

# Conspiracy theories: A cultural phenomenon



Who really killed John F Kennedy? Was Princess Diana murdered? Did astronauts really land on the moon? These are the type of questions that a lot of people have been asking, and answering with a range of theories, for *decades*.

A conspiracy theory is, according to the OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY, a “theory that an event or phenomenon *occurs* as a result of a conspiracy between interested parties; specifically, a belief that some *covert* but influential agency (typically political in motivation and oppressive in intent) is responsible for an unexplained event”. Conspiracy theories are often promoted by people who are generally

opposed to and *distrustful* of institutions and people in power, and where the evidence is missing. Belief in conspiracies can be symptomatic of a range of psychological disorders: psychologists attribute finding a conspiracy where there is none to a mental illness called *illusory pattern perception*. And, *owing* in part to the Internet, they’ve exploded in popularity in recent decades, to become a cultural phenomenon.

## Deaths of famous people

Popular conspiracy theories very often *revolve* around the death of famous people, especially those who didn’t die from natural causes. *A case in point* is the assassination of President John F Kennedy, who was shot and killed while riding in a presidential motorcade through Dallas, Texas, on November 22nd 1963. Just over an hour later, a former US marine called Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested for the murder, and two days later, Oswald was himself murdered by a nightclub operator from Dallas called Jack Ruby.

Initially, investigators concluded that Oswald had acted alone. However, a later investigation concluded that Kennedy was “probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy”. This finding was based on evidence that was *subsequently* revealed to be *faulty*, but that didn’t stop it from inspiring a wide range of conspiracy theories that persist to this day. Typically, such theories claim that



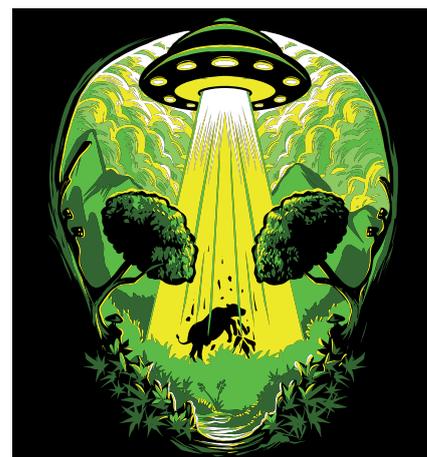
*a decade* une décennie  
*to occur* se produire  
*covert* secret  
*distrustful* méfiant

*illusory pattern perception* un schéma de fausse perception  
*owing to* dû  
*to revolve* tourner

*a case in point* un bon exemple  
*subsequently* ensuite, par la suite  
*faulty* erroné



Princess Diana



various *government bodies* conspired to assassinate the president, and then to cover up crucial evidence relating to the crime.

Conspiracy theorists are similarly *sceptical* about the official cause of the death of Princess Diana, who died after being *injured* in a car crash in Paris on August 31st 1997. French officials concluded that the driver of the car, Henri Paul, who also died in the crash, was *solely* responsible for the accident and that he was intoxicated and under the influence of prescription drugs at the time, while a British jury also pointed to other factors, including the fact that the party were being pursued by paparazzi and that they weren't wearing *seatbelts*. However, Princess Diana's boyfriend, Dodi Fayed, also died in the crash, and his father, Mohamed Al-Fayed, maintains to this day that the couple were murdered, leading to a wide range of conspiracy theories that support his *claims*.



## The earth and the moon

A 'flat-earther' is defined as 'a person who believes that the earth is flat', but the term is also used more broadly to describe 'a person who holds *outdated* or *disproven* beliefs', so in principle, you could describe anyone who *is prone to* entertaining conspiracy theories as a flat-earther. The idea that the earth is flat was widely accepted until the 4th century BC, when the famous philosophers Plato and Aristotle began to uncover evidence that the earth is, in fact, spherical. After centuries of scientific

discovery *substantiating* their claims, however, an English writer named Samuel Rowbotham began, in the mid-1800s, to promote the idea that the earth was flat after all, and he founded the Universal Zetetic Society, which is the predecessor of the modern-day International Flat Earth Research Society.

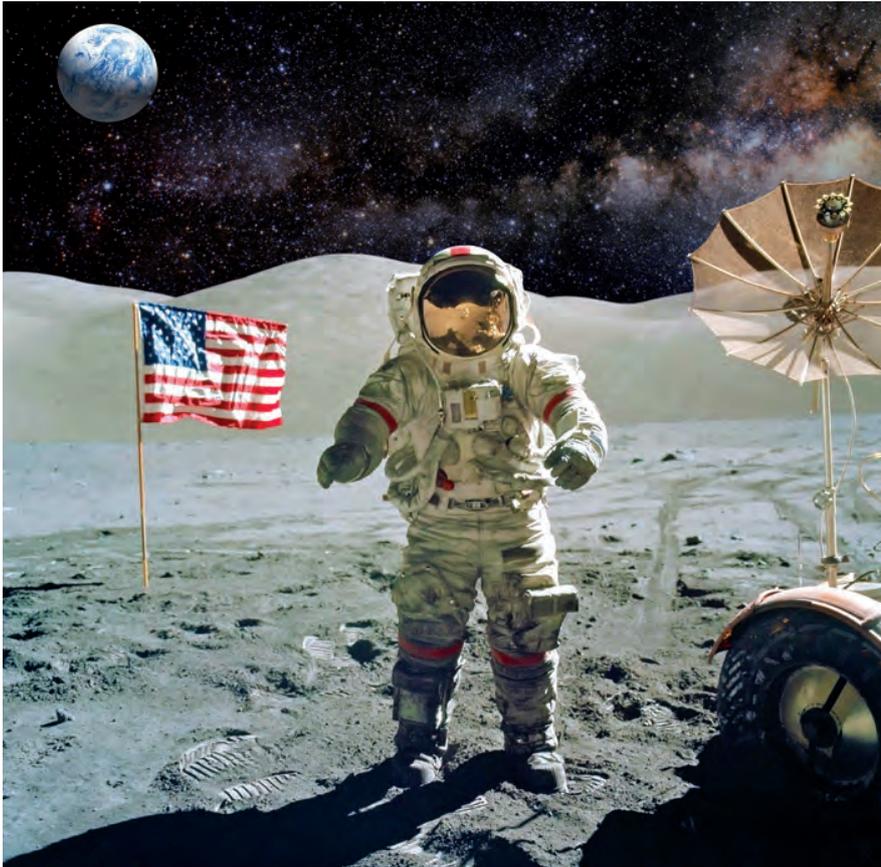
*Although* many flat-earthers disagree on the exact nature of the planet, the general consensus seems to be that it is flat and is surrounded by *an ice wall* that NASA is guarding. NASA, such theorists claim, alters and manipulates images to make the earth appear to be spherical, while conspiring with other governmental bodies *to delude* the public into believing this is the case. When challenged on the motive for doing so, some flat-earthers claim that it's an effort to hide evidence that proves the existence of God. ▶



a government body    un organisme  
gouvernemental  
sceptical /'skep.tɪ.kəl/    sceptique  
injured    blessé  
solely    (ici) entièrement

a seatbelt    une ceinture de sécurité  
a claim    une affirmation  
outdated    dépassé, obsolète  
disproven    réfuté, mis en défaut  
to be prone to    être enclin à

to substantiate    prouver, étayer  
although    bien que  
an ice wall    un mur de glace  
to delude    tromper, induire  
en erreur

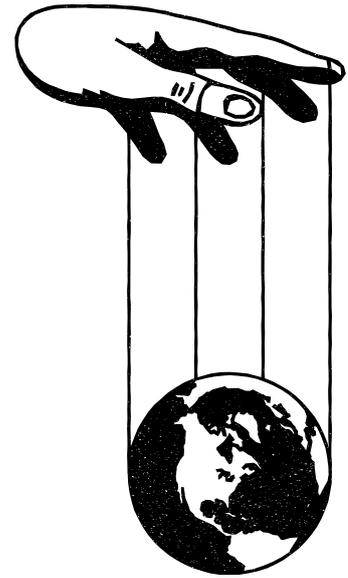


► If NASA can convince us that the earth isn't flat, it can almost certainly convince us that humans have landed on the moon, which many conspiracy theorists *argue* it has!

On July 20th 1969, the world watched on television as Neil Armstrong became the first person *to set foot* on the moon, before *uttering* the famous phrase, "One small step for man, one giant *leap* for *mankind*." However, many people claim that this and subsequent moon landings were an elaborate *hoax* staged by NASA, possibly with the help of other governmental organisations. This theory persists, despite an abundance of evidence to the contrary, including recent photographs that show five flags, all still standing, planted by astronauts on the moon's surface between 1969 and 1972.

### Aliens: Fake or real?

Another popular subject of conspiracy theories is that of the existence of aliens from other planets, and their presence here on earth. Many theorists maintain that governments and politicians, as well as organisations such as NASA, have been conspiring for decades to suppress evidence of extraterrestrial unidentified flying objects and alien visitors. While the evidence for most conspiracy theories is extremely *shaky*, this one gained



some credibility this year, when the US Department of Defense released three videos of UFOs.

The three videos, called FLIR.mp4, GOFAST.wmv, and GIMBAL.wmv, show unidentified flying objects, or UFOs, that US Navy pilots encountered during training flights in 2004 and 2015. The videos had all been previously published, two by the NEW YORK TIMES and the other by the private science organisation To the Stars... Academy of Arts & Sciences.

One of the videos was taken in 2004, 100 miles over the Pacific Ocean, and shows an *oblong* object suspended over the water and then flying away. The other two videos are from 2015 and show objects flying and rotating through the air. The US Department of Defense released the three videos in April under the Freedom of Information Act "*to clear up* any *misconceptions* by the public on whether or not the *footage* that has been circulating was real or whether or not there is more to the videos". Many people believe the UFOs in the videos are extraterrestrial in nature, and the department

*to argue* (ici) mettre en doute  
*to set foot* marcher, fouler  
*to utter* prononcer  
*a leap* un bond, un saut  
*mankind* l'humanité

*an hoax* un canular, une fausse alerte  
*an alien* un extraterrestre, un martien  
*fake* faux

*shaky* bancal  
*oblong* rectangulaire  
*to clear up* (ici) dissiper  
*a misconception* une idée fausse  
*footage* les séquences, les images



confirmed that “the aerial phenomena observed in the videos remain characterised as ‘unidentified’”. One of the people who’s applauded the release of the videos by the Department of Defense is Tom DeLonge, previously with the rock band Blink-182 and currently with the rock band Angels & Airwaves. In 2015, DeLonge founded an entertainment company called To The Stars, Inc., and, two years later, it merged into To the Stars... Academy of Arts & Sciences, which also has aerospace and science divisions dedicated to ufology and *fringe science*. DeLonge

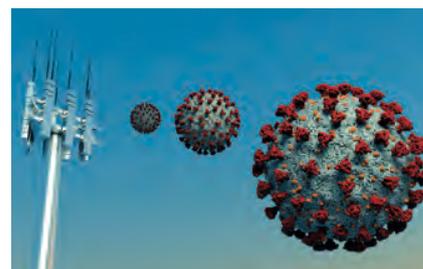
works with ex-intelligence officials to reveal information about unidentified aerial phenomena, and helped to expose the Pentagon’s UFO program in 2017. He told *ROLLING STONE* he thought the Department of Defense released the videos because of the work he and his colleagues have been doing to expose the truth. “Now they’re forced to recognise it and *acknowledge* it,” he said. You can learn more about DeLonge, in the Stars and the UFO videos by watching the History Channel series ‘Unidentified: Inside America’s UFO Investigation’. ■



Tom DeLonge

*fringe science* la science marginale  
(qui s'éloigne des théories  
généralement admises)

*to acknowledge* admettre,  
reconnaître



## About COVID-19

Just as there are climate change *deniers*, there are COVID-19 deniers. Anyone questioning what the *mainstream media* is saying is called a conspiracy theorist nowadays. Here are some of the theories about the pandemic:

- ✓ 5G networks are to blame for the pandemic, as they were developed around the same time that it began.
- ✓ Bill Gates is planning to use a COVID-19 vaccination program to implant digital *microchips* in people that will *track* and control them.
- ✓ The virus escaped from a Chinese lab.
- ✓ It was created as a biological weapon.
- ✓ The US military imported COVID-19 into China during their participation in the 2019 Military World Games in Wuhan.
- ✓ Genetically modified crops cause genetic pollution that allows viruses to proliferate due to environmental ‘imbalance’.
- ✓ COVID-19 doesn’t exist and the pandemic is *a ploy* invented by the globalist elite to take away our freedoms.
- ✓ The pandemic is a ploy invented by Big Pharma (large pharmaceutical companies) to make big money.

*a denier* un négationniste  
*mainstream media* les médias généralistes  
*a microchip* une puce électronique  
*to track* suivre  
*a ploy* un stratagème,  
un subterfuge