's political and intellectual life. Roger Allen Remington's "The Function of Conspiracy Theory in American Intellectual History" is the most wide-ranging of these works. His goal is to assess the relationship among nationalism, extremism, and conspiracy theory.<sup>99</sup> In pursuit of this objective, he identifies the two basic themes of nationalistic cabal theory as a fear of internationalism and a simple, dichotomous moral theory of good versus evil "against which all history may be measured."<sup>100</sup>

Remington analyzes the function of these themes by examining case studies of cabalist thought involving Catholics, Jews, financiers, Illuminati, and immigrants. From a survey of numerous, extended quotations from primary sources, he concludes that conspiracy theory correlates with extremism fairly consistently, and somewhat less consistently with nationalism. The theory serves the purpose of providing a bewildered public with simple, concrete answers to difficult questions of social causation.<sup>101</sup>

Related studies of interest include William Chandler Baum's "The Conspiracy Theory of Politics of the Radical Right in the United States"<sup>102</sup> Baum examines large quantities of obscure rightist literature in order to crystallize its essential characteristics. He finds several basic themes to be important: (1) "personification of history"--all evil is caused by deliberate acts of the plotters; (2) "The enemy is relentlessly becoming more bestial, cunning, and persecutory, /they are/ super-human demons"; (3) The agitator has "inside information" on the plot; (4) The evil of the cabal is measured against "the glorious past or Golden Age"; (5) A "dichotomized state of the world" is portrayed; (6) Great emphasis is placed on "the will" as the key to resisting the plot, and; (7) There is "the contradictory belief that both Satan and God are omnipotent."<sup>103</sup> In addition, Richard O. Curry and Thomas M. Brown have collected

a number of essays related to conspiracy in their volume, Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History.<sup>104</sup>

These studies vary from the socio-psychological to the popular. They provide a broad outline of the role of conspiracy theory in our history (generally conforming to the categories of research specified above) and have provided much useful background for the present study.

One additional area of interest in the socio-political literature has centered on the question of the motivation for conspiracy-oriented beliefs. Many observers have contended that conventional notions of "rational" politics simply are not applicable when one is dealing with cabalists.<sup>105</sup> This interest in uncovering the sources of extreme beliefs and actions launched a variety of sociological studies of the persons and groups that held cabalist theories.<sup>106</sup> One can summarize the views emerging from this research as supporting what Davis terms either an "ideological approach," in which conspiracy fears are seen as a function of the irrational stereotypes, fears, and prejudices inherent in the "spirit" of an era, or, a "sociological approach" in which "concrete ethnic tensions, status rivalries, and face-to-face conflicts" /serve/ as the source of cabalist themes.<sup>107</sup> However, one need not assume that absolute dissensus reigns among the socio-political interpretations of conspiracy. For even the sociological

and the ideological explanations can be "mutually supportive."<sup>108</sup>

The socio-political literature is very useful. In the main, it tends to confirm the working hypotheses gleaned from the primary sources and rhetorical studies. However, it does have several limitations. First, its focus is predominantly (but not exclusively) on right-wing extremism. Left-wing agitators and the prevalence of cabalism in mainstream thought have received relatively little attention. Second, most studies tend to regard conspiracy as a historical artifact useful for guiding inquiry into other, "deeper" questions. There is seldom any hint that the cabalist theme could be a significant aspect of history in and of itself. Both of these limitations are similar to the difficulties found in rhetorical scholarship in this area. Nonetheless a number of tentative hypotheses can be drawn from this vast array of research:

(9) The conspiracy argument occurs in times of social stress. Logically, if all were well, no one would have a rational motive to voice claims about malevolent schemes or to believe such claims if they were heard. However, when some evil intrudes upon the community's life, attributions of conspiracy often begin. John Bunzel observes that "there is a strong tendency, particularly in times of crisis, to associate every crime, misfortune, or danger in the world

with groups or organizations that hold positions of public trust. Plots of one kind or another are continually uncovered because the charge of conspiracy is apt to stir up public opinion."<sup>109</sup> Stanley Coben buttresses this claim when he concludes that "substantial evidence, then, suggests that millions of Americans are both extraordinarily fearful of social change and prejudiced against those minority groups which they perceive as 'threatening intruders.' Societal disruption, especially if it can easily be connected with the 'intruders,' not only will intensify the hostility of highly prejudiced individuals, but also will provoke many others, whose antagonisms in more stable times had been mild or incipient, into the extreme group."<sup>110</sup>

The notion of "stress" used here is somewhat vague. Each theorist tends to interpret the term according to his or her own predispositions. For Remington, only the economic stress of the Depression gave life to unsuccessful Anti-Semitic arguments that had been made in the 1920's.<sup>111</sup> For Higham, nativist outbursts correlate with eras in which, for social, political, or economic reasons, "confidence in the homogeneity of American culture broke down /and/ in desperate efforts to rebuild national unity men rallied against symbols of foreigners that were appropriate to their predicament."<sup>112</sup> For Lipset and Raab, "such social strains have usually been associated with some sense of status displacement by a mass

of Americans, occurring most dramatically during the emergence of some new ethnic or other population group. The result has been 'backlash,' the fodder for extremist movements and their conspiracy theories."<sup>113</sup> These multiple (and non-exclusive) theories may take any number of forms but they all point to the importance of some notion of social "stress"

(10) The conspiracy argument personifies evil. When a social ill is attributed to a shadowy pact, there is little ground for assuming that the misfortune is the result of accident, misjudgment, or simple "bad luck."<sup>114</sup> The conspiratorialist concretizes evil in the form of the wicked plotters, "the enemy." Hans Toch provides a historical illustration:

. . . when the bubonic plague swept over Europe in the fourteenth century (costing twenty-five million lives), popular indignation exploded against the Jews, who were accused of poisoning wells to spread the disease. Although nothing constructive was done to curb the epidemic, the persecution of Jews furnished an illusion of remedy, as well as some emotional relief.<sup>115</sup>

Whether the enemy be the CIA, the Kremlin, or the Masons, conspiracy arguments assign guilt to the villain in personal terms. Conspiracy seems to entail a "devil theory" of morals.<sup>116</sup> The offenders are not just associated with the evil--they have deliberately caused it to further their own satanic ends. In short, they are the evil.

Some observers have linked this personification of evil, especially by the right-wing, to the influence of fundamentalist Christianity.<sup>117</sup> Other analysts go so far as to argue that the conspiracy theory per se is the result of the "secularization of a religious superstition."<sup>118</sup> In this connection, socio-political studies have noted that conspiracy theories often contain religious or quasi-religious elements such as apocalypticism, millenarianism, and/or manicheanism.<sup>119</sup> However, this research establishes a direct connection to fundamentalism in only a few cases--most notably that of the radical right. A religious conception of conspiracy, while providing provocative thematic analogies, does not account for all cabalistic thought--most notably not for conspiracy allegations by persons and groups that are avowedly atheistic. The point here is that the theological aspects of conspiracy theory are useful because they provide metaphors (e.g., "devil theory") that afford much insight into this rhetorical form. Perhaps the most significant of these quasi-religious elements is the personification of the enemy. The rhetor can use this strategy to focus attention on a palpable target toward which the audience can direct its anger and fear.

(11) The conspiracy argument evinces a strictly dichotomous view of morality. The malevolent plot is the evil counterpoint to the idyllic virtues of the community's

present state or utopian future. Perhaps there is no finer expression of this Manichean morality than Charles Sumner's 1855 interrogation of his audience in Faneuil Hall: "Are you for Freedom . . . or are you for Slavery? . . . Are you for God, or are you for the Devil?"<sup>120</sup> This notion of morality gives one few choices. The world is divided into two hostile camps; there is no neutral ground, no safe harbor for those of uncertain convictions. The uncommitted will be the first victims and the willing dupes of the legions of darkness. Paul M. Winter of the Ku Klux Klan exemplified this view in 1928:

Arrayed against each other, each clan facing clan; neighbor facing neighbor; church facing church, and the air filled with the acrimonious verbiage of mighty forces shifting for strategic positions, America is threatened with the greatest political conflict she has ever been forced to encounter. It is the inevitable conflict between the forces of traditional Americanism and the thoroughly organized legions of modernism and alienism. The ultimate climax will mean the sacrifice of liberty and fundamental Americanism for the devastating institutions of medieval autocracy and religious dogma, or a greater, more spiritual nation.<sup>121</sup>

Winter's perspective is completely polar: good versus evil, right versus wrong, Americanism versus alienism, tradition versus modernism, liberty versus autocracy, and spirituality versus dogma. This dichotomous moral theory has been found in most of the conspiracy literature examined by socio-political analysts.<sup>122</sup> The clash between the sacred virtues



of the community and the profane villainies of the conspiracy provides the moral dynamis of the cabalist genre.

(12) The conspiracy argument evinces an abiding concern with secrecy. On one level, the secretive nature of a group is presumptive reason for believing that they are up to no good. Why would honest people conduct themselves covertly? Indeed, this idea became one of the tests whereby Masons, Catholics, and Mormons were deemed conspirators in the nineteenth century.<sup>123</sup> The House Committee on Un-American Activities extended this theme into our century with their 1939 proclamation that: "It is not the open and undisguised activity of the Communists that we need fear. It is not their direct influence which should occasion alarm. It is rather the subversive<sup>and</sup> insidious way in which they go about their destructive work . . . If the Communists worked in the open there would be nothing to fear, but when through policies of deception and tactics that are cleverly concealed they pursue their destructive plans, it becomes important to reckon with them as menacing factors in our national life."<sup>124</sup> This argument implies that secret acts, almost by definition, are wicked acts. And, given a dichotomous view of morality, there is no reason to believe otherwise, since a loyal citizen would not hesitate to have his or her life open to public scrutiny. Hence, focusing on secrecy is an effective strategic complement to the polar

moral theory of conspiracy rhetoric.

A second function of secrecy is to explain away any gaps in the conspiracy theorist's evidence. The covert nature of the plot's machinery makes it possible, for example, to reconcile vast causal claims with the fact that only a few "Communists" or "Illuminati" or "CIA agents" can be identified. The handful of known malefactors is only the "tip of the iceberg." In fact, the paucity of plotters is used as evidence of their enormous personal powers. How could such a small group control entire eras if they weren't virtually omnipotent? Secrecy is the impenetrable barrier that prevents the public from comprehending the true dimensions of the cabal's influence and thus forces audiences to rely on the conspiracy theorist's amazing faculties for "inside information" on the plot. Samuel F. B. Morse illustrated the role of secrecy in the conspiracy argument in 1835: "The very nature of a conspiracy of this kind/ i.e., Papal/ precludes the possibility of much direct evidence of political design; for Jesuit cunning and Austrian duplicity would be sure to tread with unusual caution on American ground."<sup>125</sup> George W. Julian amplified the "tip of the iceberg" theme in his 1852 treatment of the Slave Power: "The Slaveholders, as we have seen, numbering only one twenty-fifth of their white brethren of the South, and one fortieth of the entire population of the

South, and one hundredth part of that of the Union, are yet the real sovereigns in this Republic. The powers of the government are in their keeping, and they determine all things according to the counsels of their own will. They say to the politician of the North 'Go,' and he goeth; to the Northern priest, 'Do this,' and he doeth it. They lay their mesmeric hands upon the moral pulse of the nation, and it ceases to beat. Nothing that is earthly can stand before the dread authority of these men. They are the reigning lords and masters of the people, white and black."<sup>126</sup> These samples of discourse illustrate three things: First, that the secrecy of the plot can account for any evidential lapse since the plotters "tread with unusual caution;" second, that the dearth of known plotters implicitly magnifies their power (e.g., "one hundredth part" of the Union can extinguish an entire nation's "moral pulse"), and third, the rhetor seems to be in possession of a singular ability to discern the structure and intentions of the cabal. As a result, the community must rely on the instincts of the conspiracy theorist if it is to survive; otherwise The Plot's skulduggery will be the polis' undoing.

A paradox is exposed in these arguments. How can the plot be so secret yet so fully known to the conspiracy theorist? The essence of this paradox is embodied in the John Birch Society's annual "Scoreboard" in which the organ-

ization lists, on a country-by-country basis, the percentage of control exercised the The Plot.<sup>127</sup> There are two ways of accounting for this tension between the known and the unknowable. First, the conspiracy theorist may claim (or imply) that he or she has access to special, "inside information" that provides a unique insight into the workings of the cabal.<sup>128</sup> Or, the conspiratorialist may wish to give the impression that full disclosure, while not immediately available, is only one declassified document, one ballistics test, or one confession away.<sup>129</sup> Both of these strategies provide support for the notion that conspiracy theory is heavily dependent on secrecy for persuasive force.

Although it has its limitations, the socio-political literature affords many important insights into the conspiracy genre. The major competition for these explanations has come from modern psychiatry and psychology.

Psychological Studies. The traditional view of politics asked "Who gets what, when, how?"<sup>130</sup> Political observers in this century, however, have realized that this definition does not account for seemingly irrational political behavior, such as conspiracy fears. The new perspective advanced to explain the sub-rational asks, "Who perceives what public issues, in what way, and why?"<sup>131</sup> This notion of politics is grounded in human motivation and thus has tended to

absorb a great deal of psychological theory and research. Remington illustrated this trend when he lamented that "for those persons attracted to the /conspiracy/ theory, the ultimate answers to the 'Why' questions must be sought in Psychology rather than in History."<sup>132</sup> Several varieties of psychological research have influenced the study of cabalism.

One branch of psychological inquiry seeks to uncover the roots of "irrational" phenomena, such as mass hysteria, mob psychology, and affective political styles.<sup>133</sup> A second type of investigation focuses on the psychodynamics of specific attitudes, such as Anti-Semitism or Anti-Communism.<sup>134</sup> Other studies have assessed the specific role of individual psychology in shaping political events.<sup>135</sup> Complementary inquiries have analyzed the impact of these motives on the group and movement level.<sup>136</sup> However, perhaps the most well-known and widely used research is the literature outlining the nature of various cabal-oriented personality types, e.g., the Authoritarian.<sup>137</sup> The major influence of psychology on the study of conspiracy has been from these theories of personality types, related Freudian psychoanalytic thought, and the clinical study of paranoia.<sup>138</sup>

Personality types, such as the Authoritarian, have been used to explain the mental motivations (developed in

childhood) behind outbursts of conspiratorial fear.<sup>139</sup>

Freudian theory has been offered in these and other investigations as an explanation of the mechanism whereby subjective fears and suspicions are transformed into cabalist behavior and attitudes. The basic concept is that internal (sometimes unconscious) hostilities, fears, and doubts are displaced by projecting them onto some enemy or devil figure. Levin illustrates this school of thought with his claim that "stripped of the convoluted language that often characterizes psychological analyses of politics, almost all observers agree that extreme passion in political responses often consists of the displacement of private affect upon public objects rationalized in terms of public interest."<sup>140</sup> He provides the example of the "superpatriot": "To the infant, the world often is an awesome and foreboding place. Potential catastrophes are everywhere. The superpatriot recreates this childhood world of imminent doom and reduces the man to the child--helpless in the face of gigantic and evil forces that threaten his very existence."<sup>141</sup>

This overtly Freudian perspective characterizes some scholarly research.<sup>142</sup> However, many other commentators speak in Freudian terms with little explicit reference to his theories and their limitations for social criticism.<sup>143</sup> Hofstadter, for example, refers to the conspiratorial enemy as being "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."<sup>144</sup> Davis, being even more specific, contends that, "nativists expressed horror over this freedom from conscience and conventional morality /attributed to Mormons, Catholics, and Masons/, but they could not conceal a throbbing note of envy. What was it like to be a member of a cohesive brotherhood that casually abrogated the laws of God and man, enforcing unity and obedience with dark and mysterious powers? As nativists speculated on this question, they projected their own fears and desires into a fantasy of licentious orgies and fearful punishments. Such projection of forbidden desires can be seen in the exaggeration of the stereotyped enemy's powers, which make him appear at times as a virtual superman."<sup>145</sup> Reading statements such as these, one suspects that many political analysts have adopted one of the prime traits of the cabalist groups they study: the rapid acceptance of simple, coherent explanations for complex phenomena. Perhaps this tendency toward "bootleg" psychoanalysis accounts for much of the criticism that such studies have received both from psychologists and from those who disdain theories of the irrational.

The third aspect of psychological theory--paranoia--has also had substantial effect on studies of conspiracy-related events and groups. Of course, the most obvious

influence has been on the notion of the "paranoid style." Hofstadter, however, distinguishes the political paranoid from the clinical paranoid by arguing that the clinical case involves feelings that a plot is directed at harming the individual personally, while the political paranoid sees the plot as directed against social or political principles.<sup>146</sup> Other authors do not draw such a clear distinction.

Hans Toch, for example, argues that the "conspiracy 'consumer' suffers from a condition analogous to the pre-paranoid state--anxiety, foreboding, a sense of danger, and a deep suspicion of foul play--he is usually unable to supply the documentation and logic for a full-blodded Plot. His membership affiliations represent a source of ready-made conspiracies complete with authoritative references and eye-witness reports."<sup>147</sup> Toch's assumption, based on Freud's notion that paranoia occurs as a substitute for panic, is that examining the exaggerated conspiracy theories of clinical paranoids may provide insight into the use of such ideas by "normal" social groups.<sup>148</sup> He is certainly not alone in his conceptualization of rightist thought as quasi-paranoid.<sup>149</sup>

The result of this viewpoint has been, in Bennett's words, the popular perception of the radical right as "'extremists,' 'kooks,' 'nuts,' 'little old ladies in tennis shoes,' etc., similar, if somewhat less colorful, locutions



can be found in scholarly works."<sup>150</sup> Ironically, while many studies have focused on a quasi-paranoiac interpretation of political extremism, there is virtually no clinical evidence to support the notion that the radical right is riddled with the mentally ill.<sup>151</sup> Thus, while a clinical paranoid may be a political paranoid, the reverse is hardly inevitable.<sup>152</sup> At best, then, the notion of paranoia provides an interesting psychological metaphor to aid our understanding of the conspiracy genre.

A final effect of psychological research has come from those who do not believe that either psychoanalytic or status anxiety theories adequately explain "irrational" political behavior.<sup>153</sup> Rogin illustrates this view with his injunction that "status anxieties may find an outlet in political moderation. One must not too readily identify personal anxieties or status politics with political extremism. No particular political consequences follow from non-political attitudes such as status anxieties. The intervening political and organizational structures and attitudes are crucial."<sup>154</sup> The argument here is not that personal anxieties or fear of status loss have no impact, but that their presence is not itself sufficient to explain all conspiracy-oriented political thought. Other, intervening variables are necessary to connect the subjective world of the mind with the external world of the political arena.

For most of the investigators who object to a strict Freudian or "status" interpretation, the major intervening variable is attitude.<sup>155</sup>

Daniel Katz has outlined the four functions of attitudes as follows: (1) The Adjustive Function: attitudes acquired to achieve a goal or avoid a penalty; (2) The Ego-Defensive Function: attitudes acquired to protect one from awareness of his or her own "unacceptable impulses" or from threats in the environment; (3) The Value-Expressive Function: attitudes which allow expression of basic values and self-concept, and; (4) The Knowledge Function: attitudes that work to provide "meaning and structure to what would otherwise be a chaotic world."<sup>156</sup> Bennett goes on to argue that the conspiracy theory may be functional for the individual because it works toward each of these attitudinal goals: The Adjustive Function is served when cabalist notions allow one to enjoy the personal benefits of participation in groups that hold similar ideas. The Ego-Defensive Function is met, in Freudian terms, if one conceives of conspiracy theory as a mechanism for projecting and displacing internal tensions onto an external enemy. Similarly, if one adopts a "status" perspective, cabalism serves the Value-Expressive Function by allowing the counter-subversive to view him or herself as a valiant crusader against the evil forces that threaten the polis--a role of substantially more status than

that of mere "citizen". Finally, conspiracy theory can serve the Knowledge Function by accounting for social upheavals in a relatively simple way.<sup>157</sup>

It is apparent, of course, that this formulation evinces the preoccupation with rightist extremism and psychoanalysis that characterizes other political studies. However, the functional approach to attitudes offers the advantage of subsuming both psychiatric and status theories under a format that provides workable ways of understanding without requiring a definitive verification of either theory of motives. The functional approach, then, is sufficient for a rhetorical study of the conspiracy genre because it acknowledges the undeniable importance of psychology to discourse without reducing utterance to a mere verbal symptom of subconscious states. Thus, regardless of the subjective motivations of the individual, insight can be gained into the nature of conspiracy rhetoric by treating the artifact as an operative factor in the lives of both rhetor and audience.<sup>158</sup> This concept is central to the functional perspective of the present study.

Much of the foregoing discussion implies serious limitations in the psychological research on cabalist thought and expression. Each of the theories assessed attempts to define the causes of certain styles of human behavior. As such, these explanations often suffer from defects common

to causal analysis.<sup>159</sup> For psychology, this problem is fundamental because, as Robert Lifton observes, "the social theory necessary to bridge the gap between the individual and collectivity remains fragmented, implicit, unclear, or nonexistent!"<sup>160</sup> A psychological approach, then, must not only provide interesting theories of human psychic life, but must be able to link individual motivations with the mass events of the body politic. Attempts to formulate mentalistic explanations for political behavior have encountered a number of difficulties. Bunzel and Strout have discussed many of these problems in the following terms:<sup>161</sup> First, psychological investigators often lack sufficient evidence for their claims or have little notion of what constitutes appropriate evidence. Preparing a psychohistory of Richard Nixon, for instance, is quite difficult when the only records of his childhood years are contained in his autobiography.<sup>162</sup> Second, psychological explanations can easily be used for adversary purposes. While this problem is certainly not unique to psychiatry-at-a-distance, such studies have been characterized by the attribution of irrationality to groups of whom the investigator disapproves and by the attribution of rationality to groups viewed with more favor. As Elms notes, "it is doubtless comforting for leftists and liberals,

perhaps moderate conservatives too, to see all radical rightists in this way: twisted, lunatic, even . . . a different species altogether from the good people of this land."<sup>163</sup> Perhaps a more substantial problem, in this connection, is the lack of criteria for deciding when one should apply rational versus psychological explanations. Third, psychological inquiry often falls into the "reductive fallacy" of simply slapping Freudian schemata on any event or idea that is under study. In Strout's terms, "conflicting social groups then become stand-ins for Freud's three entities--a bloodless ballet of the categories."<sup>164</sup> Fourth, psychological investigations can be deterministic in the extreme. Again, this problem is not unique to psycho-history. However, it does have the potential to eliminate all non-psychic influences from consideration and thus is an issue which should be (but often is not) given careful consideration.<sup>165</sup> Finally, psychological notions of motive are difficult to test. Bunzel points out that "the difficulty with this kind of explanation /of membership in the John Birch Society/is that there is really no reliable way for most of us to know if it is, in fact, the explanation. It corresponds, of course, to the stereotype of the political authoritarian, and thus it is easy enough to fit the individual into the mold. But this

can hardly be equated with evidence."<sup>166</sup> If the subject fits the category, then, how is one to prove or disprove that his or her political activities are the result of repressed sexual fantasies, sublimated guilt, etc.? These limitations are not a case for discontinuing psycho-historical studies. Rather, they represent the realization that such studies face many of the same problems that have baffled traditional historians. Psychology is no panacea for the rhetorical critic.

Fortunately, the present study does not have to make final determinations on the psychology of conspiracy. Rather, as Hofstadter has argued, "historians and political scientists have always worked, implicitly or explicitly, with psychological assumptions; . . . these ought to be made as conscious as possible; . . . and they should be sophisticated enough to take ample account of the complexity of political action."<sup>167</sup> One suspects that the failure of conventional historians to clarify (and perhaps confess) their use of psychological premises may be connected in some way to the advent of psychohistory and its promise to give us the "real" explanations that are lurking behind the traditional historian's generalities. Hopefully, the present study will provide psychological assumptions of sufficient specificity to make "bootleg" psychoanalysis unnecessary. These assumptions are embodied in several hypotheses that can be

synthesized from the psychological literature:

(13) The conspiracy argument possesses an enormous urgency for the rhetor and the believing audience. If there is any one conclusion that can be drawn from the psychological research, it is that those who believe in conspiracies believe passionately. The level of personal commitment to such theories, regardless of motivation, is remarkable. As a result, counter-subversives see no justification for delay in reacting to the plot.<sup>168</sup> Samuel F. B. Morse exemplified this trait in his fulminations on the Catholic conspiracy:

Is not the evidence I have exhibited in my previous numbers sufficiently strong to prove my countrymen the existence of a foreign conspiracy against the liberties of the country? Does the nature of the case admit of stronger evidence? or must we wait for some positive, undisguised acts of oppression, before we will believe that we are attacked and in danger? Must we wait for a formal declaration of war? The serpent has already commenced his coil about our limbs and the lethargy of his poison is creeping over us; shall we be more sensible of the torpor when it has fastened our vitals? The house is on fire; can we not believe it till the flames have touched our flesh? Is not the enemy already organized in the land? . . . Because no foe is on the sea, no hostile armies on our plains, may we sleep securely?<sup>169</sup>

One need not undertake a Freudian analysis of fire imagery or serpent symbols to see that Morse's plot is only one step from victory--a powerful and immediate threat to all that is good. Perhaps it is this sense of urgency that helps to produce the counter-subversive's "heated exaggeration," strident tone, and lurid imagery.<sup>170</sup>

(14) The conspiracy argument evinces a literal-minded view of facts and events. This hypothesis is most clearly exemplified in the conspiratorialist's interpretation of documents exposing the enemy's intentions.<sup>171</sup> The cabalist reads this literature much as a fundamentalist might read the Bible, in a single-minded, literal fashion. There is no intellectual hair-splitting here; these documents mean one thing and one thing only. They expose the perfidious intentions of a diabolical plot. Once again, Morse provides an exemplar:

"As long as I live," says the Emperor /Nicholas I of Russia/, "I will oppose a will of iron to the progress of liberal opinions. The present generation is lost, but we must labor with zeal and earnestness to improve the spirit of that to come. It may require a hundred years; I am not unreasonable, I give you a whole age, but you must work without relaxation."  
This is language without ambiguity, bold, undisguised; it is the clear and official disclosure of the determination of the Holy Alliance against liberty. It proclaims unextinguishable hatred, a will of iron. There is no compromise with



liberty; a hundred years of efforts unrelaxed, if necessary, shall be put forth to crush it for ever. Its very name must be blotted from the earth . . .172

Morse's interpretation admits of no doubts that the Emperor speaks for the entire Holy Alliance, that he has the resources to carry out his campaign against liberty, and that America, the bastion of freedom, must of necessity be his primary target. The psychologist might term this "low cognitive complexity" or a "simple cognitive style" --characteristics often attributed to extremists. For the purposes of the present study, however, it is important only to be aware of the monolithic, severe styles of formulating claims that typify the cabalist's interpretation of the environment.

For the conspiracy theorist of the right, the Communist Manifesto, for example, cannot be read simply as an exposition of a certain political theory; it must be seen as a satanic handbook, a sort of anti-Bible, which is to guide the strategy and tactics of the Red Plot. Similarly, the Constitution is viewed as if it were God's personal plan for the political life of loyal Americans. This literal-mindedness bolsters the deductive logic of the conspiracy theorist by eliminating any uncertainty or vagueness that may creep into the premises of the arguments. Moreover, since any shred

of proof can be cast as dispositive if given the appropriate connotations, a literal-minded reading of "secret" documents may equip the counter-subversive with a mountain of "specific" evidence. For instance, if a local newspaper editorial defends water fluoridation and one is sure that such a policy is Red-inspired, the editorialist's name can be added confidently to one's list of "known" Communist sympathizers. Thus, a literal interpretation of something as simple as a newspaper editorial may equip the cabalist with clear evidence of a plot that more naive citizens might overlook. Perhaps this interpretative tendency explains (in part) the puzzling coexistence of simplistic causal claims and multiple, intricate supporting arguments in many conspiracy theories. The causal statements seem to serve as magnets, attracting any sort of material that possibly could be construed as containing the proper probative elements.

Jedidiah Morse illustrates the apparent specificity of evidence that can be produced by literal-minded "research." In his 1799 sermon on the Illuminati conspiracy, he voices a now-familiar claim:

I have in my possession complete and indubitable proof that such societies do exist, and have for many years existed, in the United States. I have, my brethren, an official, authenticated list of

the names, ages, places of nativity, professions, etc. of the officers and members of a Society of Illuminati (or as they are now more generally and properly styled Illuminees) consisting of one hundred members, instituted in Virginia, by the Grand Orient of France.<sup>173</sup>

Assuming Morse did possess such a list, he raises no question as to whether these societies are similar to their evil European kin or what the relation of the one hundred "members" to the society is. For Morse, "member" is a synonym for "conspirator," "society" is a synonym for "conspiracy," and "officers" is a code word for "ring leaders." Illuminati are Illuminati are Illuminati.

Hofstadter contrasts the literal-minded style of the conspiracy theorist with the more flexible perspective-taking of non-cabalist politics. For the non-conspiratorial political actor, "there exists a certain sobriety born of experience, an understanding that what sounds good on the banquet circuit may not make feasible policy, that statements, manifestos, and polemics are very far from pragmatic programs . . ."<sup>174</sup> In short, those who reject conspiracy theory are able to understand that a Russian leader's promise to "bury" the United States may be more of a product of personal anger than a clarion call to world-wide subversion. However, no such distinction exists for the cabalist: "bury" means "bury!" Thus, the literal-mindedness of the conspiratorialist reinforces his or her deductive

logic and dichotomous worldview. It may be impossible, then, for the countersubversive to see that many a Plot is, in Cohen's words, "like the prankster's fins in the water, not a shark at all . . ." <sup>175</sup>

(15) The conspiracy argument "makes sense" out of the reality of the believer. The psychological literature makes it clear that conspiratorial thinking does something for the thinker: it may lower anxiety levels, displace or project insidious self-loathing, express basic self-worth, or simply provide access to the benefits of group membership. Regardless of which perspective one adopts, it seems apparent that the idea of an omnipotent cabal controlling events allows one to understand the world in a way that would be impossible in the absence of conspiratorial thought. This is not to say that discourse summons reality into being, but that it provides a clear, systematic attribution of meaning to the often disorderly facts of one's life. Levin, giving a somewhat psychologized view, argues that "myths of conspiratorial danger can provide a universal, rather simple, easily understood, and meaningful interpretation of a bewildering world-- particularly when those myths tap unconscious proclivities and potentiate latent American perspectives. The conspirators are the cause of the difficulty. The political world is thus ordered and explained." <sup>176</sup> Thus, the fulminations of the counter-subversive

provide a means of giving structure to a world that may seem incapable of spontaneously ordering itself according to norms and expectations.<sup>177</sup> In one sense, then, the conspiracy theory stands between the believer and chaos. It may be the only way of reconciling the citizen's faith in the community with the seeming inability of the polis to ward off evil.

### Conspiracy as Rhetorical Genre

The final tasks of this chapter are to reformulate the hypotheses according to the formal categories of the extant definition of "genre," and to judge the necessity of including each hypothesis in this tentative "map" of the conspiracy argument. The preliminary hypotheses can be consolidated and reformulated as follows:

#### Substance

(1) The conspiracy argument claims that the community is being threatened by an evil force personified as a secret plot.

(2) The conspiracy argument makes a deductive, causal claim.

(3) The conspiracy argument evinces a strictly dichotomous view of morality.

(4) The conspiracy argument is capable of coopting or refuting virtually any criticism.

### Style

(5) The conspiracy argument is dramatic in form.

(6) The conspiracy argument tends toward urgency, exaggeration, and lurid imagery.

(7) The evidence for the conspiracy argument is presented en masse.

(8) The conspiracy argument evinces a literal-minded view of facts and events.

(9) The conspiracy argument is flexible enough to be easily extrapolated or quickly shifted from one subject or enemy to another.

### Situation

(10) The conspiracy argument occurs in times of social stress.

These hypotheses constitute a preliminary "map" of the conspiracy genre. However, the real test of the utility of this definition centers on the "internal dynamic" that binds these diffuse statements into a cohesive whole. This dynamic centers on the problem of reconciling the community to the existence of some moral or physical hazard. The key to the conspiracy genre is that it accomplishes this feat by personifying the enemy as a secret plot and by casting the virtuous community as engaged in a titanic struggle with the forces of darkness. In this way, the evil (or "social stress") can be attributed to the plot while the moral

claims of the polis remain intact; for as the plotters are vilified, the polis is purified. Thus, the "internal dynamic" of the conspiracy genre is the principle of transforming social maladies into a dramatic confrontation between community and cabal that enhances and purifies the social group while transferring blame and guilt to the conspiracy.<sup>178</sup>

The criterion for determining the validity of this "dynamic" is whether or not functional dependencies obtain among the hypotheses so as to render each hypothesis a necessary premise for several others. Moreover, each hypothesis must describe a formal property of the genre which bears on its role of resolving the problem of evil. Rather than examine every possible configuration of the hypotheses, the inquiry will proceed by examining the changes that would occur in the genre if each hypothesis (in turn) were deleted from the definition. The purpose of this procedure is not to map out every connection between the ten statements, but to describe relationships sufficiently important to render a verdict on the validity and uses of the notion of the problem of evil as "internal dynamic." The test of functional necessity will be two-fold: are functional relationships revealed, and, would deletion of a hypothesis fundamentally alter the generic

definition posited earlier?

Substance. (1) The conspiracy argument claims that the community is being threatened by an evil force personified as a secret plot. This fundamental proposition serves as the basis for many aspects of conspiracy rhetoric. The notion of the "community" versus an "evil force" calls for a dichotomous morality (H3). Moreover, the personification of the enemy is a foundation for the logical and moral forms within the genus. In this connection, Kenneth Burke provides the example of Mein Kampf:

Once Hitler has thus essentialized his enemy, all "proof" henceforth is automatic. If you point out the enormous amount of evidence to show that the Jewish worker is at odds with the "international Jew stock exchange capitalist," Hitler replies with one hundred per cent regularity: That is one more indication of the cunning with which the "Jewish Plot" is being engineered. Or would you point to "Aryans" who do the same as his conspiratorial Jews? Very well; that is proof that the "Aryan" has been "seduced" by the Jew. 179

Thus, Hitler's personification of the enemy allows him to deduce conclusions on the nature of the foe (H2), to make moral claims against the plot (H3) and, simultaneously, to coopt criticism (H4). Accomplishment of these strategic goals would be much less likely in the absence of a concretized enemy (e.g., if Hitler had argued that Germany's woes were simply a product of some impersonal cause such as



worldwide inflation or historical accident). Finally, the secrecy of the plot is related to the ability to shift targets, extrapolate claims, and coopt criticism in that the lack of knowledge about the cabal enables the rhetor to "fill in the gaps" anyway he or she chooses. Moreover, the mystery surrounding the cabal makes it easier for all facts to be treated as evidence (H8) since the chances of encountering inconsistent facts are greatly reduced by the admittedly covert nature of the plot. Also, the secrecy of the conspiracy aids a dichotomous moral view (H3) since only the evil would have any reason for operating under cover of darkness. Clearly, omission of these forms would drastically alter the genre in that its basic propositional content would be mitigated.

(2) The conspiracy argument makes a deductive, causal claim. The deductive logic of this appeal is fed by a literal-mindedness (H8) and an ability to coopt criticism (H4) that can transform all data into indisputable "evidence." Additionally, the causal nature of the argument strengthens its vilification of the enemy (H1) and its dualist morality (H3) in that a deterministic notion of "cause" implies intentional malice on the part of the plotters. Ultimately, however, this causal/deductive format is essential because it makes events (evil) understandable for the community by attributing them to specific, knowable causal agents--

the conspirators. Without the power of deductive causal claims, the conspiracy argument would be reduced to simply describing events rather than defining them as part of a sinister pattern.

(3) The conspiracy argument evinces a strictly dichotomous view of morality. This moral perspective is necessary if the rhetor is to separate the community from the conspiracy. Such dualism supports the deductive/causal nature of the argument (H2) in that it establishes moral premises for the syllogism. In short, it is much easier to deduce statements about the causes and effects of social maladies if one holds as a first principle the infinite malevolence of the plot and the sacred virtue of the polis. Also, a dualist morality supports a dramatic perspective (H5) in that it provides a natural context for the naming of heroes and villains and thus for the construction of a narrative depicting the causes of evil, their ultimate consequences, and the necessity of community action. Lacking a dichotomous morality, the genre would be much less able to identify the enemy plotters and to vilify their activities.

(4) The conspiracy argument is capable of coopting or refuting virtually any criticism. This capacity is a function of the latitude granted the rhetor by the plot's secrecy (H1), the literal-minded translation of all facts into "evidence" (H8), and the ability to shift targets rapidly (H9). Thus,

with judicious interpretation of certain data as "conclusive" evidence and facile substitution of targets and topics the rhetor can turn virtually any opposing argument into support for his or her case. Of course, the ultimate secrecy of the cabal provides a "last-ditch" defense should other refutational strategies be negated by some "brute" countervailing reality. Thus, the refutational ability of the genre is a composite of several of its essential formal properties, each depending on the others to achieve maximum impact.

Style. (5) The conspiracy argument is dramatic in form. The naming of symbolic heroes and villains is a natural part of the conspiracy rhetor's argument. Grounded in a dichotomous moral view (H3), the specification of the agents of good and evil becomes a necessity if the audience is fully to comprehend the events in question. Knowable agents are essential if the counter-subversive is to construct an explanatory narrative to account for the community's woes. A dramatic form, then, completes the personification of the enemy (H1) and establishes a confrontation between principles of good and evil that is conducive to exaggeration and lurid imagery (H6). Without a dramatic narrative form, the conspiracy genre would dissolve into simple discussion of issues thus voiding most of its emotive and moral content.

(6) The conspiracy argument tends toward urgency, exag-

generation, and lurid imagery. This aspect of the conspiracy genre's style reflects the high stakes attached to the argument by the rhetor. A dualist morality (H3) and dramatic perspective (H5) combine to create an often feverish tone in discourse. One who is convinced that he or she is warning the community of an ultimate evil (H1) is not likely to adopt an understated approach. Rather, the rhetor must use every available device to the maximum so that the audience understands the urgency of confronting the secret enemy. However, this hypothesis is perhaps merely a reflection of other forms rather than a unique aspect of the genre. It is quite possible to use conspiracy arguments without lurid imagery or exaggeration.<sup>180</sup> Further, many non-conspiracy arguments also use this style. It would probably be more accurate to conceive of exaggeration, etc., as a continuum (ranging from little exaggeration to much) along which conspiracy arguments may be located. (Perhaps these distinctions would offer clues to the differences between various types of conspiracy claims, e.g., extremist versus mainstream; however, this idea requires further testing.)

(7) The evidence for the conspiracy argument is presented en masse. The totality of evidence in the conspiracy argument reflects the literal-mindedness of the rhetors (H8) in that, since any fact can become evidence, the speaker

is equipped with vast quantities of testimony to fit into a coherent pattern. This pattern gives the impression that the rhetor's deductive claims (H2) are based on a wide-ranging survey of data. Also, the sometimes fragmentary appearance of the evidence can be explained away by the quasi-secrecy of the plot's machinations (H1). Omitting the density or mosaic-like structuring of evidence would indeed alter the genre. One can conceive of non-conspiracy arguments that use much evidence or of conspiracy appeals based on only a few pieces of documentation. However, the key concept here is not just the amount of evidence, but the ability to fit a truly massive quantity of documentation into a pattern that leaves the auditor with only one conclusion--conspiracy. Such a pattern is often expressed in the mosaic style of the conspiracy genre.

(8) The conspiracy argument evinces a literal-minded view of facts and events. As noted previously, literal-mindedness makes a great deal of evidence available to the rhetor (H7). Moreover, such an interpretation of the facts is essential to the deductive/causal claims of the argument (H2) because it eliminates uncertainty from logical premises and mitigates the epistemological perplexities of causal propositions. Without literal-mindedness, the evidential base for the conspiracy rhetor's arguments would be eviscerated by the secrecy surrounding the plot. The conspira-

toralist must be able to attach sinister meaning to even the slightest shred of evidence to survive in a world controlled by a plot that is adept at concealing its maneuvers.

(9) The conspiracy argument is flexible enough to be easily extrapolated or quickly shifted from one subject or enemy to another. The conspiratorialist's penchant for secrecy (H1), the literal interpretation of facts (H8), and the ease of attaching moral imperatives to any person or event (H3) makes it relatively simple to alter the scope or focus of the argument. Since the plot is never fully known, one can always discover "new" facts that alter the original argument or include new villains under the rubric of The Plot (especially since everyone and everything must be either "good" or "evil"). Thus, argumentative flexibility reflects central forms in the conspiracy appeal, without which the genre would be substantially different.

Situation. (10) The conspiracy argument occurs in times of social stress. This statement is the grounding for the basic claim of the conspiracy argument (H1) in that there would be little reason to explain or interpret evil if the community was experiencing no stress. In the absence of such stress, the public's "brute sense of the plausible" presumably would have a restraining influence on cabalist discourse. Of course, one of the basic functions of conspiracy argumentation is to define events as "stressful."

While one person might see school integration as a social good, for example, the conspiratorialist who opposes such a policy must interpret it as a great wound in the body politic. (Perhaps one can use this idea to distinguish between extremist conspiracy discourse that must define seemingly normal events, e.g., water fluoridation, as evil, and mainstream conspiracy argument wherein some event, e.g., an assassination, is generally held to be evil but must be attributed to a cause. Again, this conclusion awaits further study.) In order to accomplish this interpretation of events the rhetor must enlist a dualist moral perspective (H3) to define the phenomena as evil and a dramatic narrative (H5) based on a massive pattern of evidence (H7) so as to impose an understandable order on disturbing events. Without perceived social stress, the rhetorical situation eliciting conspiracy rhetoric would be absent and the genre would cease to exist.<sup>181</sup>

### Conclusion

The literature of psychology reinforces many of the hypotheses derived from the rhetorical and socio-political research on conspiracy. In fact, if one compares these propositions to those afforded by the survey of primary sources, two central conclusions emerge: (1) There is a remarkable degree of uniformity on the significant characteristics of conspiracy theories. And, many of these key features seem

to be mutually supportive. (2) There is much less agreement on the individual and group motives for conspiratorial thought and behavior. The first of these conclusions provides a presumptive reason for regarding conspiracy discourse as an identifiable genre. The second suggests a gap in the current understanding of conspiracy that can be readily filled by the notion of evil as the dynamic which motivates and sustains cabalist discourse.

The foregoing analysis of hypotheses has several other important implications. First, significant functional relationships have been discovered among most of these statements. Second, removal of many of the forms represented in the hypotheses would fundamentally alter the genre. Thus, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that some "internal dynamic" makes these statements cohere into a unique genus.

The essence of this dynamic is the need to construct a secular theodicy--a reconciliation between the existence of evil and the supposed virtues of the community. Every aspect of conspiracy rhetoric, be it deductive logic, dichotomous morality, dramatic structure, or extrapolation, serves the end of somehow casting social maladies into terms that the polis can comprehend and act upon.

The secular theodicy isolated here is more than a force that coalesces forms into a genre. In the forthcoming inves-



tigation of examples, it will be regarded as the rhetorical problem that elicits discourse. Hofstadter observes in this connection that, "a great part of both the strength and the weakness of our national existence lies in the fact that Americans do not abide very quietly the evils of life. We are forever restlessly pitting ourselves against them, demanding changes, improvements, remedies, but not often with sufficient sense of limits that the human condition will in the end insistently impose upon us."<sup>182</sup> The examination of the rhetoric of the Palmer Raids and the John F. Kennedy assassination will use this notion of evil-as-motive-for-discourse as a perspective from which one can understand the internal workings of the conspiratorial genus.

The conspiracy theme permeates every aspect of American public life. The fear of cabals has found legal institutionalization in the criminal offense of "conspiracy."<sup>183</sup> Literature and cinema both echo the rhythms of our paranoia.<sup>184</sup> Even the supermarket tabloid promises to reveal the "Untold Story." The ideas developed in this chapter represent some of the essentials of America's conspiratorial thought

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CONSPIRACY ARGUMENT AND THE RED SCARE

#### "The Fighting Quaker"

Ours is a land of freedom that we're  
justly proud to claim,  
Old Glory waves above us and none dares  
her stripes defame;  
Yet Reds uprose against it and we showed  
them they were wrong,  
The Fighting Quaker did it with a courage  
quick and strong.

-- Palmer Campaign Committee  
Palmer for President, 1920

A complete assessment of the hypotheses developed earlier requires that they be applied to exemplars of the conspiracy genus so that the uses and limitations of these statements can be revealed. This chapter examines the use of the conspiracy theme by a United States Attorney General in defense of a government policy. The rhetor in question is A. Mitchell Palmer; the discourse to be analyzed is his article entitled "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" which appeared in the February, 1920, issue of The Forum: A Magazine of Constructive Nationalism.<sup>1</sup> The burden of this article was to explain and justify the arrest or deportation of several thousand suspected "Reds" during 1919 that

culminated in the "Palmer Raids" initiated on January 2, 1920. Inquiry into this sample of conspiracy rhetoric will begin with a discussion of the rhetorical problem confronting post-World War I America, and the narrower rhetorical problem evident in the Attorney General's justification for his deeds. Subsequently, the rhetoric itself will be reconstructed by an explication of its themes and strategic forms. The information produced in this analysis will be examined to determine whether it confirms, denies, or requires modification of the generic hypotheses. Hopefully, this procedure will provide an initial "real world" test of the hypotheses so as to advance the present study toward a more conclusive definition of the conspiracy genre.

#### Social Disruption as a Rhetorical Problem

Rhetorical critics have often explored the notion that individual speakers may be confronted by a rhetorical problem, that is, a situation perceived as requiring a discursive response for its successful resolution.<sup>2</sup> While this approach is a useful one, it is not the only possible application of the concept. Such situations also can confront entire societies. Indeed, Chapter II argues in some detail that evil, as a social problem, often evokes a rhetorical reaction (e.g., the conspiracy genus). A culture's rhetoric, then, is often shaped by the need to resolve certain problems in

a way that enhances the social order. This idea suggests that the perception of a threat to the status quo may elicit discourse aimed at eliminating the threat or at least enabling the social group to cope with it or compensate for it. Rhetoric of this sort may be produced by elites, media, political groups, or any other actor with a stake in maintaining the prevailing cultural arrangement.<sup>3</sup> As an essentially conservative response to an endangered status quo, this type of discourse provides those whose interests are threatened with the sausory resources necessary for reaffirmation of social values and denigration of the disruptive elements. Earlier chapters have made it clear that conspiracy rhetoric is very effective in this regard. It was to such rhetoric that a troubled America turned in the years following World War I.<sup>4</sup>

In late 1918 the nation was beset by the problems of readjusting to a peacetime situation. The signing of the Armistice forced the United States to realign its entire economic and political system in order to prepare for the "normalcy" of the 1920's. The transition was a difficult one. With the elimination of wartime economic controls came rampant inflation, high unemployment, labor strife, and general public uncertainty about what the future held.<sup>5</sup> These turmoils did not leave Americans unaffected. The

war created a vastly exaggerated nationalism on the domestic scene.<sup>6</sup> When hostilities ceased, this powerful motive force was left without a coherent object or outlet. Faced with the need to explain the difficulties that the nation was experiencing, many citizens diverted their nationalism into an explanatory role, i.e., they began to feel that just as the war had been necessitated by the threat of an alien enemy, American's economic problems must also be the machinations of some foreign foe operating within our borders.<sup>7</sup> This definition of evil as being a product of alien enemies fulfilled the need for a nationalistic identity in a time of crisis. As Murray Levin puts it, this reaction was "prompted, in part, by the disruption and stress which followed the First World War. The revitalization of old American values did serve as a unifying force--a re-affirmation of the national identity--and, as such, a bulwark against disintegrating forces. The communitas created during the war could thus be continued."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the notion of an enemy intruder served to explain the causes of post-war economic chaos, to provide a comprehensible order to the threat, and to offer the hope of salvation through "one hundred percent Americanism." The Red Scare was underway.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to understand that the problems confronting America in the immediate post-war era were not just

economic. The nation had also witnessed the much-lamented triumph of Bolshevism in Russia and the perceived adulteration of the domestic social milieu by the immigration of a vast horde of aliens, many of whom were seen as being in league with leftist labor leaders under the direct control of the Bolshevik government in Moscow. As Dwight Smith contends, "just over the horizon lay bolshevism, whose influence could be detected, by observers prone to conspiracy theories, wherever the accustomed order was under attack."<sup>10</sup> Those who possessed this attitude saw the massive labor struggles and the rash of bombings that occurred in 1919 as direct confirmation that our entire social structure was under attack!<sup>11</sup> Indeed, many citizens feared that the nation was nearing a full-scale confrontation between the alien Reds and the forces of democracy.<sup>12</sup> Economic and political upheaval were paralleled by rapid changes in social behavior. Fond hopes of returning to the verities of a simpler age were shattered by the emergence of "modernist" notions of art, religion, politics, and mores. The hapless citizen hoping for a status quo ante, instead seemed to confront uncertainty and instability everywhere he or she turned.<sup>13</sup> Suddenly, there was the unthinkable possibility that the struggle to "make the world safe for democracy" had produced only a pyrrhic victory. Neither the state of

the world nor that of America matched the images promised in wartime propaganda.

Perhaps, then, in addition to economic and social maladies, the nation also fell victim to its own rhetoric. Having been committed to an idealized self-image in its war discourse, the nation had difficulty reconciling its economic and cultural chaos with its notion of America as bastion of decency and morality, leader of the crusade against the Huns. Unable to create a democratic Utopia within their borders or without, those who supported the war would have to wonder why their beloved country seemed incapable of engineering the new era of peace and freedom that had been promised in wartime propaganda. This was an America that no longer knew itself, a country capable of defeating the German empire but somehow strangely impotent when confronted with smaller, domestic problems. The cumulative effect of these troubling doubts was what Davis has called "dissillusion-- . . . a loss of faith in the correspondence of appearance and reality."<sup>14</sup> After all, if a costly war to save democracy was only a hollow effort at best, what might the more obvious social maladies of the day be concealing? This strand of thought, what one might call a "Trojan Horse mentality," formed the basis for the conspiracy claims of the 1920's.<sup>15</sup> All that was needed was an

appropriate enemy. Fresh from their triumph in Russia, the Bolsheviks were ideal candidates.

The initial rhetorical response to the Red Scare was a nationwide campaign to rekindle "Americanism" and mount a crusade against the Communist conspiracy. Many private agencies, media outlets, and individuals joined in the task of enlightening the national audience to the threat of festering Bolshevism.<sup>16</sup> Speakers engaged in this campaign often presented a very rigid contrast of the sacred values of "one hundred percent Americanism" versus the vile precepts of the conspiratorial Reds.<sup>17</sup> As one might expect, much of this discourse advocated rather harsh policies. For example, General Leonard Wood proclaimed that his policy for dealing with Red agitators would be "S.O.S. -- ship or shoot. I believe we should place them all on ships of stone, with sails of lead and that their first stopping place should be hell. We must advocate radical laws to deal with radical people."<sup>18</sup> This type of discourse was oriented toward resolving a pressing rhetorical problem of the day. As Stanley Coben explains: "Citizens who joined in the crusade for one hundred percent Americanism sought, primarily, a unifying force which would halt the apparent disintegration of their culture. The movement, they felt, would eliminate those foreign influences which the one hundred percenters



believed were the major cause of their anxiety."<sup>19</sup> Thus, rhetors of 1919-1920 tried to provide a plausible explanation for the evils that afflicted them and to call for action against the real causes of such difficulties.

It is from this effort to cope with evil that the conspiracy appeal develops. One Congressman exemplified this theme in early 1920 when he argued before the House of Representatives that "the radicals, both native and alien, are organized as never before. They defend each other. It makes no difference to what particular organizations they belong, or what they call themselves. Anarchist, communist, syndicalist--they are all the same. They connive day and night for the same thing. They know what they want--revolution by force."<sup>20</sup> Appeals of this type were both popular and effective at the time. Incidents such as the Russian Revolution and the strikes and bombings of 1919 could be placed in a coherent explanatory scheme if one assumed them to be part of a huge plot to take over America. The radicals themselves unwittingly aided conspiracy theorists by producing extremist rhetoric that drastically overstated what they could achieve. Stanley Coben observes in this connection that "domestic radicals encouraged these fears; they became unduly optimistic about their own chances of

success and boasted openly of their coming triumph . . . [The radical] periodicals never tired of assuring readers in 1919 that 'the United States seems to be on the verge of a revolutionary crisis.'"<sup>21</sup>

The irony of this situation is that, for all the Red Scare hysteria, the actual number of Communists was extremely small (less than 1/1000 of the adult population)<sup>22</sup> and their effectiveness was doubtful at best.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, the belief in an alien radical conspiracy was so powerful that thousands of citizens cached weapons and food in preparation for an armed struggle against the revolutionaries;<sup>24</sup> several deportation laws were passed and the Department of Justice established a "Radical" Division (under J. Edgar Hoover) to battle the Red peril.<sup>25</sup> Actual mass arrests and deportation of aliens began in the winter of 1919.<sup>26</sup> These federal policies were accompanied by complementary public and private actions on the state and local level. Thus, the conspiracy theme was institutionalized in law enforcement policy and in statutes such as the Alien Act of 1918 which set forth the legal principle of guilt by association.<sup>27</sup> The validity of the conspiracy theme is the major assumption underlying A. Mitchell Palmer's justification of his mass arrest policy.

#### A. Mitchell Palmer's Rhetorical Problem

A. Mitchell Palmer's political career included service as a Congressman, as the Alien Property Custodian during the war, and as the Attorney General of the United States.<sup>28</sup> Paradoxically, Palmer was quite the liberal immediately after the war, a time during which he was referred to in popular literature as the "Fighting Quaker." However, he was soon infected by the conspiracy fever gripping the nation. Palmer's appointment to the Attorney General's post in 1919 gave him the perfect opportunity to exploit the Red Scare. Having been the intended victim of one of the 1919 bombings, he understandably would place great emphasis on rooting out the Red conspiracy.<sup>29</sup> Most importantly, however, he enjoyed a unique combination of power, staff, and funding that allowed him to pursue the nation's enemies with a vigor that few could match.<sup>30</sup>

Equipped with such power, Palmer began raiding Red meeting places on January 2, 1920, in hopes of deporting large numbers of dangerous aliens quickly with the cooperation of the Department of Labor. The raids resulted in over 6,000 arrests. Wholesale violations of Constitutional rights and human dignity were typical of every phase of the procedure.<sup>31</sup> For example, the New York Times of January 3, 1920, described one raid in New York:

Meetings wide open to the general public were roughly broken up. All

persons present--citizens and aliens without discrimination--were arbitrarily taken into custody and searched as if they had been burglars caught in the criminal act. Without warrants of arrest men were carried off to police stations and other temporary prisons, subjected there to secret police-office inquisitions commonly known as the "third degree," their statements written categorically into mimeographed question blanks, and they required to swear to them regardless of their accuracy.<sup>32</sup>

For all of this effort, three handguns were the only weapons seized and only about 500 persons were actually deported.<sup>33</sup>

Given the tenor of the times it is no surprise that the raids were initially seen in the context of conspiracy theory. The headline of the January 3, 1920, New York Herald announced:

2,000 REDS ARRESTED IN 56 CITIES THROUGHOUT  
NATION IN GREATEST SIMULTANEOUS FEDERAL  
RAIDS OF HISTORY  
VAST WORKING PLOT TO OVERTHROW GOVERNMENT FEARED

On the next day the New York Times reported:

REDS PLOTTED COUNTRY-WIDE STRIKE  
ARRESTS EXCEED 5,000, 2,635 HELD  
THREE TRANSPORTS READY FOR THEM 34

The power of the conspiracy theme, then, would have been an obvious rhetorical resource available to Palmer. Dwight Smith explains the Attorney General's affinity for the conspiracy appeal when he contends that Palmer became "the

moral entrepreneur of the day, using the bombing incident as his justification for mobilizing public opinion against a radical, Bolshevik-inspired conspiracy . . . there were at least five known organizations that might threaten the country; the May day bomb threats, though not solved, were obvious conspiratorial signs; the Bolshevik cause was an indisputable force on the international scene, widely believed to be fomenting conspiratorial activity; and Palmer was in a position to do more than preach."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, prior to the raids, Palmer made numerous claims of conspiracy against immigrant agitators. He attributed the May Day bombings to the Red plot<sup>36</sup> and even went so far as to prophesy a future revolution growing out of the Bolshevik conspiracy. The Attorney General confirmed this prediction before a Congressional committee in June of 1919:

We have received so many notices and gotten so much information that it has almost come to be accepted as a fact that on a certain day in the future, which we have been advised of, there will be another serious and probably much larger effort of the same character which the wild fellows of this movement describe as a revolution, a proposition to rise up and destroy the government at one fell swoop. 37

It should come as no surprise, then, that Palmer's defense of his activities against the remonstrations of his critics should also take the form of a conspiracy appeal.

The rhetorical problem of justifying the raids and deportations developed within days of the arrests. A storm of protest from all quarters quickly replaced the initial public enthusiasm for the anti-radical dragnet. The disregard for constitutional rights displayed during the raids drew heavy criticism from many citizens. This backlash was amplified by Labor Department Acting Secretary Louis Post's dismissal of most of the deportation cases on constitutional grounds. Palmer and his Department immediately escalated the conflict by trying to have Post impeached. However, the controversy surrounding the impeachment hearings did the Attorney General's cause much more harm than good. Finally, Palmer also lost substantial credibility when it became apparent that his prophecies of an imminent Bolshevik-inspired revolution were simply not going to come true.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to a general outrage among the citizenry, the campaign against Palmer and his policies soon enlisted prominent individuals such as Jane Addams, S. S. Kresge, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.<sup>39</sup> The opponents of dragnet arrests eventually would include Federal judges, religious leaders, politicians, and well-known attorneys.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps the most powerful indictment of the raids was the 1920 publication by a twelve-member committee of attorneys entitled, To the

American People: Report Upon the Illegal Practices of the United States Department of Justice.<sup>41</sup> This legal critique of Palmer's violations of Constitutional rights was accompanied by much protest against the raids by the liberal press. The New Republic expressed its doubts on January 14, 1920, by noting that "even the anonymous suggestions of a nearby revolution were so utterly silly that even Mr. Palmer cannot have taken them seriously."<sup>42</sup> Finally, much official criticism was heaped on Palmer and his Department. For example, Rep. George Huddleston attacked the raids on the grounds that "a great many of those arrested did not know the difference between Bolshevism and rheumatism. They were illiterate, they were poor, they were friendless, aliens, many of them, and far from home. They were not voters, and they had no money; they had no voice, and so they had no champion."<sup>43</sup> The political facet of these attacks took not only the form of Labor Department resistance to Palmer's policies but, ultimately, an attempt to impeach him.<sup>44</sup> The combination of these pressures forced the Attorney General into two extended defenses of his policies before Congressional committees.<sup>45</sup>

Finding himself at the center of a maelstrom, Palmer made no attempt to deny responsibility for the raids; he defended his achievement in unqualified terms, even going so far as to assume direct responsibility for the actions of

his local agents.<sup>46</sup> Testifying before the Senate, Palmer assured the committee that:

I apologize for nothing that the Department of Justice has done in this matter. I glory in it. I point with pride and enthusiasm to the results of that work; and if, as I said before, some of my agents out in the field, or some of the agents of the Department of Labor, were a little rough and unkind, or short and curt, with these alien agitators whom they observed seeking to destroy their homes, their religion and their country, I think it might well be overlooked in the general good to the country which has come from it. That is all I have to say.<sup>47</sup>

These are not the words of a man on the defensive. Lacing his remarks with personal attacks on his critics and relying on the word of his own agents to refute their allegations, Palmer defended the raids before the Congress on the grounds of sheer necessity.<sup>48</sup> He summarized the need for wholesale deportations when he testified in 1920:

For I say to you frankly, Mr. Chairman, that I have looked upon this deportation statute not as a mere matter of punishing by sending out of the country a few criminals or mistaken ultra-radicals who preach dangerous doctrines, but rather a campaign against--and I have felt that was the purpose of the country--a growing revolutionary movement which sought by force and violence to undermine and injure, and possibly destroy, our Government.<sup>49</sup>

This explanation would form the core of the Attorney General's justificatory rhetoric.

Before proceeding to a specific analysis of a Palmer



discourse, a summary of the implications of the foregoing analysis is in order. First, hypothesis 10 (conspiracy occurs in times of social stress) seems to be consistent with the present discussion of the post-war era. The economic, political, and cultural upheavals of that age created enormous strains within American society and, as demonstrated in samples of discourse, were attended by numerous conspiracy claims aimed at explaining the causes of such maladies. Second, these "stresses" were perceived as social evils which had to be reconciled with the nature of the community. This reconciliation was accomplished by shifting blame from the "100 percent" American to the Red menace, thus preserving the moral integrity of the polis. Perhaps the quintessence of this scapegoating mindset was Seattle Mayor Ole Hanson's comparison of "Americanism" with "Bolshevism":

Americanism stands for Liberty;  
Bolshevism is premeditated slavery.

Americanism is a synonym for self-government;  
Bolshevism believes in a dictatorship of tyrants.

Americanism means equality;  
Bolshevism stands for class division and class rule.

Americanism stands for orderly, continuous, never-ending progress;  
Bolshevism stands for retrograding to barbaric government.<sup>50</sup>

The key point here is that America is more than a geographic

entity; it is Americanism--an immutable set of values and a sacred way of life. In sum, America deserves its position in the world because it possesses a moral and political core that transcends mere material considerations. This perspective easily lends itself to viewing social problems in moral terms (i.e., as evil rather than simply as error or unfortunate mishap). Moreover, a moral perspective also can encourage a shifting of blame from the community to some external agent--a plot. Thus, the rhetoric of the Red Scare seems consistent with the notion of evil as an "internal dynamic" or motive for discourse, as well as with the idea that conspiracy rhetoric evinces a strictly dichotomous view of morality, e.g., "100 percent Americanism" versus "Bolshevism" (hypothesis 3). Finally, the history and samples of discourse examined here offer support for hypothesis 1 on the propositional content of the conspiracy claim (i.e., that the community is being threatened by an evil force personified as a secret plot). Thus, the rhetorical problem confronting Palmer in 1920 affords a degree of confirmation for several of the definitional hypotheses.

#### The Case Against the "Reds": Argument and Audience

The Argument. "The Case Against the 'Reds'" appeared in the February 1920 issue of The Forum: A Magazine of Constructive Nationalism at the request of the periodical. The editors note the justificatory nature of the article when

they introduce it as an opportunity for the Attorney General to present "herewith his explanation of the Government's reason for deporting 'Reds'."<sup>51</sup>

Palmer's basic argument is a simple one: The Red conspiracy posed such a severe danger to our society that dragnet arrests and deportations are a small price to pay for rescuing a nation. The Attorney General describes his article in the opening sentence as a "brief review of the [anti-Radical] work which the Department of Justice has undertaken. . ." "the entire surface of the work of the Department . . . will be surveyed."<sup>52</sup> He goes on immediately to point out that he intends, not to placate political enemies, but to let the public know the accomplishments of his Department under adverse conditions:

I desire not merely to explain what the real menace of communism is, but also to tell how we have been compelled to clean up the country almost unaided by any virile legislation. Though I have not been embarrassed by political opposition, I have been materially delayed because the present sweeping processes of arrests and deportations of seditious aliens should have been vigorously pushed by Congress last spring. The failure of this is a matter of record in the Congressional files.<sup>53</sup>

Palmer concludes that the Justice and Labor Departments' activities "require no defense"<sup>54</sup>

The Attorney General supported this aggressive posture with several descriptive and evaluative claims:

(1) Experience abroad demonstrates that Bolshevism is a deadly threat to freedom, morality, property, and organized labor.<sup>55</sup>

(2) Information available to the government indicated that the danger of a Bolshevik revolution in America was particularly acute in 1919.<sup>56</sup>

(3) It is the responsibility of government to protect the community from the evils of Bolshevik violence or propaganda.<sup>57</sup>

(4) Congress had failed to provide adequate financial, personnel, and legislative resources to the Departments of Justice and Labor for anti-Bolshevik activities.<sup>58</sup>

(5) Lacking prosecutorial powers, the Departments of Justice and Labor collaborated in the deportation of alien agitators in hopes of forever ridding the community of the Red menace.<sup>59</sup>

On first encounter, Palmer's statements, and the evidence brought to bear on them, may seem to give the article a subdued, "just-the-facts" tone. However, closer inspection will reveal that the Attorney General was engaged in much more than a simple "survey" of his Department's policies. He was constructing and defending an explanation of the community's ills which, if sufficiently compelling, provides a powerful argument from necessity to justify his agency's tactics.

Clearly, the conspiracy theme is the linchpin of his entire position. The Attorney General describes the enemy as being composed of "vast organizations that were plotting to overthrow the government."<sup>60</sup> In their attempt to bring about revolution, "they have stirred discontent in our midst, . . . they have caused irritating strikes, and . . . they have infected our ideas with the disease of their own minds and their unclean morals . . ."<sup>61</sup> (a causal claim as predicted in hypothesis 2). The role of the Department of Justice is to "tear out the radical seeds that have entangled American ideas in their poisonous theories"<sup>62</sup> In these passages Palmer is constructing a drama in which he and his Department are the heroes and the alien Red conspiracy is the villain, the very embodiment of evil. He describes the scene as follows:

The Department of Justice of the United States, is today, a human net that no outlaw can escape. It has been netted together in spite of Congressional indifference, intensified by the individual patriotism of its personnel aroused to the menace of revolution, inspired to superlative action above and beyond private interests.<sup>63</sup>

This is no petty struggle. The Attorney General is identifying a drama that goes "beyond private interests"--a transcendent, perhaps apocalyptic, battle between the principles of good and evil.<sup>64</sup> Duncan notes the importance of this

dramatic configuration when he writes:

Whoever creates and controls the socio-dramas of everyday life controls our lives. For it is in these dramas that acts are named, and it is under these names that we participate in the struggle over principles of social order . . . During this century, this terrible century of suffering and death, millions of lives have been wrecked in wars fought in the name of various principles of social order . . . . In sociodrama we identify in action and passion with heroes who struggle to uphold principles of social order, and in this identification with leaders and causes anxiety, fear, and loneliness vanish . . . <sup>65</sup>

Thus, Palmer's contrast of the loyal American with the degenerate alien Red fits the evil facing the nation into a coherent dramatic structure and equips the audience with a moral perspective capable of categorizing information, making value judgments, and developing personal identification. This analysis provides clear support for the claim advanced in hypothesis 5, that the conspiracy argument is dramatic in form, and for the dichotomous morality posited in hypothesis 3.

The Implied Audience. The Attorney General summarizes his purpose in writing when he states that, while "it is impossible to review the entire menace of the internal revolution in this country as I know it, . . . this may serve to arouse the American citizen to its reality, its danger, and the great need of united effort to stamp it out, under our feet, if needs be."<sup>66</sup> This statement is not just a de-

claration of intent; it defines Palmer's perception of his audience. The implied auditor is the intelligent, loyal, but uninformed citizen. The Attorney General seems to be assuming that when the average American is given the "facts," common sense and integrity of character (the twin dynamos of a thriving community) will lead him or her to the correct beliefs and actions. Palmer speaks to this notion when he writes, "it has always been plain to me that when American citizens unite upon any national issue, they are generally right, but it is sometimes difficult to make the issue clear to them. If the Department of Justice could succeed in attracting the attention of our optimistic citizens to the issue of internal revolution in this country, we felt sure there would be no revolution."<sup>67</sup> This claim is most revealing. Loyal Americans are made of such trustworthy stuff that simply "attracting their attention" would be sufficient to abort a nation-wide revolution backed by an influential foreign power. Palmer, then, seems to display substantial trust in the character, intelligence, and loyalty of his audience (ironically, much more trust than he places in the Congress elected by these same citizens). His only fear is that they will not be advised of the menace they face. Thus, Palmer's intent is not to sway the alien plotter from his or her cause nor simply to provide reassurance for those who already know the magnitude of the evil

confronting them; no attempt is made to defend capitalism on its merits and little space (three of thirty-seven paragraphs) is devoted to answering charges that his arrest and deportation policy is unnecessary or overly harsh. Rather, Palmer's implied audience is loyal (perhaps troubled) Americans who, but for their lack of information, would be joining the Justice Department in its campaign to smash the Red plot.

The Case Against the "Reds": Strategic Form

Amplification. The Attorney General used a number of strategic forms to construct the sociodrama which he hoped would justify his actions. First, he employed the strategy of amplification, i.e., he attempted to make the evil nature of the conspiracy more salient for his audience. For Palmer, the first step in amplification is naming the foe. He often refers to the alien "agitators" as "Bolsheviks," "Reds," "criminals," "thieves," and the "enemy." This cluster of negative naming terms is accompanied by more extensive references to the corrupt nature of the alien malefactors. For example, he contends that Bolshevism triumphed in Russia only through "stealing, murder and lies" and that American pawns of this philosophy were possessed of a "misshapen caste of mind and indecencies of character . . .<sup>68</sup> Alien Reds, he states are guided by "unclean doctrines," employ "hysterical methods," and seek to institute



"the horror and terrorism of bolshevik tyranny such as is destroying Russia now."<sup>69</sup> He also portrays radical literature as demanding not only "the overthrow of our existing government," but "obedience to the instincts of criminal minds, that is, to the lower appetities, material and moral."<sup>70</sup> Characterizing the plotters with these naming techniques amplifies the base nature of the enemy by portraying the conspiracy as the incarnation of all social, political, and moral evil.<sup>71</sup> The clearest evidence for this conclusion is that the terms that cluster around the label "Red" are uniformly evil in connotation. "Reds" are "Communists," "seditious aliens," "criminal classes," "radicals," "men and women obsessed with discontent," "anarchists," "moral perverts," and the "lowest of all types known to New York."<sup>72</sup> These subsidiary names subsume a wide variety of political, social, and moral perfidies. Thus, for Palmer, to call a group "Reds" is no mere statement of their political preference--it is a moral indictment against a conspiratorial gang of thugs and degenerates.<sup>73</sup>

The Attorney General's naming strategy affords support for hypothesis 1, i.e., that the conspiracy personifies the evil force threatening the community. Moreover, the names used in this discourse provide the audience with a vocabulary with which the forces of good and evil can be identified and moral judgments rendered (hypothesis 3). Hypothesis 6 also finds substantiation here in that Palmer's names for the

"Reds" tend toward the lurid and the exaggerated (e.g., "alien filth," "hysterical neurasthenic women," "gang of thieves").<sup>74</sup> Thus, as the alien Reds are given titles that imply complete depravity and total intransigence, the conspiracy explanation begins to increase in salience. For only a very immoral and dangerous group would engage in such a plot.

However, in order to infer a plausible menace from the conspiracy claim, Palmer takes a second step in the process of amplification: establishing that the enemy is powerful. It is unlikely that a nation which viewed itself as the victor in the first global war would feel threatened by small, isolated groups of malcontents. As Hugh Duncan notes, "only the existence of a cunning and powerful enemy justifies demands for power. . . . For how could a great power be threatened by anything less than another great power? We increase the power of the tragic villain to increase the power of the hero. We enhance the cunning and evil of a hated neighbor to justify the need for our noble self to contest with such rabble in such ignoble ways."<sup>75</sup>

Palmer attempts to explain the gravity of the threat posed by the Reds when he describes the imminence of the revolution they advocated:

Like a prairie-fire, the blaze of revolution was sweeping over every American institution of law and order

a year ago. It was eating its way into the homes of the American workman, its sharp tongues of revolutionary heat were licking the altars of the churches, leaping into the belfry of the school bell, crawling into the sacred corners of American homes, seeking to replace marriage vows with libertine laws, burning up the foundations of society.<sup>76</sup>

The Attorney General's vivid imagery magnifies the enemy's power and thus the proportions of the menace posed to society. In addition, he cites examples of foreign countries (e.g., Russia) that have already succumbed to Bolshevism and summarizes the terrible consequences of their revolutions.<sup>77</sup> Also, he describes the intense motivation of the Reds when he states that, "As a foe, the anarchist is fearless of his own life, for his creed is a fanaticism that admits no respect of any other creed."<sup>78</sup> He concludes that the threat of revolution was so severe in 1919 that "the Government was in jeopardy."<sup>79</sup>

In his description of strategies used by elites to maintain power, Andrew King refers to techniques like Palmer's as "Crying Anarchy." He explains that "most people have a stake in the existing order and when one's substance is being threatened there is an immediate loss of objectivity. To cry anarchy is to do more than brand the activities of the challengers as merely criminal and sinister. As destroyers of society they strike at everyone. They are downright devilish."<sup>80</sup> Confronted with a menace to the

social order, then, Palmer paints his foes as devil figures capable of any heinous, conspiratorial act. The notion of conspiracy is crucial here because it makes the Reds appear much more dangerous if one believes that they would work in unison toward their wicked ends. Simply stated: the more dangerous the Reds are, the more justification for the raids.<sup>81</sup>

As Duncan suggested earlier, the Attorney General uses his magnification of the enemy to enhance the status of his agency. Palmer contrasts an international conspiracy of great cunning and power with a Department of Justice composed of a mere 500 persons and lacking appropriate funding and legislative authority.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, Palmer concludes that the Department "will pursue the attack of these 'Reds' upon the Government of the United States with vigilance, and no alien, advocating the overthrow of existing law and order in this country, shall escape arrest and prompt deportation."<sup>83</sup> These statements add up to a portrayal of the Department in the role of beleaguered defender of the faith, valiantly upholding the sacred principles of Americanism despite all adversity. Thus, while the Reds may possess superior material resources, the Attorney General and his agents are imbued with a brand of dedication, patriotism, and moral courage more than sufficient to vanquish the Bolshevik plot. Were this not the case, how

could one small Federal agency have blocked an internationally-backed revolution? In this way, then, the Fighting Quaker magnifies the evil power of the Red plotters so as to strengthen the justification for his policies and, indirectly, to highlight the virtue of his agency.

Palmer's strategy of threat magnification provides support for several of the present study's definitional hypotheses. Initially, such treatment of the Red menace is consistent with the personification of evil predicted in hypothesis 1. The ability of the conspiracy to place the entire government "in jeopardy" is a causal claim of the type delineated in hypothesis 2. Also, the clash of Bolshevik machinations (e.g., "the blaze of revolution") with Justice Department "patriotism" upholds hypothesis 3's prediction of a dichotomous moral perspective as well as lending credence to the dramatic format described in hypothesis 5. Palmer's description of the revolutionary plot as a "prairie-fire . . . licking the altars of the churches, . . . crawling into the sacred corners of American homes . . ." etc., is quite consistent with hypothesis 6's description of urgency, exaggeration, and lurid imagery. The immediacy of the threat is further enhanced by the Attorney General's claim that 1919 witnessed the near-collapse of the Federal government. Thus, the strategies used by Palmer to magnify the danger posed by the Red conspiracy

afford significant confirmation of portions of the generic "map" outlined in previous chapters.

A third variety of amplification technique used by Palmer is that of association, i.e., inferring connections between those who fit the image of the enemy so as to make the conspiracy seem larger and more dangerous.<sup>84</sup> At one point, the Attorney General defines the "Reds" as including "the IWW's, the most radical socialists, the misguided anarchists, the agitators who oppose the limitations of unionism, the moral perverts and the hysterical neurasthenic women who abound in communism."<sup>85</sup> This laundry-list technique is accompanied by the use of radical literature as a basis for extrapolating the existence of "international" Communism into a domestic Bolshevik plot. After quoting a manifesto of the Communist Party of America, Palmer states that "these are the revolutionary tenets of Trotzky and the Communist Internationale. Their manifesto further embraces the various organizations in this country . . . The phraseology of their manifesto is practically the same as was used by the Bolsheviks for their International Communist Congress. . . . The dangerous fact for us is that the Communist Party of America is actually affiliated and adheres to the teaching program and tactics of the 3d Internationale."<sup>86</sup>

As far as the distinction between one who adheres to the theory of the Internationale and one who is willing to take up arms, Palmer has a ready answer:

It was decided that there could be no nice distinctions drawn between the theoretical ideals of the radicals and their actual violations of our national laws. An assassin may have brilliant intellectuality, he may be able to excuse his murder or robbery with fine oratory, but any theory which excuses crime is not wanted in America. This is no place for the criminal to flourish, nor will he do so, so long as the rights of common citizenship can be exerted to prevent him.<sup>87</sup>

This argument is supported by Palmer's claim that Red propaganda, by itself constitutes "open defiance of law."<sup>88</sup>

For Palmer, one need not act but merely speak in support of some aspect of Marxism to be inextricably bound up with the "Reds". Thus the Attorney General associates virtually every person of non-conformist political stripe with an international Red cabal scheming to overthrow all principles of decency and order. This portrayal of the conspiracy suggests considerably more danger to society than would be attached to isolated foreign-language groups with anarchist tendencies. Thus, Palmer uses association to amplify the size (and hence the menace) of the revolutionary plot in order to enhance the justification for his actions.

Palmer's strategy of association provides support for several of the present study's hypotheses. The laundry-list technique exemplifies the "en masse" presentation of the cabalist's case as predicted in hypothesis 7. In addit-

ion, Palmer's extensive quotations from Marxist documents and his claim that mere verbal assent to any portion thereof makes one a dangerous revolutionary illustrates the "literal-mindedness" described in hypothesis 8. Finally, the association strategy itself embodies the ability to extrapolate or shift the conspiracy argument (hypothesis 9) so as to direct it at any target of appropriate character and magnitude. Thus, a number of the present study's hypotheses are consistent with the various facets of the association strategy.

Division. The amplification of the conspiracy threat is paralleled by the strategy of division, i.e., separating the Red conspirators and one hundred percent Americans into two distinct spheres in order to clarify the rationale for action against the radicals. After calling for sweeping federal anti-radical legislation, the Attorney General reassures his audience that "there is no legislation at present which can reach an American citizen who is discontented with our system of American Government, nor is it necessary."<sup>89</sup> He then divides "American citizens" from their enemies by pointing out that "the nationality of most of the alien 'Reds' is Russian and German. There is almost no other nationality represented among them!"<sup>90</sup> The Attorney General then goes on to quote the manifesto of the Communist Party of America to prove that the Reds despise normal Ameri-



can institutions such as present labor unions.<sup>91</sup> When these appeals to nationalism and self-interest are added to the obvious moral and political discrepancies between "Americans" and "Reds", it is clear that Palmer is attempting to drive a wedge between alien Bolsheviks and the rest of the human race. The utility of separating the "enemy" from the rest of humanity was pointed out by Murray Edelman:

The enemy themes that most surely and consistently evoke mass arousal and anxiety are those that make it hardest to take the enemy as a significant other: those that emphasize the respects in which he does not share our human traits and potentialities for empathy, for compassion, and for social attachments. The alien, the stranger, or the subhuman are the themes struck repeatedly. These typifications most efficiently symbolize resolute malevolence because by definition they cannot become part of the social bond, the symbols of community that induce other political adversaries to resolve their conflicts through ritualized procedures that legitimize the outcome . . . people can deliberately hurt and kill only what they do not see as an exemplification of themselves and a component in their own self-concepts.<sup>92</sup>

Thus, by identifying the "Reds" as amoral, alien, criminals Palmer effectively exiles them from the realm of moral, loyal, honest, 100% Americans.

These arguments for a Red/American dichotomy accomplish several implicit goals. First, they automatically suggest that "real" Americans are basically loyal to the

status quo even if they are "discontented." By implication, then, anyone who advocates radical change is excluded from the province of 100 percent Americanism. This appeal becomes a powerful one when coupled with the notion that being unamerican is isomorphic with being subhuman.<sup>93</sup> In this sense, loyalty becomes an ontological rather than a simply political question. To be less than 100 percent American is to abdicate one's right to human status; one is transformed from citizen into criminal--with all the attendant penalties.

Perhaps the most pragmatic goal of this division is to insulate the working person (whom Palmer thought of as the audience for Bolshevik rhetoric)<sup>94</sup> from the effects of such propaganda. The Attorney General's claim that Red leaders seek the destruction of labor unions as presently organized provides a clear reason for workers to avoid giving ear to Bolshevik messages. He contends further that the Reds' appeal to "the worker" is merely a sham, a facade concealing their tyrannical intentions. If Palmer's argument is accepted by the working class, the Reds would find themselves cut off from their "natural" audience. Thus, the Attorney General uses the division form to counter the feared rhetorical power of his conspiratorial adversaries.

A third function of Palmer's separation of Red conspiracy from American loyalty is to strengthen the warrant

for direct action against the Bolshevik plotters. In Palmer's view, the conspiratorial threat was so severe that the mass arrests and deportations of 1919 and 1920 were comparable to a "very mild reformatory sentence." He goes on to state:

It has been inferred by the "Reds" that the United States Government, by arresting and deporting them, is returning to the autocracy of Czardom, adopting the system that created the severity of Siberian banishment. My reply to such charges is, that in our determination to maintain our government we are treating our alien enemies with extreme consideration. To deny them the privilege of remaining in a country which they have openly deplored as an unenlightened community, unfit for those who prefer the privileges of Bolshevism, should be no hardship.<sup>95</sup>

This argument tells the audience that since loyal Americans cannot be harassed under existing law, those whom Palmer acted against must be dangerous, disloyal radicals. Thus, the conspiracy appears more menacing and the policy implemented to control it seems more acceptable.

A fourth function of the division of enemy plotting from Americanism is to allow Palmer to assume an aggressive style in explaining his position. Nowhere in the article is there a hint of a defensive attitude on his part. Indeed, he not only justifies the Department's mass arrests, but suggests that citizens join in the crusade. He begins this appeal with the assumption that, if the citizenry will only

harken to the call-to-arms issuing from his Department, the revolution can be prevented.<sup>96</sup> After using the conspiracy theme to awaken the reader to the magnitude of the revolutionary menace, he calls for a specific course of action:

One of the chief incentives for the present activity of the Department of Justice against the "Reds" has been the hope that American citizens will, themselves, become voluntary agents for us, in a vast organization for mutual defense against the sinister agitation of men and women aliens, who appear to be either in the pay or under the criminal spell of Trotzky and Lenine.<sup>97</sup>

In essence, Palmer is calling for a counter-conspiracy to stem the Red tide. He holds out the promise of salvation through such a practice by proclaiming: "we can get rid of them!"<sup>98</sup>

This appeal for a counter-conspiracy is consistent with Hofstadter's argument that the "paranoid" spokesperson may have the tendency to emulate the enemy. He explains that "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<sup>the</sup> apparatus of scholarship, even of pedantry. . . [this is] a kind of implicit compliment to their opponents. Secret organizations set up to combat secret organizations give the same flattery."<sup>99</sup> Besides evincing this trait,

Palmer's argument strengthens the division between plotter and loyalist by calling for citizen action against the conspiracy.

This type of division strategy (the call for action) accomplishes several purposes: (1) it identifies the loyal citizens with each other (as fellow crusaders) and appoints Palmer as the organizer of the crusade--thus justifying his policy of harassing the radicals since he is aligned with the popular will against a foreign enemy; (2) by placing Palmer in the role of a Jeremiah trying to ignite public sentiment, the strategy enables him to adopt the aggressive posture of being the possessor of knowledge vital to national survival--thus the style of his rhetoric need not be overtly justificatory, but can assume the stature of inspired, prophetic exhortation; (3) his argument implicitly defines anyone who doesn't join the crusade as being of doubtful loyalty. Thus, grounded in the conspiracy theme, Palmer's strategy of division provides him with the resources of aggressive style, definitional value judgments, negative characterizations of the enemy, and direct justification of his policies.

The Attorney General's strategy of division lends credence to a number of this study's generic hypotheses. The relegation of the Reds to the province of amoral sub-humanity certainly strengthens their role as the personification of evil (hypothesis 1). Also in this connection,

the separation of Red enemy from 100 percent American seems to be the essence of the dichotomous morality specified in hypothesis 3, and lays the basis for the dramatic confrontation predicted in hypothesis 5. This view is enhanced by Palmer's literal-minded quoting (hypothesis 8) of Party documents indicting loyal labor organizations. Moreover, the subhuman status of the Reds would lend itself to the lurid imagery and exaggeration (hypothesis 6) that occur in the discourse, for it is far easier to refer to an opponent as a "thug" or a "pervert" if one is convinced that the enemy is no better than an animal. Finally, Palmer's call for a nationwide network of citizen-agents and his implicit trust and respect for the "loyal" American speak to the importance of viewing the community (as opposed to isolated individuals) as counter-point to the conspiracy (hypothesis 1). In the context of community, one has something to fight for, rather than simply a conspiracy to flee from or fight against. Palmer's attempt to divide community from conspiracy, then, affords confirmation for several of this inquiry's hypotheses.

Argument from Definition. The Attorney General's third basic strategic form is the argument from definition. This technique springs naturally from his use of the conspiracy theme because conspiracy is a way of defining the enemy's

nature and activities: A plot is both a scheme for action and a reflection of the character of the plotters. Palmer's definitions are rooted in "two basic certainties, first that the 'Reds' were criminal aliens, and secondly that the American Government must prevent crime."<sup>100</sup> By defining the situation and the Department of Justice in this way, Palmer can make his policies appear to be merely the logical outcome of the extant circumstances. In fact, the logic of his argument (if the premises are accepted) is so powerful that he can reverse what would be the common-sense presumption against arresting and deporting large numbers of people:

I have been asked, for instance, to what extent deportation will check radicalism in this country. Why not ask what will become of the United States Government if these alien radicals are permitted to carry out the principles of the Communist Party as embodied in its so-called laws, aims and regulations? There wouldn't be any such thing left. In place of the United States Government we should have the horror and terrorism of bolsheviki tyranny such as is destroying Russian now.<sup>101</sup>

Thus, the Attorney General's definition of the Reds as the cause of the community's troubles is so uncompromising that those who counsel restraint are the ones who have to justify themselves!

The implication here is that Palmer is operating under an iron-clad definition of the alien agitators which he seems

to feel is based on some fairly clear-cut evidence. Indeed, he reports that when the Department tried to find evidence that the alien radicals might be merely overzealous reformers, "there was no hope of such a thing."<sup>102</sup> The meaning of this statement seems to be that no doubts about the evil of the "Reds" are justified. Any attempt to place a favorable (or even non-dangerous) construction on radical activities, then, is hopeless and perhaps even disloyal. Thus, Palmer's "alien conspiracy" definition of the radical movement gives him the ability to justify extreme policies and to dismiss criticism as either misguided or suspect. Based on such a definition, he is able to state confidently that his activities "require no defense."<sup>103</sup>

Palmer's arguments from definition provide considerable evidence for the validity of several of the definitional hypotheses. Perhaps the clearest support is given to hypothesis 2's claim that conspiracy discourse would feature deductive logic. The Attorney General's overt positing of indisputable "givens" provides premises from which he reasons to the conclusion that his policies are justified. In addition, his strict definition of all radicalism as "Bolshevism" and his claim that there simply is no contrary evidence gives Palmer the ability (described in hypothesis 4) to coopt or refute virtually any criticism. Those who oppose him are simply misguided, and hence irrelevant, or they are



allies of the Reds, and hence corroborate the power of the plot. Moreover, if Palmer's premises are accepted, he can rightly claim a presumption in favor of his policies. As a result, his critics would bear an onerous burden of having to defend a policy of inaction in the face of the Red menace. His argument from definition, then, provides support for some of the generic hypotheses.

Definition and Manipulation of Evidence. The fourth fundamental strategic form in Palmer's discourse centers on his ability to define and manipulate evidence. When he needs to prove the criminal intent of international Communism, he refers to the literature of the movement.<sup>104</sup> Direct quotation of Bolshevik documents occurs five times (sometimes at length) and is accompanied by four other specific references to Red publications.<sup>105</sup> Hence, Palmer makes the sweeping claim that "every scrap of radical literature demands the overthrow of our existing government."<sup>106</sup> Further evidence of the Communist menace is derived from vague references to Red activity in Russian, Germany, and America.<sup>107</sup> However, none of this evidence conclusively proves the argument that there is a powerful Red conspiracy in America actively working for our national downfall. Such an inference requires supporting materials of much higher probative value. The question becomes, then, how did Palmer validate his conspiracy inference?

The Attorney General's major technique in this regard is to base his key arguments on secret information which only he and his colleagues could possess. He declared that "My private information on what was being done by the organization known as the Communist Party of America. . . and of what was being done by the Communist Internationale . . . removed all doubt."<sup>108</sup> He goes on to make reference to "the whole mass of evidence accumulated from all parts of the country" and claims that "my information showed that communism in this country was an organization of thousands of aliens, who were direct allies of Trotzky . . . and it showed that they were making the same glittering promises of lawlessness, of criminal autocracy to Americans, that they had made to Russian peasants. How the Department of Justice discovered upwards of 60,000 of these organized agitators of the Trotzky doctrine in the United States, is the confidential information upon which the Government is now sweeping the nation clean of such alien filth."<sup>109</sup>

This secret informaton is the basis for inferences about the motives and operations of the Reds and serves as the warrant for Palmer's practices. Of course, since the actual evidence is unavailable to the public, it is very difficult to deny the validity of the conclusions drawn from it. Moreover, Palmer's unique possession of the "true" facts strengthens his ethos as the leader of the American

crusade by portraying him as the only one having sufficient information on which to base policy. In this role, the Attorney General can assert that his critics base their attacks on "confused information."<sup>110</sup> Finally, the secrecy of the information itself supports the gravity of his claims in that such evidence must have been quite difficult to obtain, owing to the covert and insidious nature of the Red plot. Thus, Palmer defines his "confidential information" as the most highly probative form of evidence. This strategy functions to enhance his conspiracy attributions, undercut his critics, and strengthen his ethos as the American nemesis of alien Communism.

This manipulation of evidence displays several characteristics described by the definitional hypotheses. The use of multiple, direct quotation from Communist discourse and references to massive reviews of "every scrap of radical literature" supports the notions of literal-mindedness and mass evidential presentation offered in hypotheses 8 and 7, respectively. Also, Palmer's claimed access to secret information allows him to refute critics as "confused" or "uninformed" (hypothesis 4); he could conceivably answer any argument by referring to other confidential materials that disproved it. Of course, basing one's claims on secret evidence greatly facilitates the deduction described in hypothesis 2 since virtually no one would be in a position to

refute the rhetor's premises. Finally, the confidentiality of certain crucial probative materials would give Palmer the ability to extrapolate or shift the focus of his claims (hypothesis 9) with great ease. The argument from secret evidence, then, represents a rather clever solution to the "paradox of secrecy" discussed in Chapter III. Rather than wrestle with the problem of reconciling the secrecy of the conspiracy with his knowledge of it, Palmer simply decrees confidentiality for all important documentation. Thus, the manipulation of evidence in Palmer's article buttresses several of the generic hypotheses.

#### Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed the function of the conspiracy theme in one artifact of A. Mitchell Palmer's defense of his anti-radical policies. Palmer's discourse evinces a heavy reliance on conspiracy appeals as a justification for his actions. The Attorney General's use of conspiracy is expressed in four strategic forms: (1) amplification; (2) division; (3) argument from definition; and (4) manipulation of evidence. These strategies would provide his implied audience with a dramatic narrative that makes sense out of the threat to the social order. Given this portrayal, mass arrests and deportations can be justified as a necessary and heroic response to a clear danger. Also, the Attorney

General can assume the status of the leader of the anti-Red crusade and critics can be made to appear foolish or disloyal. Thus, the conspiracy theme plays a central conceptual and strategic role in this example of Palmer's justificatory discourse.

Significantly, an examination of each strategic form has revealed that the hypotheses posited in Chapter III are substantially accurate in their descriptions of the conspiracy genre. The substantive, stylistic, and situational components of the discourse all seem to be consistent with these descriptive statements. However, this identity should come as no surprise since much of the material on which the hypotheses were based dealt with conservative, anti-communist arguments similar to those of Palmer. The validity of the hypotheses when applied to a much different type of discourse in the next chapter remains to be seen. However, the key point now is that the generic "map" has received at least a modicum of validation and, more importantly, the forms within the discourse evince a fundamental interdependence in their treatment of the problem of evil, thus providing evidence for an "internal dynamic."

If there is one failing of the hypothetical map of the conspiracy genre revealed so far, however, it is its inability to account for the ethos of the rhetor. Throughout

Palmer's discourse one encounters strategies and themes which have the effect of granting him a special status. For example, references to the valiant Department he heads, reliance on "my confidential information," etc. all give one the impression that Palmer is not merely an Attorney General, but the leader of a holy crusade, possessed of powers and resources beyond those of ordinary people. Unfortunately, the Campbell and Jamieson definition of a "rhetorical genre" seems to exclude consideration of the rhetor per se. Perhaps their categories of substance, style, and situation should be amended to include a category for speaker. This question will be investigated further in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CONSPIRACY ARGUMENT AND THE JOHN F. KENNEDY ASSASSINATION

Without doubt Oswald badly misfired.  
But one question still remains unanswered:  
who loaded the starting gun?

--J. G. Ballard.  
"The Assassination of  
John Fitzgerald Kennedy  
Considered as a Downhill  
Motor Race."

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a second assessment of the uses and limitations of the present study's hypotheses. The discourse chosen for examination here is substantially different from Palmer's "Case Against the 'Reds.'" Mark Lane's 1966 book, Rush to Judgment, is a highly critical study of the Warren Commission's investigation of the John F. Kennedy assassination.<sup>1</sup> The book emerges from a historical era much different from Palmer's, treats a vastly different subject (murder), and operates from a much less conservative political perspective. Analysis of the discourse will begin with an explanation of the rhetorical problem posed to the United States by the evil

of John Kennedy's assassination. The rhetorical burden confronting Mark Lane will then be discussed, followed by an analysis of the themes and strategic forms that constitute the discourse. This reconstruction of Rush to Judgment will be used to determine the validity of the definitional hypotheses as developed so far.

The John F. Kennedy Assassination  
as a Rhetorical Problem

The bullets that struck John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963, did much more than just end his life. They plunged a nation--indeed a world--into shock. News of the President's death swept the nation. The National Opinion Research Center study found that 68 per cent of the population had heard the news that Kennedy had been shot by the time he was pronounced dead, an interval of only half an hour. Ninety-two percent of the public had heard the news within two hours and an amazing 99.8 per cent were informed by 6:00 p.m. of that day. About half (47 per cent) received the message via radio and television while most of the remainder (49 per cent) were informed by telephone calls or interpersonal communication with others.<sup>2</sup> Newspapers surveyed by other investigators devoted approximately half of their available space to news about the assassination during the weekend of its occurrence.<sup>3</sup> Major television networks devoted massive blocks of time to the



event while millions of citizens watched for hours in rapt attention.<sup>4</sup> In short, the public was deluged with information in a way that it had never before experienced. As McKinley notes: "the event had caught us in a new world of instant mass communication that conveyed the images to us--the funeral tableaux, the people, even the murder of the President's accused murderer--in a telethon that threw us forever out of the slow-motion historical world of Lincoln and Garfield and McKinley into our own hard-edged, videotaped nowness. History for us had stopped. We were really there . . ."<sup>5</sup> Whereas the public had been long-distance "spectators" to other historical events,<sup>6</sup> the ubiquitous electronic media brought every detail of the President's murder into the nation's consciousness with such immediacy and detail that, in a very real sense, viewers of the events became participants. As Sheatsley and Feldman point out: "Probably never before were the sentiments of the American public engaged so deeply by a happening on the political scene."<sup>7</sup>

The flood of data that immersed the community had profound effects in both the short and long-term. Soon after hearing the news a majority of Americans had ceased their normal activities, five-sixths of them to turn on a radio or television.<sup>8</sup> A large percentage of the population, according to the NORC, experienced physical symptoms of

grief: "didn't feel like eating" (43 per cent); "smoked more than usual" (20 per cent); "had headaches" (25 per cent); "cried" (53 per cent); "had trouble getting to sleep" (48 per cent); "felt very nervous and tense" (68 per cent); "felt sort of dazed and numb" (57 per cent).<sup>9</sup>

However, perhaps the most eloquent testimony to the nation's sense of loss is that the majority of NORC's study population "could not recall any time in their lives when they had the same sort of feeling as when they heard of President Kennedy's assassination. Of those who could think of such an occasion (47 per cent of the public), the majority referred to the death of a parent, a close friend, or a relative. Only a third of the group mentioned the death of any other public figure; FDR was specifically named by about a fourth."<sup>10</sup> Thus the immediate reaction to Kennedy's death was one of shock, anguish and grief. These sentiments were echoed around the world.<sup>11</sup> For the assassination was a truly global trauma, perhaps best summarized by Mary McGrory's reflection: "we'll never laugh again."<sup>12</sup>

Beyond the sheer shock of the event, however, the nation also came to quick conclusions about responsibility for the crime. The majority of the citizenry (72 per cent in the NORC sample) was convinced at the time that Lee Harvey Oswald was the assassin; however, there was much less consensus as to his motives. If there was any one dominant motive attri-

buted to him in the first few hours after the shooting, though, it was fanaticism or mental instability.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, a substantial portion of the citizenry seemed to have a conspiratorial perspective on the assassination.<sup>14</sup>

One factor aggravating the long-term trauma of the killing was the widespread claim that the public should assume "collective guilt" for the crime.<sup>15</sup> The NORC found that, immediately after the incident, one-fourth of its respondents blamed "the public generally or . . . the social environment," e.g., a "climate of hatred."<sup>16</sup> This theme resounded in much of the discourse of the day. Two studies of sermons on the assassination have found that, while many clergy directed "vituperative language" at Oswald, they also dwelled on the notion that America, as a moral community, had created conditions facilitating the President's murder.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the President's death was doubly traumatic. Not only had a popular,<sup>18</sup> young leader been murdered, but there was a suggestion in the land that the penultimate responsibility might reside with the community itself. Harrison Salisbury exemplifies the point when he writes: "there remains in each of us some communal share of guilt in the senseless loss of a man so young and brilliant as John F. Kennedy; some feeling of a step not taken; an act not completed; a word not spoken; a thought not carried into life which would have spared us so great

a tragedy."<sup>19</sup>

In sum, then, Kennedy's death was perhaps the ultimate American tragedy. Regarded by many as the symbol of a new age of idealism and progress, Kennedy was viciously taken from the people he had been elected to lead.<sup>20</sup> For him and his nation, there would be no New Frontier. The magnitude of such a tragedy is difficult to overstate. As Toscano observes:

There is a tendency for human aspiration to be tied to the future, and for many life is made bearable by the promise of tomorrow. Premature death is an unsettling reminder of the fragility of our promised tomorrows and so touches part of the core of our being. When death comes through the brutal act of murder, a human act within the control of man and thus different from disease or accident which lie in the province of Divine fate, it makes the denial of tomorrow that much more disturbing and bitter. This is the stuff of genuine tragedy, a source of myth and legend.

The assassination of John F. Kennedy provoked vividly that sense of human fragility, that mood of sorrow and tragedy. Here was a man at the very height of power, possessing all the ingredients of human success, and with the squeeze of a trigger all of that was extinguished forever. 21

Thus, the trauma of the President's murder was accompanied by guilt, deep sadness, and the nagging question of ultimate responsibility.

One response to this sense of public unease was a great outpouring of ceremonial discourse about the late President.

The enormous shock of his death seemed to create a hunger for every sort of tribute to Kennedy that could be made available. Spoken testimonials often emphasized the President's ideals and his struggles for human freedom.<sup>22</sup> These eulogies were accompanied by memorial records, magazine articles, books, poetry, etc. While the flow of Kennedy literature may have abated since 1963, it is still very much in evidence and, in the main, portrays a very positive "image" of the President.<sup>23</sup> Thus the community attempted to deal with the evil of the assassination by engaging in ceremonial discourse that proclaimed the virtues of its slain leader and thus affirmed the essential goodness of the polis from which he had emerged.

Realizing that eulogies were not enough to resolve a murder case, the newly-sworn-in President Johnson issued Executive Order 11130 on November 29, 1963, establishing a commission of inquiry into the assassination. In his now famous memorandum to the White House, Deputy Attorney General Nicholas de B. Katzenbach wrote: "The public . . . must be satisfied that Oswald is the assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large; and that evidence was such that he would have been convicted at trial."<sup>24</sup> Katzenbach's urgent communique seems to capture one of the essential purposes of the Commission--to reassure the public that all of the facts of the case had or would

be disclosed and that there was no reason to fear that a sinister cabal was at large.<sup>25</sup> Headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, the Commission spent six months investigating the murders of John Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald.<sup>26</sup> By the time its Report was issued on September 24, 1964, it had drawn on a five-volume study by the FBI, over 26,500 interviews and reinterviews by the FBI and Secret Service, and large amounts of material solicited from the Dallas police and other state, local, and federal agencies. The Commission and its staff also heard the testimony of 552 witnesses (94 appearing before members of the Commission).<sup>27</sup> Cumulatively, these materials (excluding classified documents) comprised the twenty-six volumes of supporting evidence that soon accompanied the Report.<sup>28</sup>

The most significant conclusions of the Warren Commission were that there was "no evidence that either Lee Harvey Oswald or Jack Ruby was part of any conspiracy, domestic or foreign, to assassinate President Kennedy" and that "on the basis of the evidence before the Commission it concludes that Oswald acted alone."<sup>29</sup> The Report was an overnight paperback bestseller. Even an edition of the volumes of testimony was sold out within days.<sup>30</sup> More significantly, poll data indicated that the majority of the public accepted the Commission's conclusions.<sup>31</sup> Media approval was also forthcoming as the Report received substantial editorial

endorsements.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, in New York Times editor Salisbury's introduction to one issue of the Report he reassures the reader that "no material question now remains unresolved so far as the death of President Kennedy is concerned. True there is no confession. But the evidence of Oswald's single-handed guilt is overwhelming."<sup>33</sup> The Commission, then, gave the public a reassuring account of the crime, one that attributed substantive guilt solely to Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby. Thus, as Donald Lord notes, the majority of Americans "considered the matter closed."<sup>34</sup> Little did the Commissioners realize that this was only the calm before the storm.

Skepticism about the Warren Commission Report developed quickly. The evil imposed on the community was so enormous that ceremony and official assurances were not sufficient to reconcile it with the polis' perceived moral and political nature. Public faith in its governing institutions, massive news coverage, and the stature of the Warren Commission checked cabalist thought only temporarily.<sup>35</sup> Initial doubts created by the secrecy of Oswald's detention and his subsequent murder had been accompanied by a fairly widespread belief that, since Dallas was the center of rightist, anti-Kennedy activity, the President had been murdered by right-wingers.<sup>36</sup> When the Warren Commission's "honeymoon" with the public ended, these fears re-emerged with increased

vigor. While 31 per cent of respondents in one poll reported in October of 1964 thought Oswald hadn't acted alone, this percentage would more than double by 1968.<sup>37</sup> By the late 1970's, 80 per cent of the citizenry would be convinced that, in Tom Wicker's words, "some form of conspiracy was responsible for Kennedy's murder."<sup>38</sup> Above all else, then, it appears that the Warren Commission was a rhetorical failure. The secular theodicy it constructed to explain the evil of an assassination was not sufficient to weather the storms of public cynicism and critical attack.

The reasons suggested for this marked change in public attitudes toward the assassination are varied. Sheatsley and Feldman argue that the public was incapable of accepting "mental illness" as the explanatory factor in Oswald's behavior because it leads to the rather threatening conclusion that those who may seem "cognitively rational" could suddenly metamorphose into killers; in this sense, then, "cabalism" is a safer view because it "removes some of the caprice from the situation . . ."<sup>39</sup> Others contend that the citizenry simply had a need (as predicted by balance theory) to attribute big events to big causes.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, a recent Bayesian probability analysis of four interview studies tends to confirm that conspiracies are viewed as more efficacious than lone individuals and thus that interviewees were significantly more likely to make cabalist attributions about a



successful assassination attempt (a "big" effect) than about an unsuccessful attempt (a "smaller" effect).<sup>41</sup> The authors of this study also suggest that the public's continuing focus on the Kennedy assassination may be an example of the heightened salience some researchers contend is attached to tasks (i.e., Kennedy's life and administration) that are interrupted.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, some commentators contend that the public's cabalist suspicions may spring from a general horror and revulsion over the event itself. After the assassination, as Theodore Sorensen argued, "people find it difficult to accept the incredible fact that President Kennedy, who was so full of life and meaning, was gunned down in a mindless, senseless act . . . that he was killed by a lunatic who got lucky with a high-powered rifle . . ." <sup>43</sup> Tom Wicker speaks in more specific terms: "most Americans . . . want John Kennedy to have died for some reason of state or politics. They want an explanation that gives more than ordinary meaning to his murder, that equates it somehow with the office he held and the power he dispensed."<sup>44</sup> It appears, then, that the problem of evil posed by Kennedy's murder was monumental in nature. For fifteen years, the American public--indeed, the world--has been unable to accept the Warren Commission's "lone assassin" theory. The notion that a member of the community had spontaneously acted to take

the President's life seemed a less than satisfying explanation for this great social disaster. Fueled by the ideological fervor of the 1960's, some very real problems in the Warren Report's theory, and the trauma of two more assassinations (Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King), the public's suspicions about the JFK case could only escalate.<sup>45</sup> In short, the Warren Report was a profound rhetorical failure leaving an equally profound explanatory vacuum to be filled. This failure was in no small part due to the work of many "assassination critics" who repeatedly indicted the Commission's findings. In their effort to fill the explanatory void in the nation's understanding of the assassination these critics engaged in a discursive campaign of substantial magnitude.

The first wave of assassination criticism appeared even before the Warren Report was published.<sup>46</sup> Thomas Buchanan's Who Killed Kennedy and Joachim Joesten's Oswald: Assassin or Fall Guy? took different routes to arrive at the hypothesis that Kennedy probably had been killed by a right-wing plot.<sup>47</sup> Both books enjoyed considerable sales, especially outside the United States.<sup>48</sup> Following the publication of the Warren Report and what Kaplan describes as "the lavish, indeed uncritical praise it received," a second generation of critics appeared in 1965 and 1966.<sup>49</sup> These authors included Edward J. Epstein (Inquest), Mark Lane

(Rush to Judgment), Harold Weisberg (Whitewash), Leo Sauvage (The Oswald Affair), and Richard H. Popkin (The Second Oswald).<sup>50</sup> They offered a variety of conspiracy theories but basically agreed that the Warren Commission had been either extremely incompetent or complicitous with some sinister right-wing force (ranging from the Dallas Police Department to the CIA).<sup>51</sup> Works of this sort had a profound effect in altering the public's perception of the JFK case.<sup>52</sup> Their impact was enhanced when, in late 1966 and early 1967, major media outlets began to echo their suspicions and to call for a re-opening of the investigation.<sup>53</sup> The crescendo of this assassination furor was reached in 1967 when New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison announced that he had established the identity of the plotters: "my staff and I solved the case weeks ago. I wouldn't say this if we didn't have evidence beyond the shadow of a doubt. We know what cities were involved, we know how it was done, in the essential aspects: we know the key individuals involved and we are in the process of developing evidence now."<sup>54</sup> Garrison's flamboyant and sometimes questionable tactics culminated in an attempt to implicate Clay Shaw and David Ferrie in a CIA-related plot to have Kennedy killed.<sup>55</sup> Shaw was acquitted after less than one hour of jury deliberation and Ferrie died--some say mysteriously. The investigation and all of its publicity seemed to have come to nothing.

One commentator described the incident as "the Dienbienphu of official assassination inquiries."<sup>56</sup>

However, Garrison's failure did not inhibit the growing body of unofficial assassination investigators. In fact, some of these writers even interpreted the incident as proof that Garrison was a CIA agent assigned to discredit them by creating an embarrassing public fiasco.<sup>57</sup> Regardless of their theory of the assassination, however, the ranks of the "critics" continued to grow. One historian has estimated that about 200 people have pursued the inquiry into the case since Kennedy's death, resulting in about 500 volumes of investigative books, official publications, memoirs, etc. Most of these authors have disagreed with the conclusions of the Warren Commission.<sup>58</sup> Leaving aside some of their crazier notions, G. Robert Blakey summarizes the critics' arguments as follows: "(1) The evidence that Oswald fired the shots--scientific tests and witness testimony--was open to question; (2) Whether or not Oswald fired the shots, the assassination was the result of a conspiracy; (3) The federal government, if not actually involved in the conspiracy, undertook to cover up vital evidence of the plot."<sup>59</sup>

These and other arguments were expressed in a body of literature that can only be described as vast. The Commission's own materials consume three hundred cubic feet in the National Archives,<sup>60</sup> including 1,000 feet of file drawers

and over 100,000 electronic and photographic documents.<sup>61</sup> This huge data base has been used by critics to produce about 300 books and 3500 periodical articles (in the U.S.) since the assassination. The New York Times alone has 2000 entries on the subject, supplemented by material in two dozen newsletters, such as the Grassy Knoll Gazette. Additionally, nine governmental investigations, producing 75 volumes of reports, have touched on the case in one way or another.<sup>62</sup> Even the National Enquirer claims to have published 70 articles "based on fresh evidence of a conspiracy."<sup>63</sup> Indeed, this literature grew so fast that, by 1968, Thomas McDade, writing in the American Book Collector, could state that "there is now enough in print for the third and fourth generations of works to appear . . ."<sup>64</sup>

The vast majority of this literature was not produced by professional scholars;<sup>65</sup> it tends to either strongly support or strongly deny the Warren Commission findings--mostly to deny them.<sup>66</sup> The number and variety of conspiracy theories advanced is astonishing.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the quality of the literature varies as much as does its content. As Wrone notes: "some have produced outright fiction, others have suffered modest scholarly techniques with distorting emotions, and a few have reached conclusions through . . . careful evaluation of the evidence . . ."<sup>68</sup> Finally, the JFK literature has grown so involved and complex that even

"expert" members of the "critical community" must now specialize if they are to assert mastery over even one area of the case, e.g., Oswald's trip to Mexico City.<sup>69</sup>

This large and variegated corpus of discourse has grown continually since the assassination. More importantly, the public's suspicions have not waned. Thus in the fall of 1976 the House of Representatives appointed a select committee to investigate the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King.<sup>70</sup> After a stormy beginning, the Committee settled into a two-year investigation that concluded in January of 1979 that, based on acoustical evidence of a second gunman, Kennedy's death was "probably" the result of a conspiracy. Although the Committee's Report exonerated governmental agencies, Castro, and anti-Castro groups, it did implicate organized crime figures as possibly being responsible and urged the Justice Department to pursue the investigation.<sup>71</sup> Some voiced qualms about the suddenness of the Committee's verdict after many months of seeming confirmation of the Warren Commission's original findings.<sup>72</sup> However, the FBI and the Department of Justice currently are having the Committee's acoustical studies independently verified and are seriously considering re-opening the case.<sup>73</sup> It is doubtful that even the most thorough re-investigation would silence the critics, for any bit of doubt seems sufficient to engage investigators

who will invent new theories to explain it.

Thus, the community's attempts to deal with the evil of a Presidential assassination ranged from ceremonial discourse, through the "lone assassin" theory, to a wide variety of unofficial (and ultimately official) conspiracy theories. Perhaps the most prominent of the many conspiracy advocates has been Mark Lane.

#### Mark Lane's Rhetorical Problem

Mark Lane's career in the early 1960's opened with a controversial term as a New York state Assemblyman, an abortive run for a Congressional seat, and participation in various civil rights activities.<sup>74</sup> His connection with the John F. Kennedy assassination began with telephone interviews of witnesses the day the President died. These initial leads were followed up by the publication of his article, "Lane's Defense Brief for Oswald" (appearing in the December 19, 1963 issue of National Guardian),<sup>75</sup> and by his request to the Warren Commission to permit him to represent Oswald's interests as his defense counsel and to cross-examine Commission witnesses. The Commission denied his request,<sup>76</sup> although he ultimately would testify before that body on two occasions owing to his claimed possession of new or controversial evidence.<sup>77</sup> Also, he briefly represented Marguerite Oswald (Lee's mother).

Lane began taking his case for Oswald's innocence to the public almost immediately, in the form of record albums of his Warren Commission testimony, frequent lectures, and the establishment of the Citizens' Commission of Inquiry. In 1966 he published the best-selling Rush to Judgment and followed it in 1968 with A Citizen's Dissent.<sup>78</sup> The former book was a detailed attack on the procedure and conclusions of the Warren Commission, while the latter not only included further attacks on the "lone assassin" theory, but outlined a plot by the media to block publication of Rush to Judgment. In addition to his books and lectures, Lane joined the Garrison investigation for a time and became, by some accounts, one of the District Attorney's closest consultants.<sup>79</sup> His tenure with the New Orleans investigation was followed by a period of relative reduction in public exposure except for the publication of two books<sup>80</sup> and his 1974 arrest while acting as an attorney in the Wounded Knee Indian rights case.

Then, in 1976 Lane opened a new chapter in his career by claiming that the FBI had been involved in a plot to kill Martin Luther King, Jr. This accusation was attended by a book (Code Name "Zorro") and by Lane's becoming James Earl Ray's attorney.<sup>81</sup> Lane went so far as to persuade Ray to testify before the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1978, but Lane would feel the Committee's ire for his



allegations of a cover-up. More recently, Lane served as a lawyer for Jim Jones and the People's Temple cult. Currently he is pursuing the theory that the federal government (especially the Central Intelligence Agency) conspired to drive the People's Temple to its final end (a fate which he narrowly escaped).<sup>82</sup> Thus, unlike A. Mitchell Palmer's sudden outburst of paranoia in the Red Scare, Mark Lane's entire career has been centered on conspiracy theory.<sup>83</sup>

Rush to Judgment was the key work in launching Lane's career and in organizing the forces which were to prosecute what one reviewer called "the war against the Warren Commission."<sup>84</sup> The initial strength of the Warren Report had been that its monolithic explanation left critics with a bewildering array of conflicting alternative theories.<sup>85</sup> Developing any one of these theories engaged the critic in arguments of such ponderous complexity that they may have seemed "hopelessly dense" to the average person.<sup>86</sup> Ultimately, however, the Report's alleged flaws and the fundamental difficulty of disproving a conspiracy took their toll.<sup>87</sup> By the time Lane's book was published, poll data indicated that three-fifths of the population believed Oswald had not acted alone.<sup>88</sup> A news weekly described the scene in November of 1966:

Three years after the fact, the will to doubt [the Warren Report] is stronger and more intractable than ever. Dissent

has become a cult with its own true disbelievers--a subculture of assassination buffs who obsessively probe the massive record, swap their findings and publish new and ever more elaborate conspiracy theories.<sup>89</sup>

The same periodical commented one month later:

The dissents were dimly heard at first, in coffee-houses and lecture halls, in books and journals of the left and right. Whatever its substantial merit, the Warren report had not answered all the questions--and some of the people demanding answers now were neither ideologues nor fortune-hunters, but solid Establishment citizens.<sup>90</sup>

Thus, Lane's rhetorical objective was two-fold: (1) persuasion of his readers to disbelieve the Warren Report, and; (2) capitalizing on extant skepticism to create pressure for a re-opening of the JFK investigation. He attempted to accomplish these two ends by providing a detailed refutation of the Report that implied a different, and conspiratorial, account of the evil suffered by the community.

Apparently, Lane struck a nerve. Although he claims to have had his manuscript rejected by virtually every publisher in America,<sup>91</sup> once the book was in print it was an immediate best-seller and remained so for half a year.<sup>92</sup> Taking the form of a defense brief for Oswald,<sup>93</sup> Rush to Judgment was the first major book on the topic to receive substantial notoriety.<sup>94</sup> It was to make Lane perhaps the decade's most significant critic of the Warren Report. Even some defenders of the Report stated that Lane's work

(although flawed) was the most powerful indictment of the Commission to date.<sup>95</sup> Thus, Wrone concludes, "Mark Lane's importance goes far beyond his several publications for he played a major role in shaping a generation's picture of the assassination."<sup>96</sup>

There is a second aspect, however, to the importance of Mark Lane and Rush to Judgment. In addition to eliciting substantial public attention, his book also provided motivation for much criticism of the Warren Commission by others. Most significant in this regard is Jim Garrison's statement that:

All America is indebted to Mark Lane. . .  
 He held the door open until the rest of  
 us decided to examine the case critically.  
 His book has been extremely valuable to me.  
 In fact, it played a large part in convincing  
 me to begin the investigation which has led  
 to the conspirators.<sup>97</sup>

Lane outlined his perception of the book's role when he noted in 1967:

My book makes no judgments, points to no  
 villains, but instead tries to underscore  
 the discrepancies and omissions in the  
 Report. Now we're at stage two. Garrison  
 is going into the courtroom to show a  
 conspiracy initiated and executed by a  
 powerful force of anti-Castro plotters.<sup>98</sup>

Thus, Rush to Judgment became a central factor in the development of explanations that conflicted with the Warren Report's notion of the "lone assassin." Indeed, one observer remarked that the book "was perhaps the most influential work in

arousing critical reaction to the Warren report . . . ."99

As one might expect, Rush to Judgment was also subject to some rather harsh criticism. Anson notes that it was "pilloried by most of the major reviewers . . . ."100

Attacks on the book have included charges of outright evidential distortion, fallacious logic, the use of "straw man" arguments, one-sidedness, errors in documentation, failure to cite previous research by others, and, more recently, the accusation that the book was largely researched and written by volunteers from the Citizens' Commission of Inquiry.<sup>101</sup> Nonetheless, the book's public impact cannot be denied. Lane's attack on the Warren Commission seemed to account for the President's murder in a way that drew upon the resources of the conspiracy argument. He was writing to an audience that had been amply prepared for his ideas by previous critics and by the difficulties surrounding the Warren Report (e.g., the mystery of why certain key documents such as autopsy X-rays and photographs were kept secret). Rush to Judgment, then, appeared in response to the social stress of the assassination (hypothesis 10) in an attempt to deal with the evil of that event (internal dynamic). Lane was in a position to employ the strategies of the conspiracy genre to deny Oswald's guilt and thus to suggest very sinister implications.

Rush to Judgment: Argument and Audience

The Argument. The central goal of Rush to Judgment was best expressed in Lane's "Introduction--Retrospective" to a 1975 reprint of the book. Speaking from the vantage point of a decade he declares: "Rush to Judgment was written less to record history than with the hope that it might help to change it."<sup>102</sup> He goes on to say that the object of this change is "the false historical assertion, and all that flows from the official declaration that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin of President Kennedy."<sup>103</sup> The only thing that sustains this false "lone assassin" theory is the government's having "suppressed the evidence and hidden the truth,"<sup>104</sup> aided by "time, the Warren Commission, and a biddable press."<sup>105</sup> He concludes that "Justice and truth can be restored" and argues that, without strenuous effort to expose the truth, the entire "rule of law" is in jeopardy.<sup>106</sup>

Lane posits the guiding principle of the book's method when he states:

The Commission and the press have execrated those who find conspiracies too easily. Such criticism is no doubt condign. Those who subscribe to a coincidence theory of history, however, in which cause and effect have no place, merit equal rebuke. I embrace neither philosophy; I suggest that it is necessary to study the actions of each of the principles in this drama and only then to draw those conclusions that their behavior would seem to justify. 107

Lane appears to be characterizing his study as a straightforward "fact-finding" expedition. Calling the Warren Commission Report a "brief for the prosecution,"<sup>108</sup> he asks, "is it too fastidious to insist that conclusions logically follow, not precede, an analysis of all the evidence?"<sup>109</sup> His implicit answer to this rhetorical question is to suggest that while the Warren Commission was strongly motivated to uphold a "lone assassin" theory and thus set out to prove its preconceptions, Lane will undertake what one must assume is a neutral investigation of the facts from which he will draw only logical conclusions. He characterizes the rhetorical failure caused by the Commission's bankrupt procedure by asserting that its "half answers do not for long dispel rumors and contain doubts."<sup>110</sup> Finally, Lane claims to capitalize on the Commission's shortcomings by using its own documentation against it. His procedure is based on the assumption that "it is possible to discover enough in the volumes of testimony and evidence to question, if not overthrow, the Commission's conclusions . . ."<sup>111</sup> "After a critical reading of the report . . . rumors must revive, for, to the previously unsubstantiated imaginings of those who for one reason or another disliked the Commission's case against Oswald, much documentation has been added."<sup>112</sup>

The essence of Lane's technique is to invert the conclusions of the Warren Report by using its own content to

invalidate the links between these statements and their evidentiary base. For example, in his discussion of the "Magic Bullet," Lane begins by positing the burden of the Commission's position: "So long as the Commission maintained that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin, it was necessary to determine that the bullet which struck Governor Connally first struck President Kennedy."<sup>113</sup> He then goes on to argue (among other things) that the angles of bullet entry established by the Commission's own experts did not support the notion of a Magic Bullet, but "inadvertently proved the contrary."<sup>114</sup> The Report's explanation for this anomaly is then attacked as being inconsistent with the testimony from the doctors who treated the victims of the assassination. And, finally, he claims that the Commission was forced to assume its own conclusion: "The Commission thus employed the unproved assertion that the bullet which struck the President came from the rear as a basic premise to prove that it 'probably' hit Governor Connally as well. In this manner, the original hypothesis became a conclusion and then a basic premise from which further conjecture was spun."<sup>115</sup> This argument develops in just seven pages. Rush to Judgment is composed of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of similar inversions of the Commission's findings.

Each effort to dislodge the Report's conclusions from its evidentiary foundations is an independent unit. Indeed,

these miniature inversions could be put together in virtually any order--as could the book's thirty chapters. The purpose of this method is to draw a harsh distinction between the biased, simplistic, non-factual claims of the Report and the rigorous re-evaluation of the complex data conducted by Lane. Moreover, the stringing together of indictments gives the audience the impression that the Report is deeply (and equally) flawed on a number of independent grounds--any one of which is sufficient to cast "reasonable doubt" on Oswald's guilt. Thus, Rush to Judgment is an anti-Warren Report, a total inversion of the Committee's logic and conclusions.

Several supporting topoi are used to strengthen Lane's case against the Warren Report. They include:

1. The consensus of witness testimony is not consistent with the Warren Commission's findings.<sup>116</sup>
2. The most reliable witness testimony is not consistent with the Warren Commission's findings.<sup>117</sup>
3. The Warren Commission Report "ignores," "distorts," "reshapes," and "oversimplifies" evidence.<sup>118</sup>
4. The Warren Commission findings resulted primarily from a predisposition to allay conspiracy fears by proving that Oswald had been the "lone assassin."<sup>119</sup>
5. Governmental agencies investigating the assassination were inept or pernicious.<sup>120</sup>



6. The flaws in the Report are results, in part, of the absence of due process checks (e.g., adversary proceedings, cross-examination, etc.) on the Commission's evidence and procedure.<sup>121</sup>

7. The news media have been taken in by or are colluding with the government to promote the Warren Commission's findings and to denigrate its critics.<sup>122</sup>

These topoi are used interchangeably by Lane to support his indictment of the "lone assassin" theory. They are plugged into chapters in the way an attorney might structure legal arguments in a brief for the defense. The topoi are used in a three-step process: (1) Lane posits a fundamental assumption or conclusion of the Warren Report; (2) He introduces several basic topoi (e.g., 1, 2, 5, 6) to prove that the assumption or conclusion cannot be verified by a careful survey of the facts, and; (3) He uses the remaining topoi (e.g., 3, 4, 7) to indict the motives of the Commission and its supporters so as to neutralize any residual validity in the Commission's case. If his arguments are accepted, then, Lane has overturned the findings of the Report.

The Implied Audience. The audience implied by Rush to Judgment's content is quite similar to the implicit reader defined in Palmer's "Case Against the 'Reds.'" The first clue to Lane's audience is the book's sudden, almost jolting opening. With no preliminaries, he plunges headlong into a

detailed discussion of witnesses whose testimony seems to indicate the presence of a second gunman on the "grassy knoll." Apparently, he assumes that the reader already has a fairly extensive knowledge of and interest in the case. There is no explanation of an overall plan of attack, little transition between chapters, and no summary or conclusion at the end.<sup>123</sup> The arguments, and their accompanying elaborate documentation, are simply placed in an almost random sequential order for the reader to plow through. Stylistically the work is dense, occasionally strident, and sometimes sarcastic--clearly the product of advocacy.<sup>124</sup> Rush to Judgment appears to be trying to provide further ammunition for those who are already critical of the Warren Report and to sway those who are unsure. Like Palmer, then, Lane's implied audience is the sensible, average person. When given appropriate information, this individual will realize the government's deceit and demand reinvestigation of the assassination. However, unlike Palmer, who cast himself as a combination Attorney General and savior defending our institutions against the "Reds," Lane seems to be more of a self-appointed Special Prosecutor trying to protect "the people" from evil forces within our institutions.

Rush to Judgment: Strategic Form

Conspiracy by Implication. Lane makes his case against the Warren Commission with two basic strategic forms. First,

he employs the technique of alleging conspiracy by implication. Nowhere in the book does he charge any person or group with conniving to kill the President and Oswald.<sup>125</sup> Rather, the propositional content of the conspiracy argument (hypothesis 1) is implied by Lane's contention that the "lone assassin" theory is invalid. The underlying technique here is a variety of the argument from residue. He claims for example, that the Commission must prove that Kennedy was shot from the rear in order to implicate Oswald; however:

When the bullet struck the President's head, as one can see from the photographs, he was thrown to his left and toward the rear of the limousine. How could the Commission explain the sudden violent move of the President's body directly to the left and to the rear? So long as the Commission maintained that the bullet came almost directly from the rear, it implied that the laws of physics vacated in this instance for the President did not fall forward.<sup>126</sup>

If the President's movements don't conform to the "lone assassin" scenario, the audience is left with only one conclusion--the assassin wasn't alone. Lane uses this technique many times by indicting the logic,<sup>127</sup> evidence,<sup>128</sup> procedure,<sup>129</sup> and motives behind<sup>130</sup> the Report. Clearly, he is alluding to some rather sinister alternative conclusions.

The second step in his process of implication is the clever use of innuendo. Foremost in this regard is his

suggestion that the testimony of anyone associated with government must be suspect, a claim which would effectively neutralize at least a portion of the Commission's case. Speaking of government-related witnesses in the Presidential motorcade who disagree with Lane's thesis about shots from the "grassy knoll," he admonishes: "I do not wish to suggest that their testimony should be dismissed but it should be cautiously assessed because of the obvious possibility that it might be colored."<sup>131</sup> This point is left hanging: no explanation is offered as to why or to what extent a dignitary's wife, for example, would conform to some sort of script pre-arranged by the Warren Commission. The same device is used at other points in the book. Lane remarks that crucial photographs and X-rays of Kennedy's autopsy were never placed in the National Archives and that "failure to publish or preserve such evidence cannot be construed in any light favorable to the Commission."<sup>132</sup> He also finds it "ominous" that the Commission ignored certain key witnesses<sup>133</sup> and insinuates that the weakness of the Report's findings is prove by its common practice of developing a "second line of defense" on particularly troublesome issues.<sup>134</sup> Perhaps the quintessence of this strategy is his discussion of one detail of Oswald's murder:

The very second that Oswald became visible to those gathered in the basement [of the Dallas Police and Courts Building] for the transfer, a car horn let out a blast, a fact confirmed by television and radio tape recordings which are available.

Seconds later a horn sounded again,  
and Ruby darted forward and fired  
the fatal shot. Who blew the car  
horn twice--and why?<sup>135</sup>

In each case, Lane leaves the reader to fill in the final conclusion. Much of the book is composed of this sort of effort to induce self-persuasion in his audience.

Innuendo devices are accompanied by a third technique for implying conspiracy: obscurant naming, i.e., the use of titles designed more to conceal than to identify. Logically, since Lane makes no overt cabalistic allegations he cannot use Palmer's strategy of negative naming (e.g., "Reds," "criminals," etc.). Therefore he opts for vague references to the mysterious agents who perpetrated the President's murder and the ensuing cover-up. After an account of the threats received by many witnesses he notes, "Powerful influences certainly did exist which tended to discourage testimony that did not conform to the accepted interpretation. When witnesses reversed their testimony, the altered testimony generally conformed more closely to the Government's version."<sup>136</sup> Such veiled claims about "powerful influences" are complemented by references to the possibility that "two persons [as opposed to Oswald alone were] involved in the murder of Officer Tippit."<sup>137</sup>

Some of the identifications used in this regard are so vague that they are little more than descriptions of the time, place, and manner of activities in which someone had

to be involved. For instance, in discussing the treatment of the rifle used in the assassination Lane states: "There is no doubt that eventually an Italian carbine did emerge from the Dallas police office, as Day testified. The question rather is related to what was found on the Depository's sixth floor."<sup>138</sup> Thus, whether it be "powerful influences," "two persons," or "the Dallas police office," Lane seems intent on naming villains without identifying them. This technique transforms the motives and actions necessary to a sinister plot into symbolic principles rather than into specific, knowable villains. The audience can thus coalesce its suspicions around these principles. Of course, the vagueness of the "names" used permits the reader to make the final identification of the plotters. Consensus on the nature of the plot is not important to Lane's goals; only that his audience believe that a plot exists and must be exposed.

A final phase in Lane's conspiracy implication is his use of association, i.e., the technique of linking various disparate elements so as to suggest the magnitude of the plot. Without doubt the main point of attack here is law enforcement agencies. He begins by asserting that the FBI, the Secret Service, and the Dallas authorities want to convince the public that Oswald acted alone.<sup>139</sup> This claim is coupled with his statement that the Warren Commission (who also held

these preconceptions) had "faith in the federal and local police."<sup>140</sup> The specter of guilt spreads farther as Lane reveals<sup>in</sup> his 1975 "Introduction--Retrospective" that in 1964 the President-elect of the American Bar Association contacted the Commission in regard to having Lane silenced via professional disciplinary action. The ABA official was Lewis Powell, the man originally appointed to be Oswald's attorney and later appointed by Richard Nixon (the person who recommended Gerald Ford for the Commission) to the United States Supreme Court.<sup>141</sup> Lane, therefore, refers to the American Bar as a "willing accomplice to the systematic destruction of the truth by a Presidential Commission."<sup>142</sup> But the association does not stop with the Bar. It involves all of the agencies who have tried to conceal evidence,<sup>143</sup> to influence witnesses,<sup>144</sup> or to impede the discovery of truth by any other means. For Lane, this list includes federal and local authorities, the Commission, the legal profession, the media and just about anyone else who opposes the notion that Oswald didn't act alone.<sup>145</sup> The association he establishes, then, is not one based on political or organizational ties so much as on sheer suspicion. That is, Lane links any two or more actors whose actions are less than paradigmatic of virtue and competence. Once again, the reader is left to assess the sinister import of these "links."

The tactics which support Lane's strategy of implied conspiracy accomplish several goals: (1) Since Lane's thesis (Oswald's innocence) requires no specification of the plotters he has the flexibility to use virtually any type of argument against the Warren Commission. The only criterion here would be that the argument has to overthrow one of the Report's findings in some way. Lacking a coherent conspiracy theory, there is no external standard that his arguments must meet, i.e., Lane's claims don't have to "fit" into any hard-and-fast alternative explanation. Jacob Cohen has referred to this technique as a "strategy of pure attack" wherein the critic doesn't have to "reconstruct a singular reality" but can "move swiftly from one critical riff to another, never pausing long enough to permit the reader or listener to test the validity of each separate provocation."<sup>146</sup> (2) In addition to argumentative flexibility, the implication strategy reduces even further the already minimal burdens of defending a conspiracy allegation. Difficult questions of motive and means are rendered moot if no specific theory is advanced. There simply is no direct avenue of attack on a cabalist who declines to name plotters. Therefore, any indictment must attack Lane's case on its factual merits as a defense of Oswald, an approach that puts the attacker in Lane's province of expertise. (3) The vagueness and opacity of



Lane's claims can increase their persuasive effect. His insinuations about possible plotters, often framed as rhetorical questions, are usually left dangling at the end of paragraphs that summarize his position. The very fact that his questions remain unanswered could engage the audience in the sometimes obsessive quest to expose the plot that killed the President. His innuendos never fail to suggest tantalizing leads that could, if pursued, reveal the cabal. Thus, Lane's use of implied conspiracy can secure heightened audience involvement in the discourse--the essence of enthymematic rhetoric.

The strategy of implied conspiracy sheds substantial light on the present study's definitional hypotheses. Although Lane relies on insinuation and residue, his case does reflect most of the basic propositional elements of the conspiracy theme (hypothesis 1): the community being threatened by an evil force personified as a secret plot. However, the vague nature of the plot makes it impossible for it to be a personification of evil in the same way that the "Reds" represented all social maladies for Attorney General Palmer. Moreover, Rush to Judgment's cabalist implications, though causal in nature (hypothesis 2), offer a less clear notion of a drama (hypothesis 5), for one key actor, the villain, is unknown. Nonetheless, the basic dramatic structure is still present. Lane, by implication,

establishes that a struggle took place between Oswald and law enforcement agencies and that a second battle is now raging between the assassination critics (the public's representatives) and the dark forces that engineered the President's murder. His frequent references to attempts to spy on or persecute him make it clear that Lane regards himself as being engaged in a serious conflict between good and evil.<sup>147</sup> The continuing anonymity of the plot despite his rigorous investigation merely proves its stealth and power (hypothesis 1), and the need for further inquiry.

The logic of the conspiracy implication is deductive (hypothesis 2). Clearly, the argument from residue requires that Lane posit the following: the Warren Report's findings depend on assumption X; X is not consistent with the evidence; therefore Oswald is innocent. This is deduction at its most rigorous. Further, Lane's conspiracy claim evinces a dichotomous view of morality (hypothesis 3). Here again, though, the nature of his discourse differs somewhat from that of Palmer. Rather than asserting that all of our cherished institutions and values are in a different sphere from those of some debased foe, Lane chooses more general ideas to work with. He claims that the failure to disclose the facts of the Kennedy case jeopardizes "Truth," "Justice," and the "rule of law."<sup>148</sup>

His argument is that these values have been trammled by the Warren Commission but that they can be restored by the efforts of independent investigators, or perhaps by a Congressional inquiry. There is no room for doubt here. One either favors "truth" (and thus Lane) or backs the Warren Report--not a bad posture from which to answer critics. Finally, Rush to Judgment offers considerable confirmation for hypotheses 4 (the cooptation/refutation of criticism) and 9 (the flexibility of the conspiracy argument). As noted earlier, Lane's failure to name the plotters in specific terms and his use of insinuation, association and residual reasoning give him enormous latitude. If any one of his conclusions is refuted, his strategy of "pure attack" gives him the option of switching to another indictment of the Report, safe in the knowledge that he need defeat only one or two key premises to overturn the Commission's theory. Moreover, should time fail to reveal dispositive evidence of a plot, this failure can be interpreted as further proof of the cabal's tenacious campaign to protect itself. Or, should fairly good evidence emerge that one agency was not involved in a plot, Lane could say simply that he never explicitly had included them in his arguments; alternatively, he could posit some other group as responsible or alter the scope of the alleged plot to explain away the troubling evidence. Lane, then, would

enjoy even more argumentative flexibility than would an advocate such as Palmer who was bound to a more specific conspiracy theory. Thus, the strategy of conspiracy by implication strengthens some hypotheses but suggests modifications in others.

Manipulation of Evidence. Lane's second basic strategy is the judicious manipulation of evidence. The overwhelming impression one receives from this work is one of density. Lane is clearly trying to create the perception that he has marshalled overwhelming amounts of detailed proof for his case. Rush to Judgment's documentation includes 4,949 citations, ten appendices (with 33 citations of their own), three diagrams, and 119 footnotes. Virtually no statement lacks a citation reference. The vast majority of citations being to the Report and Hearings of the Warren Commission.

In addition to normal (but greatly expanded) documentation, Lane also "packs" his text by drawing on the testimony of multiple sources. Thus he provides a detailed account of no less than 17 witnesses to prove that Jack Ruby had connections in the Dallas Police Department.<sup>149</sup> In less specific fashion he also refers to the 58 witnesses who thought the shots came from the "grassy knoll"<sup>150</sup> and the unanimous opinion of the doctors who, after the initial examination of the President, stated that his throat wound was one of entry.<sup>151</sup> At other times, Lane's review of

evidence involves incredibly complex discussions as, for example, when he offers a virtually frame-by-frame comparison of the Zapruder film with the Commission's Report to disprove the "lone assassin" scenario.<sup>152</sup> In this way Lane attempts to establish the validity of his case, and his own credentials as a painstaking investigator, by assembling a huge physical mass of evidence.

Lane's interpretation of evidence is considerably enhanced by his literal view of the data of the case. For instance, when Dallas Police Chief Curry referred to the likely outcome of a ballistics test as "favorable," Lane interprets this, not as possibly a slip of the tongue, but as tantamount to a public declaration of his Department's intent to punish Oswald regardless of the facts.<sup>153</sup> In other discussion Lane interprets a damaging witness's preamble to a statement ("In my opinion") as indicating that the entire testimony is equivocal.<sup>154</sup> Finally, he infers that the fact that many people ran or looked toward the "grassy knoll" after the shooting means that they all thought the shots came from that direction.<sup>155</sup>

In sum, then, Lane undertakes a very detailed, in-depth study of many aspects of the case in which he treats every word, every sound, every scrap of information as containing probative value. It is almost as if there is no such thing as an insignificant phenomenon. McKinley ties

this tendency to the nature of the case when he writes:

The assassination of John Kennedy would freight with significance almost all of its circumstances, almost every person, place or event connected with it. That fact alone testifies to the killing's shock effect, to the resultant need to know what happened and, again, to the information blitz that provided the facts on which the myriad speculations and conclusions were built. But there was little gain-saying the facts themselves or what seemed to be the facts, as they emerged during and after the national mourning.<sup>156</sup>

Thus Lane's literal-minded interpretation of the facts provides him with a veritable mountain of data.

A third form of evidence manipulation in Rush to Judgment is Lane's claim to command special types of proof. While the Warren Report, he claims, relies on the FBI's hearsay interview summaries and selective use of the few confirming witnesses, his book can draw on more sophisticated and reliable probative materials. These materials include personally taped and filmed interviews with crucial witnesses,<sup>157</sup> expert ballistics testimony,<sup>158</sup> photostats of otherwise unavailable documents obtained from personal sources,<sup>159</sup> and confidential informants.<sup>160</sup> Special forms of evidence such as these are brought to bear on all portions of Lane's case both to overturn the findings of the Warren Report and to enhance Lane's stature as an investigator

of such skill and determination that he is able to secure evidence that has eluded others.

The functions of these evidence strategies are several: (1) The literal-minded interpretation of data gives Lane the ability to transform virtually any fact into "evidence." As a result, the density of Lane's case gives him the advantage of appearing to command a vast array of data. Aside from the obvious benefits to his image, the case for an implicit conspiracy is made to appear "ironclad" as a huge corpus of evidence is called upon to document it.

(2) The special forms of evidence alluded to in Rush to Judgment further the impression that the data of Lane's case are uniquely significant; after all, the fact that they could be produced only by extraordinary investigative means must say something about their importance. The author's claim to the possession of these unique insights enhances both the validity of his claims and his perceived reliability as an independent, legal investigator going to any lengths to uphold "truth," "justice," and the "rule of law." Moreover, a high level of significance can be attributed to Lane's "evidence" because the reader is given the impression that he suddenly has revealed a fact which the conspiracy would rather keep under wraps. Thus Lane can treat his probative materials, by definition, as the products of an exposé, the implication being that a powerful force is

trying to prevent its revelation. In this scenario, every fact or document takes on unique importance.

The manipulation of evidence in Rush to Judgment offers several insights into the present study's generic hypotheses. Obviously, the assembly of massive quantities of documentation is quite consistent with hypothesis 7's prediction of such a structure to the argument. However, a difference between Lane's discourse and Palmer's is that the former marshals data to let the reader conclude there is a conspiracy while the latter assembles evidence actually to describe the nature of the plot and the government's reaction to it. Moreover, the use of special forms of evidence strengthens Lane's cabalist interpretation (hypothesis 1) and his somewhat general notion of dichotomous morality (hypothesis 3) in that the unusual techniques required to secure such evidence imply the existence of a secretive and dangerous force that is attempting to quash it. The prediction of argumentative flexibility in hypothesis 9 is also supported by Lane's evidence manipulation. The vast amount of data available to him would allow him to shift subjects easily while recombining his data base in a new way so as to support whatever conclusion he desired. This flexibility would aid considerably in refuting or co-opting criticism (hypothesis 4). Finally, the literal-minded interpretation of facts and events in Lane's work



affords direct corroboration for hypothesis 8. Hence, Lane's manipulation of evidence provides support for several of the present study's hypotheses and further evidence of the relationships between them.

### Conclusion

John F. Kennedy's death shook our nation to its roots. The reactions of grief, fear and suspicion that accompanied the assassination called forth several rhetorical responses. Initial ceremonial discourse was supplemented by the calm voice of the Warren Report assuring the nation that its leader had been felled by a lone madman. However, the rhetorical failure of the Report was attended by a large variety of conspiracy theories that asserted, in Kidder's words, "that evil can be fully understood."<sup>161</sup> The result was what Cohen has called a "veritable religion of suspicion" fostered by individuals practicing the "arts of insinuation."<sup>162</sup> If suspicion was indeed a religion, Mark Lane was its high priest.

A reconstruction of the strategic forms in Lane's Rush to Judgment has provided substantial support for a number of the definitional hypotheses developed in the present study. However, significant discrepancies between the hypotheses and this sample of conspiracy discourse also have been found. First, the propositional content of the conspiracy claim is implicit, rather than explicit. As a

result, some elements of the hypotheses, such as the personification of evil (hypothesis 1) and causal claims (hypothesis 2), are not confirmed as powerfully as was the case in the last chapter. Rather, these factors still seem to be operative, but in an implicit, enthymematic way. Second, little confirmation was found for hypothesis 6. Lane does not employ lurid imagery and his sense of urgency, while present, is linked to a desire to reopen the JFK investigation rather than a fear of some imminent peril facing the community. Lane does employ some exaggeration, especially in the samples of sarcasm<sup>163</sup> and strident advocacy that punctuate the book; however, it is nowhere near the magnitude of the exaggeration employed by Palmer. Thus only one aspect of hypothesis 6 is even weakly confirmed; Lane seems more concerned with exonerating Oswald than with issuing some sort of call to arms.

Finally, as in the last chapter, it appears that Lane's ethos is an important facet of his attempt to account for the evil of the assassination. His use of special evidence and the fact that Lane was singled out for persecution by the government both speak to his status as self-appointed Special Prosecutor. This impression is enhanced by his often clinical treatment of his subject (e.g., his cold-blooded excursion into the grim details of Kennedy's wounds),<sup>164</sup> and his use of legal terminology.<sup>165</sup> It appears

then, that Lane is striving to carve out a special place for himself in the ranks of the assassination critics. Bertrand Russell is quoted to this effect just inside the book's cover: "Mark Lane's work is a great historical contribution--greater than Zola in the Dreyfus case." In the next chapter the speaker's role in the conspiracy genre will be assessed, along with the implications of other issues addressed by this study.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CONSPIRACY ARGUMENT: ANSWERS AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

The interesting question is not how all this muddle is going to come magnificently together, but but what does all this ferment mean.

--Clifford Geertz

The procedure used in this study aimed at developing a "map" of conspiracy rhetoric by comparing a number of derivative hypotheses with real-world samples of discourse. This chapter will open with a discussion of the confirmation, denial or modifications which the hypotheses received from the analysis of these two divergent exemplars. The second phase of the chapter will be an inquiry into the possibility of considering the role of the speaker's ethos in defining the conspiracy genre. Finally, the question of sub-genres within the conspiratorial category will be addressed. Suggestions for further research will be advanced in the latter two sections.

#### A Generic "Map" of Conspiracy Rhetoric

Reconstruction of the strategic forms in discourses by

A. Mitchell Palmer and Mark Lane has provided substantial confirmation for some of the present study's hypotheses. The flexibility of the conspiracy argument (hypothesis 9) and its ability to coopt and refute criticism (hypothesis 4) have both been clearly exemplified in the discourses investigated. Moreover, the notion that the argument occurs in times of social stress (hypothesis 10) also has been validated. The deductive logic predicted in hypothesis 2 has obtained, as has the "en masse" presentation of evidence (hypothesis 7) and its dramatic format (hypothesis 5). Hence, at least a portion of the tentative definition assembled in earlier chapters has been borne out by the critique of exemplars. And the confirmation comes from comparison of two quite distinct samples of conspiracy discourse. This consideration significantly increases the confidence that can be placed in this portion of the definition, because it lessens the chance that the findings are solely the product of one rhetor's idiosyncrasies.

However, the scrutiny of exemplars also indicates that modifications of various magnitude may be called for in other hypotheses. The major consideration is the fact, discovered in the analysis of Rush to Judgment, that the propositional content of the conspiracy argument (hypothesis 1) and its causal attributes (hypothesis 2) do not have to be overtly "claimed." Rather, they can be implied, as by

Mark Lane. As long as the audience gets the cabalist message, whether through direct statement to them by the rhetor or by completing the rhetor's enthymeme, it seems that the conspiracy argument has achieved at least part of its propositional intent. Of course, one cannot "personify" evil if no names are attached to the perpetrators. Nonetheless, the audience still can be made to realize that some group of agents is bringing about the maladies that the community suffers. This group, however, may be recognizable only by the fact that, without them, evil would be unexplainable; hence, they symbolize the principle of evil. Thus, hypothesis 1 may be reconstructed: "The conspiracy argument obtains in discourse that somehow characterizes the community as being threatened by evil symbolized as a secret plot." This construction is more general: It includes a wider variety of tactics that could be used to develop a conspiracy argument and does not require a declarative statement naming a specific Plot. The use of the term "symbolized" (in the sense of Sapir's "condensation symbol"<sup>1</sup>) rather than "personified" helps to achieve this end.

The need for increased generality is also true of hypothesis 2's prediction of deductive causal "claims." If the conspiracy theme is not stated outright, then neither will the causal attributions made to the plot take a de-

clarative form. Thus hypothesis 2 may be reconstructed: "The conspiracy argument assumes a deductive, causal form." The use of "form" rather than "claim" means that this statement requires only that the logic and the causal nature of the argument be somehow operative in the discourse, rather than being stated overtly.

The dichotomous morality predicted in hypothesis 3 is not nearly as obvious in Rush to Judgment as in "The Case Against the 'Reds.'" Palmer draws a clear distinction between the virtue of 100% Americanism and the depravity of Bolshevism. Lane, however, simply posits "truth," "justice," and the "rule of law" as important values and suggests that they can be restored by a thorough reinvestigation of the Kennedy assassination. It is true that Lane identifies no area of compromise between "truth" and the Warren Commission. But, in the main, the issue does not seem material to his defense of Oswald and therefore he seldom addresses it. His values are more abstract and less likely to be structured into a harsh system of moral polarity. Thus, hypothesis 3 should be reconstructed in a weakened form: "The conspiracy argument evinces a morality that tends to be dichotomous." This alteration is not a major one but it does broaden this particular form so that it can take in a wider array of moral arguments.

The part of the tentative definition most damaged by the study of exemplars was hypothesis 6. Predictions of

urgency, exaggeration, and lurid imagery were clearly confirmed in "The Case Against the 'Reds.'" They did not fare as well in the investigation of Rush to Judgment. While Lane's tone is sometimes strident or sarcastic, he employs no lurid imagery. In fact, consistent with the book's "defense brief" structure, he uses virtually no imagery at all. Further, the question of his tendency to exaggerate depends on one's own view of the facts of the case, and the urgency of his message bears only on re-opening the JFK inquiry, not on the danger facing the polis. It seems, then, that hypothesis 6 may be only weakly related to the internal dynamic of dealing with the problem of evil.

Urgency is a characteristic of any rhetor who believes his or her message to be important; a lurid and exaggerated style also could be employed in virtually any type of argument. Further, these characteristics do not seem to be intrinsic to the genre. For example, John B. Connally's 1961 address on "the Communist Conspiracy" employs none of these forms (other than the ubiquitous urgency). Indeed, when speaking of the public education campaign needed to alert the nation to the dangers of Communism, he warns:

Let partisan politics be injected--let crackpots of the radical right or left infiltrate--let emotion displace objec- tive analysis--and the project is doomed . . . The country has been alerted--repeatedly and by the highest authority--as to the emerging danger of the radical



fringe in the field of anti-communism. . .  
The activity of extremists is ill-  
conceived and misdirected. It diverts  
our attention from the real danger.  
It stands in opposition to our own  
democratic institutions and it is  
tragically divisive. It causes the  
energies of true liberals and conserva-  
tives to be expended in acrimonious and  
endless disputes.<sup>2</sup>

Connally also quotes President Kennedy on the danger of  
extremism and recommends specific measures for preventing  
fanatical rightists from seizing control of the public in-  
formation campaign.<sup>3</sup> This is not the familiar voice of the  
conspiracy advocate; there are no feverish tones, no under-  
currents of hate. Connally seems to be basing his case, in  
part, on the absence of such qualities. His appeal is for  
a rational, common-sense education program. Thus he tries  
to build his arguments around a variety of conspiracy claim  
that is designed to be persuasive via the conspicuous lack  
of exaggeration and lurid imagery. Thus it appears that  
hypothesis 6 is not confirmed. At worst it should be com-  
pletely dismissed from the generic definition; at best it is  
a weak corollary to the dramatic form of the conspiracy argu-  
ment (hypothesis 5).

The analysis of Rush to Judgment and "The Case Against  
the 'Reds'" has yielded some valuable perspectives on the pre-  
sent study's hypotheses. Several of these statements have  
received strong confirmation. Others, however, have been

modified or dismissed. If there is any one difficulty in this latter group of hypotheses it is that they were too restricted, a characteristic probably resulting from the rather monolithic nature of the literature from which they were derived (i.e., most of the secondary literature reviewed dealt only with rightist speakers and groups; even the collected primary literature tends to be of this sort). If this problem has been corrected somewhat, then the present study may be a useful addition to the literature on conspiracy. The modifications made here have the effect of making some of the hypotheses broader in scope so that they can incorporate the many possible ways in which the conspiracy argument's functions can be executed. Thus, the generic "map" of conspiracy rhetoric now looks as follows:

#### Substance

(1) The conspiracy argument obtains in discourse that somehow characterizes the community as being threatened by evil symbolized as a secret plot.

(2) The conspiracy argument assumes a deductive, causal form.

(3) The conspiracy argument evinces a morality that tends to be dichotomous.

(4) The conspiracy argument is capable of coopting or refuting virtually any criticism.

#### Style

(5) The conspiracy argument is dramatic in form.

(Corollary: the drama of the conspiracy argument can be accompanied by a tendency toward urgency, exaggeration, and lurid imagery.)

(7) The evidence for the conspiracy argument is presented en masse.

(8) The conspiracy argument evinces a literal-minded view of facts and events.

(9) The conspiracy argument is flexible enough to be easily extrapolated or quickly shifted from one subject or enemy to another.

#### Situation

(10) The conspiracy argument occurs in times of social stress.

Significantly, the sense of functional dependency among the hypotheses elaborated in Chapter III has been validated in both exemplars. The substantive, stylistic, and situational forms within this generic "map" are related to each other in functionally "necessary" ways. Removal or substantial alteration of any one of them would change the genus into something significantly different. The conclusion can be drawn, then, that these forms are part of a "dynamic fusion" bound together by some internal force. The analysis in Chapters II and III and the critique of exemplars provides

good reason for regarding the rhetorical problem of evil as the essence of this "internal dynamic." Thus, the conspiracy genre is composed of a deductive/causal substantive form a massively documented/dramatic style, and a "stressful" situation. The functional outcome of this "fusion" is a reconciliation of evil with the moral claims of the community by the location of blame and the transference of guilt to malevolent agents outside the true polis.

#### The Ethos of the Conspiracy Advocate

An anomaly developed in the analysis of the samples of discourse: both Palmer and Lane used obvious techniques to enhance their credibility, however, the definition of "genre" used in the present study does not admit consideration of these factors. Yet strategies which enhance the speaker's ethos are central because they can affect how the rhetorical forms interact and how the audience would perceive the discourse. The question becomes, then, should the category of "speaker" be added to those of "substance," "style," and "situation"? Moreover, are there any conclusions to be drawn from this analysis about generic attributes of conspiracy advocates?

These questions can be addressed together. Assuming that the "speaker" category is added to the notion of "genre" there are some tentative statements that can be advanced about the ethos of the conspiratorialist based on

the information gleaned from the exemplars. First, both rhetors adopt the posture of a crusader. Palmer makes it clear that he is leading his Department in a desperate battle against the powerful forces of international Bolshevism. Lane poses as a self-appointed Special Prosecutor trying to unearth the real facts of the Kennedy assassination so that the secret powers who oppose "truth," "justice," and the "rule of law" will be vanquished. The central aspects of the crusader posture, then, are the impression that the rhetor is a leader of "the people" and the notion that his or her efforts are the only thing that stands between the community and disaster. This latter aspect speaks to a second portion of the conspiracy advocate's ethos: the claim to superior knowledge or abilities. Palmer refers frequently to his status as head of a powerful investigative agency. Also, he speaks of the "confidential" information that led him to prosecute his campaign against the "Reds". Lane implies his expert credentials with the use of terminology, the mastery of vast amounts of highly specialized evidence, and his efforts to distinguish his research from that of the "amateur investigators"<sup>4</sup> or the "obsequious, or at least trusting, researcher . . ."<sup>5</sup> He refers to those of his ilk as the "more sophisticated student . . . those who read critically--that is, with intelligence, not necessarily with hostility."<sup>6</sup> Both

rhetors attempt to establish a special form of expert stature to increase the salience of their interpretation of events. Hans Toch has noted this same trend in his study of the use of conspiracy theories by extremist social movements:

All but those who share the secret are puppets pulled by invisible strings walking blindly to their destruction. Even if the enlightened, too, are to perish in the holocaust, they at least will not be sacrificed blindly and passively. It is they who can read between the lines of the handwriting on the wall.

Persons who hold a conspiracy belief frequently provide evidence of their superior diagnostic and prognostic skill.<sup>7</sup>

Logically, therefore, it appears that the conspiracy advocate may require a certain unique expertise--the ability to discern the machinations of a dark underworld to which ordinary people are oblivious.

A final tentative factor in the conspiracy advocate's credibility is the claim that the rhetor is being persecuted. Palmer observes, ominously, that his Department's activities have been carried out in spite of Congress rather than with their assistance. He lists numerous complaints against the legislature and thus places himself in the role of a valiant (and ultimately victorious) underdog. Lane is more direct in his claims of persecution. He details several examples

of government surveillance of his activities,<sup>8</sup> relates attempts by the Bar to have him sanctioned,<sup>9</sup> and speaks of efforts to have him prosecuted and harrassed in other ways.<sup>10</sup> Such claims could be important to the conspiracy advocate because they confirm that a powerful force does exist that thinks that he or she is so dangerous to the Plot as to merit overt suppression. Baum has noted this tendency in his study of the conspiracy theories of the radical right.<sup>11</sup> He cites an example from a speech delivered in the late forties by Gerald L. K. Smith:

. . . the secret weapon of this movement has been the fact that I've been able to keep going. That's what my enemies are worried about! They've done enough to stop me a dozen times. But I'm always able to pay my bills.<sup>12</sup>

The material supplied by the exemplars and by secondary sources, then, seems consistent with the idea that conspiracy advocacy may involve certain consistent patterns of speaker ethos. Factors such as the posture of the crusade, special knowledge or abilities, and persecution offer solid starting points for further research in this area.

#### The Question of Sub-genres

One of the premises of this study has been that previous research has overemphasized "extremist" conspiracy discourse to the exclusion of "mainstream" varieties of the genre. There is the tantalizing prospect here (one that probably

inheres in generic inquiry) of speculating on the validity of distinguishing sub-categories within the conspiracy genre. The information gained from the present analysis does suggest a few possible distinctions. First, extremist conspiracy discourse, the type described by most of the secondary literature, may engage in more exaggeration, urgency and lurid imagery. The discourses by Palmer and Lane certainly do not involve the degree of stridence of tone or the wild imagery (e.g., constant allusions to cancer or vermin) that is featured in less moderate discourse. Second, the mainstream conspiracy rhetoric reviewed here offers solutions to the problem of evil, not just explanations. Palmer calls for increased support from Congress and extensive public participation. Lane demands a re-opening of the Kennedy case so that the facts can be impartially assessed. Specific proposals of this sort are seldom forthcoming from hardcore extremists (at least those on the right).<sup>13</sup> Although there may be an occasional call to repeal the income tax, there is a hopeless pessimism about even these proposals; for the entire premise of extreme rightist discourse is that America is already fully controlled by the plot.<sup>14</sup> McPherson has found that the use of the conspiracy appeal tends to increase as the extremism of the rhetor increases.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps this change in the frequency of the appeal is accompanied by substantial



alterations in its nature. Further research into this issue might shed some light on the nature of extremist rhetoric and on the possibility that important sub-categories exist within the conspiracy genre.<sup>16</sup>

A second speculation fostered by the present study is that different varieties of conspiracy argument may be used by liberals and conservatives. Palmer and Lane clearly represent two very different political perspectives. The former envisions the community as a besieged fortress trying to repulse the attacks of a fearsome foe. The latter views the polis as having been subverted by an enemy within the walls. Palmer is trying to defend our institutions against revolution, Lane is trying to expose the evil that is being harbored by these institutions. Baum and Remington have both identified this trait as a key factor distinguishing the conspiracy theories of the radical right and radical left.<sup>17</sup>

But what of mainstream conservatives and liberals? Davis provides one possible interpretation in his treatment of the anti-slavery movement:

But the central theme [of antislavery historiography], which is so central to the paranoid style, is the conviction that an exclusive monolithic structure has imposed a purposeful pattern on otherwise unpredictable events. One suspects that this conviction is a product of the liberal faith, inherited from the Enlightenment, that history

can be shaped in accordance with a rational plan. When such a comforting expectation is continually shattered by wars, depressions, and social injustice, it is natural to assume that some evil force is at work. When the irrationality of events proves that the children of light have lost control, then the children of darkness must have secretly seized the levers of history. The illusion of American omnipotence, as Denis Brogan has suggested, easily leads to a fear of un-American omnipotence.<sup>18</sup>

One might compare this style of thought to a conservative perspective that views man as the victim of fundamental laws (including his own sinful nature). In such a view, the community and its institutions have the responsibility of husbanding certain immutable virtues and restraining the evil impulses of any errant citizen. Evil, then, represents an attack on the virtues that constitute the moral core of the polis. Thus, the enemy is any force that fosters change, since any change has the potential to prove fatal to the primal values embodied in the life and language of the polis.<sup>19</sup>

Further research into a distinction between the liberal and conservative brands of conspiracy rhetoric could be quite useful. Such analysis could reveal the differing ways in which these two rhetorics define and deal with evil. The implications of this kind of study can be profound. The conspiracy theories held by political factions can provide key insights into their values, internal conflicts, and

external operations.<sup>20</sup> For much of political life revolves around the question of finding out who the "enemy" is, what he or she is up to, and what the community is going to do about it. The analysis of cabalist thought provides one obvious way of uncovering some of these central components of the polis' public life. Insights into conspiracy argument, then, can be important in understanding the rhetorical implications of political ideology and the ideological implications of political rhetoric. Generic study of conspiracy discourse can provide a useful perspective on such issues.

#### Conclusion

The conspiracy argument combines the forces of poetic and dialectic. It is a unique fusion of the drama and the syllogism. The forms which constitute this fusion of substance, style, and situation make up a distinct rhetorical genre. This study has inquired into the nature of these forms and into their relationship to each other. Through a detailed analysis of two exemplars, the tentative hypotheses posited initially have evolved into a "map" of the genre in which a greater degree of confidence can be expressed.

More importantly, the generic study of conspiracy has afforded significant insights into the ways in which rhetorical communities deal with the problem of evil. By imposing a comprehensible order on events, cabalist discourse recon-

ciles the fact of evil with the supposed virtues of the community: the source of evil is accounted for and blame is shifted away from the true polis. This goal is accomplished through the use of dramatic perspective, massive evidence, dichotomous morality, and all of the other forms comprising this type of rhetoric. The central point is not that these forms have been catalogued (although such an inventory is desirable), but that their external function (i.e., resolving the rhetorical problem of evil) has been identified and their internal functions (i.e., their relational dependencies) have been exposed to critical analysis. Moreover, the problem of accounting for evil has been identified as the internal dynamic that binds the genus' forms together. Finally, the insights produced by the foregoing investigation have suggested several additional avenues of research.

As long as there is evil, there will be conspiracy allegations. Reconciling suffering and privation with the polis' moral claims is an essential function of rhetorical communities. The explanatory power of the conspiracy theme is a "natural" for this role. For it seems that a sinister account of events is preferable to no understanding at all; better hell than chaos.

## CHAPTER I

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR (New York: Vintage, 1955), p. 72.

<sup>2</sup>Preston Slosson, "Conspiracy Mania," letter, New York Times Magazine, 28 September 1975, p. 82. In a survey of the New York Times Index for 1950-1970, Bergesen has found reports of 1040 "political witch hunts" in the United States. Albert J. Bergesen, "Political Witch Hunts: The Sacred and the Subversive in Cross-National Perspective," American Sociological Review, 42 (April 1977), 220-233.

<sup>3</sup>Ivan Goldman, "Pack Up Your Troubles in the Handy 'Conspiracy' Bag," Chicago Tribune, 10 January 1980, Sect. 3, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Hofstadter, p. 71.

<sup>5</sup>Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 166.

<sup>6</sup>William C. Baum, "The Conspiracy Theory of the Radical Right in the United States," Diss. Iowa State 1960, pp. 111-124.

<sup>7</sup>The term "conspiratorialist" is used by Tom Bethell to describe advocates of conspiracy theories. See Tom Bethell, "Was Sirhan Sirhan on the Grassy Knoll?" Washington Monthly, 7 (March 1975), 32-38.

<sup>8</sup>John Bunzel, Anti-Politics in America (New York: Knopf, 1967), p. 37.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>10</sup>The term "cabalist" is derived from Robert Lane's notion of "cabalism" as the conspiracy theory of "undemocrats." See Robert E. Lane, Political Ideology: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), pp. 113-130.

<sup>11</sup>For example, see Gary Allen, None Dare Call It Conspiracy (Seal Beach, Ca.: Concord Press, 1971); Gary Allen, "They're Catching On," American Opinion, 20 (November 1977), 1-4, 73-90. A general discussion of Illuminati conspiracy theory is provided by Neal Wilgus, The Illuminoids (Albuquerque, N.M.: Sun, 1978); and Vernon Stauffer, New England and the Bavarian Illuminati (New York: Columbia University Press, 1918).

<sup>12</sup>Goldman, Sect. 3, p.2.

<sup>13</sup>Richard Pratte, "Conspiracy Schools and Schooling," Educational Theory, 27 (Summer 1977), 193, 194.

<sup>14</sup>The irony of this trait is that these minimum proof burdens are often accompanied by enormous quantities of supporting quotations, references, and other scholarly paraphernalia. For example, Hofstadter notes that "McCarthy's 96-page pamphlet McCarthyism contains no less than 313 footnote references, and /Robert/ Welch's fanatic assault on Eisenhower, The Politician, is weighed down by a hundred pages of bibliography and notes." The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 37.

<sup>15</sup>For a discussion of the functional approach to historical analysis see Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., A Behavioral Approach ot Historical Analysis ( New York: The Free Press, 1969), pp. 169-210.

<sup>16</sup>A. Mitchell Palmer, "The Case Against the Reds," The Forum (February 1920), pp. 173-185. Mark Lane, Rush to Judgment (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966).

<sup>17</sup>For example see Baum, "The Conspiracy Theory of the Radical Right in the United States." See also the Secondary Literature summarized in Chapter III.

<sup>18</sup>George I. Mavrodes, "The Problem of Evil as a Rhetorical Problem," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 1 (Spring 1968), 91-102.

<sup>19</sup>Jackson Harrell and Wil A. Linkugel, "On Rhetorical Genre: An Organizing Perspective," Philosophy and Rhetoric," (Fall 1978), 263.

<sup>20</sup>For example. see David Brian Davis, ed., The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971); Geoffrey K. Roberts, "Conspiracy Theories," A Dictionary of Political Analysis (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), pp. 47-48; Leon W. Belvins, "Conspiracy Doctrine, : The Young Voter's Manual: A Topical Dictionary of American Government and Politics (Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams and Co., 1973), pp. 246-247.

<sup>21</sup>Hans Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 49; Davis, p. 362; Richard Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, p. 6; David Brian Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic and Anti-Mormon Literature," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 47 (September 1960), 205-224.

<sup>22</sup>For example, in rhetorical scholarship, Farrell posits four facets of conspiracy as form and Cragan outlines the "characters" and "action lines or motives" that constitute a cabalist "rhetorical vision." Thomas B. Farrell, "Rhetoric in Two Voices: The Continuing Epistemic Conversation of Kenneth Burke," Northwestern University, 1979; John F. Cragan, "Rhetorical Strategy: A Dramatistic Interpretation and Application," Central States Speech Journal, 26 (Spring 1975), 6. In socio-political and psychological studies, Remington has noted "two recurring themes which establish continuity of thought among the several versions of the basic [international conspiracy] theory." Baum has detailed seven features of radical right

conspiracy literature, Davis has identified six "thematic continuities" of conspiratorial rhetoric, and Smith has posited "three conditions" necessary for an outburst of alien conspiracy fear. Roger A. Remington, "The Function of the 'Conspiracy Theory' in American Intellectual History" Diss. St. Louis University 1965, p. 2; William C. Baum, "The Conspiracy Theory of Politics of the Radical Right in the United States," pp. 126-129; Davis, The Fear of Conspiracy, pp. xviii-xxiii; Dwight C. Smith, Jr., "Mafia: The Prototypical Alien Conspiracy," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 423 (January 1976), 76-77. On a more theoretical level Robert Lane has defined six features of "cabalism," Murray Levin has analyzed three elements of "the conspiratorial myth," and Lipset and Raab have asserted five characteristics of conspiracy theory attendant to their "monistic" model of right-wing extremism. Robert Lane, Political Ideology, pp. 116-118. Murray B. Levin, Political Hysteria in America: The Democratic Capacity for Repression (New York: Basic Books, 1971), pp. 148, 149, 150, 151; Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1977, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 14-17. In his analysis of social movements, Hans Toch argues that cabalist groups consist of the "Conspiracy Premise," "Conspiracy Producers," and "Conspiracy Consumers (pp. 69,66)." Even the popular media offers abstracts of the basic characteristics of conspiracy-oriented activity. Tom Bethell, for example, outlines four fundamental aspects of the "conspiratorialist." Tom Bethell, "Was Sirhan Sirhan on the Grassy Knoll?," pp. 32, 33, 34, 36, 37-38. See also Ivan Goldman, "Pack Up Your Troubles in the Handy 'Conspiracy Bag.'"

<sup>23</sup>A truly complete listing of all the genre studies available in rhetoric would be an enormous and pointless task (even if one could derive an acceptable definition of "genre"). Much of this literature is summarized in Campbell and Jamieson's (eds.) excellent volume, Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action (Falls Church Va: Speech Communication Association, 1976). See especially the introductory essay by the editors. If one had to choose a few "key" works which have proven consistently useful in this area, they should include the following: Edwin Black, Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method; (1965 rpt. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978). Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 1 (Winter 1968), 1-14; Kathleen M. Jamieson, "Antecedent Genre As Rhetorical Constraint," Quarterly



Journal of Speech, 61 (December 1975), 406-415; B.L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 59 (October 1973), 273-283; Kathleen M. Jamieson, "Generic Constraints on the Rhetorical Situation," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 6 (Summer 1973), 162-170; Jackson Harrell and Wil A. Linkugel, "On Rhetorical Genre: An Organizing Perspective,"; Kenneth Burke, Counter-Statement, 2d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953); Northrup Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957); Stuart M. Kaminsky, American Film Genres: Approaches to A Critical Theory of Popular Film (New York: Fell, 1974); Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in A New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art, 3d ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957). One work on this topic which has not received the attention it merits is Kathleen M. Jamieson, "The Standardization and Modification of Rhetorical Genres: A Perspective," Genre, 8 (September 1975), 183-193. Recent examples of generic criticism include: Thomas D. Clark, "An Exploration of Generic Aspects of Contemporary American Campaign Orations," Central States Speech Journal, 30 (Summer 1979), 122-133; Carol J. Jablonski, "Richard Nixon's Irish Wake: A Case of Generic Transference," Central States Speech Journal, 30 (Summer 1979), 164-173; Ronald A. Sudol, "The Rhetoric of Strategic Retreat: Carter and the Panama Canal Debate," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 65 (December 1979), 379-391; Thomas D. Clark, "The Influence of Philosophical Perspective and Antecedent Rhetorical Form on the Composition of Contemporary American Public Address," Diss. Indiana 1976; Dennis L. Bailey, "Rhetorical Genres in Early American Public Address, 1652-1700," Diss. Oklahoma 1971. For some examples of the controversies surrounding genre criticism see John H. Patton, "Generic Criticism: Typology at an Inflated Price," The Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 6 (Winter 1976), 4-8; "The Forum," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 66 (April 1980), 206-210.

<sup>24</sup> Campbell and Jamieson, p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 20, 21, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 19. See also Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Criticism: Ephemeral and Enduring," Speech Teacher, 23 (January 1974), 12.

<sup>27</sup>Campbell and Jamieson, p. 18. See also, W. Tatarkiewicz, "Form in the History of Aesthetics," Dictionary of the History of Ideas, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), II, pp. 216-225.

<sup>28</sup>One obvious exception to this claim is Kenneth Burke's instrumental interpretation of form as the arousal and satisfaction of appetite in an audience. See his Counter-Statement. Burke pursues his concept of form in many of his later works. A useful summary of the Burkeian notion is found in Richard B. Gregg, "Kenneth Burke's Prolegomena to the Study of Rhetorical Form," Communication Quarterly, 26 (Fall 1978), 3-13. See also, Robert L. Heath, "Kenneth Burke on Form," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 65 (December 1979), 392-404;

<sup>29</sup>Edwin Black, "The Sentimental Style as Escapism, or the Devil with Dan'l Webster," in Form and Genre, pp. 75-76. See also Maurice R. Shendon, "A Study of the Implications of the Concept of Form in Art and Philosophy for Rhetorical Form," Diss. University of Washington 1971.

<sup>30</sup>For example, see Kenneth Burke on "Substance," A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press 1969), pp. 21-23, 29-35, 51-53, 43-46, 55-58.

<sup>31</sup>The astronomical analogy used here is adapted from Campbell and Jamieson.

<sup>32</sup>Campbell and Jamieson, pp. 20, 21, 23. This view is also suggested by Roderick P. Hart, "Theory-Building and Rhetorical Criticism: An Informal Statement of Opinion," Central States Speech Journal, 27 (Spring 1976), 75.

<sup>33</sup>G. P. Mohrmann and Michael Leff, "Lincoln at Cooper Union: A Rationale for Neo-Classical Criticism," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 60 (December 1974), 464-465; Frye, pp. 247-248.

<sup>34</sup>Thomas W. Benson, "The Senses of Rhetoric: A Topical System for Critics," Central States Speech Journal 29 (Winter 1978), p. 245; Kaminsky, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup>Campbell and Jamieson, p. 21.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Useful reviews of the scholarship in this area may be found in John Hick, "The Problem of Evil," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards, Vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 136-141; and Radoslav A. Tsanoff, "Problem of Evil," Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas, ed. Philip P. Wiener, Vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), pp. 161-169. See also, M. B. Ahern, The Problem of Evil (New York: Schocken Books, 1971); Peter H. Hare and Edward H. Madden, "Evil and Persuasive Power," Process Studies, 2 (Spring 1972), 44-48; Dewey J. Hoitenga, Jr., "Logic and the Problem of Evil," American Philosophical Quarterly, 4 (April 1967), 114-126; William E. McMahon, "The Problem of Evil and the Possibility of A Better World," Journal of Value Inquiry, 3 (Summer 1969), 81-90; Jeffrey Burton Russell, "The Experience of Evil," Listening, 9 (Autumn 1974), 71-83; T. Settle, "Prolegomenon to Intellectually Honest Theology," The Philosophical Forum, 1 (Winter 1968), 136-170; T.P.M. Solon and S.K. Wertz, "Hume's Argument From Evil," The Personalist, 50 (Summer 1969), 383-392; Gerald Wallace, "The Problem of Moral and Physical Evil," Philosophy, 46 (December 1971), 349-351; Aurelius Agustinus, Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil, trans. Robert P. Russell (New York: N.Y. Cosmopolitan Science and Art Service Co., 1942); Ernest Becker, The Structure of Evil: An Essay on the Unification of the Science of Man (New York: George Braziller, 1968); Albert Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Knopf, 1961); Nels Ferre, Evil and the Christian Faith (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947); David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, ed. N. Kemp Smith, 2d ed. (London, 1947); Anthony S. Mercatante, Good and Evil; Mythology and Folklore (New York Harper and Row, 1978); John S. Mill, Three Essays on Religion (London, 1874); Pierre Stephan Robert Payne, The Corrupt Society: From Ancient Greece to Present-Day America (New York: Praeger, 1975); Theodore Reik, Myth and Guilt, the Crime and Punishment of Mankind (New York: George Braziller, 1957); Paul Siwek, The Philosophy of Evil (New York: Ronald Press, 1951). The literature in communication studies which treats this topic directly is very limited. Perhaps the only well-developed discussion is that of George I. Mavrodes, "The Problem of Evil as a Rhetorical Problem," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 1 (Spring 1968), 91-102. However, even Mavrodes concerns himself almost exclusively with the philosophical aspects of the intellectual debate over the problem of evil.

He deems the problem a rhetorical one because of the necessity for influencing the beliefs of one for whom the problem is to be solved in any meaningful way; that is, logically valid arguments are not enough, the audience must be convinced that the dilemma no longer exists for them. The limitation here is that Mavrodes seems to imply that his "audience" is primarily professional philosophers and not the average social actor with which this essay is concerned.

<sup>2</sup>Hick, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>6</sup>Stanford M. Lyman, The Seven Deadly Sins: Society and Evil (New York: St. Martins Press, 1978), pp. 3-4.

<sup>7</sup>Tsanoff, p. 165.

<sup>8</sup>Leibniz is quoted in Tsanoff, p. 166.

<sup>9</sup>Tsanoff, pp. 166-169.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 168-169.

<sup>11</sup>This account of the development of sociology is related in Lyman, pp. 1-2. The characterization of social science offered here is not intended to be universal. For instance, dramatism and textual analysis have recently made substantial headway in sociology. If anything, scientism may now be on the wane in social analysis. See Clifford Geertz, "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," The American Scholar, 49 (Spring 1980), 165-179.

<sup>12</sup>Lyman, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 274. See also, Liliane Frey-Rohn, "Evil From the Psychological Point of View," Evil, ed. The Curatorium of C. G. Jung Institute, Zurich (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1967), p. 153.

<sup>14</sup>Mavrodes, p. 92.

<sup>15</sup>Frey-Rohn, p. 153.

<sup>16</sup>Ernest Bormann, "Fetching Good Out of Evil: A Rhetorical Use of Calamity," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 63 (April 1977), 130.

<sup>17</sup>Parke G. Burgess, "The Rhetoric of Moral Conflict: Two Critical Dimensions," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 56 (April 1970), 120, 126.

<sup>18</sup>Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, trans. Emerson Buchanan, (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). See also, John David Stewart, "Paul Ricoeur's Phenomenology of Evil," International Philosophical Quarterly, 9 (December 1969), 572-589.

<sup>19</sup>Ricoeur, p. 161.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>21</sup>See Lyman, p. 273. See also, Dan D. Nimmo, Popular Images of Politics: A Taxonomy (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974) p. 138; Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Symbols in Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). Indeed, the burden of most of the writings of Burke and Duncan is the dramatistic view of social action. Also, Lyman describes the "modern dramas of sin and evil" as "corrupt men and corrupt institutions [performing] against scenes of benign moral neglect, crusading virtuous exposure, and cruel or condign punishments. Rather than a promise of apocalyptic redemption, the world holds out scenarios of infinite existential variety" (p. 275).

- <sup>22</sup>Duncan, pp. 23, 210.
- <sup>23</sup>Kenneth Burke, Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose, 2d ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1954), p. 272.
- <sup>24</sup>Lyman, P. 273.
- <sup>25</sup>Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R. (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), pp. 16-17.
- <sup>26</sup>Robert E. Lane, Political Ideology: Why The American Common Man Believes What He Does (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p. 113.
- <sup>27</sup>David Brian Davis, The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), pp. 5, 72.
- <sup>28</sup>Hans Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), pp. 52-53.
- <sup>29</sup>Murray B. Levin, Political Hysteria in America: The Democratic Capacity for Repression (New York: Basic Books, 1971), p. 167. Remington concurs: "If one may judge from the experience of history, the conspiracy theory will continue to attract believers who seek out an identifiable personal enemy in their attempt to find simple answers to the complexities of social and political life" (p. 236). Roger A. Remington, "The Function of the 'Conspiracy Theory' in American Intellectual History," Diss. St. Louis University 1965. See also Richard Pratte, "Conspiracy Schools and Schooling," Educational Theory, 27 (Summer 1977), 193.
- <sup>30</sup>William E. Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940 (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 100.
- <sup>31</sup>For discussions of "scapegoating" see Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action, 3d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 39-45; Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Communication and Social

Order (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 121-142. See also Burke's "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle,'" in The Philosophy of Literary Form, pp. 190-220. An interesting example of the conspiracy argument's ability to transfer blame is provided by Shetsley and Feldman. They point out that research in two urban areas has found that crimes that do not have an immediately obvious motive are often attributed by citizens to some sort of plot (e.g., organized crime or political groups). See Paul B. Sheatsley and Jacob J. Feldman, "A National Survey of Public Reactions and Behavior," The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public: Social Communication in Crisis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 174.



<sup>1</sup>Cicero, "First Oration Against Cataline," World's Great Speeches, ed. Lewis Copeland, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Dover, 1942), pp. 36-45.

<sup>2</sup>Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 95. Bernard Bailyn, ed., Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 2 vols. (Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1969).

<sup>3</sup>For example, see Medford Evans, "Conspiracy: The New World Order Isn't New," American Opinion, 17 (December 1974), 47-52.

<sup>4</sup>For example, see Mark Lane, A Citizen's Dissent: Mark Lane Replies (New York: Fawcett, 1968).

<sup>5</sup>David Brion Davis, ed., The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1971). Hereafter cited as The Fear of Conspiracy. Other anthologies of conspiracy-related literature include: Richard Rovere, ed., Loyalty and Security in a Democratic State (New York: Arno Press, 1977); Edwin S. Newman, ed., The Hate Reader (Dobbs Ferry, N. Y.: Oceana Publishing, 1964); Roland Delorme and Raymond McInnis, eds., Anti-Democratic Trends in Twentieth Century America (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969). A collection of Congressional testimony on conspiracy may be found in Eric Bentley, ed., Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from Hearings Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1968 (New York: Viking Press, 1973).

<sup>6</sup>This definition of "conspiracy" is derived from Richard Pratte, "Conspiracy Schools and Schooling," Educational Theory, 27 (Summer 1977), 189.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 195. Pratte describes the enthymematic nature of the conspiracy argument when he observes that "what CTA/Conspiracy Theory Argument/ can guarantee and

(so far as I know) few other arguments can, is that a causal explanation (X caused Y) is intimately bound to an emotive and persuasive force--the suppressed conclusion 'and Y is immoral.' The key to the argument's effectiveness is the last element. . . . What is so seductive is that CTA qua retro-dictive explanation invokes moral criteria without exactly implying what those criteria are. Ordinarily, if X is judged to be morally reprehensible, then we are entitled to know on what criteria. What CTA suggests is that no morally reprehensible act is subject to as high a degree of moral condemnation as is the conspiratorial act" (p. 195).

<sup>9</sup>Fisher Ames, Works of Fisher Ames, ed. Seth Ames II (Boston, 1854), rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup>William G. Carr, Pawns in the Game (Toronto: National Federation of Christian Laymen, 1956), p. 148. I am indebted for this citation to Roger A. Remington, "The Function of the 'Conspiracy Theory' in American Intellectual History," Diss. Saint Louis University 1965, p. 118.

<sup>11</sup>Edwin Black, "The Second Persona," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 56 (April 1970), 118. Black uses this phrase to describe the fundamentalist, radical right, however, there is no reason to assume that it would not apply equally well to other conspiracy theorists.

<sup>12</sup>Hans Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 52.

<sup>13</sup>Abraham Lincoln, Address delivered at Springfield, Illinois, June 16, 1858, Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln, eds. John G. Nicolay and John Hay, (New York: The Century Co., 1894), 1, p. 243.

<sup>14</sup>Advertisement, American Opinion, 22 (December 1979), 55.

<sup>15</sup>Richard Hogstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 37. For a

review of some of the massive corpus of "proof" available on the Bircher's "Insider" conspiracy theory see Gary Allen, "Investigating the Great Conspiracy: 13 Clues," American Opinion, 22 (May 1979), 23-38, 89-94.

<sup>16</sup>My thinking on the ascendancy of the aesthetic in the conspiracy genre has benefited from Thomas B. Farrell, "Rhetoric in Two Voices: The Continuing Epistemic Conversation of Kenneth Burke," Northwestern University 1979, p.22.

<sup>17</sup>Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, pp. 35-38.

<sup>18</sup>Pratte, p. 192.

<sup>19</sup>Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, p. 38.

<sup>20</sup>Remington, pp. 81-82.

<sup>21</sup>William Goodell, Anti-Slavery Lecturer (Utica, N.Y., 1839), rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, p. lll.

<sup>22</sup>Robert Welch, "More Stately Mansions," Address delivered in Chicago, June 5, 1964, rpt. in The New Americanism and Other Speeches and Essays (Boston: Western Islands Publishers, 1966), rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, p. 331.

<sup>23</sup>In his discussion of the "Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle,'" Burke refers to this type of reasoning as a feature of the "unified criticism" found in Hitler's writings. This is "not criticism in the 'parliamentary' sense of doubt, of hearkening to the opposition and attempting to mature a policy in the light of counter-policies; but the 'unified' kind of criticism that simply seeks for conscious ways of making one's position more 'efficient,' more thoroughly it-self. This is the kind of criticism at which Hitler was adept. . . . This is the meaning of Hitler's diatribes against 'objectivity.' 'Objectivity' is interference-criticism. What Hitler wanted was the kind of criticism that would be a pure and simple coefficient of power, enabling him to go most effectively in the direction he had chosen" (pp. 211, 212). Perhaps, then, deterministic deduction is the "simple

coefficient" of conspiratorial persuasion, the dialectical "counterpart" of cabalist rhetoric. The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

<sup>24</sup> John Bunzel, Anti-Politics in America (New York: Knopf, 1967), p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> Jacob Cohen, "Conspiracy Fever," Commentary, 60 (October 1975), 41. Cohen's thinking here is rooted in Walter Lippmann's work, The Phantom Public.

<sup>26</sup> The International Jew: The World's Foremost Problem, Being a Reprint of a Series of Articles Appearing in "The Dearborn Independent" from May 22 to October 2, 1920, n.p., 1920, rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, p. 234. Doubtless, the epitome of this type of logic is Robert Welch's "Principle of Reversal." He believes that the Communists (now Illuminati) often intend the exact opposite of what the naive observer might assume. Selective application of this "Principle" can convert any fact into proof for Welch's case. For example, if the Reds encourage American foreign aid, they do so to bleed our treasury white; if they oppose American foreign aid, they do so to prevent the spread of liberty. Rather than inferring conclusions from data, Welch seems to use a system of deductive inversion that can insure that any datum fits the logic of his argument. For a study of one speech in which Welch used this technique see Anthony Hillbruner, "Night on Bald Mountain: or Variations on a Theme by McCarthy," Today's Speech, 10 (February 1963), 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, p. 95.

<sup>28</sup> George A. Dondero, Congressional Record, 81st Congress, 1st session, Vol. 95, Pt. 9, rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, p. 303.

<sup>29</sup> Frederick Robinson, rpt. in Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy: Representative Writings of the Period, 1825-1850 (New York, 1947), rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, p. 71.

<sup>30</sup>Cohen, p. 37.

<sup>31</sup>Stephen Earl Bennett, "Modes of Resolution of a 'Belief Dilemma' in the Ideology of the John Birch Society," Journal of Politics, 33 (August 1971), 770.

<sup>32</sup>For example, Thomas A. Hollihan argues that the Bircher's conspiracy theory "simply goes too far and frightens too many people. . . Not many people want to be worried about their immanent destruction every moment of their lives." See Thomas A Hollihan, "Conspiracy Drama and the John Birch Society: A Movement Reconsidered," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Washington, D. C., December, 1-4, 1977, p. 17.

<sup>33</sup>For example, see Charles. W. Lomas, "The Rhetoric of Demagoguery," Western Speech, 25 (Summer 1961), 160-168; Gregory Hunter Mathews, "Ethical Responsibilities and Public Address: Who Bears the Burden for McCarthy?" Thesis SUNY - Genesco 1972; Frederick W. Haberman et al., "Views on the Army-McCarthy Hearings," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 41 (February 1955), 1-18; Barnet Baskerville, "Joe McCarthy: Brief-Case Demagogue," Today's Speech, 2 (September 1954), 8-15; Barnet Baskerville, "The Illusion of Proof," Western Speech, 25 (Fall 1961), 236-242; Randall Lee Bytwerk, "Julius Streicher: The Rhetoric of an Anti-Semite," Diss. Northwestern 1975; Kenneth Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle'"; John Gerard Doran, "The Analysis and Criticism of the Rhetoric of Father Charles E. Coughlin," Diss. UCLA 1974; David Terrence Coe, "A Rhetorical Study of Selected Radio Speeches of Reverend Charles Edward Coughlin," Diss. Michigan State 1970.

<sup>34</sup>Leland M. Griffin, "The Anti-Masonic Persuasion: A Study of Public Address in the Anti-Masonic Movement, 1826-1836," Diss. Cornell 1951; Robert Wayne Smith, "A Study of the Speaking in the Anti-Secrecy Movement, 1868-1882, With Special Reference to the National Christian Association," Diss. Iowa 1956; Jeffrey Corwin Hart, "The Rhetoric of Anti-Semitism," Diss. Wisconsin 1973; Leslie Gerald Wallace, "The Rhetoric of Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association, 1887-1911," Diss. Oregon 1973.

<sup>35</sup>Philip Shug, "Fanaticism: A Practical Critique," Today's Speech, 6 (January 1958), 26-28; Roderick P. Hart,

The Rhetoric of the True Believer," Speech Monographs, 38 (November 1971), 249-261.

<sup>36</sup> John F. Cragan, "The Cold War Rhetorical Vision, 1946-1972," Diss. Minnesota 1972; Vernon Ralph Lennon, "The Language of the Cold War: A Study of Semantic Evolution," Thesis American University 1968; William Robert Underhill, "Public Address: Its Role in the Cold War, 1945-1951," Diss. Northwestern 1955; Lynn B. Hinds, "Rhetoric and the Social Construction of the Cold War Reality," Diss. Pittsburgh 1977; Wayne Brockriede and Robert Scott, Moments in the Rhetoric of the Cold War (New York: Random House, 1970).

<sup>37</sup> Robert L. Smith, "A Case Study of the Speaking of the House Committee on Un-American Activities: The San Francisco Hearings, May, 1960," Diss. Michigan State 1968; Mary Julianus McKee, "Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce: Her Rhetoric Against Communism," Diss. Illinois 1962; Timothy F. Murphy, "The Politics of Anti-Communism: Its Utilization in the Careers of Richard Nixon and Joseph McCarthy," Thesis Florida Atlantic 1972; Laura A. Kacewicz, "Anti-Communism and the Foreign Policy Consensus: A Study of Public Opinion," Thesis California State University at Long Beach 1973.

<sup>38</sup> Dale G. Leathers, "A Descriptive Study of Revolutionary Reaction of the 1960's: The Rhetoric of Salvation," Diss. Minnesota 1965; Dale G. Leathers, "Fundamentalism of the Radical Right," Southern Speech Journal, 33 (Summer 1968), 245-258; Barnet Baskerville, "The Cross and the Flag: Evangelists of the Far Right," Western Speech, 27 (Fall 1963), 197-206.

<sup>39</sup> Philip C. Wander, "The John Birch and Martin Luther King Symbols in the Radical Right," Western Speech, 35 (Winter 1971), 4-14; Craig A. Hosterman, "An Analysis of Three Rhetorical Strategies Utilized by Robert Welch in Response to the Initial Wave of Criticism Over the John Birch Society During 1960-1961," Diss. Kent State 1975; Ralph V. Barello, "A Propositional Analysis of Selected Literature of Two Right Wing Organizations and Their Spokesmen, Billy James Hargis and Gerald L. K. Smith," Diss. Southern Illinois 1970; Lynn G. Llewellyn, "The Ultra-conservative and the Mainstream Press: A Comparative Analysis," Diss. George Washington 1969; Margaret L. Walker,

"A Content Analysis Technique for Analyzing Emotional and Logical Proof in Selected Extremist Speeches," Thesis Florida State 1971; H. Toch et al., "The Wrath of the Bigot: An Analysis of Protest Mail," Journalism Quarterly, 37 (Spring 1960), 173-185; James McEvoy, Letters From the Right: Content Analysis of a Letter-Writing Campaign (Ann Arbor: Center for Research on Utilization of Scientific Knowledge, 1966); Hannah Wartenburg and Wagner Thielens, Jr., Against the United Nations: A Letter Writing Campaign by the John Birch Society (New York: Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, 1964).

<sup>40</sup>Keith R. Sanders, "An Empirical Study of the Integrity of Evidence Used in John A. Stormer's None Dare Call It Treason," Diss. Pittsburgh 1968; Keith R. Sanders and Robert P. Newman, "John A. Stormer and the Hofstadter Hypothesis," Central States Speech Journal, 22 (Winter 1971), 218-227; Craig A. Smith, "The Hofstadter Hypothesis Revisited: The Nature of Evidence in Politically 'Paranoid' Discourse," Southern Speech Communication Journal, 42 (Spring 1977), 274-289. Sanders and Newman found substantial evidential distortion in Stormer's work, but Smith did not confirm this hypothesis in his comparison of "paranoid" to "normal" scholarship.

<sup>41</sup>Black, pp. 109-119.

<sup>42</sup>Thomas A. Holliahn, "Conspiracy Drama and the John Birch Society: A Movement Reconsidered," Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Speech Communication Association, December 1-4, 1977.

<sup>43</sup>Marilyn J. Young, "The Conspiracy Theory of History as Radical Argument: Students for a Democratic Society and the John Birch Society," Diss. Pittsburgh 1974, pp. 307, 306.

<sup>44</sup>John F. Cragan, "Rhetorical Strategy: A Dramatistic Interpretation and Application," Central States Speech Journal, 26 (Spring 1975), 4-11.

<sup>45</sup>Ernest G. Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 58 (1972), 396-407.

<sup>46</sup>Cragan, "Rhetorical Strategy," p.6.

<sup>47</sup>Farrell, p. 20.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 25-26.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-34.

<sup>52</sup>Richard O. Curry and Thomas M. Brown, Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1972), p. x.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 72, 84; Remington, pp. 4-5; William C. Baum, "The Conspiracy Theory of Politics of the Radical Right in the United States," Diss. Iowa State 1960, pp. 141-143. In a survey of thousands of statements on civil rights and Viet Nam by moderate to radical leftist and rightist periodicals, McPherson found that the conspiracy appeal was used extensively at both ends of the political spectrum, but that its frequency increased as one approached the more radical zones of the continuum. Roy W. McPherson, "Parallels in Extremist Ideology," Diss. Harvard 1967, as summarized in Lipset and Roab, pp. 17-18.

<sup>55</sup>Curry and Brown, p. x.

<sup>56</sup>Perhaps most revealing in this regard is Black's finding that right-wing discourse often refers to Communism as a "cancer" threatening the very existence of free people everywhere. This strict dualism of pure Americanism versus pure Evil is typical of much conspiracy rhetoric and exemplifies the dramatic tension that inheres in the argument.



<sup>57</sup>Baum, pp. 8-9.

<sup>58</sup>Farrell, pp. 32-34.

<sup>59</sup>Black, pp. 115-118.

<sup>60</sup>Murray B. Levin, Political Hysteria in America: The Democratic Capacity for Repression (New York: Basic Books, 1971), p. 157.

<sup>61</sup>New England Weekly Review, 1830, quoted in David Brion Davis, The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style, pp. 73-74.

<sup>62</sup>Father Charles E. Coughlin, "The Menace of the World Court," Radio address, January 27, 1935, rpt. in A Series of Lectures on Social Justice Published by the Radio League of the Little Flower (Royal Oak, Mich., 1935), rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, p.250.

<sup>63</sup>Samuel F. B. Morse, Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States, 6th ed. (New York, 1844), rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, p. 99.

<sup>64</sup>For example, see Victor J. Orville, History of American Conspiracies . . . from 1760 to 1860 (1863; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1969); Nathaniel Weyl, Treason, The Story of Disloyalty and Betrayal in American History (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1950); Nathaniel Weyl, The Battle Against Disloyalty (New York: Crowell, 1951); Jacques Droz, "La Légende du complot illuministe at les origines du romantisme politique en Allemagne," Révue Historique, 226 (1961), 313-338; Walter F. McCaleb, "The Aaron Burr Conspiracy," Diss. University of Chicago 1900; Louis R. Gottschalk, "The French Revolution: Conspiracy or Circumstance," Persecution and Liberty (New York: The Century Co., 1931), pp. 445-473.

<sup>65</sup>For example, see Dennis H. Wrong, "Theories of McCarthyism--A Survey," Dissent, 1 (Autumn 1954), 385-392; Nelson W. Polsby, "Towards an Explanation of McCarthyism,"

Political Studies, 8 (October 1960), 250-271; Athan Theoharis, Seeds of Repression: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of McCarthyism (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971); Earl Latham, ed., The Meaning of McCarthyism, 2d ed. (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1973); Nick A. Masters, "Father Coughlin and Social Justice," Diss. Michigan 1955; Charles Tull, Father Coughlin and the New Deal (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1965); John H. Redekop, "Billy James Hargis: A Case Study of the American Far Right," Diss. University of Washington 1965; John Higham, "The Mind of a Nativist: Henry F. Bowers and the A.P.A.," American Quarterly, 4 (Spring 1952), 16-24; Michael W. Bouton, "Depression Era Extremists: A Study of Three Demagogues and Their Tactics," Diss. Illinois State 1978.

<sup>66</sup>For example, see Charles G. Hamilton, Lincoln and The Know-Nothing Movement (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1954); Thomas J. Curran, "The Know-Nothings of New York," Diss. Columbia 1963; Fred W. Grupp, Jr., "Personal Satisfaction Derived From Membership in the John Birch Society," Western Political Quarterly, 24 (March 1971), 79-83; Bennett, "Modes of Resolution of 'Belief Dilemmas' in the Ideology of the John Birch Society," pp. 735-772; Barbara Stone, "The John Birch Society of California," Diss. Southern California 1968; David M. Chalmers, Hooded Americanism: The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan, 1865 to the Present (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965); Ronald P. Formisan, "Antimasonry and Masonry: The Genesis of Protest, 1826-1827," American Quarterly, 29 (Summer 1977), 139-165; George M. Blakeslee, "The History of the Anti-Masonic Party," Diss. Harvard 1903.

<sup>67</sup>For example, see Earl Latham, The Communist Controversy in Washington: From New Deal to McCarthy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966); Cedric Belfrage, The American Inquisition, 1945-1960 (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973); Michael Parenti, The Anti-Communist Impulse (New York: Random House, 1969); David Cauter, The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978); esp. pp. 25-74; Donald S. Strong, Organized Anti-Semitism in America (Washington: American Council on Public Affairs, 1941); Ray Allen Billington, The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860 (New York: Rinehart, 1938).

<sup>68</sup>For example, see Carl Solberg, Riding High: America

in the Cold War (New York: Mason and Lipscomb, 1973); Eric F. Goldman, The Crucial Decade and After: America, 1945-1960 (New York: Vintage Books, 1960); Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution; Bernard Bailyn, The Origins of American Politics (New York: Knopf, 1968); Philip Davidson, Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763-1783 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941); Ira I. Gruber, "The American Revolution as a Conspiracy: The British View," William and Mary Quarterly, 26 (1969), 360-372; William J. Knox, Conspiracy in American Politics, 1787-1815 (New York: Arno Press, 1972);

D. Lijou, Thesis of Conspiracy, 1776-1945. Philosophs, Freemasons, Jews, Liberals, and Socialists as Conspirators Against Social Order (Dijon, France: University of Dijon, 1978); Peter L. Steinberg, "The Great 'Red Menace': U. S. Prosecution of American Communists, 1947-1951," Diss. New York University 1979.

<sup>69</sup>For example, see Bernard Mausner and Judith Mausner, "A Study of the Anti-Scientific Attitude," Scientific American, 192 (February 1955), 35-39; Roger Boyvey, "Mental Health and the Ultra-Concerned," Social Service Review, 38 (September 1964), 281-294; Richard Pratte, "Conspiracy, Schools, and Schooling."

<sup>70</sup>For example, see Norman Cohn, Warrant for Genocide (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

<sup>71</sup>For example, see Linda K. Gerber, "Antidemocratic Movements in the United States Since World War I," Diss. Pennsylvania 1934; Victor C. Ferkiss, "The Political and Economic Philosophy of American Fascism," Diss. Chicago 1954; Raymond G. Swing, Forerunners of American Fascism (New York: Julian Messner, 1935); Morris Schonbach, "Native Fascism During the 1930's and 1940's: A Study of Its Roots, Its Growth, and Its Decline," Diss. UCLA 1958; Wilhelm Reich, The Mass Psychology of Fascism, 1933 (New York: Farrar, Strauss, 1970); Seymour Martin Lipset, "Fascism, Left, Right, and Center," Political Man (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1960), pp. 131-175; William Eckhardt, "The Values of Fascism," Journal of Social Issues, 24 (January 1968), 89-104.

<sup>72</sup>For example, see Harry Overstreet and Bonaro Overstreet, The Strange Tactics of Extremism (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964); Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman, Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator (New York: Harper 1949).

<sup>73</sup>For most of the many authors in this area, it seems that "extremism" is a synonym for "rightist." There is a relative paucity of literature on leftwing extremism in America. For studies of rightist extremism see Everett C. Ladd, "The Radical Right: The White-Collar Extremists," South Atlantic Quarterly, 65 (1966), 314-324; Esmond Wright, "Radicals of the Right," Political Quarterly, 25 (October-December 1956), 366-377; T.E.M. McKitterick, "Radicalism After 1964," Political Quarterly, 36 (January-March 1965), 52-58; Jules Archer, The Extremists: Gadflies of American Society (New York: Hawthorn, 1969); Richard Dudman, Men of the Far Right (New York: Pyramid, 1962); George Thayer, The Farther Shores of Politics (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967); Raymond Wolfinger, "America's Radical Right: Politics and Ideology," Ideology and Discontent, ed. David Apter (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964); Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Right Wing 'Revival' and the 'Backlash' in the United States," Revolution and Counter Revolution (New York: Basic Books, 1968); Daniel Bell, ed. The Radical Right (New York: Anchor Books, 1964); Martin Trow, "Right-Wing Radicalism and Political Intolerance," Diss. Columbia 1957; Ira Rohter, "Radical Rightists: An Empirical Study," Diss. Michigan State 1967; Burton Levy, "Profile of the American Right: A Case Study of Michigan," Diss. Massachusetts 1965; Jonathan M. Kolkey, "The New Radical Right, 1960-1968," Diss. UCLA 1979. Probably the most comprehensive and authoritative recent work on radical rightism is Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1977, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). I am indebted to Lipset and Raab for many of the citations in my review of Socio-political Studies.

<sup>74</sup>Bunzel, Anti-Politics in America; Erich Fromm, May Man Prevail? An Inquiry Into the Facts and Fictions of Foreign Policy (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961); Jacob Cohen also argues, in this connection, that conspiracy theories signify a public that is abdicating its essential right to informed, reasoned political judgments. "Conspiracy Fever," pp. 33-42. See also, Jacob Cohen, Conspiracy Fever (New York: Macmillan, 1978), and Eric Hoffer, The True Believer (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

<sup>75</sup>Levin, pp. 161, 146-147.

<sup>76</sup>Gustavas Meyers, History of Bigotry in the United States (New York: Random House, 1943).

<sup>77</sup>Sidney Hook, Heresy, Yes--Conspiracy, No (New York: Day, 1953).

<sup>78</sup>Edward Shils, The Torment of Secrecy (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1956); John Cawelti, "The Cycle of Clandestinity," Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies, ed. Jack Satzman (New York: Burt Franklin and Co., Inc., 1979), 6, pp. 559-576.

<sup>79</sup>Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, pp. 3-40; The stature of Hofstadter's analysis is indicated by C. Vann Woodward's comment that it "Stands as the most balanced and authoritative analysis we have of a formidable and apparently permanent force in American politics." C. Vann Woodward, rev. of The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays, by Richard Hofstadter, "Cranks and Their Followers," New York Times Book Review, 14 November 1965, p. 84.

<sup>80</sup>Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-31.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., pp. 31-32.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-35.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-37.

<sup>91</sup>For example, Parsons finds confirmation of Hofstadter's theory in a study of several historical cases. Jack R. Parsons, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics: An Essay Review," Social Service Review, 44 (June 1970), 184-195.

<sup>92</sup>David Brion Davis, The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969).

<sup>93</sup>For example, see David E. Liedel, "David Brion Davis on Cultural History: Image, Ideology and National Style," Journal of Popular Culture, 6 (1972), 205-206.

<sup>94</sup>Davis, The Fear of Conspiracy, p. xiv; Davis, The Slave Power Conspiracy, pp. 3-6.

<sup>95</sup>David Brion Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 47 (September 1960), 205-224. See also, David Brion Davis, "Some Ideological Functions of Prejudice in Ante-Bellum America," American Quarterly, 15 (Summer 1963), 115-125.

<sup>96</sup>Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion," p. 224.

<sup>97</sup>Dwight C. Smith, "Mafia: The Prototypical Alien Conspiracy," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 423 (January 1976), 75-88.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., pp. 76-77.

<sup>99</sup>Remington, "The Function of 'Conspiracy Theory' in American Intellectual History," Diss. Saint Louis 1965, pp.vii-x.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p.2.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., pp. 238-246.

<sup>102</sup>William C. Baum, "The Conspiracy Theory of Politics of the Radical Right in the United States, Diss. Iowa State 1960.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., pp. 126-129.

<sup>104</sup>Richard O. Curry and Thomas M. Brown, eds. Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972). See also Francesco Sidoti, "Emancipazione e Congiura" Le Interpretazioni Conspiratorie della Politica, Ressegna Italiana di Sociologia, 15 (October-December 1974), 643-645.

<sup>105</sup>Francisco J. Moreno, "The Myth of Political Rationality," International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 21 (Winter/Spring 1974-1975), 21-26; Judd Marmor, "The Psychodynamics of Political Extremism," American Journal of Psychotherapy, 22(1968), 561-568.

<sup>106</sup>Mark Chesler and Richard Schmuck, "Participant Observation in a Super-Patriot Discussion Group," Journal of Social Issues, 19 (April 1963), 18-30; Frederick W. Grupp, Jr., "Social Correlates of Political Activists: The John Birch Society and the ADA," Diss. Pennsylvania 1968;

Seymour Martin Lipset, "Social Stratification and 'Right-Wing' Extremism," British Journal of Sociology, 10 (December 1959), 346-382; Gilbert Abcarian, "Political Deviance and Social Stress: The Ideology of the American Radical Right," Social Conflict and Social Change, eds. J. P. Scott and S. F. Scott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Seymour Martin Lipset and R. Bendix, eds., Class, Status and Power (New York: The Free Press, 1966); Gary Marx, "The Social Basis of Support for a Depression Era Extremist: Father Charles E. Coughlin," Thesis California-Berkeley 1962; Larry L. Hunt, "Status, Inconsistency and Support for the John Birch Society: A Multilevel Approach," Diss. Indiana 1968; R. A. Schoenberger, "Conservatism, Personality and Political Extremism," American Political Science Review, 62 (September 1968), 868-877; G. B. Bush, "Status Crystallization and Right-Wing Extremist Attitudes," Diss. Oregon 1965; David Street and John C. Leggett, "Economic Deprivation and Extremism," American Journal of Sociology, 67 (1961), 53-57. Perhaps the most comprehensive and provocative of these works is Neil J. Smelser's The Theory of Collective Behavior (New York: The Free Press, 1963).

<sup>107</sup> Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion," pp. 205-206. The "ideological approach" is exemplified by Davis' own work. The "Sociological approach" is illustrated by John Higham, "Another Look at Nativism," Catholic Historical Review, 44 (July 1958), 147-158.

<sup>108</sup> Alan C. Elms argues that "status" and psycho-analytic theories are not mutually exclusive on a logical level. In fact, he claims, they can be usefully viewed as being "mutually supportive." "Pathology and Politics," Psychology Today, 3 (February 1970), 30.

<sup>109</sup> Bunzel, p. 48.

<sup>110</sup> Stanley Coben, "The American Red Scare of 1919-1920," Political Science Quarterly, 79 (March 1964), rpt. in Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History, pp. 145-146. See also, Davis, The Fear of Conspiracy, pp. xiv, 362; Lipset and Raab, p. 519.

<sup>111</sup> Remington, pp. 172, 174, 175.



<sup>112</sup>John Higham, "Another Look at Nativism," rpt. in Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History, pp. 280-281.

<sup>113</sup>Lipset and Raab, p. 519.

<sup>114</sup>Toch, pp. 52-53.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>116</sup>Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, pp. 123-124.

<sup>117</sup>For example, see Thomas M. Brown, "The Image of the Beast: Anti-Papal Rhetoric in Colonial America," rpt. in Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History, p. 2.

<sup>118</sup>Karl Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, 5th rev. ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), II, pp. 94-95.

<sup>119</sup>Bunzel, pp. 66-67, 84, 87; Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, pp. xi, 29-30, 88-90; Alan Westin, "The John Birch Society: Fundamentalism on the Right," Commentary, 32 (August 1961), 93-104; David Danzig, "The Radical Right and the Rise of the Fundamentalist Minority," Commentary, 33 (April 1962), 291-298; Benton Johnson, "Ascetic Protestantism and Political Preference," Public Opinion Quarterly, 26 (April 1962), 35-46; Grace A. Phenger, "The Correlation Between Religious Fundamentalism and Political Ultra-Conservatism Since World War II," Thesis Bowling Green 1966; Dale G. Leathers, "The Fundamentalism of the Radical Right."

<sup>120</sup>Charles Sumner, The Slave Oligarchy and Its Usurpations (Boston, 1855), p. 1, rpt. in The Slave Power Conspiracy, p. 61.

<sup>121</sup>Paul M. Winter, What Price Tolerance? (Long Island: Hewlett, 1928), rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, p. 241.

<sup>122</sup>Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, pp. 30-31, 123-124; Baum, pp. 6, 42-43; Davis, The Fear of Conspiracy, p. 109; Lipset and Raab, pp. 13-14, 222-223, 488; Bunzel, p. 85.

<sup>123</sup>Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion," p. 212. See also, Levin, pp. 147-148; Pratte, p. 188.

<sup>124</sup>House Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of Un-American Activities and Propaganda: Report of the Special Committee on Un-American Activities . . ., January 3, 1939, rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, pp. 281-282.

<sup>125</sup>Morse, Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberty of the United States, 1835, rpt. in Remington, p. 23.

<sup>126</sup>George W. Julian, Address delivered in Cleveland, Ohio, 1852, rpt. in Speeches on Political Questions, ed. Lydia M. Child (New York, 1872), rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, pp. 122-123.

<sup>127</sup>"Scoreboard 1977: Conspiracy Influence on May 1, 1977," American Opinion, 20 (July 1977), 173. American Opinion's "Experts on six continents" estimate that the United States is 60-80 percent controlled by the "international Master Conspiracy," a substantial increase over the 20-40 percent control the Plot exercised in 1958 (p. 176).

<sup>128</sup>Toch, p. 53. See also, Riesman et al's. discussion of the "inside-dopester" in The Lonely Crowd (New York: Doubleday, 1953), pp. 199-209.

<sup>129</sup>Farrell, pp. 24-32, 35.

<sup>130</sup>Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, p. viii.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>132</sup>Remington, p. 236.

<sup>133</sup>Levin, Political Hysteria in America; Moreno, "The Myth of Political Rationality;" Franz Neumann, "Anxiety in Politics," Dissent, 2 (Spring 1955), 133-145; J. P. Chaplin, Rumor, Fear, and the Madness of Crowds (New York: Ballantine Books, 1959); Elias Canetti, Crowds and Power (London: Gallancy, 1962).

<sup>134</sup>Marmor, "The Psychodynamics of Political Extremism;" Nancy C. Morse and F.A. Allport, "The Causation of Anti-Semitism: An Investigation of Seven Hypotheses," Journal of Psychology, 34 (October 1952), 197-233; Bryant Wedge, "The Anticommunist Complex," American Journal of Psychotherapy, 24 (October 1970), 548-565.

<sup>135</sup>Alan C. Elms, Personality in Politics (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1976); Stanley A. Renshon, "The Psychological Origins of Political Efficacy: The Need for Personal Control," Diss. Pennsylvania 1973; Neil J. Smelser, "Personality and the Explanation of Political Phenomena at the Social-System Level: A Methodological Statement," Journal of Social Issues, 24 (July 1968), 111-125; David J. Singer, "Man and World Politics: The Psycho-Cultural Interface," Journal of Social Issues, 24 (July 1968), 127-156.

<sup>136</sup>Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements; Smelser, The Theory of Collective Behavior; Jerome D. Frank, "Group Dynamics of Challenge to Authority in a Changing Society," Journal of Group Psychoanalysis and Process, 1 (1968), 37-48.

<sup>137</sup>T. W. Adorno et al., The Authoritarian Personality (New York: Harper, 1950); Richard Christie and Marie Johoda, eds., Studies in the Scope and Method of "The Authoritarian Personality" (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1954); John L. Ray, "Conservatism, Authoritarianism and Related Variables: A Review and Empirical Study," rpt. in The Psychology of Conservatism, ed. G. D. Wilson (London: Academic Press, 1973); Fillmore H. Sanford, Authoritarianism and Leadership (Philadelphia: Stephen Brothers, 1950); Stephen M. Sales, "Threat as a Factor in Authoritarianism: An Analysis of Archival Data," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 28 (1973), 44-57; Milton Rokeach et al. The Open and Closed Mind (New York: Basic Books, 1960); David J. Hanson, "Dogmatism and Political Ideology," Journal of Human Relations, 18 (1970), 995-1002. Analyses

of these personality types has also found its way into rhetorical studies: Craig A. Smith, "Rhetorical Characteristics of Dogmatism and Authoritarianism," Diss. Purdue 1976; John A. Kline, "Dogmatism of the Speaker and Selection of Evidence," Speech Monographs, 38 (November 1971), 354-356.

<sup>138</sup>Howard M. Wolowitz, "The Validity of the Psychoanalytic Theory of Paranoid Dynamics Evaluated From the Available Experimental Evidence," Psychiatry, Washington, D.C., 34 (November 1971), 358-377; Howard I. Kaplan and Benjamin J. Sadock, "The Status of the Paranoid Today: His Diagnosis, Prognosis and Treatment," Psychiatric Quarterly, 45 (1971), 528-541; S. Mouchly Small, "Paranoia: An Historical Overview With A Twenty-Five Year Continuous Case Study," Behavioral Neuropsychiatry, 3 (August 1971), 2-11; Aubrey Lewis, "Paranoia and Paranoid: A Historical Perspective," Psychological Medicine, 1 (November 1970), 2-12; Joseph L. Locascio and C. R. Snyder, "Selective Attention to Threatening Stimuli and Field Independence as Factors in the Etiology of Paranoid Behavior," Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 84 (December 1975), 637-643; Yehuda Fried and Joseph Agassi, Paranoia: A Study in Diagnosis (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Riedel, 1976); Norman Cameron, "The Paranoid Pseudo-Community Revisited," American Journal of Sociology, 65 (1959), 52-58; Harold S. Zamansky, "Paranoid Reactions," International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, ed. David L. Sills (New York: Macmillan and The Free Press, 1968), XI, pp. 380-386; Smith E. Jelliffe, "A Summary of the Origins, Transformations, and Present-day Trends of the Paranoid Concept," Medical Record, 83 (1913), 599-605.

<sup>139</sup>Toch, pp. 57-63.

<sup>140</sup>Levin, pp. 155-156.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>142</sup>For example, see Franz Neumann, "Anxiety in Politics."

<sup>143</sup>Elms traces the development of the psychologization of political analysis from its roots in Freudian theory through Harold Laswell's initial application of Freud to political extremists, to the advent of The Authoritarian Personality in 1950 and the subsequent attempts,

beginning in the McCarthy era, to locate the causes of extremism in "status" factors. "Pathology and Politics," pp. 28-30.

<sup>144</sup>Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, p. 32.

<sup>145</sup>Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion," pp. 217, 218. Other examples of the projection theory can be found in: Black, p. 116; Mark Harris, "Conspiracy to the Left of Us!" New York Times Magazine, 24 August 1975, p. 12.

<sup>146</sup>Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, pp. 5-6.

<sup>147</sup>Toch, p. 66.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>149</sup>Bennett, pp. 749-750.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., pp. 749-750.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., pp. 750, 751; Elms, "Pathology and Politics," pp. 31, 58. One reason for the absence of clinical evidence on rightists, according to Elms, is that many of them regard psychologists as "out to send all true patriots to Alaskan mental institutions." It is not surprising, then, that members of the radical right are somewhat reluctant to participate in psychological research (p.30).

<sup>152</sup>Michael Rogin ventures another reason for the lack of evidence of psychopathology in rightist movement studies. He reasons that "those with severe personal problems are likely to turn their back on politics." "McCarthyism and Mass Politics," The Intellectual and McCarthy: The Radical Spectre (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1967), rpt. in Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History, p. 237.

<sup>153</sup>For example, see Elms, "Pathology and Politics," p. 58.

<sup>154</sup>Rogin, p. 237.

<sup>155</sup>Elms, "Pathology and Politics," p. 58.

<sup>156</sup>Daniel Katz, "The Functional Approach to the Study of Attitudes," Public Opinion Quarterly, 24 (1960), 163-204.

<sup>157</sup>Bennett, pp. 753, 751, 753, 752.

<sup>158</sup>For example, in a small experimental study of Anti-Semitism, Gordon W. Allport reports that the receipt of Anti-Semitic literature functioned to reduce anxiety among more intolerant subjects. "Demagogy," The Nature of Prejudice (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1954), rpt. in Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History, pp. 272-273.

<sup>159</sup>Cushing Strout, "The Uses and Abuses of Psychology in American History," American Quarterly, 28 (1976), 325-326. See also, Peter D. McClelland, Causal Explanation and Model Building in History, Economics, and the New Economic History (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); Smelser, "Personality and the Explanation of Political Phenomena at the Social-System Level," p. 118.

<sup>160</sup>Robert J. Lifton, "On Psychohistory," Explorations in Psychohistory: The Wellfleet Papers (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), quoted in Strout, p. 334. See also, Smelser, "Personality and the Explanation of Political Phenomena at the Social-System Level," pp. 120-123.

<sup>161</sup>The arguments presented here and many of the supporting illustrations are taken from Strout, pp. 324-342; and Bunzel, pp. 215-223.

<sup>162</sup>Levin, p. 155.

<sup>163</sup>Elms, "Pathology in Politics," p. 30.

<sup>164</sup>Strout, p. 338.

<sup>165</sup>Bunzel, pp. 215-216.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., pp. 217-218.

<sup>167</sup>Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, p. x. See also, Strout, p. 336.

<sup>168</sup>Harris, p. 50.

<sup>169</sup>Morse, Foreign Conspiracy, rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, p. 99.

<sup>170</sup>Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, p. 3.

<sup>171</sup>On the importance of discovering the enemy's "secret documents," see Cragan, "Rhetorical Strategy," pp. 6, 11. Also, Remington illustrates the importance of a literal interpretation of documents when he observes that "all of the American-authored writings on a Jewish conspiracy are based upon an extraordinary document known as the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion" (p.36).

<sup>172</sup>Morse, Foreign Conspiracy, rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, p. 96.

<sup>173</sup>Jedidiah Morse, A Sermon, Exhibiting the Present Dangers and Consequent Duties of the Citizens of the United States of America. Delivered at Charlestown, April 25, 1799. The Day of the National Fast (Charlestown, Mass., 1799), rpt. in The Fear of Conspiracy, p. 47.

<sup>174</sup>Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style, p. 103.

<sup>175</sup>Cohen, "Conspiracy Fever," p. 35.

<sup>176</sup>Levin, p. 167.

<sup>177</sup>There is some experimental evidence indicating that there is a fundamental psychological need to believe that the universe is orderly and just. For example, see Alan L. Chaikan and John M. Barley, "Victim or Perpetuator?"

Defensive Attribution of Responsibility and the Need for Order and Justice," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 25 (1973), 268-275.

178 For example, Bergesen argues that political witch hunts serve to unify and ritually purify the communities that conduct them by providing a "subversive" (often conspiratorial) enemy whom the agents of the "sacred" community can (sometimes symbolically and sometimes actually) vanquish. These crusades are often conducted against enemies who offer no objective threat. See Albert J. Bergesen, "Political Witch Hunts: The Sacred and the Subversive in Cross-National Perspective," American Sociological Review, 42 (April 1977), 220-233.

179 Kenneth Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle,'" The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action, 3d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 194-195.

180 For example see John B. Connally, "The Communist Conspiracy," Vital Speeches, 15 January 1962, pp. 212-214.

181 On the "rhetorical situation" see Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 1 (Winter 1968), 1-14.

182 Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR (New York: Vintage, 1955), p. 16.

183 The nature, history, and uses of the criminal offense of "conspiracy" are reviewed by: Geoffrey M. Pommer, "The Political Use of the Conspiracy Charge in America," Diss. New York University 1976; R. J. Hoskins, "A Comparative Analysis of the Crime of Conspiracy in Germany, France, and the United States," New York University Journal of International Law and Politics, 6 (Summer 1973), 245-270.

184 Conspiracy in literature and conspiratorial interpretations of literature are discussed by: Mary Gourevitch, "The Writer as Double Agent: Essay on the Conspiratorial Mode in Contemporary Fiction," Diss. Case Western Reserve 1970; Walter W. Wagar, "The Open Conspirator: H. G. Wells as a Prophet of World Order," Diss. Yale 1959; J. Meckier, "Our Ford, Our Freud and Behaviorist Conspiracy in Huxley's Brave New World," Thalia, 1 (1978), 35-59.



## CHAPTER IV

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>A. Mitchell Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" The Forum: A Magazine of Constructive Nationalism, 63 (February 1920), 173-185.

<sup>2</sup>For example, see Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 1 (Winter 1968), 1-14. For a wide variety of commentary on the "rhetorical situation" see David S. Kaufer, "Point of View in Rhetorical Situations: Classical and Romantic Contrasts and Contemporary Implications," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 65 (April 1979), 171-186; Scott Consigny, "Rhetoric and Its Situations," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 7 (Summer 1974), 175-86; Richard L. Larson, "Lloyd Bitzer's 'Rhetorical Situation' and the Classification of Discourse: Problems and Implications," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 3 (Summer 1970), 165-168; Arthur B. Miller, "Rhetorical Exigence," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 5 (Spring 1972), 111-118; Ralph S. Pomeroy, "Fitness of Response in Bitzer's Concept of Rhetorical Discourse," Georgia Speech Communication Journal, 4 (1972), 42-71; Richard E. Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 6 (Summer 1973), 154-161; K. E. Wilkerson, "On Evaluating Theories of Rhetoric," Philosophy and Rhetoric 3 (1970), 82-96; John H. Patton, "Causation and Creativity in Rhetorical Situations: Distinctions and Implications," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 65 (February 1979), 36-55. See also, the rejoinders to Patton's article in "The Forum," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 66 (February 1980), 85-93.

<sup>3</sup>For example, Andrew King has described seven strategies that elites use in trying to maintain power or to explain their loss of it. See Andrew A. King, "The Rhetoric of Power Maintenance: Elites at the Precipice," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 62 (April 1976), 127-133. It is important to realize that the threat of disorder is just one of many problems that a society may have to face. As a result, the conservative, status quo rhetoric described in this chapter is only one example of many possible types of social discourse.

<sup>4</sup>Responses to the threat of disorder may range from moderate reactions, such as calling for a study of the problem, to very extreme reactions, such as those embodied in

Richard Hofstadter's concept of the "paranoid style." This type of thought and discourse is characterized by "heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, . . . conspiratorial fantasy," and a "feeling of persecution" that is "systematized in grandiose theories of conspiracy" (p.3, 4). Postwar America, confronted with multiple economic and social maladies tended toward the paranoid style of rhetoric as a way of dealing with a chaotic environment. See Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), pp. 3-40. The question of why America was caught up in the excesses of the Red Scare rather than displaying a more moderate reaction is an interesting one that exceeds the scope of this chapter. However, some tentative explanations are available. For example, based on anthropological and psychological studies, Stanley Coben has argued that "substantial evidence . . . suggests that millions of Americans are both extraordinarily fearful of social change and prejudiced against those minority groups which they perceive as 'threatening intruders.' Societal disruption, especially if it can easily be connected with the 'intruders,' not only will intensify the hostility of highly prejudiced individuals, but also will provoke many others, whose antagonisms in more stable times had been mild or incipient, into the extreme group." See Stanley Coben, "The American Red Scare of 1919-1920," Political Science Quarterly, 79 (March 1964), 52-75, reprinted in Richard O. Curry and Thomas M. Brown, eds. Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History (New York: Rinehart, and Winston, 1972), pp. 145-146. This position suggests that a "paranoid" style may tend to emerge in proportion to the presence of several requisite social conditions. In his study of four outbreaks of alien conspiracy theory, Dwight C. Smith has tried to identify some of these factors. He contends that the Red Scare and the Palmer Raids were examples of the effect of three forces: "First there was a feeling of unease over the prospect that forces beyond our borders do, or might, exercise undue influence over the scope and direction of domestic social change . . . Second, a moral entrepreneur, in Howard Becker's words, has to take the stage to focus public attention on the conditions, or values, of American life that are at stake. Third, it must be possible to construct a set of facts, or assumptions of fact, that can be used by the entrepreneur as evidence supporting a conspiratorial explanation of potential changes for the worse." See Dwight C. Smith, "Mafia: The Prototypical Alien Conspiracy," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 423 (January 1976), 76-77.

<sup>5</sup>James L. Bates, The United States, 1898-1928: Progressivism and a Society in Transition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), p. 228.

<sup>6</sup>James C. Malin, The United States After the World War (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1930), p. 85.

<sup>7</sup>Burl Noggle, Into the Twenties: The United States from Armistice to Normalcy (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1974), p. 84. See also William Preston, Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p.3.

<sup>8</sup>Murray B. Levin, Political Hysteria in America: The Democratic Capacity for Repression (New York: Basic Books, 1971), pp. 171-172

<sup>9</sup>For background on the Red Scare see Robert K. Murray, Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955); Allan L. Damon, "The Great Red Scare," American Heritage, 19 (1968), 22-27; Paul L. Murphy, "Normalcy, Intolerance, and the American Character," Virginia Quarterly Review, 40 (Summer 1964), 445-459; Louis F. Post, The Deportations Delirium of Nineteen Twenty: A Personal Narrative of an Historic Official Experience (Chicago: C. H. Kerr, 1923); Levin, Chapter 3, "The Credibility of Conspiracy," pp. 90-140; Seymour J. Mandelbaum, ed., The Social Setting of Intolerance: The Know-Nothings, The Red Scare, and McCarthyism (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1964), pp. 61-116; Paul L. Murphy, "Sources and Nature of Intolerance in the 1920's," Journal of American History, 51 (June 1964), 60-76; John M. Blum, "Nativism, Anti-Radicalism, and the Foreign Scare, 1917-1920," Midwest Journal, 3 (Winter 1950-1951), 46-53; Philip L. Cook, "Red Scare in Denver," The Colorado Magazine, 43 (Fall 1966), 309-326; Wayne Flynt, "Florida Labor and Political Radicalism 1919-1920," Labor History, 9 (Winter 1968), 73-90; Thomas E. Vadney, "The Politics of Repression: A Case Study of the Red Scare in New York," New York History, 49 (January 1968), 56-75; Edward J. Muzik, "Victor L. Berger: Congress and the Red Scare," Wisconsin Magazine of History, 47 (Summer 1964), 309-318; Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties (New York: Harper and Row, 1931), esp. Chapter 3, "The Big Red Scare;" Preston S. Slosson, The Great Crusade and After (New York: Macmillan, 1930); William S. Bernard,

"Arms and the Alien: Post War Hysteria and the Americanization Crusade," Rocky Mountain Law Review, 11 (1938-1939), 171-185.

<sup>10</sup>Smith, p. 79.

<sup>11</sup>Bates, p. 231. See also Coben, p. 153.

<sup>12</sup>Noggle, pp. 91-92.

<sup>13</sup>David Brion Davis, The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 208.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>15</sup>The "problem" posed by post-war conditions was rhetorical in two senses: it motivated discursive responses, and, ironically, it was at least partly created by the inflated, idealistic, super-patriotic rhetoric of the war years.

<sup>16</sup>Noggle, pp. 101-102. See also Bates, p. 227.

<sup>17</sup>Coben, pp. 154-155.

<sup>18</sup>General Leonard Wood in Noggle, p. 105.

<sup>19</sup>Coben, p. 149.

<sup>20</sup>Rep. Albert Johnson, Congressional Record, April 12, 1920, p. 5551, quoted in Noggle, p. 111.

<sup>21</sup>Coben, pp. 151-152. See also Bates, pp. 227-228. For an example of the use of the radicals' own words against them see, United States Department of Justice, Red Radicalism as Described by its Own Leaders, Exhibits collected by A. Mitchell Palmer (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920).

<sup>22</sup> Andre Maurois, A History of the USA: From Wilson to Kennedy, trans. Patrick O'Brian (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), p. 92.

<sup>23</sup> Noggle, p. 91. See also Coben, p. 157. Coben relates what may be the ultimate irony of the situation; the Comintern did not take charge of the American Communist movement until after the Red Scare was well on its way into oblivion (p. 157).

<sup>24</sup> Levin, p. 156.

<sup>25</sup> Noggle, pp. 96, 107, 106-107.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 105-106, 108.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-96.

<sup>28</sup> Bates, pp. 233-234. The standard biography of the Attorney General is Stanley Coben, A. Mitchell Palmer, Politician (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963). See also, D. Johnson, "A. Mitchell Palmer," Pennsylvania History, 25 (1958), 345.

<sup>29</sup> Noggle, p. 106. There is a variety of speculation as to why Palmer chose to embrace the cause of the Red Scare. For several explanations see Robert Dunn, The Palmer Raids (New York: International Publishers, 1948), p. 49. See also Paul L. Murphy, "Sources and Nature of Intolerance in the 1920's," p. 66

<sup>30</sup> Coben, "The American Red Scare," p. 156. For background on Palmer's campaign against the Reds see Robert K. Murray, "The Outer World and the Inner Light: A Case Study," Pennsylvania History, 36 (July 1969), 265-289; John Braeman, "World War One and the Crisis of American Liberty," American Quarterly, 16 (1964), 104-112.

<sup>31</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1932 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957),

p. 43. See also Preston, p. 163.

<sup>32</sup>New York Times, January 3, 1920, quoted in Dunn, p. 32.

<sup>33</sup>Schlesinger, p. 43. See also Dunn, p. 41.

<sup>34</sup>New York Times, January 4, 1920, and New York World January 3, 1920, quoted in Dunn, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup>Smith, p. 80.

<sup>36</sup>A. Mitchell Palmer before the House Rules Committee, 1920, quoted in Dunn, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup>Palmer before a Congressional Committee, quoted in Dunn, p. 49.

<sup>38</sup>This account of the public criticism of Palmer is adapted from Smith, pp. 80-81.

<sup>39</sup>Dunn, pp. 36-37.

<sup>40</sup>Preston, pp. 221-222.

<sup>41</sup>National Popular Government League, To the American People, A Report Upon the Illegal Practices of the United States Department of Justice (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920). See also Preston, pp. 221-222, and Bates, p. 234.

<sup>42</sup>New Republic, January 14, 1920, quoted in Dunn, p. 59. For additional criticism of Palmer and his policies see W. Hard, "Is Palmer Guilty of High Crimes?," New Republic 12 May 1920, pp. 346-348; "Palmer Pleads Guilty," New Republic, 19 January 1921, pp. 217-218; "Sowing the Wind to Reap the Whirlwind," Nation, 17 January 1920, p. 7; "What Is Attorney General Palmer Doing?," Nation, 14 February 1920,

pp. 789-791; "Turn the Light on Palmer!," Nation, 2 February 1921, p. 164.

<sup>43</sup>Rep. George Huddleston, Congressional Record, April 23, 1920, p. 6086, quoted in Noggle, p. 111.

<sup>44</sup>Noggle, p. 110. See also Preston, p. 226.

<sup>45</sup>Dunn, p. 50. See United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Rules, Hearings, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer on Charges Made Against the Department of Justice by Louis F. Post and Others, 66th Congress, 2d Session, 1920; and, United States Congress, Senate, Judiciary Subcommittee, Hearings, Charges of Illegal Practices of the Department of Justice, 66th Congress, 3rd Session, 1921.

<sup>46</sup>Dunn, p. 48.

<sup>47</sup>Palmer before the Senate Judiciary Committee, quoted in Dunn, p. 52.

<sup>48</sup>Dunn, pp. 51, 52.

<sup>49</sup>Palmer before the House Rules Committee, 1920, quoted in Dunn, p. 66.

<sup>50</sup>Ole Hanson, quoted in Levin, p. 152.

<sup>51</sup>Introduction to the Palmer article, The Forum, p. 173.

<sup>52</sup>Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" pp. 173, 176.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 174, 175, 182, 184-185.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., pp. 178-180, 181.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., pp. 181-182.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 180

<sup>64</sup>Hofstadter (pp. 29-30) has noted that "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 barricades of civilization. He constantly lives at a turning point: it is now or never in organizing resistance to conspiracy."

<sup>65</sup>Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Symbols in Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 236.

<sup>66</sup>Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds!'" p. 185.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., pp. 183, 185, 175.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., pp. 180, 181, 182.



<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>71</sup>This technique is described by Hofstadter as being one aspect of the "paranoid style": "This enemy is clearly delineated: he is a perfect model of malice, a kind of amoral superman: sinister, ubiquitous, powerful, 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 (pp. 31-32). Hofstadter goes on to point out that this strategy of naming the enemy in ultimate terms is accompanied by a feeling that one's differences with the adversary are irreconcilable. (pp. 30-31).

<sup>72</sup>Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" pp. 173, 181, 174, 183, 174, 183, 175.

<sup>73</sup>For Palmer, the term "Red" had become what Edward Sapir has called a "condensation symbol"--a form to which significance is ascribed far in excess of its objective meaning. See Edward Sapir, "Symbolism," Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, ed. Edwin R. A. Seligman (New York: Macmillan, 1934), p. 493. The meaning of this term and its subsidiary cluster of names was so intensely value-laden that every manner of evil connotation seems "condensed" into the word "Red."

<sup>74</sup>Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" p. 176, 183, 182.

<sup>75</sup>Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Communication and Social Order (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 340, 397.

<sup>76</sup>Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" p. 174.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 175.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>80</sup>King, p. 129.

<sup>81</sup>Hofstadter (p. 32) notes that the 'paranoid' rhetor often contends that the enemy possesses "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 (brain-washing); he has a special technique for seduction (the Catholic confessional); he is gaining a stranglehold on the educational system."

<sup>82</sup>Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" pp. 179-180.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>84</sup>Roger A. Remington illustrates the importance of the association technique when he observes that: "In large measure, the Red Scare now appears to have been a phenomenon whereby the activities of a relatively few radical agitators and anarchists in the United States were incorrectly identified with a world revolutionary movement emanating from the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia," Roger A. Remington, "The Function of the 'Conspiracy Theory' in American Intellectual History," Diss. Saint Louis 1965, p. 162.

<sup>85</sup>Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" p. 183.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., pp. 183, 184.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 174. Hans Toch notes the importance of the spoken word in this context when he writes that "once [one] has stated his views, he has taken political action." A state-

ment of views, whether in the form of a list of theses posted on a church door or a letter to a friend, may exert influence and therefore can be categorized as conspiratorial." See Hans Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 225. For the counter-subversive, then, the plot is to be feared (in part) because of its singular rhetorical powers. This issue is discussed by Bonnie McD. Johnson, "Images of the Enemy in Intergroup Conflict," Central States Speech Journal, 26 (Summer 1975), 84-92.

<sup>89</sup>Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" p. 184.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>92</sup>Murray Edelman, Politics As Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence (Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1971), p. 115. For an excellent analysis of the de-humanization of the Jews in Nazi rhetoric see Randall L. Bytwerk, "Julius Streicher: The Rhetoric of an Anti-Semite," Diss. Northwestern 1975, esp. pp. 96-143.

<sup>93</sup>Dunn, pp. 52-53.

<sup>94</sup>Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" p. 182.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>99</sup>Hofstadter, p. 32.

<sup>100</sup>Palmer, "The Case Against the 'Reds,'" p. 174.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., pp. 177, 182-183, 184.

<sup>105</sup>Quotations from Communist literature occur on pages 177, 178, 182-183, and 184. References to Communist publications occur on pages 175, 182, 183, and 184.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 175. Emphasis added.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., pp. 174-176. Emphasis added. See also Dunn, p. 21.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Mark Lane, Rush to Judgment (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966).

<sup>2</sup>Paul B. Sheatsley and Jacob J. Feldman, "A National Survey on Public Reactions and Behavior," The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public: Social Communication in Crisis, eds. Bradley S. Greenberg and Edwin B. Parker (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1965), pp. 152-153.

<sup>3</sup>Edwin B. Parker and Bradley S. Greenberg, "Newspaper Content on the Assassination Weekend," The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>Sheatsley and Feldman, pp. 157-159.

<sup>5</sup>James McKinley, Assassination in America (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 101-102. For discussion of the news coverage see "Covering the Tragedy," Time, 29 November 1963, p. 84; R. L. Tobin, "If You Can Keep Your Head When All About You: Television and News Magazine Coverage of the Kennedy Assassination Story," Saturday Review, 14 December 1963, pp. 53-54. In fact, the news coverage was so intense that some observers discussed the possibility that it had jeopardized Oswald's survival. See, for example, L. Grove, "Did Press Pressure Kill Oswald?" (reprint), U. S. News and World Report, 6 April 1964, pp. 78-79.

<sup>6</sup>Sheatsley and Feldman, p. 167.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 167, 149.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 158. Statistics are taken from Table 2, appearing on p. 158. Significantly, only 11 percent of the NORC's study population reported that they "felt none of these" symptoms. An interview study conducted in Dallas by Bonjean, et al. November 28-30 generally confirms the NORC

findings. See Charles M. Bonjean, Richard J. Hill and Harry W. Martin, "Reactions to the Assassination in Dallas," in The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public, pp. 178-198.

<sup>10</sup>Sheatsley and Feldman, p. 154.

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, "Foreign Countries, Too, Mourn First Citizen of the World," United States News and World Report, 2 December 1963, pp. 48-49; "How Sorrowful Bad," Time, 29 November 1963, pp. 38-39; "World Resounds," America, 14 December 1963, pp. 767-771; "World Weeps and Waits," Business Week, 30 November 1963, pp. 30-31; "World Mourns in Doubt, Fear, Hope," Newsweek, 9 December 1963, pp. 56-58

<sup>12</sup>Mary McGrory, quoted in Donald C. Lord, John F. Kennedy: The Politics of Confrontation and Conciliation (Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series, 1977), p. 291. For a sampling of domestic reaction in the media see Mary McGrory, "After Great Pain, A Formal Feeling," America, 14 December 1963, p. 764; "Apocalypse and After," Christian Century, 4 December 1963, p. 1487; "And a Child's Yellow Flowers," Newsweek, 2 December 1963, pp. 20-26; R. Gilman, "Fact of Mortality," Commonweal, 13 December 1963, pp. 337-338; "From Friend and Foe in America: Sense of Shock and Dismay at the Despicable Act," U.S. News and World Report, 2 December 1963, p. 49; "Reactions in the South," Newsweek, 16 December 1963, p. 27; "Shock, then Recovery," Business Week, 30 November 1963, pp. 92-93.

<sup>13</sup>Sheatsley and Feldman, pp. 164-165, 155. A Louis Harris survey reported in January, 1964 indicates that nearly 75% of those surveyed believed Oswald to be the killer and that 41% felt that he committed the act because he was mentally ill. "Polls: Lingering Doubts," Newsweek, 6 January 1964, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup>Sheatsley and Feldman report that only one respondent in five "answered in ideological terms" when asked to attribute "ultimate responsibility for the assassination," i.e., 15 per cent blamed Communists while 5 per cent blamed right-wingers or segregationists (pp. 163-164). However, they also note that, in more general terms, 62 per cent of the

respondents felt that "other people were involved too" when asked if Oswald acted alone (p. 165). A Louis Harris survey reported in January of 1964 indicates that 20 per cent believed somebody had put Oswald up to it; 7 per cent said Communists were behind it; 1 per cent felt he had been brainwashed. Also, 7 per cent felt he acted out of radical extremist views while 5 per cent attributed blame to Communist leanings. "Polls: Lingerin' Doubts," p. 19. Another study, reported by Hans Toch, indicates that most respondents "felt that 'some group or element' could be held responsible, although only a handful could specify the identity of the 'conspirators.'" Hans Toch, citing Public Opinion News Service, 6 December 1963, in The Social Psychology of Social Movements (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> Discussions of this issue were widespread following the assassination. For example, see "Burden of Guilt," Christian Century, 8 January 1964, pp. 37-38; "Collective Guilt in the U.S.?", U.S. News and World Report, 16 December 1963, p. 10; V. Royster, "No Time for Collective Guilt" (reprint), U.S. News and World Report, 9 December 1963, p. 72.

<sup>16</sup> Sheatsley and Feldman, pp. 163-164.

<sup>17</sup> Stewart's study of 420 sermons by Northern Protestant ministers found that 162 blamed "all Americans for Kennedy's assassination, themselves included, and references to 'corporate' or 'collective' guilt were frequent." Charles J. Stewart, "The Pulpit in Time of Crisis: 1865 to 1963," Speech Monographs, 32 (November 1965), 429-430, 432. In his study of 94 sermons by rabbis and 99 sermons by Catholic priests Stewart found that, 34 per cent of rabbis and 26 per cent of priests "asserted that extremists were to blame, perhaps even more than Oswald himself . . . Second to extremism, 30 per cent of Jewish speakers and 18 per cent of Catholic speakers blamed all Americans for the tragedy . . . clergy concluded that the guilt must be collective." Charles J. Stewart, "Catholic and Jewish Pulpit Reaction to the Kennedy Assassination," Western Speech, 31 (Spring 1967), 137-138. It should be noted that 50 per cent of the rabbis and 41 per cent of the priests "cited hatred as the primary cause of the assassination" (p. 135).

<sup>18</sup>While Kennedy's popularity varied during his administration, poll data reported just two weeks before his death indicate an overall "approval" rating of 59 per cent. Although this rating was next to the lowest in Kennedy's presidency (the lowest being the 57 per cent he received in mid-October, 1963) it is most impressive when compared to the "approval" ratings received by other modern Presidents. Hazel Gaudet Erskine, "The Polls: Kennedy as President," Public Opinion Quarterly, 28 (Summer 1964), 335.

<sup>19</sup>Harrison E. Salisbury, "An Introduction to the Warren Commission Report," Report of the Warren Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), p. xxix.

<sup>20</sup>D. W. Brogan, "Death in Dallas: Myths After Kennedy," Encounter, 23 (December 1964), 20-21; Vincent L. Toscano, "Since Dallas: Images of John F. Kennedy in Popular and Scholarly Literature, 1963-1973," Diss. S.U.N.Y.-Albany 1975, p. 46.

<sup>21</sup>Toscano, pp. 85-86.

<sup>22</sup>For example, Stewart found that 60 per cent of rabbis and 31 per cent of priests studied "were particularly concerned with Kennedy's ideals [i.e., equality or civil rights] and they pleaded with their hearers to carry on the fight for civil rights, peace, and patriotism." "Catholic and Jewish Pulpit Reactions to the Kennedy Assassination," p. 134.

<sup>23</sup>Toscano reaches the conclusion that the Kennedy "image" is positive in the majority of the literature. He bases this conclusion on a ten-year review of 111 periodicals and dozens of books (pp. 104, 84, 63, 64). Toscano argues that "it is the very sense of what might have been which is the emotional cutting edge of the Kennedy image . . . To the extent to which we look back at those years [since Dallas] and remember the horrors, the sadness, the bitter frightening chaos there will always be the temptation to ask 'What if?' This is the very heart of the Kennedy appeal to the American imagination . . ." (p. 84). He also notes that Kennedy's positive "image" (one the public still holds) has provided for his memory "the best of two worlds: credit for the success in the years since



Dallas and absolution for the chaos of those very same years" (p. 83).

<sup>24</sup>Nicholas de B. Katzenbach, quoted in George Lardner, Jr., "Congress and the Assassinations," Saturday Review, 19 February 1977, p. 14. The memo was written on November 26, 1963.

<sup>25</sup>This is not to suggest that the Warren Commission was established to engineer a deliberate cover-up. Opinion on the motives of President Johnson and the Commissioners is deeply divided. For example, see Edward J. Epstein, Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth (New York: Viking Press, 1966) versus John Sparrow, After the Assassination: A Positive Appraisal of the Warren Report (New York: Chilmark Press, 1967). The argument of the present study is simply that the Commission was conceived as a "fact-finding" body which would have the effect of reassuring the nation that the Kennedy case was closed. At the time, it was feared that unfounded conspiracy charges could have serious domestic and international consequences. For example, see the discussion of the negative consequences of conspiracy fears in Lewis Lipsitz and J. David Colfax, "The Fate of Due Process in a Time of Crisis," The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public, pp. 332-335.

<sup>26</sup>Other Commissioners were Senator Richard B. Russell, Senator John Sherman Cooper, Representative Hale Boggs, Representative Gerald R. Ford, Mr. Allen W. Dulles, and Mr. John M. McCloy. General Counsel for the Commission was J. Lee Rankin.

<sup>27</sup>"Foreword," Report of the Warren Commission, pp. 6-9.

<sup>28</sup>President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, Investigation of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Hearings, Pursuant to Executive Order Creating a Commission to Ascertain, Evaluate, and Report upon the Facts Relating to the Assassination of the Late President, John F. Kennedy and the Subsequent Violent Death of the Man Charged with the Assassination, 26 Vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964).

<sup>29</sup>Report of the Warren Commission, pp. 41, 42.

<sup>30</sup>Robert Sam Anson, "They've Killed the President!": A Search for the Murderers of John F. Kennedy (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), p. 70.

<sup>31</sup>McKinley, p. 127.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>33</sup>Salisbury, p. xxix. Salisbury goes on to state that any lingering doubts about the finality of the Report will be the result of the "communal share of guilt" that remains in every American (p. xxix).

<sup>34</sup>Lord, p. 270.

<sup>35</sup>Schramm notes that cabalist thought was almost instantly accepted in Europe; however, he asserts that fuller news coverage and more faith in public institutions stilled such fears for a while on this side of the Atlantic. Wilbur Schramm, "Communication in Crisis," The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public, pp. 21-22. The argument that conspiracy theory was "blocked initially by the august stature of the Warren Commission" is made by William L. O'Neill, Coming Apart: An Informal History of the 1960's (New York: Quadrangle, 1971), p. 95. The comparison of American reactions with those of Europe appears a number of times in this literature; the unanimous verdict of these scholars is that Europeans were, and probably still are, much more enamored of conspiracy theories of the assassination than are Americans. For example, see O'Neill, p. 95; Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 7. Perhaps the best early example of this European literature is Joesten Joachim, Oswald: Assassin or Fall Guy? (New York: Marzani and Munsell, 1964).

<sup>36</sup>Lord, p. 271; Toscano, pp. 106-107. David Brion Davis, The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from

the Revolution to the Present (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 339.

<sup>37</sup>The poll was conducted by Louis Harris and was reported on October 19, 1964 by the Washington Post. The data is provided by G. Robert Blakey, "Introduction," Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations, U.S. House of Representatives, The Final Assassination Report (New York: Bantam Books, 1979), n. pag.

<sup>38</sup>Tom Wicker, "Foreward," The Final Assassination Report, n. pag.

<sup>39</sup>Sheatsley and Feldman, pp. 173-174.

<sup>40</sup>Tom Bethell, "The Quote Circuit," Washington Monthly 7 (December 1975), 39; McKinley, p. 153, Brogan, p. 23.

<sup>41</sup>Clark Mc Cauley and Susan Jacques, "The Popularity of Conspiracy Theories of Presidential Assassination: A Bayesian Analysis," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37 (May 1979), 637-644. The authors also suggest that their results may be "an interesting example of support for Kelley's (1967, 1972) analysis of variance model of subjective causality. According to this model, 'the more extreme the effect to be attributed, the more likely the attributor is to assume that it entails multiple necessary causes' (Kelley, 1972, p. 6). With the relatively easy assumption that the members of a conspiracy are thought of as multiple necessary causes, it follows from Kelley's model that a conspiracy is seen as more likely when the President is dead--an extreme effect--than when he has been missed" (p. 643). If one compares the conspiracy theorizing about the John Kennedy assassination with the almost total lack of cabalist interpretations of the two unsuccessful attempts on President Ford's life there seems to be some confirmation for the McCauley and Jacques hypothesis.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 644.

<sup>43</sup>Theodore Sorensen, quoted in "JFK: The Death and the Doubts," Newsweek, 5 December 1966, p. 26. Sorensen goes on to state that "I for myself have accepted that stark fact. I see no reason to believe it was a conspiracy"(p.26).

<sup>44</sup>Wicker, n. pag.

<sup>45</sup>McCauley and Jacques point out the remarkable longevity of JFK assassination theories: "the continuing popularity of conspiracy theories is itself a remarkable fact. . . new books about John F. Kennedy's assassination are selling 15 years after the event, selling in supermarkets and in drug stores against competition from pop psychology and sex books" (pp. 637-638).

<sup>46</sup>This account is adapted from John Kaplan, "The Assassins," American Scholar, 36 (1967), 271

<sup>47</sup>Thomas G. Buchanan, Who Killed Kennedy? (New York: Putnam, 1964); Joachim Joesten, Oswald: Assassin or Fall Guy? (New York: Marzani and Munsell, 1964).

<sup>48</sup>Kaplan, p. 271.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>50</sup>Edward J. Epstein, Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth (New York: Viking, 1966); Mark Lane, Rush to Judgment (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966); Harold Weisberg, Whitewash: The Report on the Warren Report (Hyattstown, Md.: Harold Weisberg, 1965); Leo Sauvage, The Oswald Affair: An Examination of the Contradictions and Omissions of the Warren Report (Cleveland: World Pub., 1966); Richard H. Popkin, The Second Oswald (New York: Avon, 1966).

<sup>51</sup>One dissenting voice from the right was Professor Revilo P. Oliver's two-part series, "Marxmanship in Dallas," American Opinion, 6 (February 1964), 18-36; (March 1964), 22-47. Professor Oliver contended that the International Communist Conspiracy had killed the President because he wasn't carrying out his nefarious assignments with the re-

quired speed. Oliver testified before the Warren Commission.

<sup>52</sup>Kaplan, pp. 271, 294-298; Lord, pp. 272-273. For background see Donovan L. Gay, ed., The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy: The Warren Commission Report and Subsequent Interest (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1975).

<sup>53</sup>Kaplan relates that "during the week of November 25, 1966 . . . both Life Magazine and the New York Times demanded that something be done" (p. 302).

<sup>54</sup>Jim Garrison, quoted in O'Neill, p. 100.

<sup>55</sup>McKinley notes, "the CIA is, predictably, most often involved in speculations on the assassination [of JFK]" (p. 130).

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>57</sup>O'Neill, p. 103.

<sup>58</sup>David R. Wrone, "The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy: The Critics and the Evidentiary Base," Paper presented at the Southern Historical Association Convention, November 1977, p. 2. I am grateful to Professor Wrone for supplying me with a copy of his paper.

<sup>59</sup>Blakey, n. pag. See also, Wrone pp. 3-10.

<sup>60</sup>"Assassination: Any Number Can Play," Newsweek, 7 November 1966, p. 37.

<sup>61</sup>Wrone, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup>These estimates are paraphrased from Tracy Kidder, "Washington: The Assassination Tangle," Atlantic, 243

(March 1979), 6. Kidder's figures are derived from David Wrone's ten-year bibliographic study of material related to the Kennedy assassination.

<sup>63</sup>"You Read the Truth Here 15 Years Ago," National Enquirer, 23 January 1979, p. 37.

<sup>64</sup>Thomas M. McDade, "The Assassination Industry: A Tentative Checklist of Publications on the Murder of President John F. Kennedy," American Book Collector, 18 (1968), 8. In addition to McDade's contribution, a number of others have compiled bibliographies on the Kennedy Assassination. See Tom Miller, The Assassination Please Almanac (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1977); Joan I. Newcomb, John F. Kennedy: An Annotated Bibliography (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1977), pp. 81-101; David R. Wrone, "The Assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy: An Annotated Bibliography," Wisconsin Magazine of History, 56 (Autumn 1972), 21-36; Earl C. Kubicek, "Bibliography of Books, Brochures & Magazines Dealing With Events Prior and Subsequent to the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy," American Book Collector, 22 (1972), No. 1, 26-27; No. 2, 23-26; No. 3, 23-25; No. 4, 21-29; The Committee to Investigate Assassinations, American Political Assassinations: A Bibliography of Works Published 1963-1970 Related to the Assassination of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert F. Kennedy (Washington, D.C.: Committee to Investigate Assassinations, 1973); T.H. Irwin and Hazel Hale, A Bibliography of Books, Newspaper and Magazine Articles, Published in English Outside the United States of America Related to the Assassination of John F. Kennedy (T.H. Irwin and Hazel Hale, January 1975); W.C. Thompson, A Bibliography of Literature Relating to the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy: An Extremely Comprehensive and Detailed Search of 283 Entries Excluding Magazine and Newspaper Articles (San Antonio, Texas: W.C. Thompson, 1968); Library of Congress Bibliography, Congressional Record, 28 September 1966, pp. 23206-23207. The number and scope of these bibliographies speaks to the enormous magnitude of the Kennedy assassination literature and to the continuing public interest in it.

<sup>65</sup>Wrone, Wisconsin Magazine of History, p. 24. Wrone contends that the two reasons are the fear of false con-

spiracy charges and the commitment to doing research only on events that have been made clearer by the passage of several decades (p. 24).

<sup>66</sup>Epstein, p. xvii; McDade, p. 8.

<sup>67</sup>Epstein summarizes "Sixty Versions of the Kennedy Assassination," Esquire (December 1966) and (May 1967), rpt. in Smiling Through the Apocalypse: Esquire's History of the Sixties, ed. Harold Hayes (New York: Delta, 1971), pp. 467-505. By now, Epstein's inventory would be a substantial understatement.

<sup>68</sup>Wrone, Wisconsin Magazine of History, p. 24.

<sup>69</sup>This observation is made by Kidder, p. 16.

<sup>70</sup>Lardner, pp. 14-17. Lardner argues that had the investigation concerned only JFK it probably would not have been approved. It was the Congressional Black Caucus, he contends, that provided the major impetus for re-opening the entire area owing to "its somewhat belated discovery of unexplained circumstances surrounding the killing of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." (p. 14).

<sup>71</sup>Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations, U. S. House of Representatives, The Final Assassination Report (New York: Bantam Books, 1979). See especially the divergent views found in the "Foreword," by Tom Wicker, and the "Introduction," by G. Robert Blakey (n. pag.). The Report reached a similar conclusion with regard to Dr. King although the identity of the conspirators (probably militant, racist extremists) could only be guessed at. For summary and commentary on the Committee and its Report see: Peter Goldman, "Rush to Judgment," Newsweek, 15 January 1979, pp. 26-27; David Gelman and Elaine Shannon, "Marina Oswald's Story," Newsweek, 25 September 1978, p. 45; David Gelman and Elaine Shannon, "A Tremendous Insanity," Newsweek, 2 October 1978, p. 62; Susan Fraker and Elaine Shannon, "Hints of the Mob," Newsweek, 9 October 1978, pp. 44, 47; Barbara Brotman, "A Sound Evaluation: 'Fingerprinting' the JFK Assassination," Chicago Tribune, 13 March 1979, Sect. 12, p. 1, 3; James Coates, "Mob Plot Likely in JFK Slaying Panel

Concludes," Chicago Tribune, 18 July 1979, Sect. 1, p. 1; James Coates, "JFK Death: Is a Plot Coming Into Focus?," Chicago Tribune, 7 January 1979, Sect. 1, pp. 1-2.

<sup>72</sup>For example, see "A Conspiracy of the Inept" (editorial) Chicago Tribune, 7 June 1979, Sec. 3, p. 2. Tom Margolis, "Not All Are Convinced," Chicago Tribune, 7 January 1979, Sec. 2, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup>Jeff Goldberg, "Waiting for Justice," Inquiry, 7 & 21 January, 1980, pp. 16-19. G. Robert Blakey, one-time supporter of the Warren Report and former Chief Counsel for the House Select Committee, is less restrained in his views: "The Mob killed the President of the United States and got away with it for fifteen years and continues to get away with it (Blakey quoted in Goldberg, p. 19)."

<sup>74</sup>This account of Lane's career is a composite drawn from: Tom Matthews, et al., "Conspiracy Addict," Newsweek, 18 December 1978, pp. 32-34; Steven Brill, "The Case Against Mark Lane," Esquire, 13 February 1979, pp. 50-52; Anson, pp. 71-72; Ed Bark, "Life With the Fast Lane," Dallas Morning News, 3 February 1980, p. E 1-2.

<sup>75</sup>Mark Lane, "Lane's Defense Brief for Oswald," National Guardian, 13 December 1969, pp. 5-9. The article is the unsolicited defense brief Lane submitted to the Warren Commission--unsuccessfully.

<sup>76</sup>Epstein, p. 16.

<sup>77</sup>Lane's testimony and the Commission's reaction to it is summarized on pages 276-277, 344 of the Report of the Warren Commission. His actual testimony is found in Vol. 5, pp. 546-561 and Vol. 2, pp. 32-61 of the Commission Hearings.

<sup>78</sup>Mark Lane, Rush to Judgment (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966); Mark Lane, A Citizen's Dissent: Mark Lane Replies (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).

<sup>79</sup>Anson, p. 111. Anson notes that some have character-



ized Lane as Garrison's "guru" (p. 111). Lane's commitment to Garrison was demonstrated in February 1967 when he publicly announced that Garrison had an ironclad case that would shake "the very foundations of this country" (Lane quoted in Brill, p. 5).

<sup>80</sup> Mark Lane, Chicago Eyewitness (New York: Astor-Honor: 1968); Mark Lane, Conversations with Americans (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970).

<sup>81</sup> Mark Lane and Dick Gregory, Code Name "Zorro": The Murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977). During this period (circa 1976) Lane was lecturing about 200 times a year. Mathews, p. 34.

<sup>82</sup> Mark Lane, The Strongest Poison (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1980). Lane's argument is that Jones was planning to move his group to the Soviet Union and that, to prevent the political embarrassment involved, the American government pressured him into suicidal action.

<sup>83</sup> A career of this sort has brought Lane much criticism. One fairly favorable observer described him as "bright, driven, and, to some, arrogant and self-righteous" (Anson, p. 71). Others have used somewhat harsher terms. He has been called "the chief ghoul of American assassinations," "totalitarian," "a gadfly," "always ripping off other people's work," "motivated by a hunger for a buck" (quoted in Kidder p. 8; Anson, pp. 141-142; and Brill, p. 51). After his appearance before the House Committee, Rep. Harold Sawyer said: "Mark Lane did for lawyers what the Boston Strangler did for door-to-door salesmen" (quoted in Kidder, p.8). However, perhaps his harshest critic is Steven Brill, who recently advised readers: "Don't believe him. On major issues, Mark Lane is as utterly truthless as any who has ever moved across our headlines. His motives are always the same: profit and headlines. . . . Lane has repeatedly damaged the credibility of sincere critics of these past investigations by his loud, venal, truthless presence at their side. He should not be listened to as he scavenges his way through this new national nightmare [Jonestown] lecture and literary agents in tow" (pp. 49, 52).

<sup>84</sup> Arnold L. Fein, "JFK in Dallas: The Warren Report and Its Critics," Saturday Review, 22 October 1966, p. 36.

<sup>85</sup>McKinley, p. 130.

<sup>86</sup>Anson, pp. 74-75.

<sup>87</sup>Kaplan, p. 274.

<sup>88</sup>"Assassination: Any Number Can Play," p. 37.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>90</sup>"JFK: The Death and the Doubts," Newsweek, 5 December 1966, p. 25.

<sup>91</sup>Lane quoted in Bark, p. E-2.

<sup>92</sup>Anson, pp. 73-74; O'Neill, p. 94. By April, 1967, 225,000 hardcover and 750,000 paperback copies had been produced with another large paperback edition in the works. "Pick of the Paperbacks," rev. of Rush to Judgment, by Mark Lane, Saturday Review, 29 April 1967, p. 32.

<sup>93</sup>Lane himself has stated, "my book is not an objective analysis . . . it is more like a brief for Oswald." Lane quoted in Kaplan, p. 283.

<sup>94</sup>Wrone, Wisconsin Magazine of History, p. 34; see also Kaplan, p. 278.

<sup>95</sup>For example, see Fein, p. 47.

<sup>96</sup>Wrone, "The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy: The Critics and the Evidentiary Base," p. 7.

<sup>97</sup>Garrison quoted in "Pick of the Paperbacks," p. 32.

<sup>98</sup>Lane quoted in Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>99</sup>H. H. Bernt, rev. of A Citizen's Dissent: Mark Lane Replies, by Mark Lane, Library Journal, 15 June 1968, p. 2518.

<sup>100</sup>Anson, pp. 73-74.

<sup>101</sup>Kaplan, pp. 280-285; Wrone, "The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy: The Critics and the Evidentiary Base," pp. 5,7. The Accusation about the book's authorship is made by Brill (p. 51). The accuracy of Brill's claim is not material to the present study since Lane was thought to be the author at the time of publication and probably still is by most readers. Even if the book had been written by someone else, it would still be an important example of the conspiracy genre.

<sup>102</sup>Mark Lane, "Introduction-Retrospective," (1975), Rush to Judgment (1966; rpt. New York: Dell, 1975), p. v. All citations in this section are to the Dell reprint edition.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, p. v.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxxviii.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 398.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 378.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 340

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 343.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., pp. 342-343.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>116</sup>For example, Lane claims that most of the witnesses believe the shots came from the "grassy knoll" (pp. 36-45, 113); that most of the doctors who examined Kennedy felt that his throat wound showed signs of bullet entry inconsistent with Oswald's having fired from behind (pp. 48, 53); and that 16 of 17 witnesses believe Jack Ruby was well acquainted with members of the Dallas Police Department (pp. 232-235).

<sup>117</sup>For example, Lane claims that those witnesses interviewed immediately after the shooting (and thus more reliable) tend to disconfirm the Commission's account of the events (p. 43); that the doctors who reported the soonest after their examination tended to regard Kennedy's throat wound as inconsistent with the Report's findings (p. 48). In addition to the criterion of "recency" of testimony, Lane implies throughout the book that the more unbiased or reliable the witness, the more Oswald's guilt was questioned. Indeed, in his concluding chapter he asserts that the test for use of evidence in his case has been "admission against interest" (p. 397).

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., pp. 54, 45. For example, when speaking of the "Magic Bullet," Lane claims that, "the Commission proved itself incapable of surmounting the difficulty imposed by a lack of evidence. It simply offered a conclusion based on no evidence at all--and which contradicted the 'best recollection' of the only known witness to the incident" (p. 80).

<sup>119</sup>For example, Lane cites the tests on Oswald's rifle (pp. 117, 219) and the misrepresentation of testimony about the package Oswald carried into the Book Depository (p. 147) as blatant instances of the Commission's bias. Other ex-

amples of this claim are so numerous as to defy summary. He sums up the point: The Commission's "criteria for investigating and accepting evidence were related less to intrinsic value of the information, I believe, than to its paramount need to allay fears of conspiracy" (p. 175).

<sup>120</sup>For example, Lane accuses the Dallas Police Department of "incredible stupidity" in its handling of security measures for Oswald (p. 227). He states flatly: "The Dallas Police Department was to blame for Oswald's murder" (p. 215). Also, he asserts that the Secret Service doctored evidence (p. 101) and tried to influence witnesses (pp. 242-243). The FBI is charged with similar malfeasance (p.95).

<sup>121</sup>For example, Lane notes that all FBI material developed in witness interviews is "hearsay" (p. 39n). Also, he asserts that some of those called to testify about the murder of Officer J. D. Tippit (attributed to Oswald by the Report) actually could have become witnesses for the defense had adversary procedures been in effect (p. 178).

<sup>122</sup>For example, Lane argues that the media overstates the quality of the Commission's evidence (p. 375), that they have published numerous articles uncritically affirming Oswald's guilt (p. 148), that they have reported errors and setbacks in the critics' case but have neglected to print retractions or follow-up stories that confirm that case (pp. 160, 182n) and that they have been unusually unanimous in their backing of the Report and denigration of critics (p. 286).

<sup>123</sup>Lane's concluding chapter (pp. 377-398) contains a recitation of the Commission's violations of the "rules of evidence" followed by a five-paragraph appeal to the preservation of the "rule of law". The book ends almost as suddenly as it begins.

<sup>124</sup>These observations agree with those of Kidder, p. 6, and Lord, p. 273.

<sup>125</sup>In his 1975 "Introduction-Retrospective" Lane is more direct in claiming that a conspiracy exists, but even here he is unwilling to name names beyond his implication that

federal and local law enforcement agencies, intelligence agencies, and perhaps organized crime were involved.

<sup>126</sup>Lane, Rush to Judgment, p. 55.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 40-41, 408, 309.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 38, 45, 195.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 29-35, 37, 62, 155.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. xiii, 50.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 140. Ironically, this sort of independent argumentation is exactly the strategy used by Lane himself.

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 275

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 157, 362.

<sup>140</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., pp. xxii.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. xxxvi.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>145</sup>Once again, Lane is much more forceful in his 1975 "Introduction-Retrospective," even going so far as to suggest that the federal courts blocked Jim Garrison's perjury prosecution of Clay Shaw for less than noble motives, and the Dallas Assistant Police Chief who escorted Jack Ruby to the scene of Oswald's murder was later promoted to Chief of Police. This individual had also played a significant role in mapping out the route of the President's motorcade (pp. xxvii, xiv).

<sup>146</sup>Jacob Cohen, "Conspiracy Fever," Commentary, 60 (October 1975), 39, 37.

<sup>147</sup>Lane, Rush to Judgment, pp. 375, 152, xxxvi, 182n.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., pp. xxxix, 397-398.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., pp. 232-235.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., pp. 66-68.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., p. 199

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>156</sup>McKinley, pp. 102-103.

<sup>157</sup>Lane, Rush to Judgment, p. 194.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., P. 249.

<sup>161</sup>Kidder is speaking here of current assassination critics; but there is no reason that the analysis does not apply equally well to those who pioneered in the field (p. 28).

<sup>162</sup>Cohen, pp. 37, 41.

<sup>163</sup>Lane, Rush to Judgment, pp. 128, 342, 346n.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-68.

<sup>165</sup>He uses terms such as "Prima facie" (p. 191), "chain of evidence," (p. 198), "modus operandi" (p. 366), and refers to the technicalities of the legal process (pp. 250, 377-398).



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Edward Sapir, "Symbolism," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, ed. Edwin R. A. Selgiman (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 14, p. 493.

<sup>2</sup>John B. Connally, "The Communist Conspiracy: Achieving Public Understanding of the Menace We Face," Vital Speeches, 15 January 1962, pp. 213-214.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 213, 214.

<sup>4</sup>Mark Lane, Rush to Judgment (1966; rpt. New York: Dell, 1975), "Acknowledgements."

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 203, 207.

<sup>7</sup>Hans Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 53.

<sup>8</sup>Lane, pp. 152, 375.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. xxxvi, 182.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. xxxvi, 182, ftnt, 185.

<sup>11</sup>William C. Baum, "The Conspiracy Theory of Politics of the Radical Right in the United States," Diss. Iowa State 1960, p. 61.

<sup>12</sup>Gerald L. K. Smith. Address before the Christian Nationalist Rally, St. Louis, Mo., 1948 or 1949, quoted in Baum, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup>This generalization may not hold for leftist extrem-

ists, since they often suggest "revolution" as the solution to social evil.

<sup>14</sup>Toch, p. 69.

<sup>15</sup>William R. McPherson, "Parallels in Extremist Ideology," Diss. Harvard 1967. As summarized in Seymour M. Lipset and Earl Raab, The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1977, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 17-18.

<sup>16</sup>One extant study comparing "extremist" and "mainstream" discourse is Lynn G. Llewellyn, "The Ultra-conservative and the Mainstream Press: A Comparative Analysis," Diss. George Washington 1969.

<sup>17</sup>Baum, pp. 141-143; Roger A. Remington, "The Function of the 'Conspiracy Theory' in American Intellectual History," Diss. Saint Louis 1965, pp. 4-5.

<sup>18</sup>David Brion Davis, The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p. 72.

<sup>19</sup>These notions of liberalism and conservatism are not intended to be definitive; they are merely two of many possible interpretations.

<sup>20</sup>Davis, p. 84.

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