

Dark Secrets: Conspiracy Theories

From the beginning of time, people have kept secrets. Sometimes, they may be small and insignificant, but occasionally, they are on a massive scale, involving thousands, if not millions of people. These are conspiracy theories.

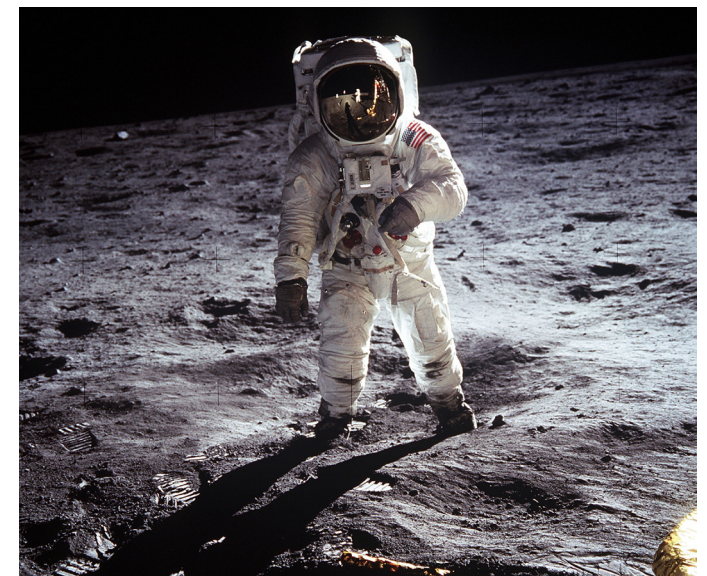
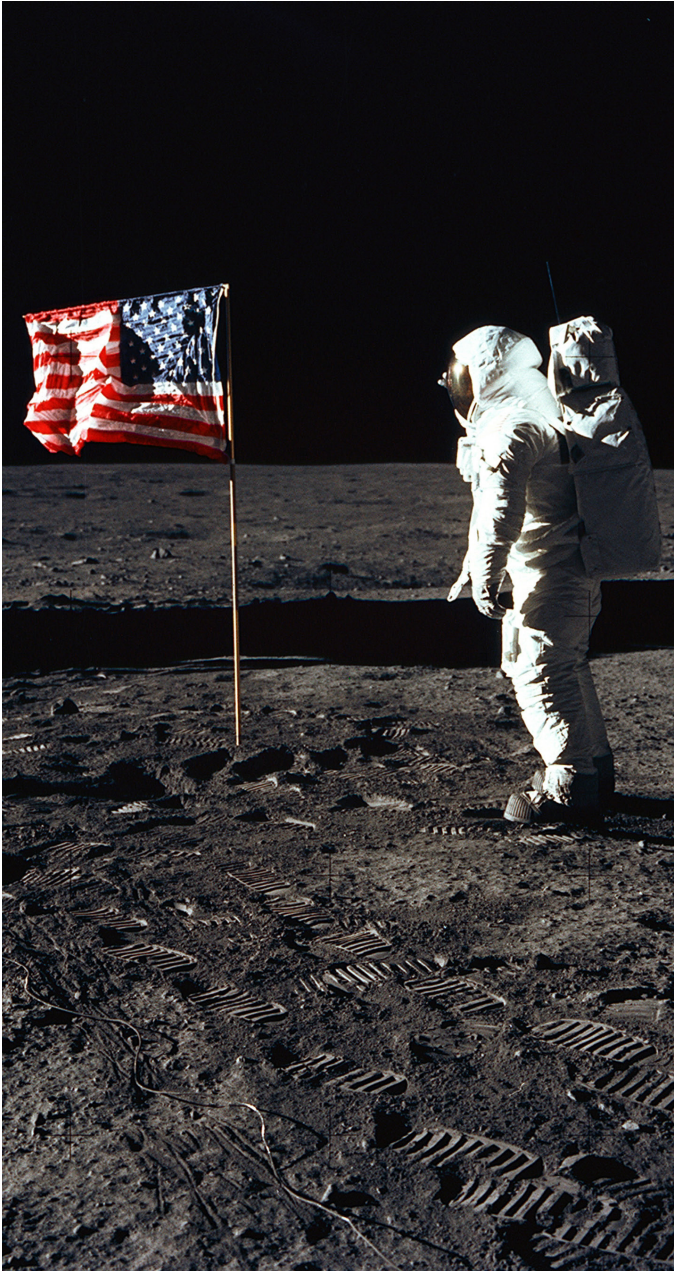
Conspiracy theorists believe that the official version of events given to the public is often not the truth: they think that people in power are lying or covering up facts, in order to manipulate or control the population. Conspiracy theories range from being about relatively small occurrences, to large, world-changing events. Some people make a living out of investigating conspiracy theories, writing books and articles about their research into them.

The key element of a conspiracy theory is that it cannot be proved. Often, conspiracy theories are outlandish and sometimes even ridiculous. They lack concrete evidence and are often born out of rumour or speculation.

The Moon Landings

Perhaps the most famous conspiracy theory of all concerns the moon landings. In 1969, astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong landed the spacecraft Apollo 11 on the moon. Footage and photos from their mission were broadcast around the world; it was the first time that man had walked on the moon.

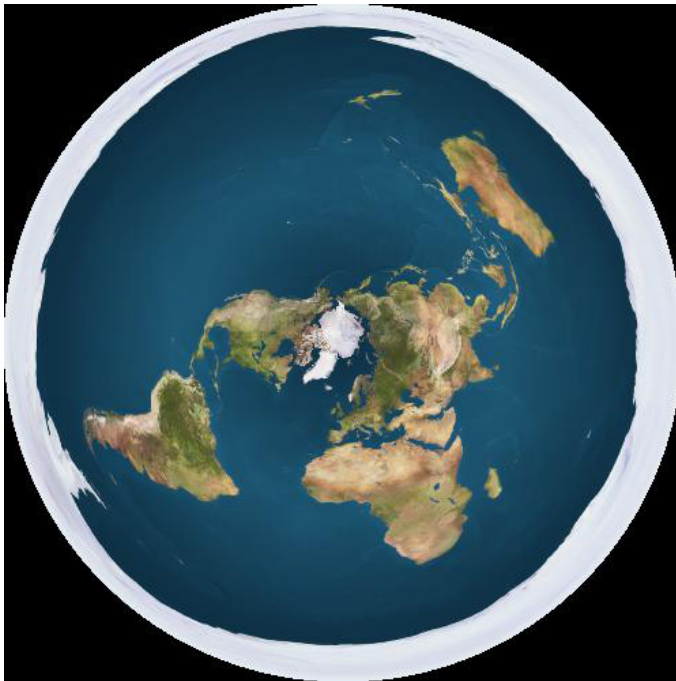
But conspiracy theorists maintain that the moon landings never actually happened. At the time, America was involved in the “space race”: an unofficial contest with the USSR (now Russia) to see who could put a man on the moon first. The theory goes that time was running out, and America realised they would never be able to achieve a moon landing, so instead they hired a studio in Hollywood and faked the whole thing. Theorists believe that the photographs from the mission give the game away – the shadows are wrong, the American flag is waving when there is no wind, and no stars can be seen in the sky. Of course, scientists have countered all these points, and no-one has so far been able to explain how the American government would have been able to keep such a massive conspiracy under wraps!



A photograph from the Apollo 11 moon landing.

The Flat Earth

Space seems to be a popular focus for conspiracy theorists. Another theory which is gaining considerable traction in the 21st century, is that the earth is not, in fact, round. A surprising number of people are starting to believe that the earth is a flat circle with the Arctic in the centre. Around the outside of the circle is a 150ft wall of ice, which stops people falling off into space. The basis for this theory seems to be that the earth looks flat – we can't generally see a curve when we look at horizon – and therefore it must be flat.



An image showing how flat earth conspiracy theorists view the world.

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This theory sits hand-in-hand with the moon landings conspiracy, as theorists believe the photographs from the moon landing must be faked, as they show a spherical earth. Flat earthers believe that NASA is at the heart of this conspiracy, and is lying to people.

It's not entirely clear what theorists believe motivates this supposed conspiracy. General distrust of science is certainly a factor.

The Missing Popstars

The idea that a famous popstar is actually dead and has been replaced by a clone is a surprisingly tenacious one. Quite a few singers have fallen foul of this theory, including Avril Lavigne, a pop star who emerged on the music scene in 2002 with her album *Let It Go*. Featuring probably her most well-known single, "Complicated", *Let It Go* had a skater-grunge-pop vibe which made it an instant hit. However, there were rumours that Lavigne didn't cope well with her new-found fame. She was so overwhelmed by the publicity, the story goes, that her record company hired a lookalike, an actress called Melissa, to make appearances as the singer.

It already sounds pretty outlandish, but things were about to become even more sinister... in 2011, rumours started circulating on the internet that Lavigne was no longer Lavigne at all. It was claimed that she had died in 2003, and been replaced full-time by Melissa. The reason for this elaborate switch? Some claimed Lavigne's record company killed her off, others said she had died in an accident.



Avril Lavigne - or is it Melissa?

As with all conspiracy theories, the evidence was shaky, at best. Fans compared images of Avril pre- and post-2003, claiming her jaw line is different, her eyes, her make-up – even her handwriting! The rumours became so persistent that in 2018 Lavigne responded to them, saying there was no truth at all behind them. But then, if she is really Melissa, fans argued, she would say that...

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Beatles megastar Paul McCartney is another musician who has been targeted by conspiracy theorists. Some fans believe that the pop star died in a car accident in 1966, and was replaced by a man who had won a Paul McCartney lookalike contest, called William Shears. To fuel the theory, there is a reference to Billy Shears on the Beatles' seminal album, Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. The rumour continues to this day, with fans citing lyrics from Beatles songs, and even playing the records backwards, to find "evidence" for their claims.



Paul McCartney or William Shears?

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The Sinister Airport

Opened in 1995, Denver International Airport is at the centre of a whole host of conspiracy theories. The third largest airport in the world, the building cost \$4.8bn and finally opened after several delays in 1995. Its features include a large underground network that was originally conceived as a computerised baggage system 26 miles long. But, despite the best efforts of the best engineers, the system wouldn't work, and is now abandoned. Some believe that this massive underground space is actually a shelter for world leaders, should an apocalypse occur.

The airport also boasts some very strange works of art. One painting features a soldier in a gas mask brandishing a gun and stabbing a dove, while another features a child in a funeral casket, while other children flee a forest fire – supposedly showing a world out of sync with nature. But possibly the most celebrated of the airport's artworks is a 32-foot high blue horse with red glowing eyes, nicknamed Blucifer. This sinister sculpture has a troubled history: a piece fell off while it was being created and hit the artist, severing an artery and resulting in him bleeding to death.

Viewed from above, the airport has a strange layout. Its runways are at odd angles, and some claim this has been done deliberately to create the shape of the Nazi swastika.

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The Blue Mustang, nicknamed Blucifer, at Denver International Airport.

Perhaps the strangest feature of all, though, is a stone plaque in the airport which features Masonic symbols and which references the New World Airport Commission. So what's the problem with that? Well, there doesn't seem to be any such thing. Journalists have researched, and no New World Airport Commission has ever been found. Although conspiracy theorists believe there is such a thing as the New World Order... Could the airport actually have been built by a group intent on taking over the world?

The New World Order

Broadly speaking, a new world order is simply a time when there is a significant shift in policy or political thought in the world. For example, at the end of the Second World War, when leaders tried to put measures into place to reduce the potential for further conflicts. However, the term new world order has also been appropriated by conspiracy theorists, to describe secret plans to take over the world.

Many conspiracy theorists believe that Freemasons are an example of a group trying to establish a new world order. Freemasonry is a male-only secret society, where members meet in 'Lodges'. It is not known exactly what takes place in the Lodges, as Freemasonry can be secretive, but it is known that there is quite a large element of ritual, with special symbols, clothing and ceremonies involved. Masons have their own handshake, so they can recognise other Masons without explicitly stating their membership. Because the organisation is clandestine, some believe that it is an elitist network, with members sitting in positions of power around the globe.

Another example of a new world order according to conspiracy theorists is the Illuminati – a secretive group of powerful people intent on taking over the world. There are many different theories centring around the idea that these people have insinuated themselves into positions of power, and that they control world events. One famous proponent of this theory is David Icke, a former professional footballer who announced in the 1980s that he believed the world was controlled by a

race of alien reptiles who can shape-shift into human form and control humanity. Among this race, known as the Babylonian Brotherhood, he lists several American presidents and members of the British royal family.



Conspiracy theorist, David Icke.

The Assassination of JFK

On November 22nd, 1963, John F Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States of America, was assassinated. The president had been riding in an open-topped car beside his wife, Jacqueline, in a presidential motorcade through Dallas when he was shot in the head. Just over an hour later, Lee Harvey Oswald, a former marine was arrested for his murder.

The assassination of Kennedy sent shock waves throughout the world. The moment of the assassination was caught on film, and recordings were played over and over again. People claimed that the number of

shots fired was more than police claimed, and that the angle of the shot did not appear to come from where Oswald was positioned. Theories that the assassination was a conspiracy started to circulate.

To add fuel to the flames of the conspiracy, Oswald was shot dead two days later while in police custody. Nightclub owner Jack Ruby was convicted of his murder; Ruby had apparently shot Oswald to spare Mrs Kennedy the agony of a trial. Oswald had not confessed to the assassination before he was murdered; indeed, he claimed he was being scapegoated and was not responsible.

Since then, polls have shown that the majority of Americans do not believe the official version of events – they think there has been a conspiracy to cover up the truth behind the assassination. Some blame the Russians, some blame the CIA, some blame the Mafia: but no-one has ever proved any of these theories.



President Kennedy and his wife in the motorcade, minutes before he was assassinated.