



Forum Neuzeit
Sommersemester

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Conspiratorial Thinking: Narratives in Modern History

Prof. Peter Knight (Manchester)

Everything is Connected: Vernacular Epistemology and the Visual Culture of Conspiracy

Most research on conspiracy theories starts from the assumption that we know what a conspiracy theory is, and we therefore need to uncover the psychological mechanisms and demographic variables that make some people more likely to believe in them. In contrast, this lecture will argue that we also need to consider how conspiracy, complicity and collusion have been imagined and represented in different historical contexts. The aim is to place conspiracy theories in the context of other culturally significant ways of making sense of causality and connectedness, hierarchy and network. In particular this paper will consider visual representations of conspiracy networks in American culture that start from the belief that “everything is connected,” ranging from the Pujo Committee’s analysis of J. P. Morgan’s financial empire in 1913, to Congressman Louie Gohmert’s recent Uranium One chart.

Peter Knight is a professor of American Studies at the University of Manchester, UK, where he is currently chair of the department of English Literature, American Studies and Creative Writing. He is an expert on conspiracy theories, and cultural dimensions of finance. He is the author of *The Kennedy Assassination* (2007), as well as the editor of *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America* (2002), and has recently published *Reading the Market: Genres of Financial Capitalism in Gilded Age America* (2016).