



Voodoo Histories: The Role of the Conspiracy Theory in Shaping Modern History

By David Aaronovitch

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"Meticulous in its research, forensic in its reasoning, robust in its argument, and often hilarious in its debunking... a highly entertaining rumble with the century's major conspiracy theorists and their theories." --John Lahr, National Book Critics Circle Award-winning author of *Tennessee Williams*

From an award-winning journalist, a history so funny, so true, so scary, it's bound to be called a conspiracy.

Our age is obsessed by the idea of conspiracy. We see it everywhere- from Pearl Harbor to 9/11, from the assassination of Kennedy to the death of Diana. In this age of terrorism we live in, the role of conspiracy is a serious one, one that can fuel radical or fringe elements to violence.

For David Aaronovitch, there came a time when he started to see a pattern among these inflammatory theories. these theories used similarly murky methods with which to insinuate their claims: they linked themselves to the supposed conspiracies of the past (it happened then so it can happen now); they carefully manipulated their evidence to hide its holes; they relied on the authority of dubious academic sources. Most important, they elevated their believers to membership of an elite- a group of people able to see beyond lies to a higher reality. But why believe something that entails stretching the bounds of probability so far?

In this entertaining and enlightening book, he examines why people believe conspiracy theories, and makes an argument for a true skepticism: one based on a thorough knowledge of history and a strong dose of common sense.



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Editorial Review

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Starred Review Like Michael Shermer in *Why People Believe Weird Things* (1997), or Damian Thompson in *Counterknowledge* (2008), Aaronovitch tackles the intriguing question of why people accept as factual things that are patently (and provably) untrue. Most of the popular conspiracy theories are here: 9/11 as an inside job; the faked moon landings; the secret Zionist world empire; the Priory of Scion's mission to safeguard the bloodline of Jesus; the murder of Vince Foster; the noncitizenship of Barack Obama. Aaronovitch demonstrates where the theories go off the rails (the Priory of Scion was a hoax concocted in the mid-1950s, for instance), and he examines the reasons why elaborate conspiracy theories, despite being so implausibly complex, capture the imaginations of so many people. It's due to a mixture of credulity, a lack of critical reasoning, a need for an underlying explanation for the inexplicable, and—perhaps most important—an inability to distinguish between the possible and the wildly implausible (for example, which is more likely: that astronauts actually went to the moon, or that thousands of people, including the astronauts themselves, perpetrated, and are still perpetrating, a mammoth hoax?). The author also examines the role the Internet now plays in disseminating, and lending apparent validity to, crackpot theories. The book is an evenhanded, lively, and fascinating look not just at the people who believe these theories but also at the people who promote them: the evidence manipulators, the liars, the con artists, and the almost pathetically gullible and uninformed. --David Pitt

Review

"Aaronovitch tackles the intriguing question of why well-educated, reasonable people sometimes believe 'perfectly ridiculous things.'" --*NPR*

"Lively... In most cases, Mr. Aaronovitch notes, conspiracy theorists would rather tie themselves into complicated knots and postulate all sorts of improbable secret connections than accept a simple, more obvious explanation." --*The New York Times*

"Every reader will have his favorite crank." -- *The New York Times Book Review*

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"Terrifying, hilarious, irreverent and addictively compelling, *Voodoo Histories* is an instant classic that should be read by everyone—a brilliant, witty and devastating analysis of, and guide to, the big lies of modern history by our most brilliant commentator" – Simon Sebag Montefiore, author of *Young Stalin* and *Stalin: The Court Of The Red Tsar*

"A brilliant, sparkling and witty demolition of numerous conspiracy theories—not only dotty but sometimes, as in the case of the fabricated Protocols of the Elders of Zion—highly dangerous and an analysis of why otherwise intelligent people are so ready to believe in them" – Ian Kershaw, author of *Hitler* and *To Hell and Back*

About the Author

David Aaronovitch is an award-winning journalist, who has worked in radio, television and newspapers in

the United Kingdom since the early 1980s. His first book, *Padding to Jerusalem*, won the Madoc prize for travel literature in 2001. He is also the recipient of the George Orwell Prize for political journalism. He writes a regular column for *The Times* (UK). He lives in north London, with his wife and three daughters.

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