

## **ENEMIES IN OUR MIDST:**

### **An Inquiry into the Nature of Conspiracy and Political Paranoia**

One of the ancient world's most enduring – albeit dubious – contributions to human history is the concept of the “scapegoat.” Throughout the ages, humankind has time and again responded to the overwhelming challenges presented by radical cultural, political or economic change and uncertainty by assessing blame – by “uncovering” pernicious, mendacious (and often monolithic) conspiracies. Whether the conspirators are called “witches,” “Masons,” Irish Catholics,” “Jewish Bankers,” or “Communists,” these “enemies in our midst” become the focus of society's fear, paranoia, and dread. Frequently, in rushing to answer the question “who's responsible?” societies fail to come to grips – or even deal with – the underlying nexus of causes that make “what is” so much different from what's “supposed to be.”

These six standalone lectures explore six different episodes of “conspiracy-building” in modern history, and attempt to discover what might be termed “the psychopathology of political paranoia.” In each case, we will examine the social, cultural and/or political upheavals that created the need for finger pointing, and investigate the conspiracies that were believed to be working behind the scenes.

#### **Lectures (six):**

1. **The Witches of Salem:** A notorious flashpoint in Colonial American history, whereby fear of change was blamed on a “devil-intoxicated” band of women
2. **The Freemasons of Revolutionary France:** In late 18<sup>th</sup> century France, many believed that the revolution – far from being an act of liberation – was actually a conspiracy on the part of a super-secret cabal.
3. **The Irish-Catholics:** In mid-19<sup>th</sup> century America, fear of newly immigrating Irish Catholics led to the formation of a Nativist political movement called “The Know-Nothings.”
4. **The Elders of Zion:** History's most notorious forgery. An attempt to prove that the world was (and to some, still is), dominated by the Tribes of Israel.
5. **The Red Scare:** Post World War I America's orgy of fear.
6. **H.U.A.C., Hollywood and McCarthyism:** Paranoia in the post-atomic age.