

****AMENDED, MARCH 2020****
HIS 351-5
The History of Misinformation

Tu-Th
2:00 p.m.
Little Fine Arts 301

Prof. Tracy Campbell
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This course is a research-intensive exploration into the creation, dissemination, and impact of misinformation in recent United States history. As such, we will be exploring something that is usually not taught in history classes—the history of things that did not happen. In the process of our examinations, students will see that the spread of misinformation is not a recent development and has a long and complex history. In addition to readings, classroom discussions, and personal journals, students will undertake research projects that examine a variety of case studies of misinformation. In the end, students should be better equipped to delineate how false stories originate and spread, as well as appreciate how they can be neutralized.

REQUIRED READINGS: Cailin O'Connor and James Owen Weatherall, *The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread*. Yale University Press, 2019.

Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. Vintage, 2008 reprint.

Kathryn S. Olmsted, *Real Enemies: Conspiracy Theories and American Democracy, World War I to 9/11*. Oxford, 2009.

The required books have been ordered through the UK Bookstore and are also available through a variety of online sites, such as Amazon. There will also be some selected readings posted online throughout the semester. For example:

Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman. "An Analysis of Rumor," *Public Opinion Quarterly* (1946-47).

Robert H. Knapp, "A Psychology of Rumor," *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Spring 1944)

Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler. "When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions." *Political Behavior* 32 (June 2010).

GRADES:

RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT #1	20%
RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT #2.....	40%
JOURNAL ENTRIES.....	40%

ASSIGNMENTS:

- 1.) You will investigate the spread of a specific misinformation campaign of the 1940s and 1950s. Specifically, find at least one source (written or oral) that supports and one that rejects the veracity and dissemination of one of the following topics:

Polio vaccination	Catholic domination of government
Mental “hygiene”	Jewish domination of news and finance
Fluoridated water	FDR and Pearl Harbor
McCarthy anti-communist hearings	Hitler alive in western hemisphere
UFOs	Eleanor Roosevelt’s communist ties
Background and motives of civil rights pioneers	Nuclear war survival
Race rumors during WWII	Japanese-American spies

**In consultation with the instructor, you may select a topic not included on this list that you find compelling.

In your paper, which should be 4-5 pages, comment on the following: can you detect the origin of the misinformation? What is the historical and social context? Why did people believe it? What critical factors went into each source’s determination of the veracity of the claims? (20%)

- 2.) In a similar fashion to research assignment #1, you will investigate the spread of a specific misinformation campaign in the 1960s and 1970s (40%):

Various suspects in the Kennedy assassination	Cigarettes and tobacco industry
Martin Luther King’s communist ties	UN and one world government
Moon landing.	Illuminati’s influence
JFK survived shooting	Elvis Presley’s fake death
Council on Foreign Relations domination	Fed.govt run by USSR
COINTELPRO	Paul McCartney dead
<i>Roots</i> and plagiarism	Howard Hughes biography

- 3.) You will keep a journal for this course (it does not have to be an actual paper journal—it can be one you have on your computer and can be sent to the instructor). The journal, which should contain numerous entries written over the

course of the semester, will be a reflection on what you have seen and learned throughout the course. Perhaps reflect on the following: what have you learned about the nature of misinformation in recent U.S. history? What does it tell us about ourselves and our culture? What have you discovered about yourself and your inclinations to believe certain stories? What is the larger significance of misinformation and how can it be combatted or neutralized? (40%)

- 4.) You will work within a team of other students (likely 3-4 in all), selected by the instructor, to investigate a specific misinformation case study from the 1940s through the 1980s and prepare a presentation (possibly a website, a visual display, or some other medium) that highlights the origins of the specific case, how misinformation spread, and why the stories were so powerful. In the end, comment on what the project tells us about American society and history. The overall grade for the presentation will also be the individual student's grade for this assignment.(30%)

NOTE: Even though this course analyzes the creation and spread of misinformation, discussions and comments should be grounded in the historical context, related to the readings and class topics, and informed by evidence from those readings. You will have the opportunity to engage in questions related to your relationship with misinformation in present-day society in your reflection journals. This is to say that our classroom discussions represent a civil, intellectual, and evidence-based space that privileges historical fact and context to advance a common understanding of the course themes.

SCHEDULE:

JANUARY

16—INTRODUCTION

21—WHAT IS A FACT? WHAT IS “TRUTH?” (O’Connor and Weatherall, pp. 1-45).

23—ARE AMERICANS “PARANOID?” WHO FALLS FOR FALSE STORIES? (Hofstadter, 3-40).

28—DIGGING: CONDUCTING HISTORICAL RESEARCH. HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE KNOW?

30--THE WORLD OF WAR: POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CURRENTS OF THE EARLY 1940s (Olmsted, 45-82).

FEBRUARY

4--CASE STUDY #1—“ELEANOR CLUBS” (Allport and Postman article)

6--RACE AND WAR (Sections from Howard Odum’s *Race and Rumors of Race*).

11--FEAR, PANIC, AND NATIONAL ANXIETY IN WORLD WAR II (sections from Odum).

13--WORLD WAR II RUMOR CLINICS--IS THIS A MODEL FOR FIGHTING MISINFORMATION? (Knapp article)

18--THE AFTERMATH OF WAR AND THE RISE OF COLD WAR FEARS (Olmsted, 83-110)

20--CASE STUDY #2—COLD WAR AMERICA: POLIO, FLOURIDATED WATER, AND COMMUNISTS. (Hofstadter, 41-92).

25—DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT #1

27—DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT #1

MARCH

3—CASE STUDY #3—THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION.**Submit Research Assignment #1** (Olmsted, 111-148).

5--THE WARREN REPORT AND DISTRUST OF GOVERNMENT (Hofstadter, 93-141).

10—DISCUSSION OF FINAL PROJECTS **Submit Reading Journals**

12—NO CLASS—WORK ON RESEARCHING FINAL PROJECT

17—SPRING BREAK

19—SPRING BREAK

AMENDED--From this point on, all regular class meetings will be held via Zoom.

24—CASE STUDY #4—THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY AND SMOKING.

26—THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY MODEL

31—WATERGATE AND THE LOSS OF TRUST (Olmsted, 149-172)

APRIL

2—THE CHURCH COMMITTEE'S REVELATIONS (Olmsted, 173-204)

7—INDIVIDUAL DISCUSSIONS OF RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT #2

9—INDIVIDUAL DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT #2

14—INDIVIDUAL DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT #2

16—NO CLASS. WORK ON FINISHING RESEARCH PROJECTS.

21—DISCUSS RESEARCH PROJECTS.

23—DISCUSS RESEARCH PROJECTS.

28—MEMORY AND MISINFORMATION (O'Connor and Weatherall, pp. 46-146; Olmsted, 205-40)**Submit Final Reading Journal**

30—MISINFORMATION AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY (O'Connor and Weatherall, pp.147-86; Nyhan and Reifler article).**Submit Research Project #2**

DO's and DON'Ts: Please do not eat or drink in class since this can distract your fellow students. Last, but not least, please turn off all cell phones and beepers before you come to class.

Academic Integrity:

Per university policy, students shall not plagiarize, cheat, or falsify or misuse academic records. Students are expected to adhere to University policy on cheating and plagiarism in all courses. The minimum penalty for a first offense is a zero on the assignment on which the offense occurred. If the offense is considered severe or the student has other academic offenses on their record, more serious penalties, up to suspension from the university may be imposed.

Plagiarism and cheating are serious breaches of academic conduct. Each student is advised to become familiar with the various forms of academic dishonesty as explained in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities. Complete information can be found at the following website: <http://www.uky.edu/Ombud>. A plea of ignorance is not acceptable as a defense against the charge of academic dishonesty. It is important that you review this information as all ideas borrowed from others need to be properly credited.

Part II of Student Rights and Responsibilities (available online <http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/Code/part2.html>) states that all academic work, written or otherwise, submitted by students to their instructors or other academic supervisors, is expected to be the result of their own thought, research, or self-expression. In cases where students feel unsure about the question of plagiarism involving their own work, they are obliged to consult their instructors on the matter before submission. When students submit work purporting to be their own, but which in any way borrows ideas, organization, wording or anything else from another source without appropriate acknowledgement of the fact, the students are guilty of plagiarism. Plagiarism includes reproducing someone else's work, whether it be a published article, chapter of a book, a paper from a friend or some file, or something similar to this. Plagiarism also includes the practice of employing or allowing another person to alter or revise the work which a student submits as his/her own, whoever that other person may be.

Students may discuss assignments among themselves or with an instructor or tutor, but when the actual work is done, it must be done by the student, and the student alone.

When a student's assignment involves research in outside sources of information, the student must carefully acknowledge exactly what, where and how he/she employed them. If the words of someone else are used, the student must put quotation marks around the passage in question and add an appropriate indication of its origin. Making simple changes while leaving the organization, content and phraseology intact is plagiaristic. However, nothing in these Rules shall apply to those ideas which are so generally and freely circulated as to be a part of the public domain (Section 6.3.1).