

---

## Principalities & Powers

---

by Samuel Francis

### Conspiracy

History, wrote Voltaire, is the sound of wooden shoes running up the backstairs and of silken slippers running down—a remark that implies that the real story of high politics is never what we are able to see but always a tale hidden from public view. Since he lived in an age of despots, enlightened and otherwise, and was on intimate terms with several of them, Voltaire was in a good position to know, and it's doubtful, if he were alive today in the age of such despots as a Free Press and Open Government, that he would be any more convinced that what he saw was really what was going on inside the dark corridors of power. Indeed, in the last few years, for all the disclosure laws enacted and all the ethics codes by which politicians and the press claim to abide, an ever-growing number of Americans seems to believe that conspiracies are firmly in the saddle and that the saddle is firmly buckled on their own backs.

The Clinton era has encouraged this belief, and probably not since the mysteries of Pearl Harbor and communist espionage in the Roosevelt administration has the American presidency been as engulfed in distrust and suspicion as it is today. Whitewater, Travelgate, a steamy labyrinth of sexual escapades, and the death of Vince Foster are only the icing on the conspiratorial cake. There are also the Waco massacre, the apparent coverup in the Ruby Ridge bloodletting, various anomalies in the Oklahoma City bombing and its investigation, a plethora of stories about drug smuggling out of Mena, Arkansas, and a jungle of questions about such issues as NAFTA, the Mexican bailout, and the New World Order. These are merely the reasonable and important subjects of conspiracy speculation. More recently, there are new theories about the strange but timely demises of Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, ex-CIA Director William Colby, and Admiral Jeremy Boorda. Then there are the wilder shores that dredge up black helicopters, golden fringe around the flag, microchip implants, and new designs for American currency. Finally, the theories lurch unsteadily into the sweaty underbrush of madness, where

the fantastic fictions of the *X-Files* take tea with platter-eyed UFO aliens and the Elders of Zion. And these are simply the conspiracy theories favored by the right. On the left, one enters yet another hall of mirrors where the reflections of reality are even more grotesque.

Whatever else conspiracy theories prove, their prevalence at certain periods of history invariably shows the impending collapse of public trust in the way things are, a readiness to ascribe to the occupants of a society's most visible and respected positions of leadership the most villainous purposes and the most ruthless means of attaining them. It is no accident that most of the major revolutionary movements in modern history have wrapped themselves in conspiracy theories or that, when such movements have been successful, a good part of the populace embraced their ideas. Nor is it an accident that in our own day such potentially revolutionary forces as the citizens' militias and similar Middle American Radical movements are among the main purveyors of conspiracy theories. And yet, for all their flaws—the absence of reliable evidence, the distraction from issues of more substance that they induce, and the delusion of an invincible enemy that they spawn—conspiracy theories point to larger and more important truths than those who weave them usually seem to realize.

A simple legal definition of conspiracy is that it is an agreement among two or more parties to commit some illegal act, but in the larger sense of the word “conspiracy,” the element of illegality is not necessary. What is necessary is the element of secrecy, and in the sense of an agreement among two or more parties to undertake some common action for a secret or undisclosed end or by secret or undisclosed means, it ought to be obvious that human beings do little else but conspire throughout their entire lives. One plans to get married, to have children, to pursue a particular career, to promote a particular business transaction, to run for office, or to adopt a certain policy toward the Third World, and each and every one of these courses of action, insofar as it is undertaken in concert with other participants and insofar as the participants do not disclose their

plans before it is convenient to do so, constitutes a conspiracy. The collaboration involved in them and the degree of secrecy that attends them are not different in kind from those involved in planning a revolution, an assassination, or a long-term subterfuge by which a close and cryptic oligarchy takes over the government of a republic. Not only do politicians, bankers, priests, Freemasons, Jews, and intelligence agencies conspire, so does everyone else. The main difference between the undisclosed plots and plans of the principals of the most popular and perennial conspiracy theories and those of everyone else is that nobody much cares about Aunt Gertrude's conspiracy with her bridge club to arrange the marriage of her nephew, or Mr. Podsnip's conspiracy with his business partners to build more parking lots. But whether we are engaged in designing One World Government or new drapes for the upstairs guest room, all of us are neck-deep in conspiracies of one kind or another most of the time.

Until the blessings of modern government and journalism were inflicted upon us, this was obviously true of political affairs. The kings and even the republics of Voltaire's age did not spend a great deal of energy informing their subjects and citizens of what they were doing or why they were doing it. To most of the literate public of premodern Europe, what went on in the councils of state or even in those parliamentary assemblies that existed was obscure, and to the far larger nonliterate public it was totally invisible. The elementary facts of history that any college survey text recounts about the age of Louis XIV or Charles I were unknown to most of their contemporaries, and even well-informed public servants like Samuel Pepys in late-17th century England entertained only the foggiest ideas about what his government was really doing. It is not inaccurate to describe conspiracy as the normal mode of government throughout most of human history, and even today we learn what really went on in a particular administration, war, or congressional battle only after a generation or so of the most intense investigation by participants, journalists, and historians.

Of course, to say that conspiracy is a

normal and regular mode of conduct for human beings does not mean that all conspiracy theories are true. The late Murray Rothbard, with his usual clear-headedness, pointed to two abiding flaws of conspiracy theories in an article published in *Reason* magazine in 1977. One flaw is that simply showing that an event benefited a particular party (the *cui bono* argument) does not prove that that party was behind the event; you have to produce empirical evidence of the party's causal role in bringing the event about. The other and more serious flaw is that conspiracy theorists have an irrepressible habit of piling their theories together to formulate what might be called the Unified Field Theory of History. "The bad conspiracy analyst," Murray wrote, seems to have a compulsion to wrap up all the conspiracies, all the bad guy power blocs, into one giant conspiracy. Instead of seeing that there are several blocs trying to gain control of government, sometimes in conflict and sometimes in alliance, he has to assume—again without evidence—that a small group of men controls them all, and only seems to send them into conflict.

Rothbard's concept of "power blocs" points to a key distinction between vulgar conspiracy theory and the more sophisticated analysis of power relationships that he advocated and practiced. A "power bloc" in Rothbard's sense is very similar to what the Italian elite theorist Gaetano Mosca called a "political force." In Mosca's view, human societies are composed of contending political forces that seek power, and these forces include all groups able to organize and mobilize considerable numbers of people and resources around them. In the late Roman Empire, Christianity and (for a time) Mithraism were such forces, able to attract a large following and to compete for power in the crumbling imperial state. In other periods of history, significant political forces have mobilized around certain military technologies or forms of organization (the Greek phalanx or Roman legion, the mounted warriors and English longbows of the Middle Ages), or economic interests (industrial wealth in the early 19th century). What may be a significant political force, one able to win the support of followers and adherents and exercise power in one historical epoch or circumstance, may cease to be significant when other forces are able to resist, overcome, or replace it. Those political forces or power blocs that are most

successful in mobilizing power then constitute an elite or ruling class.

Power blocs contend through conspiratorial means, sometimes, as Rothbard notes, in conflict and sometimes in alliance, but what is important to understand about the art and science of conspiracy is that conspiracies on a large scale are never successful unless they are backed by forces that are historically significant, by forces able to mobilize followers and resources effectively. James Burnham in *Suicide of the West* pointed to this truth in a comment on the "revisionist" theories of the left and right about conspiratorial shenanigans to bring the United States into the two world wars:

Both sets of revisionists are unwilling to recognize that those plots could succeed only because the United States was indissolubly linked by economic, fiscal, technological and strategic chains [i.e., historically significant political forces] to those wars from their beginnings and from before they began. There were just as many plots to keep the nation out of war as there were to get it in. The revisionists never explain why the pro-war plotting succeeded but the anti-war plotting so palpably failed.

This is why in this century the conspiracies of the left have been largely successful while those of the right have largely fizzled. The left, mobilized around and expressing the political force of modern managerial groups relying on the techniques of management to organize mass society, has represented a rising social and political force; the right, expressing the political force of social and economic elites that have been in protracted decline since the late 19th century, does not. Hence, groups beloved of right-wing conspiracy theorists like the Council on Foreign Relations or the Trilateral Commission are far more successful in implementing their rather discreet plans and agendas than their equally discreet counterparts on the right. The CFR and the Commission, of course, no more control American government and society than the aristocratic clubs of London controlled Great Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries. Like the clubs, the Council and the Commission are merely formal organizational expressions of the elites

that actually run things.

The problem with this concept of conspiracy as "power bloc" or "political force" is that it tends to take all the fun out of conspiracy theory. Instead of locating villainy in a small, monolithic, invisible, and all but invincible band of plotters, it offers a sociology of elites as the main explanation of the dominant historical trends of the age. But truth, if it is less fun than fiction, is at least more useful. The power bloc model ought to dispose of several of the wackier conspiracy theories without further discussion. We are not talking about Freemasons or Illuminati or Satanists or rabbis who pore over the Talmud in a millennium-long quest to make us believe in evolution, but about which groups control the instruments of political, economic, and cultural power and how they organize and use their power.

And, if the power bloc model immediately disposes of various useless and untrue "theories" of conspiracy, it also helps point us in the right direction in thinking about what the real problems of the distribution—and redistribution—of power are. For all the obnoxiousness, repulsiveness, and outright crookedness of the Clinton administration, Mr. Clinton and his wife are not the real problems imagined by those who spend their waking hours exploring the sinister conspiracies in which the First Couple and their cronies are supposedly involved. What matters—if not for the Republican Party, then at least for a serious Middle American radicalism that seeks to challenge the dominant power blocs of the country and to develop itself as a voice for a new power bloc—is not who, if anybody, murdered Vince Foster or how Hillary made her millions, but how this administration and any Republican or Democratic administration likely to replace it reflect the same structure of power that has prevailed since at least the New Deal. Once Middle Americans begin to grasp the truth that it is the power structure rather than a man, a woman, or a small gang of swindlers and sex fiends that lies behind the dispossession of their country and their cultural and economic destruction, then they will begin to understand that what really goes on behind the scenes is far deeper, far more alarming, and far more radicalizing than any tales of silken slippers running down Mr. Clinton's backstairs.

<C>

## Letter From Australia

by R.J. Stove

### Geoffrey Blainey and the Multicultural Nirvana



One's kindest possible response to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's typical attempt at a sitcom is Mark Twain's quip about *The Vicar of Wakefield*: "Nothing could be funnier than its pathos, and nothing could be sadder than its humour." Hence the astonished pleasure inspired by the Corporation's dazzling new comedy *Frontline*. A merciless skewering of current-affairs talking heads' moral pretensions, *Frontline* initially leaves viewers laughing hard enough to incur hernias, and afterward leaves them awestruck at its parodistic brilliance. Its second series contained the show's most horribly acute episode yet: a chilling tale about a harmless and mild-mannered professor who has had the impudence to publish a statistical survey of ethnic groups in Australia. His volume is of the driest, least controversial and—one would have hoped—most innocuous sort; but just because it touches, however soporifically, upon race, the *Frontline* motormouths are convinced that its author is a racist. (As Sam, the show's executive producer put it: "Can you find out whether he's got any right-wing affiliations—political, social. . . . Does he like Wagner. . . . Are his parents German?") The climax comes with *Frontline*'s anchorman Mike Moore perfecting his Vyshinsky imitation, at the hapless academic's expense, on prime-time TV:

MIKE: Welcome back. Our nation has been rocked over recent days by the release of a book that some are calling a Third Reich-type document. Entitled *Above Average*, it threatens to tear this country's social fabric apart. It was written by controversial professor Desmond

Lowe, and he joins me now. Thanks for coming on.

PROF: Thank you. I certainly didn't set out to be controversial. . . . My point was to identify prevalence and frequency on a wide range of criteria. It's not a static commentary of predetermination or causal relationships.

MIKE (not grasping this): Sure. I mean, that's obvious. But you mention race.

PROF: Yes . . .

MIKE: You attribute characteristics on the basis of race.

PROF: Statistical characteristics.

MIKE (interrupting): That's racism.

PROF: No.

MIKE: You said it.

PROF: But I . . . It was . . .

MIKE (aggressively): You said it, professor. That's racism. [Cut back to control room.]

SAM (impressed): Wow, Mike. [Cut back to studio.]

PROF: I was pointing to elements that can be altered.

MIKE: Social engineering—isn't that what Hitler did?

PROF: No, no. That's not social engineering.

MIKE: You're an apologist for Hitler.

PROF: I'm referring to my book.

MIKE: So I guess you would deny the holocaust, yes?

Every *Frontline* addict with an IQ of more than single figures knew at once whom the scriptwriters had in mind when creating the professor: Geoffrey Blainey, Australia's finest and most maligned historian. Blainey's publications

(unlike those of Moore's victim) could never be called dry, much less soporific. There, however, the list of differences between him and his fictional counterpart ends.

Five years back, any ABC program which suggested even by implication that Blainey's existence might be defensible in the cosmic scheme of things, let alone that his cogent and dignified criticisms of unrestricted immigration might deserve study, would never have gone to air. These days—though, of course, almost no one in Australian public life has been so hubristic as to suggest that there was anything actually wrong with howling down Blainey in the 1980's—his former attackers tend to be strangely mute. Insofar as Australia's We Hate Blainey Movement continues to function, most of its members come from the mass media's more overtly putrescent elements: from the Mike Moore intellectual stratum, in short. A decade ago the movement attracted, shall we say, a better class of thug: any Sydney or Melbourne lecturer who couldn't attract an ululating rent-a-mob to hear his curses of Blainey The Racist (curses no less sincere for being ritualistic) wasn't even trying. That heady era has long since ended. Where once total certitude as to Blainey's unfitness for human society reigned amid the chattering classes, there is gradually appearing an intimation of sheepish acknowledgment that in certain areas of unambiguous fact he was right and his critics wrong. His last and best book, *A Shorter History of Australia*, has earned reviews so respectful that for all their accuracy they make one's head swim. Can this man, praised on all sides as a genius of his exacting craft, be the Geoffrey Blainey whom these selfsame journals once spoke of in terms that would prematurely whiten Ice-T's hair?

For Blainey the trouble began in 1984, when he gave a Rotary speech at the town of Warrnambool, 250 kilometers southwest of Melbourne. Before that, he had been widely regarded as a figure with, if not mildly leftist sympathies, then at least a conspicuous absence of what in Australia's debauched lexical currency get called "conservative" ones. In 1973, Gough Whitlam had been eager enough to name the 43-year-old