

# CONSPIRACY THEORY? THE ETHICAL PARADOX OF “BIG IS BAD”

39<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CORPORATE COUNSEL INSTITUTE

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SCHOOL OF LAW  
THE CORPORATE COUNSEL SECTION OF THE STATE BAR OF TEXAS  
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## FACT BEFORE (CONSPIRACY) THEORY A BAD TIME TO BE BIG?

- **Profiling the “Bigs”**
  - How bad can big really be?
  - Who are the “bad bigs”?
- **Ethics challenges**
- **Making big less bad through ethics and professionalism**

## EVOLUTION OF A CONSPIRACY THEORY

### AN IDLE MIND IS THE DEVIL'S WORKSHOP?

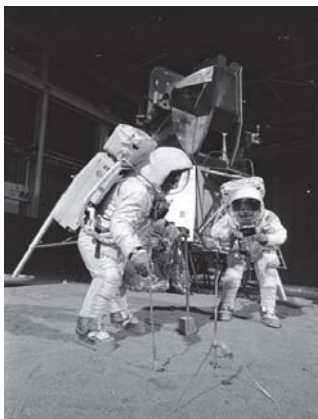
- In moments of **powerlessness and uncertainty**, the brain kicks into analytical overdrive in an attempt to create a coherent and understandable narrative
- Real conspiracies (e.g., Watergate) support belief in other conspiracies
- Belief in one conspiracy is the strongest indicator for belief in other conspiracies
- “**Backfire effect**” – efforts to debunk inaccurate information can leave people more convinced it is true

Maggie Koerth-Baker, *Why Rational People Buy Into Conspiracy Theories*  
NY Times Magazine (May 21, 2013)

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## TYPES OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES

### DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES



- **Benevolent conspiracies**, angelic forces behind scenes
- **Enemy Outside**, devilish figures scheming outside the community
- **Enemy Within**, lurking inside the nation, blend with public
- **Enemy Below**, lower class wanting to overturn social order
- **Enemy Above**, powerful people manipulating system for personal gain

Jesse Walker, *The United States of Paranoia: A Conspiracy Theory*  
(2013)

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## THE GRANDDADDY OF THEM ALL? THE REPTILIAN ELITE

- “The Shadow Kingdom” by Robert E. Howard (1929)
- Thousands of years ago, reptilian beings from other planets interbreed with humans, DNA manipulation
- Tall, blood-drinking, shape-shifting reptilian humanoids from the Alpha Draconis star system, now hiding in underground bases, are the force behind a worldwide conspiracy against humanity
- Most world leaders are related to them, including George W. Bush and Queen Elizabeth II



Wikipedia, Reptilians (2016)

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## WHY DOES IT MATTER? CONSPIRACY THEORIES ARE ALL ABOUT ETHICS

- Lies
- Covert acts
- Conflicts of interest
- Lack of transparency
- Abuse of power
- Manipulation
- Cover-up



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