

are the repository of wisdom and the bridge to our successful past and add a critical dimension to the dynamism of the young.

**George S. Alexopoulos, M.D.**

*Dr. Alexopoulos is the S.P. Tobin and A.M. Cooper Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Weill-Cornell Medical College, and Director of the Weill-Cornell Institute of Geriatric Psychiatry, New York.*

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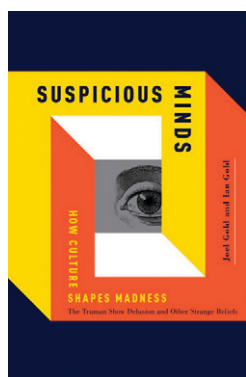
## Suspicious Minds: How Culture Shapes Madness

by Joel Gold and Ian Gold. New York, Free Press, 2014, 352 pp., \$26.00.

Navigating a middle ground between neuroscience and psychology, the authors of *Suspicious Minds: How Culture Shapes Madness* construct a novel perspective on the meaning of specific delusions and the interplay of modern society with what they posit to be a fundamental tendency of the human mind to be suspicious. Their jumping off point is the infrequently encountered delusion that one is like the character in the film *The Truman Show*, an unwilling star in a widely broadcast TV show about one's life.

The central arguments of the book are developed by means of prose interwoven with clinical vignettes of delusional patients. Starting with rich descriptions of patients with “the *Truman Show* delusion,” the authors then take us through a brief history of madness and the theories and treatments thereof. This section benefits from the dual backgrounds of the authors: psychiatry and philosophy. Thus, this history includes the underlying theories and philosophies of the time as well as the treatments used, starting (albeit briefly) with ancient cultures and progressing to modern times. It should be noted that the vast majority of this section centers on Western history.

The central theses of the book are then developed, leading to the conclusion that our modern culture, with its large cities and intrusive electronic surveillance, exacerbates what underlying vulnerabilities exist in individuals, driving some into delusional states dominated by paranoid themes. Various well-replicated findings in psychiatry are brought to bear, such as the heightened risk of schizophrenia in urban and immigrant populations. While the authors briefly mention evidence from neuroscience research regarding the relevance of particular brain areas, this part of their argument remains thinly developed. Instead, they spend much of the latter part of the book building upon the concept of a “Suspicion System” as a segue into understanding how



paranoid delusions arise and persist. They hypothesize that this Suspicion System is “the solution that evolution came up with to enable us to pick up evidence of infidelity and other social threats for the purpose of early detection and defense” (p. 165). Their construct emphasizes social interactions and draws from ideas and research on cognition, social stress, childhood adversity, Theory of Mind, and the fear system. While there is brief mention of the effect of income inequality on health, an additional natural source of support for their ideas could have come from political thinking, starting with that of Richard Hofstadter in his seminal essay, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” (1). However, the authors draw from broad sources of thought that make this book intellectually compelling and enjoyable. The boldness of their attempt at a new conceptualization is to be greatly applauded.

Many of the authors’ assertions raise questions that will require research to validate. The attempt to subsume a large number of delusions under the umbrella of a malfunctioning Suspicion System appears somewhat forced. They attribute a heightened risk of paranoid delusions to the loss of privacy in our modern society, with its Internet connectivity and electronic surveillance. This too seems forced. Acceptance of this thesis would require evidence that paranoid delusions and/or schizophrenia are on the rise in our time, a tall order to prove. Also, the very privacy they say was “vital to our health” until its recent electronic erosion is actually a very modern and Western phenomenon, yet psychosis was very common long before this recent erosion of privacy. Their decrying of a purely biological understanding of psychosis as a fruitful path to better treatments is, in my opinion, overdone, but the therapeutic usefulness of emerging biological discoveries will prove them right or wrong.

This book is of value both to the educated lay public and those in the allied mental health fields. It is written in an engaging, rather informal style. The detailed clinical vignettes of patients with colorful delusions will be informative particularly for the lay public and those in the mental health field who do not often encounter severely delusional patients. The book has over 25 pages of scholarly notes, plus a 30-page bibliography, although these are of limited usefulness because the authors chose to leave out references to either in the text.

This book is to be commended for developing new hypotheses that invite new research questions. The capstone of the authors’ arguments is the humane and clinically important point that the *content* of our patients’ delusions deserves our compassionate exploration and attention, even while we use biological means (i.e., medication) to diminish their hold on our patients’ lives. The book ends with a plea that our field accept the relevance of psychological/social, as well as biological, factors in mental illness (i.e., that psychology and neuroscience work in harmony for the treatment of our patients). The tension between these two poles has defined and divided our field for many decades (2). Future developments in our field will determine the extent to which using both approaches synergistically will bring better outcomes for our patients than using either approach alone.

## REFERENCES

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Erica Duncan, M.D.

*Dr. Duncan is an Attending Psychiatrist in the Mental Health Service, Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Decatur, Ga., and an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Emory University School of Medicine.*

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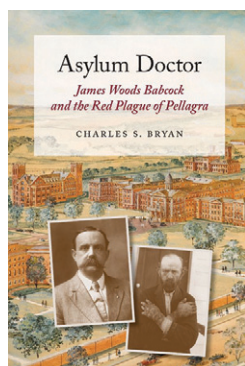
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## Asylum Doctor: James Woods Babcock and the Red Plague of Pellagra

by Charles S. Bryan, M.D. Columbia, S.C., University of South Carolina Press, 2014, 376 pp., \$34.95.

An attorney encounters his client in a state hospital. His client alleges he is unable to obtain release. The lawyer “investigates” and pens a long, hyperbolic letter to the state legislature alleging “mismanagement,” citing numerous deficiencies. These include dirty conditions, abusive and limited nursing staff, insufficient physician resources and treatment, poor diet, and inhumane conditions. The letter contains a veiled threat of litigation. It leads to an investigation that includes a legislative committee, outside consultants, and rounds of testimony and results in an openly fractured committee and two competing reports. Political favoritism, personal relationships, and the media play large roles in the investigation and its outcome. It is ultimately determined that inadequate medical resources and insufficient and poorly trained staff resulted in poor documentation, increased use of restraint, poor treatment, increased length of stay, and patient mortality. The investigation finds that underfunding is behind the deficiencies, and the hospital superintendent is blamed for not asking for funds but is also praised for consistently running the hospital within budget. The outcome of the investigation results in promises of a new hospital, more resources, and administrative changes.

This series of events does not describe a recent investigation but rather the investigation of the management of the South Carolina Hospital for the Insane by James Woods Babcock, M.D., in 1909. This biography not only documents that there is “nothing new under the sun” as it relates to management and politics of state hospitals, it also describes the life of a remarkable physician. Dr. Babcock was a Harvard educated, McLean trained “alienist” (psychiatrist). Despite excelling as a psychiatrist in Boston, he chose to accept the position of superintendent of the state hospital in South Carolina, largely for personal reasons. He was a true “triple threat” in terms of academics:



an excellent clinician, researcher, and teacher. His inadequacies as a manager caused him many problems, including the above-described investigation. He tended to be non-confrontational and a consensus builder, which hindered his effectiveness as an administrator but paid large dividends in his role in the battle against pellagra.

Dr. Babcock played a central role in the documentation of and research into the extent, causes, and treatment of pellagra from 1907 to 1914. Pellagra, a disease caused by poor niacin intake related to inadequate nutrition, was a mystery for decades. There were two competing “camps” as to the etiology of pellagra, the infectious hypothesis group led by Dr. Louis Sambon and the dietary inadequacy/nutritional deficit camp championed by Dr. Joseph Goldberger. It is fascinating how over 100 years ago cultural beliefs and political attitudes influenced the outcome of a scientific investigation (as it does today). Southern politicians did not want to see poor nutrition for underprivileged individuals as having anything to do with pellagra and voted accordingly in the legislature in terms of funding. Individuals who championed politically unpopular views (nutritional deficit theories related to pellagra) were often forced out of office or demoted for expressing unpopular ideas. Dr. Babcock organized numerous conferences and published extensively on pellagra, which opened the eyes of physicians in this country about a disease present in Europe for many years. Dr. Babcock used pellagra research as a refuge from a situation that he could not control in large part: the management of the State Hospital. Ultimately, Dr. Babcock was forced to resign for supporting an outstanding clinician who happened to be a woman.

The author provides exquisite detail and context regarding “asylums” operating at the time, medical history relevant to pellagra, and the evolution of clinical research. The book is richly detailed with numerous photographs that bring to life the individuals involved in the story. The notes and research are meticulous. There are clear parallels drawn between the politics and economics of the time and today and how they influence the “believability” of science (e.g., corn diet and pellagra in the late 1800s versus global warming today). The book also documents how presentation and personality can sometimes influence scientific endeavor. Dr. Louis Sambon, a charismatic and entertaining speaker, championed the cause of infectious etiology for pellagra, despite little hard evidence, which slowed progress for decades, and contributed to the death of thousands of people.

*Asylum Doctor* is an entertaining and quick read reinforcing that the more things change, the more they remain the same. Many issues with which society wrestles on a day-to-day basis are not new, and despite our repeated reminders of them, continue to slow progress.

John R. DeQuardo, M.D.

*Dr. DeQuardo is affiliated with the Colorado Mental Health Institute at Pueblo, Colo.*

*Dr. DeQuardo has served as a consultant for Eli Lilly and has received speaker's fees from Forest and Otsuka.*

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