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Dances with Devils How Apocalyptic and Millennialist Themes Influence Right Wing Scapegoating and Conspiracism

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This study originally appeared in the Fall 1998 issue of *The Public Eye* magazine.

Revised 4/16/99

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Part One:

The Roots of the Apocalyptic Paradigm

An Overview of the Dynamics

The approach of the year 2000 has already stimulated widespread discussion of apocalyptic fears and millennialist expectations. Often lost in the discussion is the important *ongoing* role that specific types of apocalyptic and millennialist thinking play in shaping the demonization, scapegoating, and conspiracism used by various right-wing political and social movements.¹

A remarkable number of myths, metaphors, images, symbols, phrases, and icons in Western culture flow from Christian Biblical prophecies about apocalyptic confrontations and millennial transformation.² The Bible's Book of Revelation contains warnings that the end of time is foreshadowed by a vast Satanic conspiracy involving high government officials who betray the decent and devout productive citizens, while sinful and subversive tools of the Devil gnaw away at society from below.

In *The Origins of Satan*, author Elaine Pagels points out that today:

"Many religious people who no longer believe in Satan, along with countless others who do not identify with any religious tradition, nevertheless are influenced by this cultural legacy whenever they perceive social and political conflict in terms of the forces of good contending against the forces of evil in the world."³

The anticipation of a righteous struggle against evil conspiracies has become a central apocalyptic narrative in our nation's religious, secular, political, and cultural discourse.⁴ This is certainly evident in popular culture where films such as "Armageddon" and "Apocalypse Now" and the TV series "Millennium" name the tradition while mainstreaming the ideas. Films

including "Rambo," "Mad Max," "Red Dawn," "Die Hard," "Terminator" and their sequels reinterpret apocalyptic visions while obscuring their origins.⁵ The "X-Files" film and its related TV series are quintessential apocalyptic narratives. "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" stomps incarnate evil in a weekly TV series. Prophetic scripture provides the paradigm for sensational scripts. What is entertainment for some, however, is spiritual and political reality for others.

The irrational fear of powerful conspiracies—conspiracism—has flourished episodically throughout US history. Usually it is right-wing groups that have fanned apocalyptic fears of evil conspiracies to create a powerful political weapon. The results can be devastating. There have been crusades against sin; waves of government repression justified by claims of subversive conspiracies; and campaigns to purge alien ideas and persons from our shores.⁶ Starting in the 1620s, witch hunts swept New England for a century, and fears of plots by Freemasons or Catholics swept the nation in the 1800s. This century has produced allegations of a Jewish banking cabal behind the Federal Reserve, and the anticommunist witch hunts of the McCarthy Period in the 1950s.⁷

Could it happen again at the end of the 20th century? Holly Sklar, author of *Chaos or Community: Seeking Solutions, Not Scapegoats for Bad Economics*, argues that it might:

"The demonization of immigrants, welfare recipients, people of color, and single mothers is already tolerated to an alarming degree in mainstream political debate. Now as we head toward the millennium, we also face the rising fervor of those driven by visions of culture war and apocalypse."⁸

Contemporary interpretations of apocalyptic millennialism can be sorted into three related and

overlapping tendencies that range from sacred to secular: First, in the view of some Christian fundamentalists, we are in the apocalyptic millennial "End Times" or "Last Days" prophesied in Revelation and other books of the Bible; Second, a more generic and often secularized apocalyptic world view of impending crisis is reflected in diverse movements across the political spectrum; Third, there is a generic sense of expectation and renewal, generated merely by the approach of the calendar year 2000, because it is a millennial milestone in human recorded history.⁹

These apocalyptic fears and millennial expectations in turn influence three broad contemporary right-wing movements in the US:

- Activists in various sectors of the Christian Right, ranging from electoral to insurgent, and with varying views regarding whether or not the year 2000 marks the End Times. This includes attempts by Christian hard-liners to purify the society as part of a religious revival, such as the homophobic statements by Trent Lott, and advertisements calling on homosexuals to "cure" themselves by turning to Jesus. The most aggressive activists engage in theologically-motivated acts of violence against abortion providers.
- Right wing populists, including survivalists, gun rights activists, anti-elite conspiracists, and participants in the Patriot & armed militia movements. Conspiracist scapegoating is rampant in this sector. A popular speaker in these circles is Robert K. Spear who believes the formation of armed Christian communities is necessary as we approach the End Times. Preparing to survive the coming apocalypse has led to a survivalist subculture that stores food and conducts self-defense training—a culture that now spans a continuum from religious to secular in right-wing populist groups.
- The far right, including neonazis and persons influenced by far right versions of the Christian Identity religion. Identity beliefs were behind the assassination of Denver talk show host Alan Berg, a spree of armed robberies and murders starting in the 1980s, the tragic shoot-out between federal agents and the Weaver family in Idaho, and—in some reports—the brutal dragging death of a Black man in Jasper, Texas.

In each of these sectors, scapegoating is widespread. Scapegoating always needs to be taken seriously when it becomes tolerated in political and social discourse.¹⁰ But scapegoating that is generated or enhanced by apocalyptic fears has distinctive features and targets.¹¹ Any group can be framed as doing evil or being evil, given enough creative energy on the part of the scapegoater, although the actual framing of the

allegations will depend on the sector of the right—Christian nationalist, right wing populist, or far right.¹²

The approaching millennium creates an apocalyptic milieu in which demonization, scapegoating, and conspiracism could again have serious consequences in our society, especially since rhetoric has already turned to violence. If we are to limit the potential short-term damage, and understand the significance of the long-term dynamic, we need to better understand the thinking of those who live in the shadow of the Apocalypse.

Most people delving into the topic for the first time find the layers of complexity, unfamiliar vocabulary, and competing timelines to be daunting. The effort is nevertheless worthwhile because it helps to explain what often appears to the uninitiated as inexplicable behavior among members of right-wing social and political movements.¹³ What do Christian fundamentalists mean when they warn about the "signs of the times?" How did apocalyptic millennialism set the stage for the Oklahoma City bombing? Why do members of ultra-conservative groups such as the John Birch Society and Eagle Forum worry that the UN is trying to create a globalist "One World Government?" What is the "The Mark of the Beast?"

Behind much of the current resurgence of scapegoating and the spread of conspiracy theories about secret elites lies apocalyptic and millennialist themes as old as Satan.

Apocalypse

The word "revelation" is a translation of the Greek word "*apokalypsis*."¹⁴ The original Greek term referred to unveiling hidden information or revealing secret knowledge concerning unfolding human events. Thus, the words "apocalypse," "revelation," and "prophecy" are closely related. Prophets, by definition, are apocalyptic.

In its more common usage, the word "apocalypse" has come to mean the belief in an approaching confrontation, cataclysmic event, or transformation of epochal proportion, about which a select few have forewarning so they can make appropriate preparations. Those who believe in a coming apocalypse might be optimistic about the outcome of the apocalyptic moment, anticipating a chance for positive transformational change; or they might be pessimistic, anticipating a doomsday; or they might anticipate a period of violence or chaos with an uncertain outcome.¹⁵

In Christianity, the Apocalypse refers to a gigantic global battle with Satanic forces that signals the end of time. The apocalyptic tradition also exists in Judaism, Islam, and other religions, and pre-dated Christianity.¹⁶

Apocalypticism can also be found among a few New Age devotees and environmental activists.¹⁷

Revelation Interpreted as Apocalyptic Conspiracist Narrative

Christian apocalypticism is based on many sources in the Bible, including the Old Testament books of Daniel and Ezekiel, and the New Testament Gospel of Matthew. The primary Biblical source, however, is the Book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament.¹⁸ The central narrative of Revelation is that righteous Christians need to know they will be tricked and betrayed by trusted political and religious leaders who are secretly conspiring with Satan. Revelation, the chronicle of an apocalyptic vision, was written about 95 AD, but parts derive from prophetic elements of the book of Daniel and other Old Testament books.¹⁹ The identity of John of Patmos, the author of Revelation, is disputed, but most experts suggest it was not the same John, the disciple of Jesus, who authored the fourth Gospel.²⁰

Revelation describes in graphic terms what will happen when an angry God finally intervenes in human affairs at the end of time. The narrative describes the End Times as a period of widespread sinfulness, moral depravity, and crass materialism. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse ride in bringing God's wrath in the form of wars, disease, civil strife, and natural disasters. Satan's chief henchman appears in human form as the Antichrist, a popular world leader who secretly harbors sympathy for the Devil. He promises peace and unity of all nations under one world government—but it's a conspiracy. His agents are tracking down and punishing Christians who refuse to abandon their faith. Satan's allies receive a mark—the Mark of the Beast—represented by the number 666.

This period of hard times are called “the Tribulations” and culminate in a final cataclysmic doomsday confrontation of massed armies in the Middle East, at a place named Armageddon. Good triumphs over evil at the battle of Armageddon, ushering in a millennium of Christian rule.

The narrative of Revelation provides important clues for understanding the rhetoric and actions of devout Christians who are influenced by apocalypticism and millennialism. Among Christians, belief in an actual coming apocalypse is particularly strong among those Fundamentalists who not only read the Bible literally, but also consider prophetic Biblical text to be a coded timetable or script revealing the future.²¹ Those that believe the apocalypse is at hand can act out those theological beliefs in social, cultural, and political arenas. An example might be when believers view current world events as “signs of the End Times” or see those with whom they disagree as agents of the

Antichrist. Today, apocalyptic themes influence many diverse Christian groups, including those who do not think the End Times are close at hand. Conspiracist appeals also reach a wide secular audience of alienated persons on a cultural and often unconscious level.

Millennium

Considerable attention has been focused on the fact that the year 2000 marks the turn of a calendar millennium. The word *Millennium* specifically refers to a span of one thousand years. It has come to mean the point at which one period of one thousand years ends and the next begins. For most Christians, the millennial year 2000 will be a time of celebration, reflection, and renewal.

Contemporary Christian Fundamentalists interpret Revelation as a prophetic warning about tumultuous apocalyptic events marking End Times that herald the second coming of Christ. Most also believe that when Christ returns, he will reign for a period of one-thousand years—a millennium. So the turn of the calendar to the year 2000 doesn't necessarily have theological significance. Norman Cohn, in *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, chronicles how Christian apocalyptic fervor appears at seemingly random dates throughout Western history.²² A major US episode of Christian millennialist fervor occurred among the Millerites in the 1840s.²³

Any date in any calendar system (Judaic or Islamic for example) can be understood as significant given the creativity of those using numerological equations to find justification.²⁴ But the rotund numerological significance of the year 2000 has spawned millennialist expectations both inside and outside Christianity, with apocalyptic warnings now coming from contemporary Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and New Age prophets.²⁵

Visit a large bookstore and scan the titles in the religion, prophecy, new age, and occult sections and you will see a cornucopia of books anticipating the year 2000. Surfing the Web reveals a pulsating multimedia cacophony of millennial expectation. The topics range from secular to spiritual and from cataclysmic doom to transcendent rapture in what Michael Barkun has called an “improvisational style” of millennialism and apocalypticism.²⁶

For instance, the Heaven's Gate mass suicide in 1997 merged millennial prophetic visions from the Bible, the prophecies of Nostradamus, and the literary genre of science fiction.²⁷ Conspiracist William Cooper weaves an apocalyptic vision out of historic anti-Semitism and modern UFO lore.²⁸

Two Apocalyptic Traditions in Christianity

In *Anti-Apocalypse*, academic Lee Quinby argues that "Apocalypticism in each of its modes fuels discord, breeds anxiety or apathy, and sometimes causes panic," and that "this process can occur at the individual, community, national, or international level." What makes apocalypse so compelling," argues Quinby," is its promise of future perfection, eternal happiness, and godlike understanding of life, but it is that very will to absolute power and knowledge that produces its compulsions of violence, hatred, and oppression."²⁹

Yet not all contemporary Christian interpretations of the book of Revelation promote apocalyptic demonization. Within Christianity, there are two competing views of how to interpret the apocalyptic themes in the Bible. One view identifies evil with specific persons and groups, seeking to identify those in league with the Devil. This view easily lends itself to demonization. A more positive form of interpreting apocalyptic prophecy is not based on demonization; it is promoted by those Christians who see evil in the will to dominate and oppress. Apocalyptic thinking, in this case, envisions a liberation for the oppressed. The two interpretations represent a deep division within Christianity.

Even some relatively conservative and orthodox Christians look to the prophetic tradition of siding with the poor and oppressed, and these themes can be found in both the New and Old Testaments.³⁰ This is the tradition of the Social Gospel in Protestantism, and Liberation Theology in Catholicism. It can be found in today's Sojourners group and the tradition of "prophetic anger" coupled with "evangelical populism."³¹ Social justice activist Daniel Berrigan uses apocalyptic discourse in the Bible as a tool in challenging oppression, corruption, and tyranny.³² Philosopher René Girard argues that the New Testament can be used to help unravel scapegoating.³³ Author and activist Cornel West identifies himself with a prophetic tradition rooted in African-American Christianity and the struggle for Black civil rights. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached from this tradition when he spoke truth to power.

Within mainstream denominations, independent evangelical churches, progressive Christian communities, and followers of liberation theology are many Christians who are painfully aware of those historic periods when some Christian leaders sided with oppression, and used demonization as a tool to protect and extend power and privilege. This discussion seeks to honestly explore the heritage of apocalyptic demonization, or a doomsday version of millennialism, but not to stereotype all Christians as continuing that heritage.³⁴ In *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind*, Peter J. Gomes, minister in The

Memorial Church at Harvard University, argues that the Bible must be read carefully to avoid using the text to legitimize "doctrinaire prejudices" in the dominant culture. Gomes suggests Biblical literacy as an antidote to Biblical literalism.³⁵

Some of the most vocal critics of apocalyptic demonization and conspiracist scapegoating come from within Christianity. One such critique is Gregory S. Camp's *Selling Fear: Conspiracy Theories and End-Times Paranoia*, which is impressive both as a historical and theological work. Camp warns of the "very real danger that Christians could pick up some extra spiritual baggage" by credulously embracing conspiracy theories.³⁶ As early as 1993, Bruce Barron wrote a stinging rebuke of apocalyptic Christian conspiracism in the *Christian Research Journal*, when reviewing Pat Robertson's 1992 *The New World Order* and Gary H. Kah's 1991 *En Route to Global Occupation*.³⁷ Paul T. Coughlin, cautions conservative Christians in *Secrets, Plots & Hidden Agendas: What You Don't Know About Conspiracy Theories*.³⁸

Even skeptics can attempt to be respectful of Christianity as is author Tim Callahan who debunks the idea that the Bible can be used as a crystal ball in the 1997 *Bible Prophecy: Failure or Fulfillment?*³⁹ The danger comes not from Christianity, but from Christians who combine Biblical literalism, apocalyptic timetables, demonization, and oppressive prejudices.

From Demonization to Scapegoating to Conspiracism

The poisoned fruit of conspiracist scapegoating is baked into the American apple pie, and the ingredients include destructive versions of apocalyptic fears and millennialist expectations. This is true whether we are studying the sector of the Christian Right that is consciously influenced by Biblical prophecy, or more secularized right-wing movements for which Bible-based apocalypticism and millennialism have faded into unconscious—yet still influential—metaphors. To fully comprehend the subtext of many US right-wing movements, we need to review the interactive dynamics among demonization, scapegoating, and conspiracism.

Demonization

Demonization often begins with marginalization, the process in which targeted individuals or groups are placed outside the circle of wholesome mainstream society through political propaganda and age-old prejudice. The next step is objectification or dehumanization, the process of negatively labeling a person or group of people so they become perceived more as objects than as real people. Dehumanization often is associated with the belief that a particular group of people are inferior or threatening. The final step is

demonization; the person or group is seen as totally malevolent, sinful, and evil. Needless to say, it is easier to rationalize stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and even violence against those who are dehumanized or demonized.

Demonization fuels dualism—a form of binary thinking that divides the world into good versus evil with no middle ground tolerated. Dualism allows no acknowledgment of complexity, nuance, or ambiguity in debate, and promotes hostility toward those who suggest coexistence, toleration, pragmatism, compromise, or mediation. James Aho observes that our notions of the enemy “in our everyday life world,” is that the “enemy’s presence in our midst is a pathology of the social organism serious enough to require the most far-reaching remedies: quarantine, political excision, or, to use a particularly revealing expression, liquidation and expulsion.”⁴⁰

Scapegoating

The ritualized transference of evil onto a demonized “other” and the subsequent expulsion of that “evil” is a familiar theme across centuries and cultures.⁴¹ In western culture the term “scapegoat” can be traced to an early Judaic ritual described in the Book of Leviticus in the Bible.⁴² The term scapegoat, however, has evolved to mean “anyone who must bear the responsibility symbolically or concretely for the sins of others,” Richard Landes explains. “Psychologically, the tendency to find scapegoats is a result of the common defense mechanism of denial through projection.”⁴³

One cannot, however, take a psychological model and directly apply it to society.⁴⁴ As psychiatrist Susan Fisher explains, the mechanism of scapegoating within a family—a well-studied phenomena—does not necessarily work the same way as the scapegoating of groups on a societal level where “the scapegoated group serves more as a metaphor,”⁴⁵ Scapegoating by large groups and social movements is not an indication of mass mental dysfunction, even though there may be psychological issues involved, and even though some of the individuals involved may suffer from a variety of psychological problems.⁴⁶ Recent research on the subject suggests the phenomena is more complicated than commonly pictured, involving several personality types and multiple psychological processes.⁴⁷

Scapegoating on a societal level can be seen as a process whereby the hostility and aggression of an angry and frustrated group are directed away from a rational explanation of a conflict, and projected onto targets demonized by irrational claims of wrongdoing. As a result, the scapegoated group bears the blame for causing the conflict, while the scapegoaters feel a sense of innocence and increased unity. It is scapegoating whether the conflict is real or imaginary, the grievances

are legitimate or illegitimate, or the target is wholly innocent or partially culpable. Scapegoating can be used as a rationale to justify the retention or acquisition of unfair power and privilege.

Scapegoats are often pointed out by demagogues—leaders willing to use emotionally-manipulative appeals coupled with simplistic and subjective explanations.⁴⁸ The arguments that demagogues use to prove the culpability of the scapegoats may seem obviously artificial, but given the unresolved anger and frustration of the persons being mobilized, any attempt at explaining and perhaps resolving the conflict seems better than indifference and inaction. Demagogues often portray the scapegoat as not just culpable but actually evil; demonizing the scapegoat by claiming the scapegoat is involved in a sinister conspiracy that threatens to sabotage the entire society.

Conspiracism

It is very effective to mobilize mass support against a scapegoated enemy by claiming that the enemy is part of a vast insidious conspiracy against the common good. In conspiracist discourse, the supposed conspirators serve as scapegoats for the actual conflict within the society.⁴⁹ The conspiracist worldview sees secret plots by tiny cabals of evildoers as the major motor powering important historical events; makes irrational leaps of logic in analyzing factual evidence in order to “prove” connections; blames social conflicts on demonized scapegoats; and constructs a closed metaphysical worldview that is highly resistant to criticism.⁵⁰ Historian David Brion Davis notes that movements to counter the “threat of conspiratorial subversion” have a special status and meaning in the US, “a nation born in revolution and based on the sovereignty of the people.”⁵¹

By blaming a small group of individuals for vast or horrific crimes, conspiracism serves to divert attention from the institutional locus of power that drives systemic oppression, injustice and exploitation. As explained by Frank P. Mintz:

“Conspiracism serves the needs of diverse political and social groups in America and elsewhere. It identifies elites, blames them for economic and social catastrophes, and assumes that things will be better once popular action can remove them from positions of power.”⁵²

Right-wing conspiracist scapegoating not only identifies and blames elites, but also identifies and blames alleged “subversives” and “parasites” from groups that have relatively low social or economic status.

In Western culture, conspiracist narratives are significantly influenced by metaphors from Biblical apocalyptic prophecy. Stephen O’Leary in *Arguing the*

Apocalypse contends that the process of demonization is central to all forms of conspiracist thinking.⁵³ Leonard Zeskind argues it is impossible to analyze the contemporary political right, without understanding the “all-powerful cosmology of diabolical evil.”⁵⁴ To Zeskind, conspiracy theories are “essentially theologically constructed views of events. Conspiracy theories are renderings of a metaphysical devil which is trans-historical, omnipotent, and destructive of God’s will on earth. This is true even for conspiracy theories in which there is not an explicit religious target.”⁵⁵

S. L. Gardiner points out that many current “conspiracy theories directed against the government are part of a *rhetorical strategy* genuinely intended to undermine state power and government authority,” but this occurs in a “metaphysical context” in which “those in control are implicated in a Manichean struggle of absolute good against absolute evil. That they are the agents of the devil is proved by the very fact that they control a corrupt system.”⁵⁶ The fear of a subversive conspiracy to create a collectivist one world government, however, spans a continuum of beliefs from religious to secular.

Philosopher Herman Sinaiko observes that “The most decent and modest communities have people in their midst who are prone to scapegoating and who see the world as run by conspiracies. A healthy community is organized in a way that controls them and suppresses their tendencies. When a community is in crisis, the standards and control mechanisms are weakened, and these people step forward and find their voice and an audience.”⁵⁷

Mass outbreaks of conspiracism are a distinct narrative form of scapegoating in the political and social arena rather than a mass outbreak of paranoid psychological pathology. There are certainly mentally-unbalanced individuals who promote paranoid-sounding conspiracist theories, however it is simplistic to imagine that these suspicious and often anti-social individuals periodically join together to form large mass movements around shared goals. It is also naive to assume that power elites or government agencies are exclusively populated by clinically paranoid leaders who see subversion behind all social change and, therefore unilaterally activate the repressive agencies of the state. Conspiracist scapegoating certainly involves psychological processes, but it plays an objective role as a useful social and political mechanism in actual power struggles throughout US history. An understanding of that role is essential to explaining its power and effectiveness.

Conspiracism can occur as a characteristic of mass movements, between sectors in an intra-elite power struggle, or as a justification for state agencies to engage in repressive actions. Conspiracist scapegoating

is woven deeply into US culture and the process appears not just on the political right but in center and left constituencies as well.⁵⁸ An entrenched network of conspiracy-mongering information outlets spreads dubious stories about public and private figures and institutions, using a variety of corporate and alternative media.⁵⁹

In highlighting conspiracist allegation as a form of scapegoating, it is important to remember the following:

- All conspiracist theories start with a grain of truth, which is then transmogrified through hyperbole and filtered through pre-existing myth and prejudice,
- People who believe conspiracist allegations sometimes act on those irrational beliefs, which has concrete consequences in the real world,
- Conspiracist thinking and scapegoating are symptoms, not causes, of underlying societal frictions, and as such should not be ignored,
- Scapegoating and conspiracist allegations are tools that can be used by cynical leaders to mobilize a mass following,
- Supremacist and fascist organizers use conspiracist theories as a relatively unthreatening entry point in making contact with potential recruits,
- Even when conspiracist theories do not center on Jews, people of color, or other scapegoated groups, they create an environment where racism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of prejudice and oppression can flourish.

Key Narrative Roots

The Salem witch trials sought to expose witches and their allies as conspiring with the Devil.⁶⁰ Modern scholarship has shown that persons accused of being witches were disproportionately women who did not conform to societal expectations, and that there was frequently an economic dimension to the charge, such as a disputed inheritance.⁶¹ This is evidence that demonization, scapegoating, and conspiracism—elements of every witch hunt—arrived on our shores with the overwhelmingly Protestant early settlers and their view that Godly persons were in a struggle with a literal Satan. These ideas were influenced by the apocalyptic narrative of Revelation, but were not always linked to a specific widespread period of millennial expectation. They did set the stage, however, for the generalized paradigm of conspiracism in the US, which revolves around narratives of subversion by evil forces doing the work of the Devil.

Satan, the Devil, and the Antichrist

What Christians conceive as the embodiment of evil has varied over time. According to Robert Fuller, in

his book, *Naming the Antichrist*, "During the first three centuries of Christian thought, the identities of Satan and the Antichrist were frequently intertwined," but after that, "The Antichrist has generally been understood to be Satan's chief disciple or agent for deceiving humanity in the final days...."⁶²

The idea of the Devil, an incarnate powerful evil demon leading a battle against God, gains prominence in the eight and ninth centuries in Christianity.⁶³ By the thirteenth century, "the Devil reached the acme of his influence."⁶⁴ Christianity, from the 1100s through the 1500s, experienced a period of militant millennialism, and paid special attention to identifying the Antichrist and his evil followers.⁶⁵ By taking a hard line in opposition to the practice of magic and witchcraft during this period, Christian authorities taught followers that some persons in league with the Devil possessed special powers and skills. Alliance with the Devil might be through demonic possession or soul-selling, it might manifest itself as spreading the false religion of the Antichrist, or recalcitrant sinfulness. The response ranged from exorcism, to torture, to execution. With this reading of the relationship between the Devil and certain demonized individuals, the seeds of future witch hunts were sown.

Devil worshipping is a charge that has been leveled against religious reformers, followers of non-Christian religious traditions, non-believers, and dissidents of all stripes. According to Paul Caras in his book *History of the Devil*, "[t]he saddest side of the Devil's history appears in the persecution of those who were supposed to be adherents of the Devil; namely, sectarians, heretics, and witches."⁶⁶ As Elaine Pagels dryly observes, "Satan has, after all, made a kind of profession out of being the 'other'."⁶⁷

Jews were linked by the Christian church to the Antichrist as early as the second century.⁶⁸ By the twelfth century Jews are charged with the ritual murder of children, poisoning of wells, desecration of communion bread and wine, and other calumnies.⁶⁹ The original Papal inquisition in the thirteenth century was largely directed against dissenters linked to Satanic influence. The charge frequently served an opportunistic purpose. The Christian order of the Knights Templar was accused of "bestial idolatry" by "an avaricious king of France...anxious to deprive them of their wealth."⁷⁰ The later Spanish Inquisition, in the fifteenth century, frequently sought to test the sincerity of converted Jews and Muslims, some of whom were suspected of concealing sinister motives.⁷¹

The demonization of Jews as magical agents of the powerful Devil gains strength during the sixteenth century Renaissance and the Reformation. During this period, the earlier false allegations about Jews secretly engaging in murder and desecration again became

widely believed among Christians.⁷² Jews are even accused of being agents of the Antichrist in a coalition with the Amazons.⁷³ Martin Luther believed Jews were agents of the Antichrist in what he thought were the approaching End Times, although he also included orthodox Catholics loyal to the Papacy, the Turkish invaders of Europe, and, eventually, just about everyone who disagreed with him.⁷⁴

Conspiracist movements in the US, from the 1800s on, have derived their specific narratives from two historic roots: false allegations about Freemasons and false allegations about Jews.⁷⁵ Implicit in both narratives, as they were modified for US consumption, is the theme that America is essentially a Christian nation threatened with subversion by anti-Christian secret elites with allies in high places. The secular version of US conspiracism omits the overtly religious references and simply looks for betrayal by political and religious leaders.

Freemasons

Masonic lodges and individual Masons in the fraternal societies of Freemasonry were first accused of being the Devil's disciples in the late 1700s, an idea that flourished in the US in the 1800s.⁷⁶ Those who embrace this theory often point to symbols associated with Freemasonry, such as the pyramid and eye on the back of the one dollar bill, as evidence of the conspiracy.⁷⁷ The original allegation of a conspiracy within Freemasonry to control the world traces back to British author John Robison who wrote a 1798 book with the lengthy title: *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, carried on in the secret meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies, collected from good authorities.*⁷⁸ Robison influenced French author Abbé Augustin de Barruel, whose first two volumes of his eventual four-volume study, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*, beat Robison's book to the printer.⁷⁹

Both Robison and Barruel discuss the attempt by Bavarian intellectual Adam Weishaupt to spread the ideas of the Enlightenment through his secretive society, the Order of the Illuminati, founded in 1775. The rationalist Enlightenment ideas of the Illuminati were, in fact, brought into Masonic lodges, where they played a role in a factional fight against occultist philosophy.⁸⁰ Weishaupt, a professor of Canon Law at the University of Ingolstadt in Germany, was banished in 1786 by the government, and the Order of the Illuminati was suppressed.⁸¹

Weishaupt, his Illuminati society, the Freemasons, and other secret societies are portrayed by Robison and Barruel as bent on despotic world domination through a secret conspiracy using front groups to spread their influence.⁸² Barruel claimed the conspirators "had sworn hatred to the altar and the throne, had sworn to

crush the God of the Christians, and utterly to extirpate the Kings of the Earth."⁸³ For Barruel the grand plot hinges on how Illuminati "adepts of revolutionary Equality and Liberty had buried themselves in the Lodges of Masonry" where they supposedly caused the French revolution, and then ordered "all the adepts in their public prints to cry up the revolution and its principles." Soon, every nation had its "apostle of Equality, Liberty, and Sovereignty of the People."⁸⁴ Robison, a professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, argued that the Illuminati evolved out of Freemasonry, and called the Illuminati philosophy "Cosmo-politism."⁸⁵

These books both promote three conspiracist contentions that are still subscribed to today in some US rightist groups: First, that the Enlightenment themes of equality and liberty are designed to destroy respect for property and the natural social hierarchy; Second, that there is a plan to destroy orthodox Christianity and replace it with universalism, deism...or worse; Third, those with a cosmopolitan outlook, who encourage free-thinking and international cooperation, are disloyal subversive traitors, out to undermine national sovereignty and promote moral anarchy and political tyranny.

These conspiracist themes soon merged with the idea that individual Masons influenced by the Order of the Illuminati were in league with the Devil (as agents of the Antichrist); a claim that quickly became entwined with allegations that Jews were "behind everything." This web of conspiracy allegations crossed the Atlantic, and during the 1800s produced outbreaks of Protestant suspicion about Freemasons.⁸⁶ This was followed by the idea that Catholics were satanic agents of the Antichrist, who allegedly had chosen to make his End Times appearance as the Pope.⁸⁷

Jews and the Forged Protocols

Jews returned as prime candidates for Satanic collusion after circulation of the forged anti-Semitic propaganda tract, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, the root source in this century of anti-Semitic allegations of a vast Jewish conspiracy.⁸⁸

The *Protocols* grew out of propaganda intrigues within the secret police of Czarist Russia in the late 1800s.⁸⁹ The main Russian print source of the *Protocols* first appeared as an appendix in *The Big in the Small, and Antichrist as a Near Political Possibility; Notes of an Orthodox Person* by Sergei A. Nilus, published in 1905 but republished to wider audiences in 1911 and 1917.⁹⁰ The *Protocols* itself is inspired by (and plagiarized from) earlier works that allege conspiracies, especially a satiric 1865 French work, *Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu*, by Maurice Joly; and a 1868 German novel, *Biarritz*, by Hermann Goedsche.⁹¹ Equally dubious documents claiming proof

of similar secret conspiracies have circulated for centuries.⁹²

The text of the *Protocols* purports to be minutes of the secret meetings of a Jewish ruling clique conspiring to take over the world. The *Protocols* incorporate many of the core conspiracist themes outlined in the Robison and Barruel attacks on the Freemasons, and overlay them with anti-Semitic allegations about anti-Czarist movements in Russia. The *Protocols* reflect themes similar to more general critiques of enlightenment liberalism by those supporting church/state oligarchies and other theocratic—and thus anti-democratic—forms of government. The interpretation intended by the publication of the *Protocols* is that if one peels away the layers of the Freemason conspiracy, past the Illuminati, one finds the rotten Jewish core.

According to the *Protocols*, Jews work through Masonic lodges and thus Jews are behind the plan for global conquest. The list of charges in the *Protocols* is long, and includes false claims that Jews: use liberalism to weaken church and state, control the press, work through radicals and revolutionaries, manipulate the economy, especially through banking monopolies and the power of gold, encourage issuing paper currency not tied to the gold standard, promote financial speculation and use of credit, seek to replace traditional educational curriculum to discourage independent thinking, encourage immorality among Christian youth, use intellectuals to confuse people, control "puppet" governments both through secret allies and by blackmailing elected officials, weaken laws through liberal judicial interpretations, and will suspend civil liberties during an emergency, then make the measures permanent.⁹³

After the Russian revolution, Czarist loyalists emigrated to countries in Europe and to the US, and brought copies of the *Protocols* claiming they were the plans used by the Judeo-Bolsheviks to seize power.⁹⁴ The *Protocols* became a core source of allegations by Hitler and his allies in the German Nazi movement of a Judeo-Masonic-Bolshevik conspiracy. In early 1920 a private English translation was printed in Britain, and that summer London's *Sunday Post* published a series described by Norman Cohn as "eighteen articles expounding the full myth of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, with of course due reference to the *Protocols*."⁹⁵ The newspaper's correspondent in Russia, Victor Marsden, produced a new English translation of the *Protocols* that is still in print and sold today.⁹⁶ The *Protocols* are circulated in the US by anti-Semitic conspiracists across the political spectrum, and are posted on the Internet. Walter Laqueur reports that the *Protocols* are still circulated by contemporary anti-Semitic Russian nationalists.⁹⁷

Many of the anti-Semitic allegations made during this century come from the allegations found in the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. These charges continue to circulate today in the anti-Semitic US far right, but if the scapegoated Jew is replaced with the more diffuse target of cosmopolitan globalist liberal secular humanism, many of the same allegations form the core critique of the contemporary US populist right and Christian Right. According to historian Richard Landes, the *Protocols* is "behind much current anti-modern discourse, especially the paranoid and conspiracist texts, which are widespread on the Web."⁹⁶ Given the centuries-old Christian charge linking evil with magical or devious Jews, at least some form of anti-Semitism is intrinsic to most conspiracist thinking in Western cultures, even when it is unconscious.

Variations on Conspiracist Themes

The charges against the Illuminati group and the Freemasons embodied a backlash against the Enlightenment. Subsequently, the same conspiracist allegations were adapted for use against progressives, Jews, communists, internationalists, and secular humanists. The overall paradigm is apocalyptic demonization, and the range of scapegoats that gets demonized is vast. At the same time, the dynamics are complex, involving distinct social, political, cultural, and religious movement that frequently overlap.

In the US, the Christian fundamentalist movement emerged in the early twentieth century as a backlash against the principles of the enlightenment, modernism, and liberalism.⁹⁹ During roughly the same period, the fear of a global subversive communist menace was influenced by Christian apocalyptic millennialism, so much so that Joel Kovel, titled his 1994 book on the subject, *Red Hunting in the Promised Land*.¹⁰⁰ In 1919 the US government launched the Palmer Raids, which rounded up thousands of Russian and Italian immigrants as a response to fears that anarchists and Bolsheviks in this population were subversives conspiring to bring down the US government.¹⁰¹

The threat of communism—represented as a Red Menace—became the main focus of apocalyptic conspiracism. According to Frank Donner:

The root anti-subversive impulse was fed by the Menace. Its power strengthened with the passage of time, by the late twenties its influence had become more pervasive and folkish. Bolshevism came to be identified over wide areas of the country by God-fearing Americans as the Antichrist come to do eschatological battle with the children of light. A slightly secularized version, widely-shared in rural and small-town America, postulated a doomsday conflict between decent upright folk and

radicalism—alien, satanic, immorality incarnate.¹⁰²

While political anticommunism took center stage, subplots were woven into the script between the two World Wars. An important synthesis of Illuminati/Freemason and Protocols conspiracism is work of Nesta H. Webster. Her major works are the 1919 *The French Revolution*, the 1921 *World Revolution: The Plot Against Civilization*, and her 1924 *Secret Societies and Subversive Movements*.¹⁰³ While Webster stressed non-Jewish secret elites, there are anti-Semitic themes throughout her work. Webster helped write the original *London Morning Post* series which introduced the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to a wide British audience.¹⁰⁴

In 1935 two authors amplified the themes of a conspiracy by international finance. Father Denis Fahey's *The Mystical Body of Christ in the Modern World*, was an openly antisemitic work envisioning an organically populist (volkish) Catholic society. Gertrude Coogan's *Money Creators*, contained implicit antisemitic conspiracist allegations linking the Illuminati and the Rothschilds to a secret cabal that created the Federal Reserve.¹⁰⁵ According to Frank P. Mintz, "The Coogan book...served as a classic of rightist populism, enjoying distribution by the Liberty Lobby, Gerald L. K. Smith's Christian Nationalist Crusade, and the National States Rights Party in the early 1970s."¹⁰⁶

In the mid-1930s Elizabeth Dilling transmogrified many of Nesta Webster's themes and applied them to Roosevelt and the New Deal, portraying communism as Jewish, and Roosevelt as an agent of the conspiracy.¹⁰⁷ Dilling engaged in racist and anti-Semitic red-baiting from the Patriotic Research Bureau in Chicago and penned *The Red Network* and *The Roosevelt Red Record and its Background*.¹⁰⁸ A more overtly anti-Semitic tract was the 1941 *New Dealers in Office*, with an appropriate subtitle "with their Red Front personnel." The booklet consists of a list of Roosevelt appointees with supposedly Jewish-sounding names. The cover sported the slogan, "Keep America Christian."¹⁰⁹

Leo Ribuffo's study, *The Old Christian Right*, demonstrates the influence of apocalyptic Biblical prophecy on Protestant far right conspiracist movements in the interwar period, especially on the major figures Ribuffo profiles: William Dudley Pelley, Gerald B. Winrod, and Gerald L. K. Smith.¹¹⁰ It was not difficult for conspiracists and bigots within the conspiracist wing of the Christian fundamentalist anticommunist movement to weave in threads from the conspiracy theories about Freemason and Jewish elites, especially since anti-enlightenment impulses permeate all these conspiracist theories. Pelley is an example of

how conspiracist allegations can “pull out all stops,” especially in using anti-Semitism. An example of this full-blown variation on the demonic Judeo-Bolshevik

theme appeared as a chart in Pelley’s 1938 publication, *Liberation*:¹¹¹

Anti-Christ

Judaism
materiality
modernism
leftist
Jewish socialism
Jewish communism
Protocols of Zion
Communist Manifesto
democracy
Communism
internationalism
Jewish subversion

Christ

Christianity
spirituality
fundamentalism
rightist
individualism
constitutionalism
U.S. Constitution enforced
“Bill of Rights”
constitutional republic
Americanism
National patriotism
American vigilantism

War

Peace

After WWII overt anti-Semitism and pro-fascist sentiments were deemed unacceptable by most Christian conservatives, who were quickly re-mobilizing against the Red Menace. The Cold War spawned a number of God-fearing anticommunist groups, some of which still exist, such as: the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, with its combination of free market ideology and religious ecumenism, expressed by its logo of General George Washington kneeling in prayer; the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade, founded by Fred Schwarz, which primarily networked Protestants but includes a handful of Jews; and the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation, run by Eleanor L. Schlafly, which primarily networks among Catholics.

Conspiracist countersubversion themes are imbedded in the rhetoric of many Christian Right anticommunist groups. They have consistently hinted that international communism was linked to betrayal by secret globalist elites manipulating the US. Frequent targets are the Rockefeller family and the Council on Foreign Relations.¹¹² A significant work in this genre was the 1952 book by McCarthy supporter, Emanuel M. Josephson, *Rockefeller, ‘Internationalist’: The Man Who Misrules the World*. Josephson saw the Council on Foreign Relations as a nest of conspirators carrying out Rockefeller orders on behalf of international finance capital.¹¹³ Another typical example is Dan Smoot’s 1962 *The Invisible Government*.¹¹⁴ Similarly, Mary M. Davison’s 1962 book, *The Secret Government of the United States*, describes the Council on Foreign Relations as “The King-Makers Club Which Has

Become The Nation’s Invisible Government.” run by the “international bankers.”¹¹⁵

One of the most significant of the conspiracist books published in the 1960s was Phyllis Schlafly’s 1964 book, *A Choice not an Echo*. The book was written to promote the Goldwater presidential bid and characterized the campaign as a revolt of “Grassroots Republicans” against the secret internationalist “kingmakers” alleged to control both the Democratic and Republican parties.¹¹⁶ *A Choice not an Echo* mainstreamed the conspiracist idea that the shadowy elites behind Wall Street capitalism also propped up Moscow communism.

Carroll Quigley’s 1966 *Tragedy and Hope*, saw US history after the Civil War as shaped by a power struggle between international finance capital and industrial capitalism. Quigley saw British influence, especially Rhodes scholarships, as crucial to understanding role of foundations and politicians in shaping US policy.¹¹⁷ Two authors affiliated with the John Birch Society adapted and extended Quigley’s work. Cleon Skousen’s *The Naked Capitalist* was self-published in 1970. Gary Allen wrote several books, including *None Dare Call it Conspiracy*, published in 1971, which sold over 5 million copies.¹¹⁸

One of the most prolific conspiracists in this genre, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, was Phoebe Courtney, who also co-authored several books with her husband Kent Courtney. The Courtneys’ and the John Birch Society helped spread the anti-government concept called “constitutionalism,” which embodies the claim that secret elites manipulate the economy and the

political process, use the Federal Reserve and the IRS as political weapons, and have created a huge federal bureaucracy, all of which violates basic elements of the original, unamended, US Constitution.¹¹⁹

In the 1960s, a great deal of right-wing conspiracist attention focused on the United Nations as the vehicle for creating the One World Government. Mary M. Davison, in her 1966 booklet *The Profound Revolution*, traced the alleged "New World Order" conspiracy to the creation of the Federal Reserve by international bankers, who she claimed later formed the Council on Foreign Relations. At the time the booklet was published, "international bankers" would have been interpreted by many readers as a reference to a postulated "international Jewish banking conspiracy." Davison included the standard call for the people to rise up against internationalism and rebuild a constitutional form of government—a call echoed later by various right wing populist groups including the contemporary armed militia movement.¹²⁰ Davison later wrote tracts that were overtly anti-Semitic and tied to Christian Biblical passages.¹²¹

The overt British-Jewish conspiracist theory continues to be pursued in many publications, based primarily on tracts "written by British fascists in the 1930's," according to Dennis King, who tracked Lyndon LaRouche's worldview back to this genre.¹²² The most energetic purveyor of this theme is Eustace Mullins, antisemitic author of the 1952 book *Mullins on the Federal Reserve* and in 1954 *The Federal Reserve Conspiracy*. Mullins writes in two styles, one ostensibly focusing on banking practices, the other expressing open and vicious anti-Semitism.¹²³

Anticommunism became a broad umbrella under which those with a wide variety of views as to "who is really behind the conspiracy" could find common ground. Was the plot run by Moscow Reds, Wall Street Plutocrats, British Bankers, or the Jews? Issues could have multiple subtexts.¹²⁴ For instance there was concern over the erosion of national sovereignty by the United Nations because it was seen as favoring communist-style collectivism. Right-wing conspiracists expressed the conviction that the United Nations would erode nation-state sovereignty, and facilitate intrusive federal intervention on the local level. The concern over federal violations of states' rights was promoted in some cases by libertarians, such as the publishers of the periodical *The Freeman*, but "states' rights" often provided a veneer that masked underlying segregationist and white supremacist sentiments, even if they were unconscious.¹²⁵

Anti-Jewish allegations could easily be added to anticommunism. In the mid-1950s William G. Carr promoted the anti-Semitic variant on conspiracism with books such as *Pawns in the Game* and *Red Fog over*

America. According to Carr, an age-old Jewish Illuminati banking conspiracy used radio-transmitted mind control on behalf of Lucifer to construct a one world government. The secret nexus of the plot was supposedly the international Bilderberger meetings on banking policy. The anti-Semitic Noontide Press distributed *Pawns in the Game* for many years.¹²⁶

Linking Godless communism to the Antichrist was also an easy step for the more zealous right-wing Christian activists in the 1950s. Typical of this genre is *One World a Red World*, a pamphlet by Kenneth Goff that claims to link Stalin and the "new world-order" to the Antichrist and the Mark of the Beast. Goff warns that: "The dream of the 'One-Worlders' may look good on paper but it all adds up to the age-old plan of Satan to produce a Christless Millennial Reign—that man himself can be God."¹²⁷ Goff, a former communist organizer, turned to Christianity and then to white supremacy, writing a 1958 pamphlet claiming biblical support for segregation, *Reds Promote Racial War*, that claimed communists promoted racial strife.¹²⁸

Most Christian anticommunism, however, avoided and eschewed overt anti-Semitism. A view more typical of Christian fundamentalist concern with the Antichrist was expressed by Gordon Lindsay in his 1966 pamphlet, *Will the Antichrist Come Out of Russia?* His introductory blurb states that "All agree that Soviet Russia has the spirit of the antichrist. She is a godless, defiant power which seeks to get control over the whole world." But he also equivocates: "We demonstrate by 12 separate identifications that Russia is truly related to the Beast system of Revelation 13, although this does not mean that the antichrist will come out of her."¹²⁹ In a similar vein is *The Real Power Behind Communism*, a late 1960s pamphlet in which Dr. W. S. McBirnie warns "We must do all in our power to struggle against the greatest evil of the day, socialism and communism, because they are of the Antichrist."¹³⁰ Claiming that something is "related" to the Antichrist without being more specific is common in this genre.

John A. Stormer, a Republican Party activist and Protestant fundamentalist, wrote *None Dare Call it Treason* in 1964, which sold over 7 million copies. The book alleged a vast communist conspiracy manipulating the government.¹³¹ In 1965 Stormer had a Christian renewal experience and wrote a sequel, *The Death of a Nation*, in which he explicitly linked the collectivist conspiracy to destroy America to the work of the Antichrist and discussed signs of the End Times and possible millennial timetables.¹³²

It is important to note that mainstream Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church reject these conspiracist notions. Nonetheless, subcultures among Protestants and Catholics keep conspiracist ideas alive

within Christianity just as various non-religious subcultures spread apocalyptic conspiracism in secular society. Today, Christians with a conspiracist interpretation of the Book of Revelation are especially alert to betrayal by political leaders whom they suspect of promoting collectivism and a tyrannical one-world government.¹³³

Conspiracist Scapegoating and Right-Wing Populism

An effective mechanism for inflaming conspiracist scapegoating throughout US history has been apocalyptic forms of right-wing populism, especially when coupled with millennial expectation.¹³⁴ This dynamic has been obscured because right-wing populism was branded by early academic studies as an "extremist" phenomena among a "lunatic fringe" of the "radical right" embracing a "paranoid style." This idea is a legacy from the first foray into establishing a broad social science outline for studying right wing populism—the pluralist school of analysis which saw right-wing social movements as outbursts of irrational collective behavior fueled by status anxiety. This view is called by critics "centrist/extremist theory."¹³⁵

Challenging Centrist/Extremist Theory

Centrist/extremist theory arrived with the 1955 publication of a collection of essays titled *The New American Right* edited by Daniel Bell. Eight years later the collection was expanded and republished under the title, *The Radical Right*. Contributors to the expanded volume included Bell, Alan F. Westin, Richard Hofstadter, Seymour Martin Lipset, Earl Raab, Peter Viereck, Herbert H. Hyman, Talcott Parsons, David Riesman, and Nathan Glazer. Not all of the authors shared all of the analytical views outlined in the volume, but since 1955 a number of books appeared that either elaborated on or paralleled the general themes of centrist/extremist theory first sketched in *The New American Right*.¹³⁶

Centrist/extremist theory, especially as outlined by Lipset, Raab, Viereck, and Bell, sees dissident movements of the left and right as composed of outsiders—politically marginal people who have no connection to the mainstream electoral system or nodes of government or corporate power. Social and economic stress snaps these psychologically-fragile people into a mode of irrational political hysteria, and as they embrace an increasingly paranoid style they make militant and unreasonable demands to defend their social and economic status. Because they are unstable, they can become dangerous and violent. Their extremism places them far outside the legitimate political process, which is located in the center where pluralists conduct civil democratic debates. The solution

prescribed by centrist/extremist theory is to marginalize the dissidents as radicals and dangerous religious political extremists. Their grievances and demands need not be taken seriously. Furthermore, law enforcement can then be relied upon to break up any criminal conspiracies by subversive radicals who threaten the social order.

Centrist/extremist theory ignores real power struggles in the society. It is a *status-quo* oriented frame of reference that too often dismisses dissidents of all stripes. It stifles a healthy public debate over how to unravel systems of oppression, allows individuals to ignore their own complicity in oppressive behavior, and obscures the supremacist forces woven into our society's central institutions.

An increasing number of progressive social scientists and analysts reject centrist/extremist theory and use a different set of theories to explain how social movements work.¹³⁷ As Christian Smith observes:

"The 1970s saw a major break in the social-movement literature with earlier theories—e.g., mass society, collective behavior, status discontent, and relative-deprivation theories—that emphasized the irrational and emotional nature of social movements..... There was at the time a decisive pendulum-swing away from these "classical" theories toward the view of social movements as rational, strategically calculating, politically instrumental phenomena."¹³⁸

Using these new theories, a different paradigm emerges. According to this new paradigm, most people who join right-wing populist movements are not acting out of some personal pathology, but out of anger and desperation. They are demonstrating a willingness to grasp at straws in an attempt to defend hearth and home against the furious winds of economic and social change threatening their way of life. They may feel abandoned, or claim that no one in power seems to be listening. They come to believe that no one cares except others in the same predicament. Their anger and fear are frequently based on objective conditions and conflicts—power struggles involving race, gender, ethnicity, or religion; economic hardship; changes in social status; conflicts over cultural issues; and other societal transformations that cause anger, confusion, and anxiety. Whether or not their grievances are legitimate (or even rational) they join with others to confront what they believe is the cause of their problems. Often, instead of challenging structures and institutions of power, they attack demonized scapegoats, often in the form of conspiracist allegations. Sometimes they resort to violence.

If this characterization of right-wing populism is accurate, then activists developing strategies and tactics

to challenge these movements need to rethink the ideas and rhetoric based on the centrist/extremist model that favors labels such as "radical right," "wing nuts," "lunatic fringe," or "religious political extremists."¹³⁹ Racism, sexism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism—along with other forms of supremacist ideology—are not the exclusive domain of marginal and militant groups, but are domiciled in mainstream US culture and politics.

Populist Conspiracism

When conspiracism is blended with populism, the result is frequently a worldview called "producerism." Producerist movements consider the "real" patriotic Americans to be hard-working people in the middle- and working-class who create goods and wealth while fighting against "parasites" at the top and bottom of society who pick their pockets.¹⁴⁰

Gary Allen provides an example of producerism in his 1971 *None Dare Call it Conspiracy*, which included a graphic chart showing the middle-class being squeezed between the ruling elite "insiders" above, pressured by the Rothschilds, Rockefellers, and Council on Foreign Relations, and the rabble below, pressured by "naive radicals" of the left, such as SDS, the Black Panthers, the Yippies, the Young Socialist Alliance, and Common Cause.¹⁴¹ In 1974 Allen updated the scenario in *Rockefeller: Campaigning for the New World Order*, articulating the anti-globalist theme of much current conspiracism in the Patriot and armed militia movements.¹⁴² Allen's work is championed by the John Birch Society.

Producerism not only promotes scapegoating, but also has a history of assuming that a proper citizen is a White male. Historically, groups scapegoated by right-wing populist movements in the US have been immigrants and people of color, especially Blacks. Attention is diverted from inherent white supremacism by using coded language to reframe racism as a concern about specific issues, such as welfare, immigration, tax, or education policies.¹⁴³ Non-Christian religions, women, gay men and lesbians, youth, students, reproductive rights activists, and environmentalists also are scapegoated.¹⁴⁴ Sometimes producerism targets those persons who organize on behalf of impoverished and marginalized communities, especially progressive social change activists.¹⁴⁵

The nativist and Americanist movements emerged as a way to promote a broad Christian nationalism, and a way to enforce implicitly white supremacist northern European cultural standards among increasingly diverse immigrant groups.¹⁴⁶ Producerism played a key role in a shift from the main early mode of right-wing populist conspiracism which defended the *status quo* against a mob of "outsiders," originally framed as a conspiracy of Freemasons or Jews or aliens. Today, right-wing

populist conspiracism targets the government and other "insiders." According to Michael Billig:

"With the replacement of the old aristocratic orders in Europe and the increasing participation of the middle classes in political life, there came a change in the themes of the conspiracy mythology. In the United States the change accompanied the threats to the hegemony of the old white Anglo-Saxon Protestant group, posed by waves of new immigrants in the middle of the nineteenth century. The conspiracy theory ceased to defend government against conspirators, but located the conspiracy within government, or more often behind government."¹⁴⁷

Two organizations representing the nativist tradition—the John Birch Society and the Liberty Lobby—played a significant role in promoting producerism and helping it transform into populist anti-government conspiracist themes during the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁴⁸

The John Birch Society (JBS) maintains that internationalist "insiders" with a collectivist agenda, (claimed to be behind both communism and Wall Street capitalism), are engaged in a coordinated drive to destroy national sovereignty and individualism. JBS members are primarily elitist, ultraconservative, and reformist. Its conspiracist theories do not center on scapegoating Jews and Jewish institutions, nor do they center on biological racism. In a more subtle form of racism and anti-Semitism, JBS promotes a culturally-defined WASP ethnocentrism as the true expression of America. Echoing historic producerist themes, implicit racism and anti-Semitism are intrinsic to the group's ideology, but they are not articulated as principles of unity. JBS conspiracist narrative traces back to Robison's book alleging a Illuminati Freemason conspiracy. The Society's roots are in business nationalism, economic libertarianism, anti-communism, Eurocentrism, and Christian fundamentalism.¹⁴⁹

The Liberty Lobby's conspiracist narrative is that the secret elites are Jews (descended from non-European bloodlines) who manipulate Blacks and other people of color to destroy national unity and popular will, which derives its strength from a racially-separate organic tribalism. The Lobby is primarily populist, fascist, and insurgent. It promotes conspiracist theories that center on scapegoating Jews and Jewish institutions, and on biological racism as the basis for white supremacist xenophobia. However, through the use of coded rhetoric, and appeals to racial separatism that extol Black nationalist groups, the group attempts, with some success, to mask its core racism and anti-Semitism. The Liberty Lobby relies on historic anti-Semitic conspiracist sources that trace back to the

Protocols and its many progeny. Its roots are in isolationism, small business resentment of large corporate interests, and eugenicist White racial nationalism.

The JBS and Liberty Lobby both use populist rhetoric, but JBS members distrust the idea of the sovereignty of the people, and stress that the United States is a republic not a democracy, which they dismiss as a "mobocracy." This explains how the JBS can criticize the alleged secret elites, yet retain an elitist point of view; they want to replace the "bad" elites with the "good" elites—presumably their allies. Both groups use conspiracist scapegoating, a common feature of right-wing populism. Starting in the 1970s, other branches of right-wing populist conspiracism began to grow, in the Christian Right, the Christian Identity religion, the Lyndon LaRouche network, and in both secular and religious forms of survivalism.

Populism can come from the bottom up, but it also can be deployed from the top down—used to attack the *status quo* by outsider business factions seeking to displace entrenched power structures. These outsider factions use populist rhetoric and conspiracist, anti-elite scapegoating to attract constituencies in the middle class and working class. As right-wing populist movements grow, they can lure mainstream politicians to adopt scapegoating, in order to attract voters. Their theories can legitimize acts of discrimination, or even violence. And reformist populist movements can open the door for insurgent right-wing movements such as fascism to recruit from their own movements by arguing that more drastic action is needed.¹⁵⁰ Fascism itself is a distinctive form of conspiracist right-wing populism. Fascist groups are not likely to seize state power in the US (or in most countries), but can seriously damage attempts to extend democracy and

equality as they encourage scapegoating and conspiracism in adaptive and creative ways while engaging in recruitment and ideological training.¹⁵¹

Because right-wing conspiracism so often rests on an anti-elite critique, it has been known to fool gullible leftists.¹⁵² Various Green Party activists have had to struggle against conspiracism, including the anti-Semitic variant, among members and even a handful of leaders.¹⁵³ Populist conspiracism also has found a home in certain Black nationalist and Arab anti-imperialist groups.¹⁵⁴ Libyan President Muammar Qaddafi has actually tried to unite left and right groups that oppose the US government at meetings in Tripoli, Libya.¹⁵⁵

We must be careful to draw a distinction between critiques that extend economic and social justice, and those that claim economic privilege for middle-class consumers at the expense of social justice. Anti-regime criticism is rampant in the conspiracist right.¹⁵⁶ There is a need to educate and thus inoculate large sectors of the white middle class and working class against the dead end of right-wing populism with its penchant for scapegoating. If we tolerate the paradigm of conspiracist scapegoating by right-wing economic populists simply because it appears to advance a short-term anti-corporate or anti-government agenda, we are creating a dangerous alliance with people whose long-term vision—wittingly or unwittingly—promotes racist, sexist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic outcomes.¹⁵⁷ We will be throwing our long-term allies overboard and helping sink the ship of state, when we should be plotting a new course on a sturdy vessel we all help to rebuild.

This is especially true given the current period of apocalyptic anxiety and millennial energy, which infuses the Christian right, populist right, and far right.

Part Two:

Apocalyptic Millennialism and Contemporary US Right-Wing Movements

Examining the Different Sectors

As the millennium approaches, targets of apocalyptic demonization already include Jews, Catholics, Mormons, Moslems, Freemasons, New Age devotees, peace activists, environmentalists, feminists, abortion providers, and gay men and lesbians. Members of groups ranging from the Trilateral Commission to the National Education Association are suspect—not to mention federal officials and UN troops. The person targeted as the devil's disciple could be you, or a neighbor, or a friend.

Apocalyptic fears and millennial expectation play an important role in three sectors of right-wing populism in which demonization, scapegoating, and conspiracism flourish: the Christian Right; the populist right, including survivalist, Patriot, and armed militia movements; and the far right, especially the neonazi version of Christian Identity theology.

The Christian Right

The New Right coalition of the late 1970s "represented a reassertion of the 'fusionist' triad of moral traditionalism, economic libertarianism, and militarist anticommunism," explained sociologist Sara Diamond.¹⁵⁸ It was a coalition between secular conservatives and traditionalist Christians. Much of the New Right's mobilization of supporters was based on promoting a narrow, exclusionary, and northern European version of traditional Biblical values.¹⁵⁹ As Laura Saponara puts it:

"The 'deep structure' of New Right rhetoric is rooted in historic and contemporary constructs of Biblical literalism articulated through recurring, polarizing themes of good and evil, personal salvation,

evangelism, and the inevitability of apocalypse, among others."¹⁶⁰

Clearly, some of the Christians mobilized by the New Right felt, and still feel, they are engaged in "Spiritual Warfare" with Satanic forces.¹⁶¹ The role of Biblical apocalyptic thinking within mainstream Christian groups is well-documented by academics such as Sara Diamond, Paul Boyer, Robert Fuller, and Charles B. Strozier.

Open discussion of evil and Satanic forces is unremarkable within the Christian Right, even among savvy policy analysts and lobbyists. A 1983 booklet from the Free Congress Research and Education Foundation titled *The Morality of Political Action: Biblical Foundations* includes a Bible-based defense of the practice of Christian political activists misleading or tricking opponents as justified by the higher purpose of the Christian struggle against evil. The author advises that while opponents may be doing the work of the Devil, it would be wrong to publicly accuse them of being "a card-carrying member of Satan's band," not because it might be untrue, but because it falls under "the scope of the Lord's command: 'Judge not lest ye be judged.'"¹⁶²

Still, it must be remembered that some politically-conservative fundamentalist groups oppose this paradigm, and warn against demonization that conflates church and state. For example, the Institute for the Study of Religion in Politics argues that:

"...if the price of re-establishing a 'public Christian culture' in this country means that the church must ostracize its opponents, ghettoize the adherents of other religions and cultures, make enemies of women who choose abortion, demonize homosexuals, etc. as it seeks to gather political power into its hands—maybe, just maybe, the price isn't worth paying."¹⁶³

Dueling Eschatologies

Within Christianity there are many competing views regarding the millennial apocalypse; the theological study of these views is known as *eschatology*. At the center of eschatological study is a debate over theological theories of the "end time," when the forces of evil will be vanquished and the forces of good rewarded.¹⁶⁴

Post-millennialists believe that Christ returns only after a thousand years of reign and rule by Godly Christian men, and they urge militant Christian intervention in secular society. Smaller sectors, including preterists and a-millennialists, while still anticipating the eventual return of Christ, believe the prophesied millennium is not a major theological issue for Christianity, or believe it already has happened, thus de-emphasizing the Tribulations, the Rapture, and Armageddon as practical considerations affecting daily life.

Most Christian fundamentalists are pre-millennialists, believing the return of Christ starts the millennial, thousand-year period of Christian rule. For them, the year 2000 doesn't necessarily have theological meaning or signify the End Times. More important to them is the belief in an inevitable and final apocalyptic battle between good and evil. Pre-millennialists believe the second coming of Jesus will occur before his thousand years of reign and rule.

For pre-millennialists, faithful Christians may experience no tribulations, some tribulations, or all of the tribulations. This difference is expressed in eschatological timelines called pre-tribulationist, mid-tribulationist, and post-tribulationist. Furthermore, not all pre-millennialist Christians believe in "the Rapture"—the temporary protective gathering of Christians up into Heaven while the battle against evil rages on Earth during the Tribulations. If they do believe in the Rapture, there is no agreement on whether or not raptured Christians then return to an earth purged of evil. The exact sequence of the Rapture, the Tribulations, and the battle of Armageddon is also disputed.

For many decades, the primary Protestant eschatology was a form of pre-millennialism called Dispensationalism, an interpretation developed by theologian John Nelson Darby that outlined specific historical epochs or dispensations that are pre-ordained by God.¹⁶⁵ In this timeline, Christians are raptured up to heaven before the Tribulations, the sinful are punished, and then Christ returns for a millennium of rule over his loyal flock. This combination of pre-tribulationist and pre-millennialist views has sometimes encouraged a large sector of the Christian faithful to passively await salvation while remaining aloof from sinful secular

society, while at other times an activist mode seeks to intervene in public affairs.

For example, aloof pre-millennialist Dispensationalism gained renewed support after the Pyrrhic victory for Christian fundamentalists in the 1925 Scopes "Monkey" Trial. This famous Tennessee case ruled that teaching evolution (instead of creation) was not proper in the public schools, but the case proved a substantial public embarrassment to fundamentalists who were widely portrayed as ignorant, backward, and irrational.¹⁶⁶ As a result, many fundamentalists retreated from active participation in the electoral and legislative arena. This lasted until an activist Cold War message that Christians should re-engage in civic participation, encouraged by evangelical groups such as Moral Re-armament and evangelists such as Billy Graham, brought many Christians back into the voting booths in the 1950s. It wasn't until the mid-1970s that evangelicals began to mobilize around partisan political issues in a way that directly linked their theology to the electoral sphere.¹⁶⁷

While many previously passive sectors of Christianity were being mobilized by conservative political organizers, a complementary theological movement influenced by popular Christian philosopher Francis A. Schaeffer and theologian Cornelius van Till, called for a more "muscular" and interventionist form of Christianity. The most zealous version of this renewal movement was called Reconstructionism, a post-millennial theology which argues that the US Constitution is merely a codicil to Christian Biblical law.¹⁶⁸ Rooted in militant early Calvinism and the idea of America as a Christian redeemer nation, Reconstructionism sees religion, culture, and nation as an integral unit in a way that echoes some European clerical fascist movements of the 1930s.

Among the leading Reconstructionist ideologues are R. J. Rushdoony, Gary North, and Greg Bahnsen. There are few Reconstructionists, but they have facilitated the emergence of a more widespread and softer form of dominionism, the theocratic idea that regardless of religious views or eschatological timetable, Christian men are called by God to exercise dominion over secular society by taking control of political and cultural institutions.¹⁶⁹ The result is a broad dominionist movement of Christian nationalism that has spread from independent evangelical churches into mainstream Protestant denominations and even small sectors of Catholicism.

From Red Menace to New World Order

Apocalyptic millennialism provides a basic narrative within the US political right, claiming that the idealized society is thwarted by subversive conspiracies.¹⁷⁰ During the 1980s and 1990s, the main

demonized scapegoat of the US hard right shifted seamlessly from the communist Red Menace to international terrorists, sinful abortion providers, anti-family feminists, homosexual "special rights" activists, "pagan" environmentalists, liberal secular humanists and their "big government" allies, and globalists who plot on behalf of the New World Order. The relatively painless nature of the shift was due in part to the basic underlying apocalyptic paradigm, which fed the Cold War and the witch-hunts of the McCarthy period.¹⁷¹ To understand this dynamic requires stepping back a few paces to the roots of fundamentalist belief.

One of the core ideas of the fundamentalist Christian Right during this century has been that modern liberalism is a handmaiden for collectivist, Godless communism. Many conservative Christian anticommunists believe that collectivism is Godless, while capitalism is Godly. They often link liberalism to Godless collectivism; then to the notion of a liberal secular humanist conspiracy; and finally conclude that globalism is the ultimate collectivist plot. Prior to the collapse of communism, many leaders of the new Christian Right had already embraced a variation on their long-standing fear of secret elites in league with Satan: the secular humanist conspiracist theory.¹⁷² According to George Marsden, the shift in focus to the secular humanist demon:

"...revitalized fundamentalist conspiracy theory. Fundamentalists always had been alarmed at moral decline within America but often had been vague as to whom, other than the Devil, to blame. The "secular humanist" thesis gave this central concern a clearer focus that was more plausible and of wider appeal than the old mono-causal communist-conspiracy accounts. Communism and socialism could, of course, be fit right into the humanist picture; but so could all the moral and legal changes at home without implausible scenarios of Russian agents infiltrating American schools, government, reform movements, and mainline churches."¹⁷³

A number of contemporary Christian Right ideologues promote the secular humanist conspiracist theory, including: Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition; Beverly LaHaye, leader of Concerned Women for America; her husband, the Rev. Timothy LaHaye, a well-known Christian author; and Dr. James Dobson, founding President of Focus on the Family, whose syndicated radio program is on thousands of stations.

The shift in focus from anti-communism to the claim that secular humanism now plays the key subversive role in undermining America is reflected in right-wing author John Stormer's two books, the

second an update for the 1990s of his influential 1964 book *None Dare Call it Treason*.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, some militant Protestant fundamentalists within the antiabortion movement, influenced by hard right theological activist Francis A. Schaeffer, claim a conspiracy of secular humanists as the source of Godless disregard for what they argued is sinful murder of the unborn.¹⁷⁵ In 1991 David A. Noebel of Summit Ministries, an ultra-conservative Christian training center located outside Colorado Springs, Colorado wrote the 900 page *Understanding the Times* textbook used in 850 Christian schools enrolling a total of over 15,000 students.¹⁷⁶ The book argues that secular humanism has replaced communism as the major anti-Christian philosophy.¹⁷⁷

Secular humanists—pictured as the torchbearers of liberal Godlessness and New Deal statism—are scapegoated from a variety of perspectives: economic, anti-elitist, and moral, as well as religious. The idea of the secular humanist conspiracy also parallels and buttresses the resurgent libertarian theme that collectivism destroys individual initiative and saps the vigor of the free market system. It also echoes the concerns of conservatives, neoconservatives, and paleoconservatives over creeping moral decay and the failure of New Deal liberalism. This congruence of various sectors of the right, each opposing liberal secular humanism for its own reasons, has resulted in some remarkable tactical coalitions following the rise of the New Right in the late 1970s, especially around issues of public school curricula and government funding for education.

For many conspiracy-minded Christians, communism was but one manifestation of Satan's age-old, one-world conspiracy. They argue that if the ultimate villainous agent of control is Satan, the ideologies promoted by demonic agents can easily shift from Godless communism to secular humanism, and from global communism to a new world order. The collapse of communism in Europe allowed a shift in focus to other aspects of the alleged conspiracy—the collectivism and statism promoted by liberalism and secular humanism. As mentioned earlier, more secular hard right groups had long contended that behind Moscow Bolshevism and Wall Street capitalism were the same shadowy secret elites with their traitorous allies in Washington. Removing Soviet communists from the alleged secret team still leaves other dangerous players in the field.

Conspiracism in the Christian Right often is overlooked by the mainstream media, despite the prominence of those who promote it. Prior to the 1998 elections, Dr. James Dobson led a well-publicized campaign to pull the Republican Party into alignment with Christian Right moral principles. Dobson and his

colleague Gary Bauer co-authored *Children at Risk: The Battle for the Hearts and Minds of Our Kids*, which sees an escalating civil war with the forces of Godless secular humanism. Dobson praises Noebel's Summit Ministries, especially its youth training seminars and its high school curriculum that immerse students in apocalyptic conspiracist theories about the secular humanist menace.¹⁷⁸

Dobson's endorsement of Summit is significant because it illustrates how some of the more doctrinaire leaders of the Christian Right are comfortable with Old Right conspiracism. Among Noebel's previous works are *Communism, Hypnotism and the Beatles*, and *The Homosexual Revolution: End Time Abomination*. Summit Ministries has a longstanding relationship with the conspiracist John Birch Society, placing large ads in the John Birch Society's publications over many years. In at least one instance, in 1983, Summit Ministries appears to have served as a conduit for tax-exempt donations for the JBS.¹⁷⁹ Noebel recently absorbed the newsletter of Fred Schwarz' hard right Christian Anti-Communism Crusade.

Even when not directly tied to diabolical schemes, conspiracism is widespread in the Protestant Christian Right. Pat Robertson's *The New World Order* is littered with conspiracist allegations and references, including his invocation of the Freemason conspiracy "revealed in the great seal adopted at the founding of the United States." Robertson links Freemasonry to End Times predictions of a "mystery religion designed to replace the old Christian world order of Europe and America"¹⁸⁰ Later in the book he says:

In earlier chapters, we have traced the infiltration of Continental Freemasonry by the new world philosophy of the order of the Illuminati, and its subsequent role in the French revolution. We then were able to find clear documentation that the occultic-oriented secret societies claiming descent from Illuminism and the French Revolution played a seminal role in the thinking of Marx and Lenin.¹⁸¹

As Michael Lind and Jacob Heilbrunn have pointed out in a critique of the book published in *The New York Review of Books*, Robertson moves beyond the Illuminati/Freemason conspiracy and incorporates allegations that originate in anti-Semitic sources.¹⁸²

Anticipating the End Times

While most mainstream Christian religious leaders are reluctant to suggest the year 2000 marks the End Times, some are hinting that the date has theological significance, and a few have announced that the End Times have already started.¹⁸³ There is even a glossy full-color monthly magazine titled *Midnight Call: The Prophetic Voice for the Endtimes*. One Christian

publishing house offers a catalog, "Armageddon Books." Its 1998 Internet version describes itself as the "World's largest Bible prophecy bookstore featuring books, videos, and charts on armageddon, antichrist, 666, tribulation, rapture, revelation." There are over 400 items. Credit cards are accepted. There are links to 160 other prophecy websites.¹⁸⁴

Many Christian fundamentalists are scanning for the "Signs of the Times," a phrase used to highlight the possibility that a specific worldly event may fulfill a Biblical prophecy and thus be a signal of the End Times, when faithful Christians are expected to engage in appropriate (though highly contested) preparations. Earthquakes, floods, comets, wars, disease, and social unrest are commonly interpreted as such signs.

The demonic interpretation of apocalyptic Biblical prophecy, such as found in the Book of Revelation, has long encouraged conscious and unconscious fears about evil subversive conspiracies. Apocalyptic fundamentalists are thus especially concerned with false prophets and political or business leaders who are subverting God's will and betraying the faithful by urging them to abandon their righteous conduct, especially in terms of sinful sexuality or crass materialism. Many faithful Christians believe they must take on special duties during the End Times. These duties carry the weight of Biblical prophecy, and in some cases, actions may even be felt to be mandated by God. Revelation's prophecies can thus motivate action, especially on the part of those fundamentalists who combine Biblical literalism with a textual timetable.¹⁸⁵ When this worldview intersects with oppressive prejudices, it is easy to prophesy the appearance of demonization, scapegoating, and conspiracism.

Author Hal Lindsey re-ignited Protestant apocalyptic speculation in 1970 with his book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which sold 10 million copies.¹⁸⁶ Lindsey argued that the End Times had arrived and that Christians should watch for the signs of the times.¹⁸⁷ Billy Graham again raised expectations in his 1983 book, *Approaching Hoofbeats: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, where he observed that Jesus Christ, "The Man on the white horse...will come when man has sunk to his lowest most perilous point in history." Graham then discussed how bad things were in the world.¹⁸⁸

Paul Boyer argues that Christian apocalypticism must be factored into both Cold War and post Cold War political equations. He notes that the 1974 prophecy book, *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis* sold three-quarters of a million copies.¹⁸⁹ The mainstreaming of apocalypticism received a major boost when, in 1983, Ronald Reagan cited scriptural authority to demonize the Soviet Union as an "evil empire."¹⁹⁰ Grace Halsell wrote in her book, *Prophecy*

and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War, of how some evangelists, including Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Hal Lindsey, hinted that use of atomic weapons was inevitable as part of the final battle of Armageddon.¹⁹¹

Halsell's book, and a monograph by Ruth W. Mouly, *The Religious Right and Israel: The Politics of Armageddon*, argued that one reason certain sectors of the Christian Right mobilized tremendous support for the State of Israel during the Reagan Administration, was in part because they believed Jews had to return to Israel before the millennialist prophecies of Revelation could be fulfilled.¹⁹²

Prophecy belief is widespread in the US. Philip Lamy reports that during the Gulf War, 14 percent of one CNN national poll thought it was the beginning of Armageddon, and "American bookstores were experiencing a run on books about prophecy and the end of the world."¹⁹³ In 1993 a *Times/CNN* national poll found that 20 percent of those polled thought the second coming of Christ would occur near the year 2000.¹⁹⁴

The process of prophecy belief triggering apocalyptic demonization and then leading to searches for the Devil's partners is continuously updated. Paul Boyer points out that those seen as the prophesied agents of Satan girding for End Times battle can be foreign or domestic or both. He notes how in prophetic literature the identity of Satan's allies in the Battle of Armageddon has shifted seamlessly over time, circumstance, and political interest from the Soviet Union to Chinese communists, to Islamic militants; and warns of an increasing level of anti-Muslim bigotry in some contemporary apocalyptic subcultures.¹⁹⁵

Robert Fuller has looked at the range of current targets:

"Today, fundamentalist Christian writers see the Antichrist in such enemies as the Muslim world, feminism, rock music, and secular humanism. The threat of the Antichrist's imminent takeover of the world's economy has been traced to the formation of the European Economic Community, the Susan B. Anthony dollar...and the introduction of universal product codes."¹⁹⁶

Visions of the Satanic Antichrist are common in relatively mainstream sectors of the new Christian Right. Typical of the current apocalyptic genre is a recent mailing from Prophetic Vision, a small international Christian evangelical outreach ministry, reporting that "prophecy is moving so fast" and "the Return of Christ is imminent." The mailing goes on to declare that the Antichrist, "Must be alive today waiting to take control!" and then solicits funds for the "end time harvest."

Rev. Pat Robertson frequently ties his conspiracist vision to apocalyptic hints that we are in the millennial "End Times," and End Times themes have repeatedly appeared on his "700 Club" television program. On one July 1998 program Robertson hinted that a tsunami in New Guinea coupled with the appearance of asteroids might be linked to Bible prophecy. Just after Christmas, 1994, the program carried a feature on new dollar bill designs being discussed to combat counterfeiting. The newscaster then cited Revelations 13 and suggested that if the Treasury Department put new codes on paper money, it might be the Antichrist's Mark of the Beast, predicted as a sign of the coming End Times.¹⁹⁷

Christians are also debating the importance of the "Y2K" bug, the technical programming problem that crashes some computer software when it tries to interpret the year 2000 using earlier computer code written to recognize only the numbers 0-99 for calendar-based calculations. As in secular circles, responses range from cautious preparations to doomsday scenarios that have led some to establish rural survivalist retreats.¹⁹⁸ At the 1998 Christian Coalition's annual Road to Victory conference, a workshop was devoted to announcing a plan to mobilize churches to provide food, water, shelter, and medical supplies in case the Y2K bug caused widespread societal problems.¹⁹⁹ This mobilization was justified by arguing the anticipation of resulting disruptions was appropriate no matter what the eschatological viewpoint; and that if there was no serious disruption, the supplies could aid the poor. This equation neatly sidestepped the issue of the End Times, while allowing those who believe we are in the End Times to work cooperatively with those who do not.

Christian Reconstructionist author Gary North is now a much-quoted expert on the Y2K bug. He sees much chaos created by Y2K, but dismisses the link to Christ's imminent return.²⁰⁰ Some post-millennialists are more in line with the suspicious view expressed in the John Birch Society magazine, *New American*: "Much like the Reichstag fire, could the Millennium Bug provide an ambitious President with an opportunity to seize dictatorial powers?"²⁰¹

Most Christians, even those who think the End Times are imminent, do not automatically succumb to demonization, scapegoating, and conspiracist thinking. Yet in the escalating surge of millennial titles, a scary number name the agents of the Antichrist or claim to expose the evil End Times conspiracy: Examples include: *Global Peace and the Rise of Antichrist*; *One World Under Antichrist: Globalism, Seducing Spirits and Secrets of the New World Order*; *Foreshocks of Antichrist*; *How Democracy Will Elect the Antichrist*; *The Ultimate Denial of Freedom, Liberty and Justice According to the Bible*.²⁰²

Gender issues play an important role in apocalyptic millennialism. In describing the symbolism in Revelation, one contemporary Catholic commentary cautions against negative stereotyping of women.²⁰³ This is a needed caution, because anti-feminist, misogynist and homophobic interpretations of Revelation are widespread. A 1978 brochure with an apocalyptic subtext from Texas Eagle Forum was titled: *Christian Be Watchful: Hidden Dangers in the New Coalition of Feminism, Humanism, Socialism, Lesbianism.*²⁰⁴ As Lee Quinby has noted, while it is difficult to predict the outcomes of millennial moments, the current manifestation is unlikely to be good for women.²⁰⁵

A good example is the Christian evangelical men's movement, Promise Keepers, which has scheduled "Vision 2000" rallies at "key population centers and state capitols around the United States," for January 1, 2000.²⁰⁶ At the massive Promise Keepers rally of Christian men on the Washington Mall in October 1997, questions about the approaching End Times elicited eager responses.²⁰⁷

While the Promise Keepers is driven in part by millennial expectation, it is also a response to the need for men to find a coherent identity in modern culture that responds in some creative way to the issues raised by the civil rights and feminist movements.²⁰⁸ Nonetheless, when push comes to shove, men in the Promise Keepers are still considered the spiritual leaders in their families. As PK president Randy Phillips said, "we have to listen and honor and respect our wives," but admitted, "[w]e talk about ultimately the decision lying with the man."²⁰⁹

Acknowledging the sincere religious devotion and quest for growth of many Promise Keepers men, academic Lee Quinby, who has extensively researched the subject area, nonetheless sees political content in the group's vision of "apocalyptic masculinity," which rejects gender equality and scapegoats homosexuals and feminists "as a threat to the pure community." Quinby calls this tendency "coercive purity."²¹⁰

Sociologist Sara Diamond reports that even some Christians who are dubious of "hard" End Times claims have nevertheless been re-energized by a "softer" millennial view of the year 2000 as a time for aggressive evangelism or even "spiritual warfare" against demonic forces.²¹¹ The broad quest for purity associated with the "softer" millennial thinking among apocalyptic Christians can breed violence, such as seen in the escalating attacks on abortion providers. It has already sparked legislative efforts to enforce divisive and narrowly-defined Biblical standards of morality. The wave of newspaper advertisements calling on gay men and lesbians to "cure" themselves by turning to Jesus is another example of a Christian coercive purity

campaign influenced by millennial expectation. Richard K. Fenn, a professor of Theology and Society at Princeton Theological Seminary, argues that popular "rituals of purification" in a society are closely associated with apocalyptic and millennial beliefs.²¹²

Jeremiah the Profitable Prophet

An example of a group profiting from a campaign of millennial ritual purification is Jeremiah Films, named after the Biblical prophet. Jeremiah Films and Jeremiah Books are run by the husband and wife team of Pat and Caryl Matrisciana.

Sen. Trent Lott, who in 1998 denounced homosexuals as not just sinful but sick, had already appeared in Jeremiah's 1993 anti-gay video "Gay Rights, Special Rights." The video, used in several statewide legislative campaigns to erode basic rights for gay men and lesbians, also features former attorney general Edwin Meese III and former education secretary William J. Bennett, along with notable conspiracists such as David Noebel of Summit Ministries. Lott also stars in Jeremiah's 1993 video "The Crash—The Coming Financial Collapse of America," which comes in two versions, one with a secular doomsday scenario and another with a special Christian cut featuring discussions of End Times Biblical prophecy.

Jeremiah has a large collection of conspiracist videos. Caryl Matrisciana, a leading author of Christian Right books with conspiracist themes, co-hosted a thirteen-part video series from Jeremiah titled "Pagan Invasion." The series includes videos that claim evolution is a hoax, Freemasonry is a pagan religion, Halloween is a tool for Satanic abduction, and Mormonism is a cult heresy. The Jeremiah video on Mormonism has earned rebukes from mainstream religious commentators for its bigoted intolerance toward the Mormon faith.²¹³

One segment of the Jeremiah Films series "Pagan Invasion," is titled "Preview of the Antichrist." It is described in an online Christian Right catalog with the following blurb:

"According to Ancient Hebrew scriptures, in the last days mankind will urgently seek the security of a one - world government. This global desire for a super leader, who will bring peace and safety to a world in chaos, will ultimately leave the human race vulnerable to the beguiling charm and the most intelligent, powerful, and charismatic person of all history. The Bible calls this man the "anti-christ." Ironically, he will dominate the globe and orchestrate society's ultimate destruction. Chuck Smith and Caryl Matrisciana host this blueprint of apocalyptic events. Interviews with prophecy experts Chuck Missler, Hal

Lindsey, and Peter Lalonde explain "why" the world will follow this man into perdition. Must viewing for all who desire a glimpse of the future."²¹⁴

Jeremiah is best known for *The Clinton Chronicles*, a video distributed widely by Jerry Falwell, which alleges that the President is at the head of a vast murderous conspiracy. *The Clinton Chronicles* video and the subsequent *The Clinton Chronicles* book are the work of Jeremiah's Patrick Matrisciana, who is also founder and president of Citizens for Honest Government, a group dedicated to the impeachment of President Clinton.²¹⁵

Many of the conspiracist attacks on President Bill Clinton originate in the apocalyptic sector of the Christian Right. One example is a book penned by Texe Marrs, titled *Big Sister Is Watching You: Hillary Clinton And The White House Feminists Who Now Control America—And Tell The President What To Do*. The book claims a plot by "FemiNazis" and their allies in "subversive organizations whose goal is to end American sovereignty and bring about a global Marxist paradise."²¹⁶

Catholic Marianist Apocalypics

Catholics who pay special devotion to the Virgin Mary constitute a diverse Marianist subculture within the Church. Some Marianist groups have clashed with Church hierarchy over what constitutes an appropriate amount of adoration expressed for the Virgin Mary in relation to that reserved for Jesus Christ. Some Marianists report sightings or apparitions of the Virgin Mary; and these are sometimes considered End Times warnings.²¹⁷

The basic message of the Marianist magazine *Fatima Crusader*, for example, is that we are in the apocalyptic End Times and are facing a direct struggle with Satan. Furthermore, the magazine urges that the actions and religious devotions of true Catholics must be based on End Times warnings and predictions made in appearances by the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ before the Catholic faithful.²¹⁸

Visions of the Virgin Mary have inspired devout Catholics to pay more attention to their religious duties since 1531 when an apparition of Mary appeared at Guadeloupe, Mexico. A shrine to the Virgin of Guadeloupe was built at the site, and the appearance was venerated in Europe.

The Virgin Mary also appeared several times before three children in Fatima, Portugal in 1917, and a shrine to Our Lady of Fatima was built there as well. A major message delivered at Fatima was the need to carry out the consecration and conversion of Russia to Christianity.²¹⁹ This mandate had serendipitous benefit to the anticommunist movement within Catholicism,

which in turn had socio-political consequences in Europe and the US.

Now, given the collapse of Godless communism in Russia, this task might seem less pressing. Not so; in the worldview of *The Fatima Crusader*, Russian tyranny can come in many forms. *The Fatima Crusader's* editorial position is that the predictions at Fatima refer to the threat of a Russian-style collectivist One World Government ushered in by socialists, liberals, secular humanists, homosexuals, abortionists, and followers of the New-Age spirituality movement. Articles in *The Fatima Crusader* also weave in millennialist references to Biblical prophecies about the End Times struggles against Satan and the Antichrist.

Numerous apparitions of Mary have been reported at a number of locations, with disputes arising among competing factions within the Marianist subculture as to which appearances are true and to be venerated, and which are hoaxes to be denounced. Medjugorje is a Herzegovinian village in what was Yugoslavia, where visions, first reported in the 1970s, draw Marianists from all over the world.²²⁰ In Bayside, New York, starting in 1968, the late Veronica Lueken reported visions that became increasingly apocalyptic, including news from the Virgin that the Antichrist was alive and on earth.²²¹ Starting in 1993 the faithful gathered at Conyers, Georgia to hear divine messages from Mary revealed through former nurse Nancy Fowler.²²²

In the Summer, 1994 issue of the Marianist *Fatima Family Messenger*, Charles Martel writes, in an article on "The Antichrist," that "The Church is in a shambles" characterized by:

- "Open rebellion against authority,
- "Enthusiasm for abortion, contraception, divorce, etc.,
- "Addition of many clerics to Marxism,
- "Presence of un-Catholic teachings in seminaries and universities,
- "Widespread and well organized homosexual network,
- "Acceptance of New Age belief as the latest of ecumenism."²²³

Martel argues that "There is much more indisputable evidence available which indicates that the Antichrist is here and is in command."²²⁴

Another right-wing Catholic publication with apocalyptic themes is the *Michael Journal*, which includes conspiracist articles about the parasitic nature of financial elites that reflect historic anti-Semitic themes. *Michael Journal* celebrates the memory of Father Coughlin, the Catholic priest whose national radio programs in the 1930s moved from labor populism to anti-Semitism and eventually to fascist-style demagoguery. Coughlin is described as a man

"Who courageously denounced the bankers' debt-money system." According to the *Michael Journal*, "The Illuminati are elite men, those on the top, who control the International Bankers to control, for evil purposes, the entire world." Followers of the *Michael Journal* lobbied against the Massachusetts seat belt law, believing it was a collectivist step toward Satanic One World Government. The newspaper featured an article titled "The Beast of the Apocalypse: 666" which proclaimed that "Satan's redoubtable ally" was a "gigantic auto-programming computer" in Brussels at the headquarters of the European Common Market.²²⁵

Right-wing Catholic Marianists and apocalyptics are a significant force in the militant wing of the anti-abortion movement. Human Life International, a right-wing Catholic group, is a major source of anti-abortion materials for such activists. HLI publishes and distributes books that feature conspiracist thinking and misogyny, with titles such as *Sex Education: The Final Plague*, *The Feminist Takeover*, and *Ungodly Rage: The Hidden Face of Catholic Feminism*. HLI also distributes the book *New World Order: The Ancient Plan of Secret Societies*, by William T. Still, which attacks the Freemasons as part of conspiracy to control the country through the issuing of paper money.²²⁶ The book is also sold by right-wing groups other than HLI. According to Still, his book:

"...[s]hows how an ancient plan has been hidden for centuries deep within secret societies. This scheme is designed to bring all of mankind under a single world government—a New World Order. This plan is of such antiquity that its result is even mentioned in ...Revelation...."²²⁷

As this comment citing Revelations suggests, the battle against the conspiracy is the battle between good and evil. The back cover blurb of Still's book confirms this by stating that the plan "to bring all nations under one-world government" is actually "the biblical rule of the Antichrist."²²⁸

Asserting that the Federal Reserve is part of the conspiracy, Still incorporates references to the Rothschild banking interests in a way that reflects historic anti-Semitic theories alleging Jewish control over the economy.²²⁹ Still's book is endorsed in a back-cover blurb by D. James Kennedy, Ph.D., influential senior minister of the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church. According to Kennedy's blurb:

"Regardless of your views about the coming of a world government, Bill Still's new book will make you reassess the odds. He traces the historic role of secret societies and their influence on the "Great Plan" to erase nationalism in preparation for a global dictatorship. He allows the facts to speak

for themselves, as he sounds an ominous warning for the 21st Century."²³⁰

Here we see apocalyptic conspiracism bridging the divide between politically-active right-wing Catholics and Protestants.

The Patriot & Armed Militia Movements

In the 1970s and 1980s far right Christian Identity and Constitutionalist groups interacted with apocalyptic survivalists to spawn a number of militant quasi-underground formations, including some that called themselves patriots or militias.²³¹ During the height of the rural farm crisis in the early 1980s, one of these groups, the *Posse Comitatus*—a loosely-knit armed network that spread conspiracism, white supremacy, and anti-Semitism throughout the farm belt—captured a small but significant number of sympathizers among farmers and ranchers.²³² Other groups, such as Aryan Nations and the Lyndon LaRouche group were also active, and soon a loose network was constructed linking tax protesters to groups as far to the right as various Ku Klux Klan splinter groups and neonazi organizations.

The Patriot movement and its armed wing, the citizen militias, are revivals of these and earlier right-wing populist movements, emerging in the 1990s after the collapse of European communism and the launching of the Gulf War. When President Bush announced his new foreign policy would help build a New World Order, his phrasing surged through the Christian and secular hard right like an electric shock, since the phrase had been used to represent the dreaded collectivist One World Government for decades. Some Christians saw Bush as signaling the End Times betrayal by a world leader. Secular anticommunists saw a bold attempt to smash US sovereignty and impose a tyrannical collectivist system run by the United Nations. This galvanized into activism pre-existing anti-globalist sentiments within the right.²³³

A self-conscious Patriot movement coalesced involving some 5 million persons who suspected—to varying degrees—that the government was manipulated by secret elites and planned the imminent imposition of some form of tyranny. The Patriot movement is bracketed on the reformist side by the John Birch Society and the conspiratorial segment of the Christian right, and on the insurgent side by the Liberty Lobby and groups promoting themes historically associated with white supremacy and anti-Semitism. A variety of pre-existing far right vigilante groups (including Christian Identity adherents and outright neonazi groups) were influential in helping organize the broader Patriot and armed militias movement.²³⁴ The Patriot movement has drawn recruits from several other pre-existing movements and networks, including gun rights,

anti-abortion, survivalist, anticommunist, libertarian, anti-tax, and anti-environmentalist.

Patriot movement adherents who formed armed units became known as the armed militia movement. During the mid-1990s, armed militias were sporadically active in all fifty states, with numbers estimated at between 20,000 and 60,000.²³⁵ Both the Patriot and armed militia movements grew rapidly, relying on computer networks, FAX trees, short-wave radio, AM talk radio, and videotape and audiotape distribution. These movements are arguably the first major US social movements to be organized primarily through overlapping non-traditional electronic media. The core narrative carried by these media outlets was apocalyptic: featuring claims that the US government was controlled by a vast conspiracy of secret elites plotting a New World Order, and was planning to impose a globalist UN police state in the near future.

A key early figure in organizing the militia movement using the short-wave radio and the Internet was Linda Thompson, whose elaborate apocalyptic warnings and conspiratorial assertions of government plots were widely believed within the militia movement until she called for an armed march on Washington, DC to punish traitorous elected officials.²³⁶ Her plan was widely criticized as dangerous, probably illegal, and possibly part of a government conspiracy to entrap militia members. Mark Koernke, *aka* Mark of Michigan, quickly replaced her as the most-favored militia intelligence analyst.

In anticipation of attack by government agents, a significant segment of the Patriot and armed militia movement embraces survivalism. Survivalism is an apocalyptic view (with both Christian and secular proponents), that advocates gathering and storing large supplies of food, water, and medicine, in anticipation of economic collapse, social unrest, or the Tribulations. Some adherents also purchase gold and other precious metals as a hedge against currency devaluation; and some acquire weapons. Philip Lamy titled his book on the subject *Millennium Rage: Survivalists, White Supremacists, and the Doomsday Prophecy*.²³⁷

As a protective maneuver, a number of survivalists have withdrawn to remote, usually rural, locations, or formed small communities for mutual self-defense. This is what led the Weaver family to a remote region of Idaho. Randy Weaver and his wife were survivalists as well as Christian Identity adherents. Had the federal marshals who surrounded their house in 1992 factored these beliefs into their plan for arresting Randy Weaver, the subsequent deadly shoot-out might have been avoided. Federal Marshal William Degan, and Weaver's wife Vicki and son Samuel died. Randy Weaver and his friend Kevin Harris were wounded.²³⁸

Some Christian fundamentalist survivalists believe that to avoid the Mark of the Beast, they must live apart from secular society for a period of up to 42 months. Robert K. Spear, a key figure on the patriot and militia training circuit, is the author of *Surviving Global Slavery: Living Under the New World Order*.²³⁹ According to Spear, we are approaching the Tribulations of the End Times. Spear cites Revelation, Chapter 13, and warns that Christians will soon be asked to accept the Satanic Mark of the Beast and thus reject Christ. True Christians, according to Spear, must defend their faith and prepare the way for the return of Christ through the formation of armed Christian communities. His book is dedicated to "those who will have to face the Tribulations."

In 1993, the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas functioned as this type of fundamentalist survivalist retreat. Davidian leader David Koresh was decoding Revelation as an End Times script and preparing for the Tribulations. The government's failure to comprehend the Davidian's millennialist worldview set the stage for the deadly miscalculations by government agents, which cost the lives of 80 Branch Davidians (including 21 children), and four federal agents.²⁴⁰ TV coverage of this incident sent images of fiery apocalypse cascading throughout the society, further inflaming the apocalyptic paradigm within right-wing anti-government groups.²⁴¹

Throughout the late 1990s, the Patriot and armed militia movements overlapped with a resurgent states' rights movement, and a new "county supremacy" movement. There was a rapid growth of illegal so-called "constitutionalist" "common law courts," set up by persons claiming non-existent "sovereign" citizenship. These courts claimed jurisdiction over legal matters on the county or state level, and dismissed the US judicial system as corrupt and unconstitutional.²⁴² Constitutionalist legal theory creates a two-tiered concept of citizenship in which white people have a superior "natural law" or "sovereign" citizenship. Amazingly, many supporters of constitutionalism seem oblivious to the racism in this construct.

The most publicized incident involving common law ideology was the 1996 standoff involving the Montana Freeman, who combined Christian Identity, bogus common law legal theories, "debt-money" theories that reject the legality of the Federal Reserve system, and apocalyptic expectation.²⁴³ On a global level, many of the fears over declining sovereignty are linked to the idea that "the UN is a critical cornerstone of the New World Order," as one Birch Society publication put it.²⁴⁴

Three men suspected of shooting a law enforcement officer while attempting to steal a water truck in Colorado in 1998 had talked to friends about

the coming collapse of society, using Patriot-style rhetoric. Two reportedly attended meetings of a local Patriot group.²⁴⁵ Incidents like this are likely to increase as we near the year 2000. However, the conspiracist scapegoating of right-wing populism, like that in the Patriot and armed militia movements, creates not only individual acts of violence, but also what Mary Rupert has dubbed "a seedbed for fascism."²⁴⁶ Right-wing populism is a recruitment pool for the far right.

The Far Right

The far right in the US is composed of groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, the Christian Patriots, ideological fascists, and neonazis. The term "far right" in this context refers to groups with an aggressively-insurgent or extra-legal agenda, including calls for denying basic human rights to a target group. Christian Patriots combine Christian nationalism with constitutionalism.²⁴⁷ Non-Christian neonazis are able to work in coalitions with the Christian Patriot groups due to shared anti-government sentiments and conspiracism rooted in historic anti-Jewish bigotry.

The most significant worldview in the Christian Patriot movement is Christian Identity, which believes the US is the Biblical "Promised Land" and considers white Christians to be God's "Chosen People."²⁴⁸ Michael Barkun in *Religion and the Racist Right* has tracked the influence of apocalyptic millennialism on major racist and anti-Semitic ideologues within Christian Identity, including Wesley Swift, William Potter Gale, Richard Butler, Sheldon Emry, and Pete Peters.²⁴⁹ The neonazi version of Identity ideology claims Jews are Satanic agents who manipulate subhuman people of color.²⁵⁰

Christian Identity was a common core belief in the *Posse Comitatus* in the 1980s. Some Ku Klux Klan and racist skinhead groups now espouse Identity, as does Aryan Nations. Identity is a millennialist ideology that plans for an imminent apocalyptic race war, and history has proved that they act on their beliefs—making the threat of violence especially real.²⁵¹ Many proponents of Christian Identity seek to overthrow the "Zionist Occupational Government" in Washington, DC and establish an exclusively white, Christian nation. In this ideology Jews are pictured as agents of the Antichrist who must be eliminated to prepare the way for the return of Christ.²⁵²

The Gulf War encouraged Christian Patriot groups to peddle anti-Semitic conspiracist theories about Jewish power behind US military involvement. An example was the 40-page newsprint tabloid booklet by Nord Davis, Jr., *Desert Shield and the New World Order*, published in 1990 by his Northpoint Tactical Teams.²⁵³ Other pre-existing Christian Patriot groups quickly reached out to the emerging militia movement with similar propaganda materials. For instance the

Tennessee-based Christian Civil Liberties Association published *The Militia News*, ostensibly a newspaper but actually a catalog of books and other educational resources including guides on how to evade government tracking and surveillance. The opening article, "U.S. Government Initiates Open Warfare Against American People," is a good example of anti-Semitic Christian Patriot dogma:

"...following the turn of the 20th century, Communism (the Judeo-Bolsheviks of Russia) and other diabolical movements and philosophies—Fabian socialism, materialism, atheism, and secular humanism—would, like malignant parasites, establish themselves in America. Even our presidents, beginning with Franklin Roosevelt, would begin using the resources of this nation to finance and support our foreign enemies, particularly the Communist and Zionist movements."²⁵⁴

The article rails against what the author sees as the unconstitutional attack on states' rights by "Court mandated integration and forced busing" in the 1960s, and the "systematic de-Christianization of the nation."²⁵⁵ Warning this is part of a "satanic conspiracy," the author advises that for the government to succeed, "the globalists must outlaw and confiscate" firearms.

"Every gun owner who is the least bit informed knows that those who are behind this conspiracy—who now have their people well placed in political office, in the courts, in the media, and in the schools, are working for the total disarming of the American people and the surrender of our nation and its sovereignty....The time is at hand when men and women must decide whether they are on the side of freedom and justice, the American republic, and Almighty God; or if they are on the side of tyranny and oppression, the New World Order, and Satan."²⁵⁶

Mobilizing gun owners was the first step in building the militia movement out of the Patriot movement. The Weaver and Waco incidents focused the attention of the Patriot movement as examples of government tyranny, and served as trigger events to galvanize a mobilization in 1993 and 1994 around stopping the Brady Bill and gun control provisions of the Crime Control Act.²⁵⁷ But more militant and suspicious elements within the Patriot movement grafted apocalyptic conspiracist fears onto the gun rights campaign, arguing that if gun rights were restricted, a brutal and repressive government crack-down on gun owners would quickly follow. The Weaver and Waco incidents were seen as field tests of the planned repression, with the ultimate goal being UN

control of the US to benefit the conspiracy of secret globalist elites. While for many this was a secular narrative, an apocalyptic and millennialist End Times overlay was easily added by Christian fundamentalist elements in the movement. Another overlay was overt anti-Jewish conspiracism. The solution, given this narrative, was to create independent armed defensive units to resist the expected wave of government violence—thus the armed citizens militias.

Timothy McVeigh, who had moved from conspiracist anti-government beliefs into militant neonazi ideology, blew up the Oklahoma City federal building on the anniversary of the Waco conflagration to protest government abuse of power which he, and others, believed was prelude to a tyrannical New World Order.²⁵⁸ It is likely that McVeigh wanted his act of terrorism to push the more defensive and less ideological militias into a more racialized and militant insurgency. His act of terrorism mimicked a scenario in the novel *The Turner Diaries*, which he distributed to friends. Written by neonazi William Pierce, *The Turner Diaries* has apocalyptic themes invoking the cleansing nature of ritual violence typical of Nazi ideology, which also sought a millenarian Thousand Year Reich.²⁵⁹ McVeigh's apparently secular concern that during the Gulf War the government had implanted a micro-chip into his body echoes historic concerns among fundamentalist Christians that the Mark of the Beast might be hidden in electronic devices.

The Politics of Apocalyptic Millennialism

The period immediately prior to a millennial date can be marked by people turning inward in preparation, removing themselves from society, and in extreme cases, committing suicide. Conversely, some who believe the end of time means there will be literally no time for punishment, may act out on their anger by killing their enemies. Other people swept up in millennial expectation target demonized groups for discrimination or violence to cleanse the society, or push it toward the final showdown. During the post-millennial period, people can turn outward, and express anger over failed expectations by blaming scapegoated groups for having prevented the transformation.²⁶⁰

In Robert Fuller's view, apocalyptic fervor is complex, and part of a "literary and theological tradition," that is "transmitted through a variety of cultural institutions that are relatively immune" to certain "social or economic forces."²⁶¹ Philip Lamy agrees that millennialism has many sources, but contends it generally can be tied to societal conflict and resistance to change.²⁶² An early study of millenarian "Cargo Cults" in the Pacific Islands showed how they grew as a resistance movement against colonialism.²⁶³

Millennialist movements in the US often have reflected a manichaeian framework of absolute good versus absolute evil. As Jeffrey Kaplan notes:

"A manichaeian framework requires the adherent to see the world as the devil's domain, in which the tiny, helpless "righteous remnant" perseveres through the protection of God in the hope that, soon, God will see fit to intervene once and for all in the life of this world."²⁶⁴

This perspective can promote a passive, fatalist response, or can lead some to be pro-active and interventionist, seeking to prepare the way for the anticipated confrontation. Believers can be optimistic or pessimistic about the outcome.

Fuller ties the millennialist viewpoint to the larger issues of demonization and scapegoating when he argues that:

"Many efforts to name the Antichrist appear to be rooted in the psychological need to project one's "unacceptable" tendencies onto a demonic enemy. It is the Antichrist, not oneself, who must be held responsible for wayward desires. And with so many aspects of modern American life potentially luring individuals into nonbiblical thoughts or desire, it is no wonder that many people believe that the Antichrist has camouflaged himself to better work his conspiracies against the faithful."²⁶⁵

In many cases the worldview of the reader or listener determines who gets scapegoated by the conspiracist narrative. Some people exposed to the same conspiracist article or radio program might decide the villains are generic new world order secret elites who are manipulating the government, while others will be convinced it is demonic forces of the Antichrist signaling the apocalyptic End Times. Some, inevitably, will blame it all on the Jews. A skillful wordsmith can address all three audiences at the same time by using coded rhetoric.

The book *Trilaterals Over Washington* appears to be a secular critique, but it takes on a new dimension when the illustration on the cover is identified as the three-headed beast mentioned in Revelation, which in turn gives added meaning to the inside graphic with the headline: "The Trilateral Commission: the Devil's Triangle of your future."²⁶⁶

In some cases the audience provides its own overlay that extrapolates beyond the intended message. C. Wright Mills, G. William Domhoff, and Holly Sklar have written structural and institutional critiques of power that eschew conspiracism.²⁶⁷ Yet right-wing populists cite these works, then claim that more informed research has exposed the nest of secret elites at the source of the conspiracy. Antony C. Sutton's

Wall Street and the Rise of Hitler even features a chart showing Sutton names more "conspirators" than Domhoff, meant to prove that Sutton has the superior analysis.²⁶⁸ Both Domhoff and Sklar have expressed exasperation at having their work touted by right-wing conspiracists.²⁶⁹

In November, 1997 the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University held an international symposium to discuss the historical dynamics of apocalypticism. Most of those at the symposium agreed that the track record is bleak. Center director Richard Landes expressed his concern that "most people don't understand how quickly demonization and scapegoating can gain an audience in millennial times, particularly when believers become disappointed and frustrated."

Landes hopes the current millennial moment can have a positive outcome, and that apocalyptic fervor can be directed away from scapegoating and toward constructive and self-reflective renewal projects.²⁷⁰ Stephen O'Leary points out that this will be tricky, "the study of apocalyptic argument leads to the conclusion that its stratagems are endless, and not susceptible to negation through rational criticism."²⁷¹ He suggests patience, a sense of tragedy in history, and a sense of humor in interaction as the best strategies for mending communities that have experienced the trauma of apocalyptic confrontation.

As we approach the millennium, there is an increase in, and a convergence of: apocalyptic thinking, demonization, scapegoating, and conspiracism. At the same time we are in the midst of the longest right-wing backlash movement since the end of Reconstruction. Ritual purification campaigns by the Christian Right continue to spread divisiveness. For some apocalyptic Christians, the End Times have arrived, and the witch hunt for satanic agents has begun in earnest. A right-wing populist revolt against globalization blames secret elites and sinister conspiracies. Clinic attacks, terrorist bombings, and racist murders can be linked to increasing apocalyptic preparation or retribution. Yet there has been reluctance to recognize the pattern and face the dilemma, despite numerous books on the subject by serious scholars.

Apocalyptic conspiracy theories played a role in the criminal cases of John C. Salvi, 3d, convicted in the murder of two reproductive health center workers and the wounding of five others, and the case of Francisco Martin Duran, who sprayed the White House with bullets. Duran was known to listen to a conspiracy-mongering right-wing Colorado-based radio talk show hosted by Chuck Baker that broadcast conspiratorial claims by adherents to the Patriot and armed militia movements.²⁷² Both Duran and Salvi showed signs of psychological disturbance.

Salvi was arguably mentally ill, and later committed suicide in jail. Prior to his deadly rampage, Salvi distributed lurid photographs of fetuses from Human Life International. He began quoting from Revelation and warning about the need for increased vigilance and action among devout Catholics.²⁷³ He had expressed interest in the armed militia movement.²⁷⁴ Much of John Salvi's rhetoric about the corrupt money system echoed themes in the *Michael Journal*. Magazines found in Salvi's residence included *The New American* and *The Fatima Crusader*, both published by right-wing groups promoting conspiracist theories and vociferously opposing abortion and homosexuality.²⁷⁵ One issue of *The New American* found in John Salvi's possession contained an article exploring the idea that killing an abortion provider might be morally justified, an idea promoted in some militant anti-abortion circles.²⁷⁶

Some people with a mental illness who carry out acts of violence cannot successfully control their fears and anger and act them out against real targets. Salvi's psychological condition was not demonstrated by his claims about a banking conspiracy, which are commonplace in the Catholic apocalyptic right, nor was his choice of targets random.²⁷⁷ Certainly a person like Salvi does not represent the mainstream of Catholicism, the anti-abortion movement, or the US political right, but he expresses the views of a durable subculture with conspiracist views that target scapegoats.

This dynamic of rhetoric triggering violence functions more easily among the mentally ill. But scapegoats can be injured or killed by those people—no matter what their mental state—who act out their conspiratorial beliefs in a zealous manner. The failure of political and religious leaders to take strong public stands against groups and individuals that demagogically spread scapegoating conspiracist theories encourages this dangerous dynamic. Yet when President Clinton spoke out against the rhetoric of demonization following the Oklahoma City bombing, he was criticized by pundits across the political spectrum.²⁷⁸

Many questions need more study. When does demonizing rhetoric by demagogues motivate action among followers who are not mentally ill? Why and when do seemingly sane followers of ideological leaders begin to act out their beliefs through violence? When and how does apocalyptic violence become a mass movement? How and when can it become state policy?

Right-wing populist movements can cause serious damage to a society because they often popularize xenophobia, authoritarianism, scapegoating, and conspiracism. This can lure mainstream politicians to adopt these themes to attract voters, legitimize acts of

discrimination (or even violence), and open the door for revolutionary right-wing populist movements, such as fascism, to recruit from the reformist populist movements.

According to Richard K. Fenn:

Fascist tendencies are most likely to flourish wherever vestiges of a traditional community, bound together by ties of race and kinship, persist in a society largely dominated by large-scale organizations, by an industrial class system, and by a complex division of labor. Under these conditions the traditional community itself becomes threatened; its members all the

more readily dread and demonize the larger society.²⁷⁹

Fenn argues that apocalyptic themes that lead to this tendency can be found in all three of the political tendencies examined in this study: the Christian Right, Patriot and armed militia movements, and the fascist right.²⁸⁰

By understanding the apocalyptic and millennialist roots of the conspiracist narratives peddled by right-wing populist forces, we can better understand why their claims—that seem on the surface to be outlandish—nonetheless resonate in certain alienated sectors of our society.²⁸¹

Conclusions

The history of apocalyptic fervor and millennial expectation is written by those secure in their knowledge that all previous predictions of terminal cataclysm have turned out to be false. After all, if the end of time ever arrives, it will leave behind no historians or sociologists, thus making skepticism an appealing and safe alternative. While believers prepare for the spiritual tsunami that will wash away both sins and sinners, skeptics make the assumption that it is just another wave that will eventually collapse, seeping away through the infinite sands of time. Yet no matter what we believe, we are all destined to experience the effects of the apocalypse, because it invents itself in the maelstrom of the human mind, and no logical arguments can stop the storm.

Mere observation is morally insufficient. We need to do damage control in anticipation of the apocalypse. The challenge is to respect devout religious belief while

focusing societal energy on a millennial period of introspection and renewal rather than a period of fear and mistrust. We ignore apocalyptic fears and millennial expectation at our own peril, and by ignoring the trends, we put others in peril as well. Given the already evident tendency toward apocalyptic scapegoating as we approach the year 2000, it is entirely predictable that more people will be targeted as evil agents of the Satanic Antichrist, traitorous minions of the globalist new world order, or simply sinners to be disciplined and kept in line in religious campaigns of coercive purity.

In times such as these, history passes a harsh judgment on silence. Instead of waiting to see who is next on the list, we must speak out against all forms of apocalyptic demonization, scapegoating, and conspiracism, because they are toxic to democratic discourse.

Author's Note

Many of the themes and ideas expressed in this paper are the result of joint work with Matthew N. Lyons on the forthcoming *Too Close for Comfort*. Seminars hosted by historian Richard Landes, director of the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University, helped me frame this discussion, as did conversations with Sara Diamond, Fred Clarkson, Philip Lamy, Aaron Katz, and Erin Miller.