

Trust No One? Conspiracy Theories in American History

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American history is marked by episodic occurrences of what Richard Hofstadter called the "Paranoid Style" in American politics. In the late eighteenth-century, conservatives in New England feared that the Illuminati were trying to bring godlessness and the guillotine to America. Today, about a third of Americans do not believe the official explanations for the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Almost three quarters doubt that John F. Kennedy was killed by a lone gunman, instead blaming a conspiracy that might include the CIA, the KGB, the mafia, Fidel Castro, Lyndon B.

Johnson or even John F. Kennedy himself. This lecture will examine some of the most famous conspiracy theories in American history, some reasons why conspiracy theories are so frequent and persistent, and the role they play in American political and popular culture.