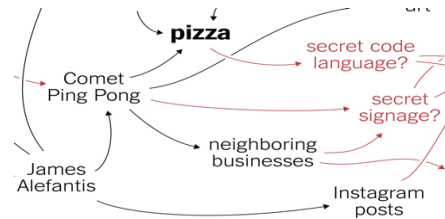
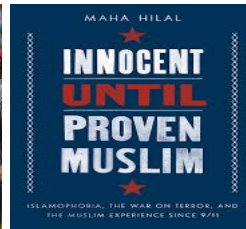


# Conspiracy Theories

## Hofstra University/Fall 2022

Professor: Santiago Slabodsky ([Santiago.slabodsky@hofstra.edu](mailto:Santiago.slabodsky@hofstra.edu))  
Teaching Fellow: Kaithlyn Sanchez ([ksanchez7@pride.hofstra.edu](mailto:ksanchez7@pride.hofstra.edu))  
Classroom: Breslin 0013  
Class Time: M/W 11:20am-12:45pm  
Office: 104 J Heger Hall  
Office Hours: Wed. 1:45-2:45pm (please e-mail for appointment)



### Course Description

Conspiracies seem to be everywhere ... but are they? For some, they explain what is hidden in the world, and for others, they are a misguided interpretation of this same world. Discrimination, persecution, attacks against political systems, and even murders have followed these theories. This course will explore what is behind this phenomenon. We will explore the histories, politics, media, and social media discourses; possibilities, and problems behind conspiracy theories; and why some religious, racial, and gender collectives seem to be usual targets. Students will be able to understand not only how conspiracy theories came to be and changed through time, but also to discern between them and sound social critique.

### Assignments

#### 1. Weekly Quotes 20%

You are to post on Blackboard one quote from the text or video we are reading/watching. You will post two quotes per week, one on Sunday (for Monday classes) and one on Tuesday (for Wed classes) at 9:00pm. The quote should be about something you want to

discuss because called your attention, you feel strongly about it (in favor/against) or you need help to fully understand it. Quotes after 9pm and repeated quotes will receive no credit.

2. Active Attendance and Class Participation 20%  
You are to participate actively in class through group and plenary discussions. You can be absent 1 class without penalization. Starting the second class the grade will suffer.
3. Letter (1500 words -this is around 5-6 pages double-spaced-) 25%  
You are to write a letter to a challenging interlocutor explaining a key issue you learned in class. More information will be provided in class two weeks before the deadline.
4. Final Project: Research Paper (2750 words – this is around 8-9 pages double-spaced) or Alternative Project 35%  
You are to write a research paper. Those students who have B+ or above in the midterm and posted above 85% of the quotes may arrange an alternative project with the professor. More information will be provided right after the midterm.

## **Bibliography**

- All material will be posted on blackboard

## **Schedule**

### **Unit I: Conspiracy Theories: Analysis and Definitions**

#### W 9/7 Intro and Video

*We will watch excerpts of the following videos*

[https://video.vice.com/en\\_us/video/charlottesville-race-and-terror-vice-news-tonight-on-hbo/59921b1d2f8d32d808bddfbc](https://video.vice.com/en_us/video/charlottesville-race-and-terror-vice-news-tonight-on-hbo/59921b1d2f8d32d808bddfbc)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsN96zE8FuE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDXJ9OUco04>

#### M 9/12 Why Should We Study Conspiracy Theories?

Joseph Uscinski, *Conspiracy Theories: A Premier* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020), 1-13 and 21-27.

#### W 9/14 Can We Define Conspiracy Theories?

Joseph Uscinski, *Conspiracy Theories: A Premier*, 27-41.

#### M 9/19 Special Activity Conspiracies in Europe: Antisemitism, Islamophobia and Racism

We will attend a special lecture by Hofstra faculty who obtained a grant to study hate and conspiracism from the European Union (scholars include: Carolyn Dudek and Paul Fritz-Political Science-, Sally Charnow-History-and Santiago Slabodsky-Jewish Studies). Readings TBA.

W 9/21 What are the Components of a Conspiracy Theory?

Jovan Byfod, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 71-94.

M 9/26 No Classes (Rosh Hashana) [So on Wed you may have a bit more readings]

**Unit II The Emergence of Conspiracy Theories: Reasons Behind a Modern Phenomena**

W 9/28 Emergence I: Purity of the Modern Empire [since we won't have class on Monday, this day we will have a bit more of material]

Francoise Soyer, *Antisemitic Conspiracies and Theories in the Early Modern Iberian World* (Leiden, Brill, 2019), 1-14 and 17-30.

The Constantinople Letter (1489) <https://samisdat.in/en/blog/letter-from-constantinople-1489>

M 10/3 Is Emergence I: Purity of the Modern Empire

Francoise Soyer, *Antisemitism, Forgeries and Conspiracies in Modern Iberia*, 31-53

Listen: <http://historyhub.ie/antisemitism-forgeries-conspiracy-theories-early-modern-iberia-soyer>

W 10/5 No Classes (Yom Kippur)

M 10/10 Emergence II: Colonialism, Racism and Sexism

Irene Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 143-153 and 163-185. Second Reading TBA.

W 10/12 Special Lecture: Islamophobia in Europe Today

Farid Hafez (Williams College) will be lecturing. Readings TBA

M 10/17 Emergence III: Modern Change and Revolution in the Nation-State

Jovan Byfod, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction*, 40-57

Excerpts of the "Protocols of the Wise of Zion" in *The Jew in the Modern World* Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz eds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 363-367.

W 10/19 Emergence III: Modern Change and Revolutions in the Nation-State

Jovan Byfod, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction*, 58-61 and 65-70

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmLLHMY9-wc>

**M 10/24 Research Day [More instructions will be given the prior week. It is also Diwali for students who need to be absent]**

**W 10/26 Midterm Due**

### **Unit III Conspiracy Theories in the US**

#### M 10/31 History of the US through Conspiracy Theory

Deborah Blum and Jesse Ventura “American Shadows” (3/7/2019)

<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/694463513>

Anikka Neklason, “The Conspiracy Theories that Fueled the Civil War” *The Atlantic* (5/29/2020)

#### W 11/2 Conspiracy Theories and US Elections

Readings TBD according to what is happening in the midterm elections.

#### M 11/ 7 Birtherism

Adam Serwer, “Birtherism of a Nation” *The Atlantic* 5/13/2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rdELrNvI9m4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B998-9DmecM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttt0itAOEbg>

#### W 11/9 Analyzing Birtherism

Ahsley Jadina and Michael Traugott, “The Genesis of the Birther Rumor: Partisanship, Racial Attitudes and Political Knowledge” *Journal Race, Ethnicity and Politics* 4 (2019): 60-80

#### M 11/14 QAnon

Lecture by Megan Goodwin and Elizabeth Diaz at Hofstra (2/26/2021)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vu-b4bqGvn4&t=3734s>

[If students need to be missing for Sukkot, please let me know. You are excused and if necessary, can meet 1-1 to catch you up]

### **Unit IV Attacking the Other**

**[In this section we will particularly explore media reflections and scholarly work according to the categories we have developed during the course. So following on our discussions I may be changing some of the readings for a better fit. For an excellent journalistic resource <https://www.theatlantic.com/shadowland/>. It is behind a paywall but you can get 30-days free]**

#### W 11/16 Conspiracy Theories and European Discussions

Brian Klug, “The Limits of Analogy: Comparing Islamophobia and Antisemitism” *Patterns of Prejudice* 48.5 (2014): 442-459.

Kevin Sachs, “Are Europe’s Muslims its New Jews” <https://www.arenweurope.com/stories/are-europes-muslims-its-new-jews/>

Shani Burke, “The Discursive ‘othering’ of Jews and Muslims in the Britain First Solidarity Patrol” *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 28.5. (2018): 365-377.

M 11/21 and W 11/23 No Classes (Research and Conversion Day)

M 11/28 Islamophobia in the US

Jasmin Zine, *Under Siege: Islamophobia and the 9/11 Generation* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2022), 1-15.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BG23YxKm3C0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r43aSB46Qdw>

W 11/30 Covid and “Yellow Peril”

Yao Li and Harvey Nicholson, “When ‘model minorities’ become ‘Yellow Peril’ – Othering and the Racializations of Asian Americans in the COVID-19 Pandemic” *Social Compass* (2021): 1-13 (pre-publication)

CBS, The History of Anti-Asian Hate Crime in America (8/1/2021)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JX-GD4fGFHk>

M 11/5 Save the Children! Mainstream Gender Politics in Conspiracies

We will read a series of articles by Kaitlyn Tiffany in *The Atlantic*

“The Women Making Conspiracy Theories Beautiful” (8/18/20)

“The Great (Fake) Child-Sex Trafficking Epidemic” (9/12/21)

“How a Fake Baby is Born” (7/13/20)

W 11/7 Antisemitic Conspiracies: Soros, Caravans, Immigration

Article TBA according to discussions in class.

Migrant Caravan, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H02UcIVw1J4>

Soros, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWyzdknqz6E>

S 12/11, M 12/12 and T 12/13 1-1 Meetings for Final Paper

Final Date: 11:59pm Final Essay Due

**Academic Honesty:**

- Hofstra University Honor Code: “As a member of the Hofstra community I pledge to demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior in all aspects of my life, both inside and out of the classroom. I understand that I am accountable for everything I say and write. I will not misrepresent my academic work, nor will I give or receive unauthorized assistance for academic work. I agree to respect the rights of all members of the Hofstra community. I will be guided by the values expressed in the P.R.I.D.E Principles. I accept the responsibility to follow this Honor Code at all times.”
- Honor Code Short Form: “I pledge on my honor that I have done this work with honesty and integrity, without giving or receiving unauthorized assistance.”
- Academic Honesty: Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious ethical and professional infractions. For information regarding Hofstra’s statement of principles with respect to academic honesty, examples of violations, procedures for handling violations, as well as a student’s right to appeal a charge, see Faculty Policy Series #11 for undergraduate students ([http://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/Faculty/Senate/senate\\_FPS\\_11.pdf](http://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/Faculty/Senate/senate_FPS_11.pdf)) N.B. It is my policy that any violation of

the Academic Policy will result in a failing grade, at least for the paper; a second violation will result in a failing grade for the course. All violations will be reported to the Provost's Office.

**Students with Disabilities:**

If you believe you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Student Access Services (SAS). In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, qualified individuals with disabilities will not be discriminated against in any programs, or services available at Hofstra University. Individuals with disabilities are entitled to accommodations designed to facilitate full access to all programs and services. SAS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will provide students with documented disabilities accommodation letters, as appropriate.

Please note that accommodations may require early planning and are not retroactive; please contact SAS as soon as possible. All students are responsible for providing accommodation letters to each instructor and for discussing with him or her the specific accommodations needed and how they can be best implemented in each course. For more information on services provided by the university and for submission of documentation, please contact Student Access Services, 107 Student Center, 516-463-7075.

**Deadlines:**

Please be mindful of University deadlines. See [www.hofstra.edu/deadlines](http://www.hofstra.edu/deadlines).

**Incomplete Policy:**

Hofstra's policies regarding Incomplete grades, default grades, and associated deadlines can be found in the Undergraduate and Graduate Studies Bulletins (<http://bulletin.hofstra.edu/>).

**Notice on Campus Sexual Assault and Discriminatory Harassment:**

University policy and federal laws such as Title IX, Title VI and the ADA make it clear that sexual violence and harassment based on any protected characteristic are strictly prohibited and are subject to standards of accountability at the University. If you or someone you know has been sexually assaulted or subjected to discriminatory harassment, the University offers multiple resources to support you and has policies and procedures to address these offenses. For more information, contact the University Title IX Coordinator, Jean Peden-Christodoulou, at 516-463-6815, [Jean.C.PedenChristodoulou@hofstra.edu](mailto:Jean.C.PedenChristodoulou@hofstra.edu); the University Equal Rights & Opportunity Officer, Jennifer Mone, at 516-463-1800, [eroo@hofstra.edu](mailto:eroo@hofstra.edu); or refer to the applicable University policy at [www.hofstra.edu/eoe](http://www.hofstra.edu/eoe).

**Student Policy Prohibiting Discriminatory Harassment, Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct**

Hofstra prohibits sexual and other discriminatory harassment, stalking, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault and other sexual misconduct (collectively, "Gender Based Offenses"). If you or someone you know believes they have been subjected to any of these Gender Based Offenses, help is available. To make a report, or for more information about Hofstra's Student Policy Prohibiting Discriminatory Harassment, Relationship Violence, and Sexual Misconduct (available at <http://hofstra.edu/sexualmisconduct>), please contact the Title IX Coordinator at (516) 463-5841 or [TitleIXCoordinator@hofstra.edu](mailto:TitleIXCoordinator@hofstra.edu), or Public Safety at (516) 463-6606. Confidential resources and support are also available from clinicians in Student Counseling Services (516-463-6791), medical professionals at the Health and Wellness Center (516-463-6745), and clergy in the Interfaith Center.