

Critical Insights: Conspiracies

CHOICE Editor's Top 75 Community College Resources for November 2020

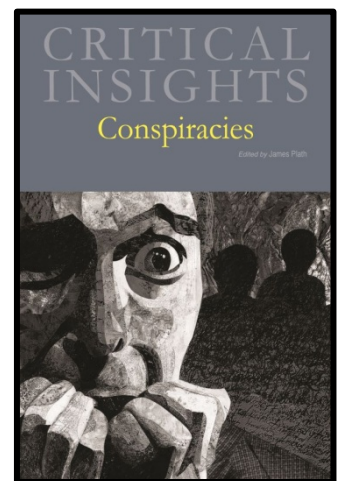
"The current conspiracy and conspiracy-theory publishing landscape is dominated by those who promote conspiracies, those who debunk them, and those who try to explain why people believe them and how to convince them to stop. This collection differs by offering essays about conspiracy and conspiracy theories in classics and other novels, popular film, and graphic novels. As part of the "Critical Insights" series, the book adheres to the series' standard format: essays are arranged in sections titled "Critical Contexts" and "Critical Readings." Plath's introductory essay provides historical context for conspiracy theories in the US and mentions many of the most persistent (e.g., the moon landing as hoax). Essays run from 14 to 20 pages and conclude with works cited. **Among the cultural texts examined are Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, George Orwell's *1984*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Oliver Stone's film *JFK*, Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code*, the James Bond films, and *The Watchmen*.** The list of resources and bibliography that close out the book include writings from "academics, journalists, experts, [and] professionals" as well as "more biased information." Plath explains that he includes works that "tend more toward propaganda than illumination" because they represent a large part of "conspiracy theory nonfiction currently being published." **Summing Up: Recommended. Lower- and upper-division undergraduates."**

—CHOICE

"Editor James Plath is the R. Forrest Colwell endowed chair and professor of English at Illinois Wesleyan University where he teaches American literature, journalism, film and creative writing. Every chapter in *Critical Insights: Conspiracies* is an essay written by a different author, all centering around conspiracies present in novels, films, plays and graphic novels.

(Continued)

FULL
TEXT
REVIEW



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2 University Plaza, Suite 310, Hackensack, NJ 07601
(800) 221-1592 FAX (201) 968-0511
www.salempress.com csr@salempress.com

Critical Insights: Conspiracies

"The pieces each author writes about are either ones that are commonly used in high school AP classes or found on syllabi for undergraduate coursework. **Each author's dissection of their instance of conspiracy is unique and opens the readers eyes to the many ways in which conspiracy is and has been present in written media.**

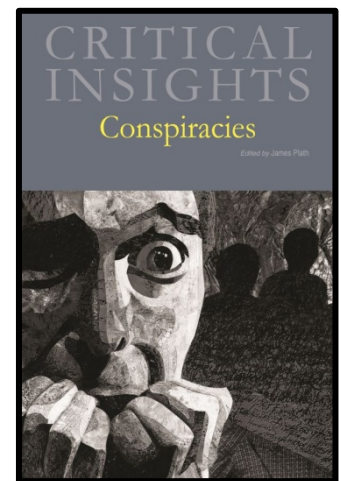
The "Critical Contexts" section consists of four chapters that introduce readers to a few of the different bases upon which conspiracy theories might build. It covers religion, politics, race and economics. This section provides a warm up for "Critical Readings" which dives into 10 essays based on incredibly varied texts from Shakespeare to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to *The Shining*. **It is a truly varied and well-rounded sample of scholarly analysis of conspiracy.** The most thought provoking chapter was the one written by M. Katherine Grimes that centered around contemporary young adult fiction. She draws on commonalities in young adult literature and finds that conspiracy is inspirational in these texts. For young people in these books, they are "inspired to conspire" as a way of fighting against injustices perpetrated by adults in power. She makes connections between this theme and current events; particularly the involvement of young adults' in various social justice causes. Her chapter sees conspiracy not as an overt theme but rather as an undercurrent that promotes critical thinking in young people.

***Critical Insights: Conspiracies* would serve as an excellent tool for English teachers at the high school and undergraduate level. It is thought-provoking and features essays that would be for great supplementary materials to compliment the original works that students might study. Overall, I would want to have this book around to reference if ever I needed to further explore any of the works featured in it.**

ATG Reviewer Rating: I need this in my library. (I want to be able to get up from my desk and grab this book off the shelf, if it's not checked out.)

- Against the Grain, 2022

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