

HSTR122: Conspiracies, Hoaxes and Moral Panics, Spring 2020

Subject to change

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Dave Granlund, Leavenworth Times, 23 October 2017

Course description:

A history of conspiracy thinking, moral panics, and paranoia from the Middle Ages to the present, focusing mainly on the Anglo-American world, but with some larger comparative content. How and why do people in different times and places succumb to prejudice and passion and abandon toleration and reason, privileging rumour, innuendo and fake news over empirical evidence and common sense? How have irrational fears and beliefs shaped and continue to shape the course of history? Topics and themes include: 1). Conspiracy theories and the persecution and scapegoating of minorities, from Jews, witches, Catholics and Freemasons in the medieval and early modern periods to communists and Muslims in the contemporary era. 2). Famous hoaxes and murder mysteries, from the Princes in the Tower, Jack the Ripper and the assassination of JFK to modern ufology and cryptology. 3). Moral panics, ranging from anti-Semitic violence during the Crusades and the Black Death, the witch, the Gunpowder Plot and the Popish Plot, Tulip mania and the South Sea Bubble to McCarthyism and alien abduction.

Proposed assignments:

30%: 4 X quizzes = 10% each (best 3 out of 4)

30%: 4-5 double-spaced page (1000-1250-word) analysis of a scholarly article

40%: an openbook 3-hour final examination on two essay topics provided in advance.

Proposed reading list:

Select readings posted on CourseSpaces.