



Conspiracy Theories Syllabus

Instructor

Mr. Ludlow

Email

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Class Location

Room 525

Course Overview

This course takes a close look at conspiracy theories in American history—some recent, some from the more distant past. Our learning objectives include examining a.) the evidence and logic used to argue for different theories; b.) the forces and events that give rise to them; c.) the identities of those who support various theories; d.) the methods used to promote and disseminate conspiracy theories, and; e.) the uses to which these theories are sometimes put. We will also take a look at the theories scholars have offered to explain the prevalence of conspiracy theories in modern American culture (theories about theories!!)

This course is guided by two basic assumptions. The first is that conspiracy theories are just that— theories, not statements of fact. Nor are they the same as scientific theories which are subject to testing and revision. As students we must distinguish between factually-established cases of conspiracy such as the Burr Conspiracy and the Watergate Cover-up from unproven conspiracies including Kennedy assassination theories and improvable conspiracies such as those involving alien life forms and UFOs. It is important to keep these distinctions in mind. While occasional lighthearted indulgence in our pet theories is encouraged and will enliven the class, students will not be allowed to use this course as a forum for promoting their conspiracy beliefs.

The second assumption is that even though conspiracy theories often involve ludicrous, sinister, or grossly-exaggerated explanations of the course of human events, they are still important for us to understand. They often express serious underlying tensions, prejudices, and apprehensions on the part of those who hold them. Understanding these tensions is more than an academic exercise. As the Oklahoma City bombing tragically demonstrated, conspiracy theories can motivate people to undertake harmful actions. Even in less harmful cases, conspiracy theorizing has serious implications for the functioning of democratic society. We need to understand how conspiracy theories influence not only how people see the world, but how they act in it.

Course Materials

- Writing utensils and paper
- Access to the internet outside of class (speak with instructors if this is a problem)

Rules and Expectations

Students are expected to abide by the rules and expectations at all times.

- Be Ready
- Be Respectful
- Be Responsible

Grading Breakdown – Per Quarter

Type	Points	Percentage
Discussions	60 (10X6)	20% Total
Classwork	60 (10X6)	20% Total
Essays	60 (30X2)	20% Total
Projects	60	20% Total
Tests	60 (30X2)	20% Total

Grading Breakdown – For Semester

Type	Percentage
Quarter 1 Grade	45%
Quarter 2 Grade	45%
Final Exam	10%

Homework Policy

Essays will be assigned at the end of the week. They are due back to the instructors on the first day the student returns to school. Students will lose 10% per day from the final grade of any assignment turned in late until the 5th day, at which time the assignment will no longer be accepted. Additional readings may be assigned through Google Classroom. It is the responsibility of the student to complete all assigned readings.

Additional Information

This is a high school level course. Students are expected to maintain an appropriate sense of maturity when discussing topics. Academic decorum will be enforced throughout the class. Students who are struggling are encouraged to speak with instructors BEFORE they begin to see negative grades.