

Conspiracy Theories in the Face of Tragedy

When most people think about conspiracy theories, they are quick to dismiss them as irrational and untrue. Those that are willing to acknowledge the possibility that some conspiracy theories might have validity are usually only interested in discovering if they are true or not. Both of these responses limit the possible insights people can obtain from the study of conspiracy theory. When studying conspiracy theories it is understandable to have a level of skepticism about the argument being presented, but instead of looking for fallacies in their reasoning, scholars can look deeper into the motivations for the person writing the conspiracy theory and what messages the narrative contains beyond the surface level. Many scholars are studying conspiracy theories for reasons other than proving or debunking them, and they are discovering more about their importance in understanding society. When scholars analyze conspiracy theories, they suspend their notion of the truth, and they ask more pertinent questions that can probe what is happening in society to foster this conspiracy thinking. Scholars have acknowledged the functions conspiracy theories serve for the people continuing to write and read them, like their ability to provide a simple explanation in confusing time and to empower those who have discovered the “truth.” Conspiracy theories are full of insights into society, but only by going beyond the question of truth can a scholar discover what beliefs are behind the theory and what it can reveal about social structures. Taken one step further, conspiracy theories often highlight dissatisfaction with aspects of society and many reveal ideologies of hate, so by discovering the roots of these emotions, efforts can be made to assuage fears and create understanding.

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Conspiracy theory is considered a marginalized form of discourse, but it is far more popular than people would think. People resort to conspiratorial thinking on a daily basis when they challenge the received view of something. Conspiracy theories can take on this simplified conversational form, but they can also be found in literature, movies, music, and almost any other form of media. The Internet has made conspiracy narratives and discussion forums available to everyone. Thomas McLaughlin, author of *Street Smarts and Critical Theory*, helps us to better understand conspiracy theories as a form of vernacular theory. According to McLaughlin, vernacular theory is “the uncovering and questioning of cultural assumptions,” in the colloquial language of everyday man (McLaughlin, 25). Anyone can challenge cultural assumptions; conspiracy theorists in particular use their narratives to question social and political power structures. This new, broader definition of what conspiracy theory can encompass demonstrates the vastness of this phenomenon. For this reason alone, it is reasonable and important to study conspiracy theory, and to discover what makes these theories so popular. But more so, conspiracy belief represents how people are reacting to societal changes, which can be influential to scholars of various fields. According to Gary Alan Fine’s *Manufacturing Tales: Sex and Money in Contemporary Legends*, “The themes of contemporary legends represent a transformation of society: the social environment exemplified through narrative” (Fine, 30). Conspiracy theory is a subset of contemporary legends, and they both offer insight into the minds of their writers and society as a whole through their narrative content. Conspiracy theories are a major part of our culture, whether people realize it or not, and for this reason there is growing field of scholars studying them to better understand what they can tell us about society, past and present.

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There are more and more scholars discovering the value of conspiracy theories and devoting time to the study of them. There is a noteworthy group of scholars who have developed a body of work looking into the significance and meaning of conspiracy belief. All of the scholars concur that conspiracy belief appeal to human psychological needs, and these scholars believe it is important to look more deeply into this phenomenon because of what such inquiry might reveal about society. They differ, however, on the specific psychological needs conspiracy belief fulfills and whether or not conspiracy theories have a positive or negative effect in general. Steve Clark, professor at Charles Sturt University, and author of *Conspiracy Theories and Conspiracy Theorizing*, attributes conspiracy theories to the “fundamental attribution error,” which states “humans systematically make the error of severely overestimating the importance of dispositional factors, as well as the concomitant error of severely underestimating the importance of situational factors, when seeking to understand and explain the behavior of others” (Clarke, 144). It is because of this cognitive error that conspiracy theorists turn to conspiratorial explanations for events and why they continue to believe those explanations despite all of the evidence to the contrary. However, Clarke believes that although they contain logical fallacies, conspiracy theories are ultimately beneficial to society because by challenging the established view for better explanations, they can reveal actual conspiracies and demand more openness from the government. While Clarke has the most positive outlook on conspiracy theories, other scholars recognize their possibilities as well. Mark Fenster, author of *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*, defines conspiracy theories as populist narratives that theorize on the distribution of power, seeing the believers as “the people” in opposition to

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the “power bloc.” He believes the explanations these theories give can be the beginnings of a social movement, which could create positive change, but if their explanations are too simple, they usually fall into racist, anti-Semitic, or exclusionary narratives, taking away any of their positive qualities (Berlet, Interview w/ Fenster). For Fenster, conspiracy theories have the ability to create constructive change in society, but also the ability to harm society with negative messages. While some scholars see the benefits of the theories when they study them, others see violence and an erosion of public trust.

Other scholars who look into the motivations behind conspiracy theories also point out the dangers of conspiracy theories. One such scholar is Timothy Melley, author of *Empire of Conspiracy*, who attributes the surge of conspiracy theories in postwar America to agency panic, which states that people have seen larger social systems taking away their individuality, so they panic and try to reassert their individuality through conspiracy theories. But while this psychological reaction creates conspiracy belief, Melley also sees, “a fierce commitment to individual autonomy -the opposition of self to “society”- may lie behind violent, masculinist “solutions” to the threat of social control”(Melley, 148). Chip Berlet, senior analyst at Political Research Associates, has the same worries as Melley in that he believes some adherents of these theories will sometimes act on their irrational beliefs, and the consequences of that are very real. He also points out that conspiracy theories “create an environment where racism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of prejudice and oppression can flourish”(Berlet, Conspiricism). Furthermore, Robert Alan Goldberg, author of *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America*, acknowledges the purpose of conspiracy theories for people because of the refuge they offer in a time of crisis and tragedy, the

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clarity and order they provide for believes, and they even seem to be a cure for

powerlessness. He also sees conspiracy theorists as providing a new history and new authority in the space made by the decline in faith in traditional authorities. This is where Goldberg sees a problem, conspiracy theories are eroding faith in the government, and while a certain level of skepticism can be healthy, conspiracy theories put the world into black and white, and this weakens the ability of the government to govern (Berlet, Interview w/ Goldberg). Conspiracy theory scholars all study conspiracy theories because they understand that they can offer insights into the mindset of society, but they differ on if conspiracy theories have a positive or negative effect, what specific needs of the people they accommodate, and how to go about studying them.

There are multiple ways to look at conspiracy theories, and these many approaches depend on a scholar's interests. The determining factor in how scholars go about studying conspiracy theory is their ultimate goal for their research. For example, Robert Alan Goldberg sees how conspiracy theories diminish people's faith in the government. Therefore, he is more interested in looking at what the conspiracy theories are saying about problems in the government so that the problems can be addressed, thus decreasing the number of conspiracy theories. Through his research, Goldberg has targeted intelligence failure as a reason for conspiracy theories, and that assessment could tell officials what areas need to be improved upon. Professor Kenelem Averill, author of "The 'Paranoid Style' in British Politics—anti-Europeanism in Britain as right wing populism" uses an approach to studying populist narratives called the Kleinian or object-relation approach. He looks at how individuals' relationships affect their development, which then interacts with large-scale social and historical change. He analyzes the

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emotional texture to draw out the fears about these changes. For example, he looks at the fear of submission through the traditional relationship between men and women, and the importance of masculinity. This is apparent through the connotations and emotions of the language in British narratives about the EU taking over Britain, as seen in the descriptor, “passively endure every assault on its independence”(Averill, 8). Averill’s approach is useful and insightful, but Gary Alan Fine offers a methodological approach that is interested in what narratives reveal about society that can incorporate Averill’s ideas about the emotional texture of the language and its representation of societal fears.

When studying conspiracy theories, Gary Alan Fine offers the best method for analyzing narratives. Fine’s approach is less restricted by his goal for the end results, and so we can use his method to analyze a narrative with an open mind. Studying conspiracy theories offer us a look into the fears and insecurities of a population, and Fine provides a method that looks at a variety of aspects of a conspiracy theory that can distinguish those emotions. When you look at a narrative of a conspiracy theory, you find the basic information the author is trying to convey. But with Fine’s process, you don’t stop there. His methodology pushes you to also look at personal imperatives and performance dynamics. Looking at these features of a conspiracy theory really force you to look further into the writer’s motivations and deeply rooted beliefs, which are most important in discovering the true message of a conspiracy theory. Fine’s approach is all encompassing, and it allows scholars to analyze the whole package instead of a narrow view with limited purposes.

I have composed an archive that more extensively outlines the view points of different scholars and their methods of studying conspiracy theory. My archive is also

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targeted specifically at conspiracy theories about government involvement in sneak attacks and internal resistance. The archive begins with the secondary sources that help orient new scholars to the field of conspiracy theory in general. They include articles explaining the functions of conspiracy theory and interviews with scholars in the field, such as Mark Fenster, Michael Barkun, and Robert Alan Goldberg. This archive accompanied by this guide should introduce scholars to the field, and then move them into developing questions and finding actual conspiracy theories to work with.

To begin research on conspiracy theories, we need to start with interest in a specific area in order to narrow our search. Once we start with a base topic – for example, conspiracy theories about government involvement in sneak attacks and internal resistance – we can ask initial questions to instigate the research process. Some questions could be: What are the primary events that conspiracy theories have been developed about? Who is writing these conspiracy theories? What patterns appear in these conspiracy theories? These are simple questions that help us narrow our search, but can lead to more provocative questions. From these questions I found primary sources including narratives, photos, and video clips to be examined about Pearl Harbor, the OKC bombing and 9/11. They range in their origins, which is important in the analysis. Some are lone articles posted on the Internet, and others are part of conspiracy theory archives or journals. These primary sources make up the majority of the archive because they offer us a variety of aspects of conspiracy theory to look at. After analyzing a few of these articles using Fine’s diamond, certain patterns appear, which can lead to more questions.

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The following is a sample analysis of William F. Jasper's conspiracy theory "OKC Bombing: Exposing a Coverup." The narrative content includes information from undercover operative for federal ATF Carol Howe, who says she warned federal officials before the bombing. Jasper takes this as evidence that the government purposely let the bombing occur. He points to the fact that there are alumni of Elohim City, a white separatist community, working in federal agencies and also to the fact that the ATF agents were not in the building the day of the Oklahoma City Bombing. Jasper suggests that President Clinton allowed the bombing to happen to gain support for his policies. He also accuses the "Establishment Press" for being allies of the Clinton administration and helping to cover-up the government's prior knowledge. Now that we have taken a look at the content itself, we look more specifically at personal imperatives and performance dynamics. William Jasper is a prolific writer of conspiracy theories about the OKC bombing and 9/11, so he has a passionate commitment to sharing his "true" account of the events. The personal imperatives that can be drawn out of the article are his anti-liberal and anti-media ideologies. Throughout the narrative he portrays himself and the few other "truth seekers" as heroes who resist the "Big Media," which suggests a fear of large social structures. As for performance dynamics, this article comes from The New American, which is a journal devoted to conspiracy theories that attack the government and mainstream press. This is a journal that probably has an established audience, especially because the articles build on each other in a continuing case against the government and media. Also, this article has links to the journal's website, which has more articles that everyone can read and learn the "truth" from. This analysis

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demonstrates there is a fear of the big government and big media lying to the public and abusing their power to infringe on individuality.

The patterns I found in this article and other ones about 9/11 and Pearl Harbor are claims the government had secret prior knowledge of attacks, claims the government used a tragedy to garner support for policies, and claims the media assisted in the cover-up, particularly in the more recent events. These patterns provoke more questions into the public's faith in the government, the public's response during a crisis, and the role of the media in public opinion. These are the foundations of productive research questions, meaning questions that don't have simple answers and can provide insights into society but also lead to even more questions. From here I created my essential question: How does crisis coupled with a lack of faith in government result in conspiracy theories about events like 9/11, the OKC bombing, and Pearl Harbor, and what effect does the media have in creating and perpetuating these theories? This question is targeted to specific conspiracies and certain conditions, but it is also broad enough to leave room for theorizing and more questioning. To help answer my essential question, I need to have supporting questions that can direct my research. For example, how have people reacted in times of crisis? Is there evidence of decreasing faith in government? How does conspiracy theory help people in times of crisis or deal with their feelings toward the government? How does the media cover tragic events? How do people feel towards the media? To accompany the primary sources, the archive includes specific secondary sources that help to answer the supporting and essential questions. These include articles relating the conspiracy theories of 9/11 to diminishing faith in the government and the effects of media on public opinion.

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The secondary sources that help answer my supporting questions allow me to look at my primary sources with new insight. For example, one of the helpful secondary sources in answering my questions is “Conspiracy theories: Public arguments as coded social critiques: A rhetorical analysis of the TWA Flight 800 conspiracy theories” by Shane Miller. He argues that there is skepticism towards government based on real lies of presidents like Eisenhower and Johnson. Also, he says that trust in the government fell from 80 percent to 40 percent because of Watergate and Vietnam. Once the secrets about Cold War experiments were revealed, faith decreased even more (Miller). When we look at the events that Miller attributes the decline of trust in government to, it helps us understand primary sources like “The Truth Behind 9-11” a conspiracy theory found at a site called North Star Zone. The author of this conspiracy theory uses historical events, such as Hitler’s burning of the Reichstag, Pearl Harbor, and the OKC bombing, as proof that the government was involved in 9/11. He or she wants to be able to use history and precedent to make a point. The government’s deceptions that Miller points out demonstrate that real lies of the past create distrust, which causes people to rethink or reinterpret history to rationalize what is happening now. Furthermore, Miller also gives us information on one type of media: the World Wide Web. Miller believes that the Internet fosters conspiracy belief because it offers too much information, and the reliability of sources gets blurred. Furthermore, it offers everyone a chance to communicate, which can be empowering for people who want to express their views. This also influences the interpretation of “The Truth Behind 9-11” because within one article the author provides evidence about “Operation Northwoods” being the plan for the attack, the CIA running the same drill to distract NORAD, evidence of insider trading,

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FEMA being prepared the night before, accounts of bombs going off in the towers, and the UNOCAL pipeline in Afghanistan. This information is all over the board, and because of the array of facts it is easy for readers to take it at face value instead of sifting through all of the other sources available. Another secondary source that provides insight into conspiracy theory and its function during crisis is Robert Alan Goldberg's "Who Profited from the Crime Intelligence Failure, Conspiracy Theories and the Case of September 11." Both Goldberg and Miller point out that conspiracy theories arise especially in times that are unfamiliar or outside the range of normal experiences, and that description definitely characterizes 9/11, the OKC bombing, and Pearl Harbor. According to Goldberg, intelligence failure creates room for conspiratorial explanations of events and secrecy causes rumors. When these claims are combined with a lack of faith in government it is easy to see how the author of "The Truth Behind 9-11" concludes that 9-11 is a conspiracy to take away American freedoms, especially with the Patriot Act coming out of the surge of support after the attacks. After synthesizing the ideas presented in the primary and secondary sources, it is possible to propose an answer to the essential question, and see where else the research takes us.

From my research I have come to some conclusions about conspiracy theories that develop in times of crisis in connection to a lack of faith in government. Conspiracy theories are not new; they always have been a part of our culture. But with new modes of media, information can be transmitted more quickly and more easily than ever before. This extends the reach of conspiracy theories. And it exposes true lies and real faults of the government, and that only increases the number of conspiracy theories. The media are often blamed in conspiracy theories because the mainstream press covers the official

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story, not the conspiratorial side. But at the same time, the news media often cast officials in a negative light, and that diminishes the public's faith in government and consequently helping to create the more conspiracies. Conspiracy theories are extremely political, and in times of crisis the majority of the people have rallied around the president at the time, but when that president's policies are in opposition to the beliefs of a conspiracy theorist, he or she wants to counterbalance the surge of support by spreading his or her version of the truth to as many people as possible. Furthermore, conspiracy theories help people believe they are maintaining control of their lives in confusing times: these theories provide answers and reasons after events that shock the senses. Sneak attacks and internal terrorist activities often seem senseless or overwhelmingly complex, and consequently conspiracy theories become especially popular after such events.

This collection of primary and secondary sources looks at why conspiracy theories are so prevalent after a tragic event. Scholars can look at this research to see how people are reacting in these situations, and they can use it to look at what the government the media are doing to foster conspiracy belief. Once it is discerned what these social structures are doing to create fear in the public, there can be efforts to regain the public trust and help people deal with tragedy better by providing more answers and assurance. Often times the response to a conspiracy theory is to try and debunk it, but this does not soothe the fears of conspiracy theorists because they only see these attempts as proof that there was a conspiracy in the first place. Instead, officials need to work at improving the inequities of society that cause conspiracy theories.

The insights that can be derived from conspiracy theories can be useful to scholars in various fields. The most obvious field that could use them is political science

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because conspiracy theories tend to be politically motivated. They represent the people's great fears and disappointments of the government, which political officials or those studying politics could use to see where the government has gone wrong and what it can do to improve in the future. Other areas could find them useful as well; historians, for example, could have new interpretations of the way people reacted to historical events when they look at conspiracy theories. Sociologists could have a better understanding of how people relate to social structures through conspiracy theories.

I agree with Robert Alan Goldberg when he says that conspiracy theories can diminish the government's ability to govern by eroding the faith in institutions or that they can incite violence, not all conspiracy theories do, but some could with the right person. For this reason, I think it is crucial to discover the motivations behind conspiracy theories so we can try to fix the problems that they highlight. At this point in time, society is truly becoming global, and because of this, it is important that there is tolerance and understanding among people. Many times conspiracy theories have racist or anti-Semitic tones, and if these feelings continue to spread, it could damage the relationships among people within and between borders.

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<<http://www.psa.ac.uk/2005/pps/Averill.pdf>>.

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<http://www.publiceye.org/antisemitism/nw_fenster.html>.

Berlet, Chip. "Interview: Robert Alan Goldberg." PublicEye.org 2004. 21 Nov. 2005
<http://www.publiceye.org/antisemitism/nw_goldberg.html>.

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<<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=159472801&Fmt=3&clientId=31812&RQT=309&VName=PQD>>.

"The Truth Behind 9-11." NorthStarZone. 18 Nov. 2005
<<http://www.geocities.com/northstarzone/WAR.html>>.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

5 Dec. 2005 <<http://www.mediumrecords.com/wtc/southtower.hoboken01.mov>>.

This is a video recording on the morning of September 11th that sounds like a news report. However, on the screen the makers of the video have marked the helicopters flying around the towers, saying they had something to do with the collapse of the towers. They also have words written on the screen to point out dust and smoke coming from the bases of the towers.

This primary source can be looked at to see what impact a visual conspiracy theory has on viewers in comparison to a written one. It also helps with video analysis of a primary source.

“9-11 - A Bonanza For Bush BACKGROUND ISSUES: THE ABIDING TRUTH DEFICIT.” Alt.conspiracy 2005. 5 Dec. 2005
<http://groups.google.com/group/alt.conspiracy/browse_frm/thread/8ffeb35010b60c68/44c773d4a5aa66b0?hl=en#44c773d4a5aa66b0>.

This alt.conspiracy posting accuses Bush of being involved in the 9/11 attacks because of the monetary gains. The author of the posting writes the conspiracy theory in the form of a letter, starting with “Hey Suckers.” He also provides quotes and links to other sites that share his views.

This primary source can be analyzed not only for its emotional content about Bush’s involvement, but also for its letter format and links at the end, which tell us a lot about his personal imperatives.

“9/11 Currency Conspiracy.” Armageddon Online. 22 Nov. 2005
<<http://www.armageddononline.org/911.php>>.

This is a site that shows how the \$1 bill contains the New World Order symbol and then the \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50, and \$100 bills all show a representation of the World Trade Center or Pentagon attacks, showing how our currency has foretold these events.

This is a primary source that can be analyzed to discover why conspiracy theorists so often connect the New World Order with the 9/11 attacks. It can also be an example of how conspiracy theorists use images to further their purpose.

911EYEWITNESS. 2005. Blue Star Media Group. 5 Dec. 2005
<<http://www.911eyewitness.com/>>.

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This web site is both a conspiracy theory about bombs going off in the base of the twin towers and an advertisement for videos of the towers on September 11th. This site has flashing words with a voice recording reading the words as they pop up on the screen.

This is a primary source that can be looked at for its dual purpose of proving that it was bombs that brought the towers down and of earning money. Also, we can analyze what effect the animation and voice recording has on viewers.

“Another Official Pre-9/11 Image of the WTC Being Targeted.” The Memory Hole. 2004. 21 Nov. 2005 <<http://www.thememoryhole.org/911/managing-wmd.htm>>.

This is a copy of the manual for employees who would respond in the event of a terrorist attack that points out the towers as being a possible target. It has US Justice Department seal on it to prove the government lied about not being able to foresee the attack.

This can be a primary source used as an example of analysis of images as conspiracy theories. Also, this image can be related to the decreasing trust in government.

Bollyn, Christopher. “CIA, FBI Knew Since 1995 About Possible Hijack Scheme.” AmericanFreePress.net 2004. 5 Dec. 2005 <<http://www.americanfreepress.net/Mideast/CIAKnew.htm>>.

This article outlines “Project Bojinka,” which apparently lays out the plans for 9/11 attack. This source suggests that officials in the Philippines notified US officials about the attacks back in 1995. The main purpose of the author is to ultimately attack the failure of the government, and even more so the media.

This primary source has interesting aspects, such as its dependence on reports from the foreign press and foreign officials. Also, it is a good article to look at in comparing the views of less respected press and the mainstream press.

Gadbaw, Mike. “Oklahoma Bombing – 9/11 Connections.” Mind Control Forum. 2004. 22 Nov. 2005 <<http://www.mindcontrolforums.com/mgl.htm>>.

This is a primary source that includes multiple aspects. It comes from the personal experience of a man who claims he suffered from government mind control and that he was a friend of Timothy McVeigh. He wants to spread the truth about the government suppression of the militia.

This source can be used to analyze the effect of a personal experience narrative on a conspiracy theory. It can also be used to look at personal imperatives deeply rooted in anti-government and anti-Semitic feelings.

Grigg, William Norman. “Why We Fought.” The New American 17.14 (2001) 18 Nov. 2005 <http://www.thenewamerican.com/tna/2001/07-02-2001/vol17no14_ww2.htm>.

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Grigg argues that FDR let Pearl Harbor happen because he wanted to defeat the Isolationist movement and because he had already been planning on having our country permanently involved in the international world through the United Nations.

This is a primary source that can be analyzed to look at Grigg's motivations for writing this conspiracy theory, and it can be studied to trace the patterns in conspiracies about similar situations.

Jasper, William F. "Al-Qaeda's OKC-9/11 Ties." The New American 20.15 (2004): 21-23. ProQuest. George Washington U Lib., Washington DC. 17 Nov. 2005
<<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=671972831&Fmt=4&clientId=31812&RQT=309&VName=PQD>>.

Jasper discusses the obvious ties between the Oklahoma City bombing and 9/11 through the connection between 9/11 suspects and the Oklahoma bombers McVeigh and Nichols. He points out the FBI failures and cover-ups to suggest a possible conspiracy.

This is a primary source from a frequent writer of conspiracy theories about OKC and 9/11. It can be used to analyze the personal imperatives that cause him to make connections between the two events in conspiracy theories.

Jasper, William F. "OKC Bombing: Exposing a Coverup." The New American 21.19 (2005): 25-28. ProQuest. George Washington U Lib., Washington DC. 1 Nov. 2005
<<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=903473861&Fmt=4&clientId=31812&RQT=309&VName=PQD>>.

Jasper claims that the government knew about the Oklahoma City bombing before it happened, but let it happen in order to push through policies. He also discusses how the media has worked with the government to cover-up their prior knowledge.

This is a primary source that can be analyzed using Fine's diamond to find deeper motivations for writing it, and it can show patterns that show up in conspiracy theories about government involvement in internal domestic attacks.

Lavello, Randy. "Bombs in the Building: World Trade Center 'Conspiracy Theory' is a Conspiracy Fact." PrisonPlanet.com. 16 Nov. 2005
<http://www.prisonplanet.com/analysis_lavello_050503_bombs.html>.

Lavello writes conspiracy theory trying to prove that it was the United States and Israeli governments that brought down the Twin Towers with bombs, and that the planes were a distraction.

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This is a primary source that can be an example of analysis of a conspiracy theory's content and structure to reveal deeper emotions and reasoning behind the conspiracy theory.

London, Richard V. "McVeigh's Friend Ready to Go Public On OKC Conspiracy."

[AmericanFreePress.net](http://www.americanfreepress.net) 2004. 5 Dec. 2005

<<http://www.americanfreepress.net/html/mcveigh.html>>.

This is an account of a person who knew McVeigh and who says an undercover informant named Stassmeir manipulated McVeigh into doing what he did. He also relays information that the government purposely let the OKC bombing happen and spread word of an Iraq connection to spread anti-Arab and anti-Iraq feelings.

This is a primary sources that is interesting to look at because although it has typical elements of a conspiracy theory, it is also in the format of a newspaper report, which could give it more credence for some readers.

"Oklahoma City Bombing Questions." [StopCovertWar.com](http://www.stopcovertwar.com) 5 Dec. 2005

<<http://www.stopcovertwar.com/McVeigh.html>>.

This is a conspiracy theory from Team Infinity, who sees the government's involvement in OKC as an attempt to take away our freedom. Their main goal for this narrative is to have it be a call to action. They format it with bold and underlined sections for emphasis, and they mostly frame their evidence as questions to make the reader think and get involved.

This is a good article to look at performance dynamics and personal imperatives because it comes from a group with an obvious mission, and their format is meant to draw in the reader to want to be involved.

"Pearl Harbor Attack: The Great Deception." [NorthStarZone](http://www.geocities.com/northstarzone). 18 Nov. 2005 <

<http://www.geocities.com/northstarzone/PEARL.html>>.

This is a primary source that claims FDR was involved in the New World Order and that he allowed Pearl Harbor attacks to happen to fund the International War Machine. The New World Order allegedly created World War II to create a one-world government.

This primary source will be interesting to look at because it shows how old conspiracy theories inspire new ones. But at the same time, new conspiracy theories about recent events add to previous ones.

Piper, Michael C. "Hijackers Really Arabs? Maybe Not." [AmericanFreePress.net](http://www.americanfreepress.net) 2004. 5

Dec. 2005 <[http://www.americanfreepress.net/Mideast/Were_the_9-](http://www.americanfreepress.net/Mideast/Were_the_9-11_Hijackers_Really/were_the_9-11_hijackers_really.html)

[11_Hijackers_Really/were_the_9-11_hijackers_really.html](http://www.americanfreepress.net/Mideast/Were_the_9-11_Hijackers_Really/were_the_9-11_hijackers_really.html)>.

This is a conspiracy theory that says it was really Jewish fanatics posing as Arabs who flew into the Twin Towers. Piper blames Ariel Sharon and the Israeli government for sponsoring the attacks to ensure Israel's survival by spreading hate for the Arab world.

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This is a primary source that we can look at to analyze anti-Semitism in conspiracy theories. It is also an article that blames government, but a foreign one, so it provides different aspects to look at than the ones blaming the US government.

Pippin, Jerry. "Amazing New Evidence Emerges about Oklahoma City Bombing."
[JerryPippin.com](http://www.jerryppin.com) 2005. 5 Dec. 2005 <
http://www.jerryppin.com/OKC_Bombing.htm>.

This article about Terry Nichols tries to clear his name by claiming undercover FBI agents framed him and McVeigh. However, the author says the government is trying to keep Nichols quiet about this matter.

This primary source gives us a different aspect to consider because it is more important to the author to show the innocence of McVeigh and Nichols than it is for him to prove the guilt of the government, so he has different personal imperatives to examine.

"The Truth About the Oklahoma City Bombing." [NorthStarZone](http://www.geocities.com/northstarzone). 18 Nov. 2005
<<http://www.geocities.com/northstarzone/OKC.html>>.

This is a conspiracy theory from a web site full of anonymous articles. This specific narrative is about the government having prior knowledge of the Oklahoma City bombing and doing nothing to stop it, and even possibly placing bombs in the building themselves.

This is an example of a primary source that can be analyzed with Fine's diamond, with special attention paid to the structure of the narrative and the source where it comes from.

"The Truth Behind 9-11." [NorthStarZone](http://www.geocities.com/northstarzone). 18 Nov. 2005
<<http://www.geocities.com/northstarzone/WAR.html>>.

This is an anonymous conspiracy theory about government involvement in the 9/11 attacks in order to fund the International War Machine. It combines passionate outcries of injustice and emotional photographs with lists of evidence to demonstrate the truth and disgrace of this conspiracy theory.

This is a primary source that can be analyzed for its narrative content as well as other aspects of the piece, like the pictures, the website it comes from, and its lack of a named author.

Trifkovic, Srdja. "PEARL HARBOR CONSPIRACY? FDR and the making of a war."
[FreeRepublic.com](http://www.freerepublic.com) 5 Dec. 2005
<<http://www.freerepublic.com/forum/a3a3522a943db.htm>>.

Trifkovic lists evidence to prove the government had prior knowledge of the Pearl Harbor attacks, but lets readers draw their own conclusions from the evidence. At the end, he

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implies that the American Empire that exists today is proof of the conspiracy during Pearl Harbor.

This is an interesting primary source because it exemplifies a more respectful tone that is present in many conspiracy theories about FDR and Pearl Harbor. This illustrates a possible trend that authors feel the need to be more considerate when criticizing presidents who served before the 1960s.

Walker, Bill. "Days of Deceit: 12-7-41 and 9-11-01." StrikeTheRoot.com 5 Dec. 2005 <<http://www.strike-the-root.com/51/walker/walker9.html>>.

Walker tries to not sound conspiratorial in his article by explaining that it is human nature to live in small tribal bands and respond to the leader's call for war, which is why governments can lie to the people to drag them into wars. He thinks Pearl Harbor should be a warning to the public not to let the lie of 9-11 persist so as long as the Pearl Harbor one has.

This is a primary source that offers an interesting look into personal imperatives because the article has so many angles, such as criticism of public education, anger over letting the Holocaust last longer than it should have, and the implication that people can't think for themselves.

Secondary Sources

Averill, Kenelem. "The 'Paranoid Style' in British Politics—anti-Europeanism in Britain as right wing populism." PSA 2005. 3 Dec. 2005 <<http://www.psa.ac.uk/2005/pps/Averill.pdf>>.

Averill discusses his views of right wing populism developing in Britain as evident in the less recognized press. He offers the Kleinian approach as a method of looking at these narratives to better understand the people's fears about the relationship between Britain and the EU.

His views on how to study these narratives offer us a different method to weigh its usefulness in comparison to others. Also, his views about populism and agency complement those of Mark Fenster and Timothy Melley.

Berlet, Chip. "Conspiricism as a Flawed Worldview: An Introduction with Links." PublicEye.org 2005. 5 Dec. 2005 <http://www.publiceye.org/top_conspire.html>.

Chip Berlet summarizes his own views on conspiricism and the dangers that this kind of thinking can have on society because of the prejudices apparent in the narratives. Ultimately he believes that conspiracy theories impede real social movements.

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This article explicitly outlines Berlet's views on the study of conspiracy theory, and as a major player in the field, his views can be added to the discussion among different scholars to help us distinguish the existing views and methods of study.

Berlet, Chip. "Interview: Mark Fenster." PublicEye.org 2004. 21 Nov. 2005
<http://www.publiceye.org/antisemitism/nw_fenster.html>.

Berlet relates an interview between the New Internationalist and Mark Fenster to discuss his views about populism and conspiracy theory, and how the social movements can either be positive or negative.

Berlet, Chip. "Interview: Michael Barkun." PublicEye.org 2004. 21 Nov. 2005
<http://www.publiceye.org/antisemitism/nw_barkun.html>.

This interview between the New Internationalist and Michael Barkun, a main player in conspiracy theory study, explores his views on what attracts people to conspiracy theories. He also discusses the correlation between conspiricism and rational criticism.

Berlet, Chip. "Interview: Robert Alan Goldberg." PublicEye.org 2004. 21 Nov. 2005
<http://www.publiceye.org/antisemitism/nw_goldberg.html>.

Berlet writes an article about an interview with Robert Alan Goldberg in which Goldberg conveys his views about both the functions of conspiracy theories for people and the theories ultimately negative effects on society.

Goldberg's arguments about conspiracy theories can be compared and contrasted to those of other scholars, and his interview can also help new scholars understand his views.

Clarke, Steve. "Conspiracy theories and conspiracy theorizing." Philosophy of the Social Sciences 32 (2002): 131-150.

Clarke suggests conspiracy theorists hold onto their beliefs despite all of the evidence that disproves their theories because of the fundamental attribution error. Also, he explains his conclusion that conspiracy theories are ultimately beneficial to society.

Clarke's argument can be useful in the study of conspiracy theory because he helps demonstrate physical benefits of conspiracy theories, and he also illuminates human mental processes.

Fine, Gary Allen. Manufacturing Tales: Sex and Money in Contemporary Legends.
Knoxville: University Tennessee Press, 1992.

Fine provides an argument that conspiracy theories need to be analyzed beyond an assessment of their factual validity, and he provides a method for doing that analysis that includes looking at narrative content, personal imperatives, performance dynamics, and social structures.

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Fine helps us to better understand the function of conspiracy theory in society, and he gives a productive method for analyzing primary sources.

Goldberg, Robert Alan. "Who Profited from the Crime? Intelligence Failure, Conspiracy Theories and the Case of September 11." Intelligence & National Security 19 (2004): 249-261.

Goldberg discusses how conspiracy thinking and intelligence failures combine in the occurrence of a national crisis to meet people's psychological needs. He looks at various conspiracy theories about 9/11 from both the right and left.

This article can be used to help answer the essential question about how crises and lack of faith in government related conspiracy theories. His views can also be added to the discussion of how conspiracy theories appeal to the people writing and reading them.

Goldzwig, Steven R. "Conspiracy rhetoric at the dawn of the new millennium: A response." Western Journal of Communication 66 (2002): 492-506. ProQuest. George Washington U Lib., Washington DC. 2 Nov. 2005
<<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=253539131&Fmt=3&clientId=31812&RQT=309&VName=PQD>>.

Goldzwig analyzes the ideas presented by Leroy G. Dorsey, Charles J. Stewart, and James Darsey that discuss why conspiracy theories have arisen and why they are believable to people. He also portrays these theories as diseases that need to be combated.

The ideas of the various essayists contribute to discussions about the popularity of conspiracy belief.

Hari, Johann. "Who really downed the twin towers?" New Statesman 15.703 (2002): 12-13. ProQuest. George Washington U Lib., Washington DC. 16 Nov. 2005
<<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=115734036&Fmt=4&clientId=31812&RQT=309&VName=PQD>>.

Hari discusses why conspiracy theory is so popular from the perspectives of various conspiracy theory scholars. He uses the 9/11 conspiracies as an example to develop his own hypothesis.

The different claims from the scholars as to why people are drawn to conspiracy theory can be added to our discussion about the purpose and function of conspiracy belief. Their ideas can be incorporated into our own, or we can disagree with them and point out our reasons for dispute.

McLaughlin, Thomas. Street Smarts and Critical Theory. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

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McLaughlin defines vernacular theory as the challenging of cultural assumptions, and he provides an argument for this type of theorizing deserves study.

McLaughlin's argument equates vernacular theory with conspiracy theory, and this connection helps us better understand conspiracy theory.

Melley, Timothy. Empire of Conspiracy. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.

Melley looks at a variety of types of conspiracy theories at different angles, and he comes up with the theory of agency panic to explain the surge of conspiracy theories in postwar America, which says that people saw themselves losing their individuality in the fact of large social structures, causing them to panic into trying to reassert their individuality.

Melley's argument about agency panic provides another explanation of conspiracy belief that can be put into discussion with the other scholars, and we can determine which scholars provide the best explanations for the popularity of conspiracy theories.

Miller, Shane. "Conspiracy theories: Public arguments as coded social critiques: A rhetorical analysis of the TWA Flight 800 conspiracy theories." Argumentation and Advocacy 39.1 (2002): 40-56. ProQuest. George Washington U Lib., Washington DC. 2 Nov. 2005
<<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=159472801&Fmt=3&clientId=31812&RQT=309&VName=PQD>>.

Miller argues that conspiracy theories fulfill two roles: an argumentative role and a social critique role. He also discusses the reasons for the popularity of conspiracy theories are a lack of faith in government based on real lies and the emergence of the World Wide Web.

Miller's argument adds to the discussion of the function of conspiracy theory in society, and it also provides evidence towards the essential question about what role diminishing faith in government plays in fostering conspiracy theories.

Moy, Patricia, and Scheufele, Dietram A. "Media effects on political and social trust." Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly 77 (2000): 744-759. ProQuest. George Washington U Lib., Washington, DC. 17 Nov. 2005
<<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=72046442&Fmt=4&clientId=31812&RQT=309&VName=PQD>>.

Moy and Scheufele explain the process and results of a study done to determine what kind of effects various modes of media have on political and social trust. Also discusses possible reasons for lower levels of trust in government.

This article can be used as evidence that there has been a decline in the public's trust in government, which can be applied to why people write conspiracy theories. It also can be used to discuss the media's effect on conspiracy theory.

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Roefs, Wim. "They're all in it together." New Statesman & Society 8.372 (1995): 32.

ProQuest. George Washington U Lib., Washington DC. 1 Nov. 2005

<<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=7719807&Fmt=3&clientId=31812&RQT=309&VName=PQD>>.

Roefs discusses aspects of American culture, which makes it susceptible to conspiracy belief, explaining why conspiracy theories are so prolific in our society.

This article can be used in debate about whether what he proposes about American society does or does not create an atmosphere of conspiratorial thinking.

I, Riley McIntyre, declare that I am the sole and original author of this work. This assignment was completed in compliance with the requirements of the course and The George Washington University's Code of Academic Integrity.