

Major Essay Assignment 4 Conspiracy Theories

America has a fascination—some might argue an obsession—with conspiracy theories. Theories abound about secret government mind control experiments, Microsoft loading its software with subliminal messages, the CIA selling crack cocaine in the ghettos in order to finance its covert activities, NASA's staging of the Apollo moon landings at a secret military base, the government's use of captured UFO technology at a top secret military installation known as Area 51, and the Holy Grail of conspiracy theories, the assassination of President Kennedy. Many conspiracy theories have become so well-accepted that they are an integral part of the fabric of our culture, and in many cases they have become, like urban legends, a part of our cultural mythology.

Many sociologists argue that America's obsession with conspiracy theories is a recent phenomena, part of our post-World War II, post-modern culture. They argue that the government has become so big and so secretive that it has created a culture of secrecy, making society susceptible to epidemics of suspicion in which conspiracy theories thrive and multiply. Others argue—especially in the case of the UFO phenomena—that modern science has taken much of the mystery out of every-day life, and that conspiracy theories such as the UFO phenomena are a kind of quasi-religious response that fulfills our need for mystery.

Whatever the causes, conspiracy theories abound. Your assignment for this unit is to write a 5-7 page essay in which you explore some aspect of conspiracy theories. What is your interest (or disinterest) in the topic? Are you drawn to it? Resistant to it? Does your interest in conspiracy theories say anything about your proneness to believe in extraordinary explanations of things? Is there one particular theory to which you are drawn or that you want to believe? What does that theory say about your attitudes in a larger sense? For example, does your interest in either the Kennedy assassination or 9/11 conspiracies suggest something about your own feelings towards the government? Does your interest in UFO theories suggest something about your relationship toward religion? What does the Telletubbie conspiracy say about your feelings toward the media? Do any of the myriad of conspiracy theories that surround Bill Gates and Microsoft say anything about your feelings toward large, monolithic corporations, or perhaps about the encroachment of technology in our daily lives? As you consider your relationship to conspiracy theories, you should tie your thoughts to one particular theory that speaks to your interest in this unit. In addition to those already mentioned, some possible topics include:

- The "assassinations" of Princess Diana, Marilyn Monroe, Bob Marley, Tupac Shakur, or Kurt Cobain.
- The government cover-up of the Roswell UFO crash, or public reactions to a UFO abduction case (i.e. Betty and Barney Hill, Whitley Strieber, Travis Walton, etc.).
- The Apollo moon landing "hoax."
- The Philadelphia experiment.
- The government's implantation of individual monitoring devices through vaccines, dental fillings, etc. Also, barcodes as a means of monitoring or control (Satanic or governmental).

- Any of the conspiracy theories associated with the "New World Order" (Novus Ordo Seclorum).
- Secret societies such as the Illuminati, Skull and Bones, Freemasons, Elders of Zion, Priory of Scion, Trilateral Commission, etc.
- Satanic ritual abuse theories.

Length: 5-7 pages.

Due dates:

Tue., Apr. 28: Peer draft. (bring 2 copies to class.)

Tue., May 5: Final draft.

Submitting Your Work

Unit essays must be submitted in a plain, 2-pocket folder with your name and course and section number clearly written on the outside. Plastic folders or folders containing school logos will not be accepted. The following items must be included inside your folder:

- Final draft of essay, stapled, in a pocket by itself.
- First draft of essay I reviewed (if applicable).
- Completed peer evaluation forms.
- Essay grade sheet.

Penalties: Failure to turn in a peer draft on the due date will result in a one letter grade penalty on your final paper. Failure to turn in peer evaluations on the due date will result in a one letter grade penalty on your final paper. If late, your final draft will be docked one letter grade for each calendar day it's late. Folders missing any other of the above-mentioned items will be considered incomplete and will be docked one letter grade per calendar day late until all the items have been received.

Grading Criteria

When assigning grades, I reserve "A" for exceptional papers -- you do not get an A on a paper simply by addressing the paper topic in a standard way and avoiding mechanical errors.

Your essay will be graded according to the following three criteria:

Invention

- *Introduction and Thesis:* Are these components of your essay clearly written, easily identifiable, and effective in presenting the topic, discussing its significance, and providing direction to the paper as a whole?
- *Accuracy, Wording, and Research:* Have you used the required sources to support your argument, and do you express their concepts fairly and accurately? Have you integrated quotes smoothly? If you are paraphrasing, do you use your own words yet still remain faithful to the author's original meaning? Have you expressed your ideas clearly and concisely? Is the essay in your own words? NOTE: Failure to meet research requirements may result in an 'E' for the essay.

- *Criteria:* Have you clearly and defined necessary terms? Have you illustrated your criteria with specific examples and, if necessary, contrasting examples? Have you established ethical, logical, and/or emotional reasons (evidence) in support of your thesis?
- *Revision:* Are there substantial changes between the final version and the draft of the essay? Does your final version meet the length requirements? NOTE: Failure to meet the length requirements may result in a failing grade.

Organization

- *Beginning:* Have you offered an introduction in which you explain the issue and show why it is relevant? Have you presented a clear thesis that guides and unifies the essay?
- *Middle:* Are your paragraphs focused and well developed? Do your paragraphs contain topic sentences? Have you revised for clarity and worked on eliminating wordy, unclear, and/or repetitive areas in your essay? Have you included transitional words between sentences and paragraphs to make your ideas flow more smoothly?
- *End:* Do you offer a conclusion that does more than merely repeat your major ideas?

Style

- *Format:* Does your paper adhere to MLA format, including font and point size? Have you correctly cited from your sources and inserted a parenthetical citation after each quote? Have you introduced quotes in an effective way? Have you included a "Works Cited" page?
- *Tone:* Is your tone appropriate for the chosen audience?
- *Grammar/Sentences:* Is your paper free from grammatical errors such as sentence fragments, fused sentences, comma splices, mixed constructions, apostrophe errors, subject/verb and pronoun/antecedent disagreement? Is the essay free from spelling errors?