

Reading Conspiracy Theories: Thinking Along With the Unabomber (really, no 'b')

Exploratory Draft: Feb. 2
Completely Revised Draft: Feb. 12-Feb. 15 (depending on peer review group)
Rewrite: Feb. 20 or Feb. 22 (depending on peer review group)
Length: 1250-1750 words

Assignment Goals: To develop the critical reading tools and habits of mind of a good analyst; to distinguish between a productive thesis and an unproductive one; to learn how to deploy textual evidence in support of an original interpretive claim; to learn how to assess critically the writing of a peer. To get oriented to the phenomenon of conspiracy theory; to make first contact with the field of conspiracy theory studies.

Readings: Michael Kelly, "The Road to Paranoia;" Robert Alan Goldberg, "Mainstreaming Conspiracism," in *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); John Baez, "The Crackpot Index," *Skeptic* v. 8, no. 4 (2001): 18; Theodore Kaczynski, "Industrial Society and Its Future;" Alston Chase, "Harvard and the Making of the Unabomber," *Atlantic Monthly* (June 2000): 41-65; Ingrid Walker Fields, "White Hope: Conspiracy, Nationalism, and Revolution in *The Turner Diaries* and *Hunter*," in Peter Knight, ed., *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America* (NY: NYU Press, 2002): 157-76; Timothy Melley, "Agency Panic and the Culture of Conspiracy," in Peter Knight, ed., *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America* (NY: NYU Press, 2002): 57-81; Alasdair Spark, "Conjuring Order: The New World Order and Conspiracy Theories of Globalization" in *The Age of Anxiety: Conspiracy Theory and the Human Sciences*, eds. Jane Parish and Martin Parker (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2001); *Writing Analytically* (WA) Chs. 1-3, 5-7, 8.

The Tasks: Conduct a close analysis of Theodore Kaczynski's "Industrial Society and Its Future," write an interpretive essay for an audience of GWU seniors that makes an original argument about the ideas and issues raised by the Manifesto as viewed through the lenses of conspiracy theory scholarship and aspects of Kaczynski's biography. "Close reading" is defined on p. 211 of *Writing Analytically*: "A close reading explicates (unfolds) an interpretation by making selected features of your subject explicit that otherwise might not be readily recognized or understood. A close reading moves beyond the obvious, but it does not leap to some hidden meaning that is unconnected to the evidence. Rather it follows logically from the evidence; the meaning is implicit in the details, waiting to be brought out by the writer who is careful enough to look closely and questioningly." You may use no more than 3 related passages from "Industrial Society and Its Future" as grist for your analysis. You must also set up, use, and pay off one quote each from Kelly, Goldberg, Fields, Chase, Melley, and Spark to help you reveal something new and interesting about the Manifesto.

Grading Criteria: The essay demonstrates that its author has suspended judgment until s/he understood the "Industrial Society and Its Future." A productive and contestable thesis is identifiable, original, interpretive, and productive (see box in WA, p. 164, see also p. 197); the thesis evolves (WA Ch. 6). The first instance of the working thesis is underlined; subsequent reformulations of the thesis are marked with double-underlines. In support of the thesis, patterns of repetition and contrast have been noted and discussed; anomalies have been noted and discussed; indirectly suggested meanings have been made explicit (for more on each of the preceding criteria see WA Ch. 2). Specific well-described passages from the Manifesto are analyzed as evidence testing the thesis; specific well-described passages from secondary sources are used to develop and complicate your interpretation of the Manifesto. The introduction and conclusion function well (WA Ch. 8); the writer has developed a serious, engaging and authoritative voice; the essay is effectively organized (see WA Ch. 6 for more); the essay is free from grammatical and typographical errors; it properly uses in-text page/paragraph references and a works cited list.

UW20 : CONSPIRACY THEORIES

The George Washington University: Spring 2007

Dr. Eric Drown

“Thinking Along with the Unabomber” (Close Reading) Assessment Form

Name: _____

The introduction functions well.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

Positions the essay as a response to some aspect of
conspiracy theory studies:

Yes Somewhat No

Establishes the topic of the essay:

Yes Somewhat No

Develops the topic of the essay:

Yes Somewhat No

Meets/challenges readers' needs and expectations:

Yes Somewhat No

The thesis is identifiable, original, interpretive, and productive.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

Identifiable:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Original:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Interpretive:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Productive:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

In order to test, support, and complicate/enrich your theses, your essay noted and discussed the meaning or effects of significant patterns of repeated and contrasting elements in ideas and/or rhetoric in the Manifesto.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

Noted:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Discussed:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

The Manifesto's implicit meanings have been made explicit and discussed in order to test, support, and complicate/enrich your theses.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

Made explicit:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Discussed:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Specific, well-chosen, well-described passages are drawn from the Manifesto and analyzed as evidence relevant to the thesis. They are set up and paid off.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

Well-chosen:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Set up:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Described:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Analyzed:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Paid off:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Specific, well-chosen, well-described passages are drawn from secondary sources and analyzed as evidence relevant to the thesis. They are set up and paid off.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

(Kelly)

Well-chosen:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Set up:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Described:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Analyzed:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Paid off:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

(Goldberg)

Well-chosen:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Set up:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Described:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Analyzed:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Paid off:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

(Fields)

Well-chosen:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Set up:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Described:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Analyzed:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Paid off:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Specific, well-chosen, well-described passages are drawn from secondary sources and analyzed as evidence relevant to the thesis. They are set up and paid off.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

(Chase)

Well-chosen:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Set up:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Described:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Analyzed:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Paid off:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

(Melley)

Well-chosen:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Set up:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Described:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Analyzed:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Paid off:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Specific term used:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

(Spark)

Well-chosen:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Set up:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Described:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Analyzed:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Paid off:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

The evidence you offered persuasively tests, supports or complicates/enriches your theses.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

Primary sources: The evidence offered

Tests thesis:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Supports thesis:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Complicates/enriches:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Secondary sources: The evidence offered

Tests thesis:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Supports thesis:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Complicates/enriches:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

The thesis evolves (questions, interpretations, and explanations are reformulated as your analysis develops).

Quality Pts. Earned: []

Yes Some A little Not at All

The body of the essay is effectively organized.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

Yes Mostly Somewhat Not at All

The conclusion functions well.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

Makes an effective transition from the body of the essay	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Offers more complex, nuanced and productive versions of the argument	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Connects specific conclusions to more abstract or general concerns relevant to our study of CT and/or the world	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Acknowledges limits of the current study	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Pays off readers' effort with a significant, productive, and insightful walk-away point	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

The essay demonstrates that you have suspended judgment about Kaczynski's argument until you understood it.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

Yes Somewhat A little Not at All

The writer has developed a serious, engaging, and authoritative voice.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

Serious:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Engaging:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Authoritative:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/> No

The essay is free from grammatical and typographical errors.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

Yes Mostly Somewhat Not at All

The essay properly uses an academic citation system.

Quality Pts. Earned: []

In-text page/paragraph references:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Works cited:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Total Quality Points: /60 **Percentage:** **Grade:**

A=85-100

B=61-84

C=37-60

R/F=<37

Peer Review For “Reading Conspiracy Theories” Assignment

Due: As assigned the week of Feb. 6-9
Length: 500-750 words

Assignment Goals: To learn how to read and comment on a fellow writer’s work in order to help him or her develop his or her ideas into an intelligible, persuasive, interesting and productive essay; to provide peers with a considered intellectual response to their work with the goal of helping her or him meet the intellectual and compositional standards of the class and the field of conspiracy theory studies. To learn to apply such standards to one’s own writing.

The Tasks: Read, analyze and mark up a peer's draft using MS Word's reviewing tool and the “Marking and Analyzing Early Drafts” handout. Write a peer review letter aimed at helping make the essay more intelligible, persuasive, interesting, productive, and/or significant.

Grading Criteria: The review letter shows signs of a careful and considerate reading of the draft; it offers both an accurate overview of the essential argument of the draft (of about 150 words) and invokes specific examples to engage and respond to the author’s ideas; it helps the author locate the essential ideas of his or her draft; it helps the author develop ideas in their draft (through devil’s advocacy, problematizing binaries, offering alternative explanations or interpretations of evidence, providing richer or problematizing examples, suggesting new nuances or complications, qualifying claims or in other ways); writes something about the possible pitfalls and potential of the piece; **does not** take up issues of organization, style, grammar, and voice in the context of particular ideas.

Peer Review Letter Assessment Form
Name:

The review letter:

shows signs of a careful and considerate reading of the draft **Quality Pts. Earned:** []

Careful Not Careful
 Considerate Inconsiderate

offers an accurate overview of the essential argument of the draft (about 150 words) **Quality Pts. Earned:** []

Overview: Yes No
Accuracy: Accurate Partially Accurate Inaccurate

helps the author locate the essential ideas of their draft **Quality Pts. Earned:** []

Yes No

helps the author develop ideas in their draft through devil's advocacy, **Quality Pts. Earned:** []
problematizing binaries, offering alternative explanations or interpretations
of evidence, providing richer or problematizing examples, suggesting new
nuances and complications, qualifying claims, or in other ways.

Yes No

uses specific examples to engage and respond to the author's ideas **Quality Pts. Earned:** []

Uses specific examples: Yes No

writes something useful about possible pitfalls in the essay (in terms of the *ideas*) **Quality Pts. Earned:** []

Yes No

writes something about the potential of the essay (in terms of the *ideas*) **Quality Pts. Earned:** []

Yes No

does not take up issues of organization, style, spelling, or grammar **Quality Pts. Earned:** []
(and you shouldn't take them up)

Doesn't take up Takes up

Total Quality Points: /32 **Percentage:** **Grade:**