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**Auszug aus:**

*Popular Conspiracy Theories - from Area 51 to 9/11*

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## Conspiracy theories

In an era of global communication, conspiracy theories have become popular all over the world. Especially in the U.S.A., they spread **like never before**. The term “conspiracy theory” is used for **widespread beliefs** that secret agreements between powerful hidden forces are made in order to deceive and mislead the common people. For conspiracy theorists, the world is sharply divided between good and evil forces: the “**innocent**” common people and the “**evil**” members of a conspiracy aimed at **stealing power or** obtaining freedom. All evil can be traced back to a single scapegoat. Popular scapegoats responsible for the evil are governments or governmental institutions (the U.S. government in general and the CIA in particular), banks or religious groups. The masses are regarded as a “**brainwashed herd**”, **unaware of the malign** alliances that conspiracy theorists have already uncovered.

Conspiracy theories are not falsifiable, since their creators deeply mistrust science and are convinced that scientists are very likely to be involved in secret, evil plans. In contrast to scientists, conspiracy theorists try to find meaningful patterns in random occurrences and give after the fact-explanations for historical events. The fact that real conspiracies like the Watergate scandal occur, supports the widespread belief that conspiracy theories are not fictional but real.

Throughout history, mankind has been creating conspiracy theories. One of the earliest occurred, when the city of Rome caught fire in the year 64 AD. Shortly afterwards, people started to spread the opinion that Roman Emperor Nero had started the fire. In the Middle Ages, the persecution of witches by Inquisition was triggered by conspirational thoughts. Jews have repeatedly been blamed for all evil from ancient times till present. In the Middle Ages, they were made responsible for the outbreak of the Black Death and for the deaths of Christian children. Another popular scapegoat is the secret organisation “**Illuminati**”, **founded Germany** in 1776. The foundation originally stood for enlightenment ideals, but after its prohibition in 1780, it was suddenly regarded as an enemy of the church. Predominantly in the U.S., the belief in secret and evil Illuminati plans still exists.

There are many reasons why conspiracy theories have always been popular. The action of conspiring can help to make sense of the confusing world and simplify complex structures. It is easier to divide the world into black and white, especially if the conspiracy theorists considered themselves as part of the good side. Conspiracy theories are very likely to occur in communities that are experiencing political disempowerment or social isolation. If people feel helpless and are unable to change their living conditions, the belief in a conspiracy theory may serve as a refuge and satisfy the need for meaningfulness. Furthermore, conspiracy theories can hold communities together by creating a shared belief and a common enemy.

1. List some characteristics of conspiracy theories!
2. Why have conspiracy theories been popular throughout history?

## TYPES OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES

The event conspiracy theory **“reveals”** a certain event or set of events as an outcome of a conspiracy.

The \_\_\_\_\_ is a famous event conspiracy theory.

The systemic conspiracy theory is centered on the belief that a single, evil organization plans to secure \_\_\_\_\_ of a country or even of the \_\_\_\_\_. The anti-Semitic systemic conspiracy theory about \_\_\_\_\_ pursuit of the world domination repeatedly served as a warrant for genocide.

\_\_\_\_\_ theories combine several conspiracies. For instance, the American conspiracy theorist Milton William Cooper spread the belief that aliens as well as the secret organization \_\_\_\_\_ were involved with the U.S. \_\_\_\_\_.

Fill in the gaps with the words listed below:

entire world / government / Kennedy assassination / Jewish / control / Illuminati / super conspiracy /

## FRAME YOUR OWN CONSPIRACY THEORY

The following steps might serve as a useful guideline:

- Formulate a thesis (“group x seeks world domination, event x was a conspiracy”)
- Find a scapegoat and demonize it
- Raise questions and collect **unexplainable facts** that could “prove” your thesis.
- Call science into question
- Combine real facts and fiction; then construct connections between the two



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