

COMM 244 : THE RHETORIC OF CONSPIRACIES AND CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Transcript title

Rhetoric of Conspiracies

Credits

4

Grading mode

Standard letter grades

Total contact hours

40

Lecture hours

40

Course Description

Explores the rhetoric of conspiracies and conspiracy theories in history, current events and in literature. Focuses on diverse cases of conspiratorial conjecture to support students' ability to more readily discern political propaganda and intrigue.

Course learning outcomes

1. Generate the range of definitions and audiences associated with conspiracy and conspiracy theories.
2. List elements that comprise conspiracies and conspiracy theories.
3. Describe the conditions that encourage conspiracies or conspiracy theories.
4. Discern the credibility of conspiracy theories using skills in argumentation and analysis.

Content outline

1. Definitions of "Conspiracy" and "Conspiracy theory":
 - a. Etymology
 - b. Real conspiracies
 - c. False conspiracies
2. Historical and contemporary examples of conspiracies or conspiracy theories
 - a. Ancient: Death of Alexander the Great, Assassination of Julius Caesar
 - b. Renaissance: The Babington Plot, The Throckmorton Plot, the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, the Pazzi/Montefeltro Conspiracy
 - c. Modern: Assassination of John F. Kennedy, Assassination of Malcom X, COINTELPRO-Fred Hampton, Iran-Contra Affair,
 - d. Contemporary: Death of Vince Foster, 9/11 and the Saudis, Pizza-Gate/Q-anon
3. Conspiracies or conspiracy theories in literature and drama.
 - a. Drama
 - i. Shakespeare, W. *Julius Caesar*, 1599 or *King Lear*, 1606
 - ii. Behn, A. *The Counterfeit Bridegroom; Or, The Defeated Widow*, 1677

- iii. Pinter, H. *The Dumbwaiter*, 1957
 - iv. Amiri Baraka, *The Dutchman*, 1964
- b. Literature
 - i. Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)
 - ii. Shea, Robert. *Illuminatus* (1975)
 - iii. Eco, Umberto. *The Name of the Rose* (1980)
 - iv. DeLillo, Don. *Libra* (1988)
 - c. Reportage
 - i. Woodward, Bob and Bernstein, Carl. *All the President's Men* (1977)
 - ii. Milbank, Dana. *The Destructionists*, (2022)
 - iii. Howley, Kerry. *Bottoms Up and the Devil Laughs* (2023)
 - d. Film
 - i. *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962)
 - ii. *Dr. Strangelove* (1964)
 - iii. *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998)
 - iv. *Arlington Road* (1999)
 - e. Television
 - i. *Mission Impossible* (1966-)
 - ii. *The Prisoner* (1967-)
 - iii. *The X-Files* (1993-)
 - iv. *Homeland* (2011-)
4. Conditions conducive to conspiracies or conspiracy theories
 - a. Poverty and Wealth, Imbalance of power
 - b. Hierarchy
 - c. Secrecy and Need-to-know standard
 5. Elements of conspiracies or conspiracy theories
 - a. Motive/Justification
 - b. Plan
 - c. Target
 - d. Cutout, go-between
 - e. Cover-up/Cover-story
 - f. Patsy
 - g. Money, influence, power
 - h. Bribes/threats/coercion
 - i. False Flag
 - j. Straw Man, Bait and Switch
 - k. Vilification/Dehumanization
 6. Rational argumentation to evaluate conspiracy theories.
 - a. Propositions of Fact
 - b. Inferences: Sign, Authority
 - c. Contributors to Scholarship
 - i. Hofstadter, Richard, Columbia University
 - ii. Dale-Scott, Peter, Univ of California, Berkeley
 - iii. Uscinski, Joseph, Univ. of Miami
 - iv. Rubenstein, Jay, Univ of Southern California
 - v. Schrum, Bob, Univ of Southern California
 - vi. Antonio Patteri, Oxford University

Required materials

Textbooks required. Subscription to news via library resources.

General education/Related instruction lists

- Arts and Letters