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## Book Reviews

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# The British art of framing up innocents

by Mark Burdman

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### **A Conspiracy of Crowns: The True Story of the Duke of Windsor and the Murder of Sir Harry Oakes**

by Alfred de Marigny with Mickey Herskowitz  
Bantam Press, London, 1990  
308 pages, with index, £14.95

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Of the many recent books on the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, this one is among the most scandalous. The authors develop the case that the Duke, as Royal Governor of the Bahamas in the 1940s, was "a willing conspirator in a plot to send an innocent man to his death," in order to cover up his own treasonous and illicit involvement in an international money-smuggling coordinated by a top Nazi-linked operative.

The innocent man was co-author Alfred de Marigny himself. In July 1943, he was charged with the murder of his father-in-law, the eccentric multimillionaire gold miner Sir Harry Oakes. De Marigny's good fortune was that the frameup was so crude, that even in the British-run Bahamas, he was acquitted.

Using trial transcripts, the authors show how the frameup was concocted, with a central role being played by mob-connected police investigators from Miami, Florida, brought in personally through the intervention of the Duke of Windsor. The reader gets a shocking insight into how the British Establishment arranges frameups. What is even more astonishing is the central involvement of the former Edward VIII, who abdicated in 1936 over his marriage to Wallis Warfield Simpson and became the Duke of Windsor. The Duke emerges from this book as a petty mafia thug, in addition to his better-known roles of racist, anti-Semite, and Nazi sympathizer. The former Edward VIII had it out for de Marigny, an iconoclast of French descent, born on the island of Mauritius, who once had the acute sense to refer to the Duke, within his earshot, as "nothing more than a pimple on the ass of the British Empire."

The motivations for the murder of Oakes and the frameup of de Marigny, are particularly treacherous. In the authors' view (after some introductory chapters, most of the book is written in first-person narrative style), the Duke of Windsor and his co-conspirators, including Bahamas wheeler-dealer Harold Christie, were intent on covering up a scheme they were involved in to shift funds to a Mexican bank that was also handling Nazi money. The key architect of this laundering scheme was Sweden's Axel Wenner-Gren, a notorious Nazi collaborator. So, during a time when Britain was at war with the Nazis, the Duke of Windsor was greedily involved in financial schemes with a man listed in official American intelligence reports as a dangerous Nazi collaborator! When Oakes became an impediment to the success of the arrangement, he was removed. De Marigny, whom the unscrupulous Duke of Windsor personally detested, was the convenient fall-guy.

To this day, de Marigny regrets that the full story of the Duke of Windsor's role in the frameup was never allowed to come out in court. Even his own lawyer, who otherwise pursued the case mercilessly to win his acquittal, backed off during the trial from pursuing the Duke of Windsor's role, out of an undeserved loyalty to the British Royal Family. The Duke of Windsor himself, as Royal Governor, was able to suppress attempts to reopen the investigation into Oakes's murder, and no official agency, whether British, American, or Bahamian, has ever forced the truth to come out.

One puzzling element in the book is de Marigny's cursory dismissal of another theory of the Oakes murder that has received circulation in recent years, based on an investigation by the American criminologist Marshall Houts, who later wrote a book on the subject. Houts's thesis, given credence in a 1988 British book on the Duke and Duchess of Windsor (*King of Fools*, by John Parker), was that Oakes was killed by a mafia hit team deployed by Meyer Lansky. According to this analysis, Lansky had arranged, with the Duke of Windsor and others, to make the Bahamas into a casino-gambling center, à la the French Riviera so much beloved of the Duke. Oakes got into the way of the plan, and was eliminated.

Lansky's name is never mentioned in *A Conspiracy of Crowns*. Whatever the reasons, one has to grant de Marigny the right to come to his own conclusions: He was the victim of an atrocious operation, which caused him much physical and emotional suffering, and this book is his testament. But for others, the Duke of Windsor-Lansky connection, both in the Oakes affair specifically and more broadly in gambling and organized crime in the Caribbean, would be a matter for fruitful investigation. One wonders what insights the late King Edward VIII's longstanding intimate since the mid-1930s, the strange British intelligence operative Kenneth de Courcy (a.k.a. the Duke of Grantmesnil), today the author of the *Special Office Brief* newsletter and other arcane items, might have on this matter?