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The Endless Profitable Infowars: Alex Jones's Conspiracy Theories and his Success between 1998 and 2016

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The Endless Profitable Infowars

Alex Jones's Conspiracy Theories and his Success between 1998 and 2016



Alex Jones on October 22, 2018 yelling at protesters before a Trump campaign rally in Houston.

Mark Mulligan/Houston Chronicle

Master Thesis

History: Politics, Culture and National Identities, 1789 to the Present

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Introduction

In the 1980s, after an onslaught of earthquakes had devastated the world from California to Armenia, Dan Chittock, a Salt Lake City entrepreneur, saw a business opportunity.¹ He organized a national trade show where people could gather that were interested in preparing for more natural disasters. The national trade show, the Preparedness Expo, attracted only a small crowd in its first years but that changed after Chittock enlisted far-right activists to speak during the three-day conference. The far-right activists used the conference to spread the message that survivalism should not just be embraced to prepare for the possible effects of devastating acts of God but also to withstand evil and unpredictable plots devised by mankind. The federal government specifically according to these activists plotting to destroy all individual liberties and to establish a New World Order. The introduction of the far-right speakers was accompanied with a massive growth of guests with far right beliefs like Christian patriots, militia members and white supremacists. In 1995, The Washington Post reporter Serge F. Kovalski, visited the revitalized Preparedness Expo and witnessed the many booths trying to cater to the new audience that Chittock had managed to attract. A survivalist attending the Preparedness expo in 1995 could buy for example survival kits, knives, manuals on sniper training and charts that showed how to identify the U.N's black helicopters.² Preparedness became big business.

Modern survivalists preparing for the inevitable war they believe they have to win in order to preserve their individual liberties do not have to visit a conference if they wish to purchase elementary or military means of intended survival. They can simply visit online stores of organizations like Infowars, one of the sources for news about the war that would be taking place between the elites trying to establish a New World Order and the brave citizens that were resisting those efforts.. One of America's most famous conspiracy theorists, Alex Jones, the owner and main star of the Infowars media empire, informs his loyal viewers almost daily about the many special discounts on the items obtainable in the Infowars store.³ But there is more, by buying items from the Infowars store like the

¹ UPI Archives, "Colo. Expo called supremacist event," *UPI*, October 27, 1995, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1995/10/27/Colo-expo-called-supremacist-event/9534814766400/>.

² Serge F. Kovalski, "A Show of Strength For Militia Movement; Anti-Establishment Consumer-Survivalists Gather For Conference, Product Exhibition; 'Preparedness Expo' Geared to Survivalist Consumers," *Washington Post*, September 24, 1995. Accessed August 13, 2021, Factiva.

³ *The Alex Jones Show*, "Report: Carbon Taxes to be Used to Force People Out of Their Physical Body," July 8, 2021, Banned video, 24:17, 24:03-24:17, <https://banned.video/watch?id=60e6328b36819249dd287baf>.

bestselling X-2 nascent iodine spray, the client would not only invest in their own health but also in the future of the Infowars operation.⁴

Exact figures that detail, the size of Jones's audience, is not available. The Anti-Defamation League estimated Jones's YouTube channel had around 2.4 million subscribers and 17 million monthly views before it was deleted. The Infowars site would garner over 10 million visitors every month.⁵ Another site of the many companies offering data about the digital market, Quantcast, also reported 10 million unique visitors to the Infowars site in November 2016.⁶ Another company that also offers data about the digital market, SimilarWeb, concludes that a total of 9.26 million visits were made to the Infowars site in May 2020.⁷ Jones has acquired a sizeable amount of wealth while tapping into the same market as the booth owners present during the 1995 Preparedness Expo. According to court documents made available during Jones's 2014 divorce proceedings, Infowars made more than 20 million dollars annually in the preceding period.⁸ Jones's success as a conservative conspiracy theory media personality also shows in his ability to interview influential people such as politician Ron Paul in 2017 and presidential candidate Donald Trump in 2015.⁹ Jones despite being one of the most successful and famous modern conspiracy theorist has not been the subject of much academic research.¹⁰ This is one of the reasons why Jones was chosen to be the subject of this thesis.

⁴ *The Alex Jones Show*, "FBI Agent Who Led Michigan Governor Kidnapping Plot Arrested for Assaulting Wife at Sex Party," July 24, 2021, Banned video, 8:05, 7:18-7:44,

<https://banned.video/watch?id=60fb579908b4e30ba06f2c17>. ; "Survival Shield X-2 – Nascent Iodine," Infowars, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.infowarsstore.com/survival-shield-x-2-nascent-iodine>.

⁵ "Alex Jones: Five Things to Know," Anti-Defamation League, accessed July 2, 2020,

<https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/alex-jones-five-things-to-know>.

⁶ Zack Beauchamp, "Alex Jones, Pizzagate Booster and America's Most Famous Conspiracy Theorist, Explained," *Vox*, December 7, 2016, accessed June 23, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/10/28/13424848/alex-jones-infowars-prisonplanet>.

⁷ Patrick Langridge, "How Accurate Are Website Traffic Estimators?," *Screaming Frog*, June 13, 2016, accessed June 24, 2020, <https://www.screamingfrog.co.uk/how-accurate-are-website-traffic-estimators/>. ;

"Infowars.com – May 2020 Overview." SimilarWeb, accessed July 2, 2020,

<https://www.similarweb.com/website/infowars.com/>.

Online data collection companies often either over- or underestimate certain data categories, meaning that the data presented on these sites should be treated as an estimate

⁸ Elizabeth Williamson And Emily Steel, "Conspiracy Theories Made Alex Jones Very Rich. They May Bring Him Down," *New York Times*, September 7, 2018, accessed June 24, 2020,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/07/us/politics/alex-jones-business-infowars-conspiracy.html>.

⁹ *Factbase Videos*, "Infowars: Alex Jones Interviews Donald Trump – December 2, 2015," November 3, 2017, YouTube video, 33:33, <https://youtu.be/4LeChPL0sLE>. ; *OCCUPY THE MEDIA*, "Infowars | Ron Paul Full Interview w/ Alex Jones," 11 December, 2017, YouTube video, 15:09, <https://youtu.be/zaCCreRfqis>.

¹⁰ Aaron Hyzen And Hilde Van Den Bulck, "The Most Paranoid Man in America": Alex Jones as Celebrity Populist," *Celebrity Studies* (November 2019): 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2019.1691756>. ; Hilde Van den Bulck And Aaron Hyzen, "Of Lizards and Ideological Entrepreneurs: Alex Jones and Infowars in the Relationship between Populist Nationalism and the Post-Global Media Ecology," *The International Communication Gazette* 82, no 1 (October 2019): 42-59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048519880726>.

These are the only academic texts I could find.

0.1. Research Questions

This thesis aims at answering these two main research questions: “How did the content of Jones’s conspiracy theories evolved between 1998 and 2016?” and “What elements of Jones’s films and radio show have contributed to the success of his career as a media personality in the period between 1998 and 2016?”.

This thesis aims at offering some valuable insights on the Alex Jones phenomenon by focusing on a central subject within his repertoire, conspiracy theories. They appear in almost everything that is produced by his company, Infowars. The main goal of Infowars was once specifically described on their main website, Infowars.com, as “Seeking the truth and exposing the scientifically engineered lies of the globalists and their ultimate goal of enslaving humanity.” On the same now deleted page Jones was described as being dedicated to “...promoting a true culture of liberty, transparency and freedom on a planetary scale to empower humanity, while vehemently opposing Agenda 21 and the globalist threat to national sovereignty.” and “...a bullhorn for true libertarian principles and the empowerment of humankind in the eternal battle against tyranny.”¹¹ Globalists are a name given to the villains in many conspiracy theories like one conspiracy theory that constantly reappears in Jones’s work about globalist elites that are working towards establishing a one-world authoritarian government, New World Order.¹² The Agenda 21 that Jones is mentioned as being opposed to is one of the subjects that has been incorporated into this conspiracy. It is a non-binding agreement between 179 countries that was signed at the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The aim of the agreement is to promote sustainable development worldwide.¹³ Conspiracy theorists like Jones, conservative political commentator Glenn Beck and some members of the rightwing advocacy group, the John Birch society believe that Agenda 21 is actually part of the global elites’ nefarious plans to install a New World Order. The believers predict that if the global elites were to succeed that the world will suffer through a “new Dark Ages of pain and misery yet unknown to mankind”, and that the United States will be reduced to just a vassal state.¹⁴

¹¹ “Who is Alex Jones And What Is The Infowar? ...And Why Should You Care?” Infowars, accessed August 3, 2021, <https://archive.is/itfhG#selection-1113.123-1113.127>.

¹² Liam Stack, “Globalism: A Far Right Conspiracy Theory Buoyed By Trump,” *New York Times*, November 15, 2016, accessed July 28, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/15/us/politics/globalism-right-trump.html>.

¹³ Rafael D’Almeida Martins, “Agenda 21” in *Green Cities: An A-to-Z Guide*, ed. Nevil Cohen and Paul Robbins (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2011), 8-9.

¹⁴ Intelligence Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, *Agenda 21: The UN, Sustainability and Right-Wing Conspiracy Theory* (Montgomery: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2014), 5-7.

In this thesis, the choice was made to research the content of Jones's conspiracy theories specifically in the period between 1998 and 2016 for several reasons. The first reason is that primary sources from before 1998 are harder to find. Jones founded Infowars in 1999 but before this period he already produced content related to conspiracy theories for his own program on Austin Community Access Television and for his own radio program called *The Final Edition* that was broadcasted on KJFK radio in the period between 1996 and 1999.¹⁵ KJFK radio is a non-commercial radio station currently known as KUTX radio with a broadcast area in the Greater Austin area in the U.S. state of Texas. The firing of Jones from his position at KJFK radio in 1999 was explained by the station operation manager Brian Billeck as being the result of the difficulties that the radio station had with finding advertisements for Jones's radio show because of the controversial viewpoints that he shared while on air. Jones stated that there was another reason for his firing. The radio station had tried to force him to change his controversial content about for example the deep-seated corruption of the Clinton family. Jones of course refused the demands and this would have led to him being fired. Billeck responded to Jones's claims by saying that he only had been asked to broaden his content not to censor himself.¹⁶ 1999 was not just the year wherein Jones was fired from his job at KJFK radio but also the year wherein he founded Infowars and when his new radio show, *The Alex Jones Show*, found a home on the Genesis Communication Network (GCN), the radio network owned by the former precious metal entrepreneur Ted Anderson.¹⁷ *The Alex Jones Show* is still affiliated with this network. For this reason, there is an extensive archive of The Alex Jones episodes available on the GCN website from 2010 onwards.¹⁸ This is where I have found most of *The Alex Jones Show* episodes that were used during my research.

A second reason to choose the period between 1998 and 2016 was that Jones gained most of his fame and notoriety because of statements he has made and conspiracy theories he has spread after he published his first film, *America Destroyed By Design*, in 1998 and founded Infowars in 1999. Jones is famous for many reasons such as his outrageous behavior as a media personality and because of how frequently he mentions false flag

¹⁵ Harmon Leon, "The Alex Jones Origin Story: On Austin Public Access TV, His Act Was Never an Act," *Observer*, April 17, 2019, accessed June 24, 2020, <https://observer.com/2019/04/alex-jones-austin-public-access-tv-origin-story/>.

¹⁶ Lee Nichols, "Media Clips: Psst, It's A Conspiracy: KJFK Gives Alex Jones the Boot," *Austin Chronicle*, December 10, 1999, accessed June 24, 2020, <https://www.austinchronicle.com/news/1999-12-10/75039/>.

¹⁷ "Infowars: October 09, 1999," Web.Archive, accessed July 13, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/19991009085521/http://infowars.com:80/>.

¹⁸ "The Alex Jones Show Archives," Genesis Communications Network, accessed August 5, 2020, <https://gcnlive.com/JW1D/index.php/archivespage?showCode=1>.

operations. A false flag operation is an event that is carried out with the intent of blaming a second party. False flag operations are both historical facts and a popular trope within conspiracy theories.¹⁹ Jones is for example famous because of the big role he played in the popularization of the theory that the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting was a false flag operation.²⁰ The Sandy Hook shooting took place in Newtown, Connecticut and was perpetrated by the 20-year-old Adam Lanza on December 14, 2012. Lanza had shot and killed his mother earlier that day, afterwards he entered Sandy Hook Elementary School and killed 20 children and 6 adult staff members.²¹ Jones besides this has also made a name for himself because of the similar role he played in the popularization of the idea that the 9/11 attacks were a false flag operation orchestrated by the United States government.²²

The last reason why I decided to look into the timeframe is Jones's special relationship with former president of the United States, Donald Trump. Jones as an anti-government conspiracy theorist portrays in the majority of his content most politicians as enemies to the public. They are often accused of either being puppets or members of the global elites. Trump's modern predecessors: Nixon, Carter, Reagan, Bush Senior, Clinton, Bush Junior and Obama, were portrayed as literal puppets in his 2010 film *Police State 4: The Rise of FEMA* while he was discussing that the real power in the United States was not in the hands of the executive branch but in those of groups like the United States National Security Council and the Bilderberg group.²³ The United States National Security Council is a forum that is part of the Executive Office of the President of the United States and its tasks are to advise the president about national security and foreign policy matters and to assist when necessary with the implementing of national security and foreign policy. The

¹⁹ Leonard Weiss, "The Lavon Affair: How A False-Flag Operation Led To War And The Israeli Bomb," *Bulletin Of The Atomic Scientists* 69, no. 4 (November 2016): 59. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1177/0096340213493259>. ; Joseph Uscinski, "Five Things To Know About 'False Flag' Conspiracy Theories," *Washington Times*, October 27, 2018, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/10/27/false-flag-theories-about-the-mail-bombs-are-already-widespread-here-are-5-things-to-know-about-conspiracy-theorists/>.

²⁰ Elizabeth Williamson, "How Alex Jones and Infowars Helped a Florida Man Torment Sandy Hook Families," *New York Times*, March 29, 2019, accessed August 3, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/29/us/politics/alex-jones-infowars-sandy-hook.html>.

²¹ James M. Shultz et al., "The Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting as tipping point 'This Time Is Different'," *Disaster Health* 1, no. 2 (April 2013): 66. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4161/dish.27113>.

²² Jeremy Stahl, "Where Did 9/11 Conspiracies Come From?," *Slate*, September 6, 2011, accessed August 3, 2021, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/trutherism/2011/09/where_did_911_conspiracies_come_from.html?via=gdpr-consent.

²³ *ChangeDaChannel*, "Police State 4: The Rise of FEMA Full Length," April 23, 2010, Youtube video, 2:20:38, 1:35:15-1:36:17, <https://youtu.be/Klqv9t1zVww>.

Bilderberg group is a group of influential figures for example political leaders, but also finance experts, influential media figures and academics from Europe and North America who have met since 1954 with the goal of fostering discussion and dialogue between the two continents.²⁴ Many conspiracy theories have developed around the annual meetings of the Bilderberg group partly because the proceedings are not made public.²⁵ Conspiracy theories about the Bilderberg group have been popular with both the far left and far right.²⁶ Ever since Trump became a presidential candidate, Jones frames him as a great person who could finally fight for the common people from within the political system that was corrupted by the global elites.²⁷ In 2016, Trump's election was presented by Jones in *The Alex Jones Show* as a rare victory for his side in the war for the soul of humanity.²⁸ It will be interesting to ascertain if and how Jones's adapted his content in response to such a seemingly rare positive development.

In this thesis, the decision was made to research specifically episodes from *The Alex Jones episodes* and films for three reasons. These two categories of primary sources are firstly the source of Jones's more well-known theories. They also appear to be aimed at slightly different audiences. Jones's films are aimed at his loyal audience and at curious onlookers. In his films, his loyal audience is encouraged to show the documentaries to their family, friends or other important figures so they will join the wars for the soul of humanity.²⁹ The films make it possible for curious onlookers to find the main platform Jones uses to update his followers about recent developments in the endless wars against

²⁴ "What are the Bilderberg Meetings and what are its goals?" Bilderberg Meetings, accessed August 3, 2021, <https://www.bilderbergmeetings.org/frequently-asked-questions>; "Bilderberg Meetings" Britannica Academic, accessed August 3, 2021, <https://academic-eb-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/levels/collegiate/article/Bilderberg-Meetings/79193>.

²⁵ Annie Gowen, "Is Bilderberg a Conference on World Affairs or a Powerful Global Cabal? Depends on Who You Ask," *Washington Post*, June 1, 2012, accessed August 3, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/is-bilderberg-a-conference-on-world-affairs-or-a-powerful-global-cabal-depends-on-who-you-ask/2012/06/01/gJQA5uqx7U_story.html.

²⁶ Hugh Wilford, "CIA Plot, Socialist Conspiracy, or New World Order? The Origins of the Bilderberg Group, 1952-55," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 14, no. 3 (September 2003): 70-71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592290312331295576>.

²⁷ *VICE News*, "Alex Jones Says Trump Is Just The Start," January 7, 2017, Youtube video, 6:19, 2:24-4:10, <https://youtu.be/IlaWnSftVuc>; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Rev. Clenard Childress: There Is A Satanic Power Working Against Trump," June 26, 2020, Banned video, 38:52, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5ef535a5672706002f2f02e3>; *The Alex Jones Show*, "DESTROY OR BE DESTROYED: Alex Jones' Emergency Message To Trump," June 28, 2020, Banned video, 8:13, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5ef9077a672706002f336ee4>.

²⁸ Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 9, 2016, 10:30-11:30.

²⁹ *TriCorneredHat*, "Police State 2000 Alex Jones FULL LENGTH," November 16, 2012, YouTube video, 2:02:18, 3:20-6:12, <https://youtu.be/V9HGfRrfv-Q>; *DocX*, "Police State 2 The Takeover (Documentary by Alex Jones)," April 11, 2017, YouTube video, 2:02:48, 2:00:00-2:02:35, <https://youtu.be/DRuHedUXtR8>.

the global elite, thereby gaining new audiences. Text saying 'Infowars.com' and 'Prisonplanet.com' that faded on and off the screen was one way they could this platform.³⁰ The last reason to research these specific categories primary sources is that Jones played a slightly different role in each. Jones takes on the more serious role of documentarian in his films. He extensively explains and provides ample proof for most of the theories he presents.³¹ He for example claimed in his film *Martial Law 9/11 Rise of the Police State* that Arnold Schwarzenegger, a famous Austrian-American famous actor and producer who was the governor of California, was going to be installed as president of the United States by the global elites. The proof he provides for the theory that Schwarzenegger and the global elites were working together were the many skeletons that would be in Schwarzenegger's closet. Jones pointed to the time that he had posed for a gay magazine and that his father, Gustav Schwarzenegger, would have been a Schutzstaffel (SS) officer.³² Research has shown that Gustav Schwarzenegger voluntarily applied to join the Austrian National Socialist Party and to the Sturmabteilung (SA). There seems to be no proof however that Gustav had even been a SS officer.³³ In Jones's radio show, he uses a specific technique of presentation. He seems to assume that the people listening are familiar with the theories that he has supported and therefore that he does not need to explain them. An example of such a theory is about the true purpose of the FEMA camps.³⁴ FEMA refers to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, a bureau of the United States Department of Homeland, that has the task of providing relief during large-scale disasters and of ensuring continuity of government after such events. A conspiracy has existed since the 1970s that claims that the FEMA camps will be used to imprison Americans in concentration camps.³⁵

The second research question: "What elements of Jones's films and radio show have

³⁰ *ChangeDaChannel*, "Martial Law 9/11: Rise of the Police State," June 3, 2014, YouTube video, 3:00:07, 12:57, 17:13, 41:03 & 1:18:00, <https://youtu.be/uzo9IAgyOr0> ; *ChangeDaChannel*, "Police State 4: The Rise of FEMA Full Length," April 23, 2010, YouTube video, 2:20:38, 50:37, 1:12:37, 1:24:56 & 1:34:49, <https://youtu.be/Klqv9t1zVww>.

³¹ *ChangeDaChannel*, "Martial Law 9/11: Rise of the Police State," 12:57, 17:13, 41:03 & 1:18:00 ; *ChangeDaChannel*, "Police State 4: The Rise of FEMA Full Length," 2:20:38, 50:37, 1:12:37, 1:24:56 & 1:34:49.

³² *ChangeDaChannel*, "Martial Law 9/11: Rise of the Police State," 3:00:07, 2:10:50-2:16:50 & 2:18:18-2:23:33.

³³ Tracy Wilkinson And Matt Lait, "Austrian Archives Reveal Nazi Military Role of Actor's Father," *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 2003, accessed August 4, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-aug-14-me-father14-story.html>.

³⁴ Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 7, 2012, 39:40-40:52.

³⁵ Larry Keller, "Fear of FEMA," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, March 2, 2010, accessed August 4, 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2010/fear-fema>.

contributed to the success of his career as a media personality in the period between 1998 and 2016?”, has been chosen firstly because Jones often is perceived as just an ‘innocent wacko’ by outside observers.³⁶ There is a story that creates doubt about whether Jones is truly as radical as he claims to be. Josh Owens, a former Infowars staffer, claims that Jones told him in a phone call after Owens himself had quit his job that he did like his job anymore. Jones however could not quit, he said, because of all the people financially depending on him.³⁷ The Jones described by Owens cannot be found in the content that Jones has produced. In this content, he has complained about his job but he emphasized that quitting was not option not because of the people that were financially dependent on him but because quitting would mean that he personally would hand his enemies a victory.³⁸ Two other stories that have been told about Jones describe him specifically as an entrepreneur. Two former Infowars employees were quoted in a BuzzFeed profile from 2017 saying that Jones adjusted his stories to connect them to products that were on sale in the Infowars store. He could financially profit from these products because they were actually failing products that were purchased by Infowars at very low costs.³⁹ Caolan Robertson, an American filmmaker that made far right propaganda films before disavowing the movement, leaked a clip of Jones saying that he is “...fucking sick of fucking Donald Trump...” and that he wished that he “...never would have fucking met Trump.” Robertson also told that Jones would have belittled his audience off camera. Jones would have claimed that he could sell his audience anything even “...dick pills...”⁴⁰ All these stories about Jones indicate that he is not just an innocent wacko or a lucky passive passionate ideologue but also an entrepreneur that has made conscious decisions during his career to build a profitable brand.

This thesis will not be able to provide definite conclusions about what elements Jones deliberately has incorporated into his content to maintain his loyal audience. It will however highlight certain elements that might have been incorporated deliberately and

³⁶ Aaron Hyzen And Hilde Van Den Bulck, ‘The Most Paranoid Man in America’: Alex Jones as Celebrity Populist,’ *Celebrity Studies* (November 2019): 3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2019.1691756>.

³⁷ Josh Owens, ‘I Worked for Alex Jones. I Regret It,’ *New York Times*, December 5, 2019, accessed July 28, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/05/magazine/alex-jones-infowars.html>.

³⁸ Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2011, 48:00-49:58.

³⁹ Eric Alterman, ‘Alex Jones Is A Practiced Swindler – Just Like His Biggest Fan,’ *Nation*, June 28, 2017, accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/alex-jones-is-a-practiced-swindler-just-like-his-biggest-fan/>.

⁴⁰ Michael Edison Hayden, ‘Alex Jones on Leaked Video: ‘I Wish I Never Met Trump’,’ *Southern Poverty Law Center*, March 2, 2021, accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/03/02/alex-jones-leaked-video-i-wish-i-never-met-trump>.

explain at least partially the notable longevity of his career by focusing on a major subject within his repertoire, conspiracy theories, and on other reoccurring elements. These insights might also help with placing Jones in the wider context of modern American media entrepreneurs.

0.2. Relevance of Research Questions

My research questions are relevant for several reasons. One reason was that Jones has not been the focus of much academic research despite being one of America's most famous and successful conspiracy theorists. He has only been the main subject of two academic articles both written by the Communication Studies professor Hilde Van Den Bulck and the PhD student Aaron Hyzen.⁴¹

Besides that it is also valuable that more is known about Jones because he as a person and his company seem to have played a role in the radicalization process of individuals.⁴² From 1998 onwards, Jones, his broadcasts and his company continuously and effectively spread ideas that appeal to people prone to them because of their background and status in life. These people are found both within the average republican political sphere and in political spheres that veer further to the right. The average republican might relate to Infowars personalities because the personalities constantly proclaim their fervent love for the United States, the American constitution and the values they attribute to them.⁴³ The average republican watching Infowars content shall also be confronted with conspiracy theories about the Deep state and the New World Order that are popular with factions within the radical right like some members of the militia and Patriot movement.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Aaron Hyzen And Hilde Van Den Bulck, "The Most Paranoid Man in America': Alex Jones as Celebrity Populist," *Celebrity Studies* (November 2019): 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2019.1691756>. ; Hilde Van den Bulck And Aaron Hyzen, "Of Lizards and Ideological Entrepreneurs: Alex Jones and Infowars in the Relationship between Populist Nationalism and the Post-Global Media Ecology," *The International Communication Gazette* 82, no 1 (October 2019): 42-59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048519880726>.

⁴² Katie MacBride, "There's "One Simple Phrase" Experts Say Works On Conspiracy Theorists," *Inverse*, May 7, 2021, accessed August 16, 2021, <https://www.inverse.com/mind-body/psychology-of-online-radicalization>.

⁴³ *Bowne Report*, "Infowars Will Not Back Down!," June 22, 2020, Banned video, 7:27, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5ef0df1ec7a607002f1f626e>. ; *The David Knight Show*, "Richard Proctor: How to Limit Federal Judiciary & Other Ignored Parts of the Constitution," July 5, 2019, Banned video, 29:11, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5d1f97f043502c0012511ff7>. ; *Fire Power News*, "DEMS HATE THE CONSTITUTION," December 4, 2019, Banned video, 4:19, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5de8353cbc3b270016a8ecbf>.

⁴⁴ D.J. Mulloy, *American Extremism: History, Politics and the Militia Movement* (London/New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 178. ; Lorna L. Mason, "Insurgency on the Populist Right: A Case Study of the Contemporary U.S. Patriot Movement," (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 2006), 129. ; *War Room With Owen Shroyer*, "New World Order Goes All In During Coronavirus Panic," March 25, 2020, Banned video, 11:18, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5e7ab280b027530090bc4d13>. ; *Special Reports*, "Owen Shroyer

Somebody watching the Infowars content will not only become familiar with some of the conspiracy theories of the far right but also with some major figures within the movement because of the interviews that Jones has conducted with some of them. Two of these figures are Elmer Stewart Rhodes, a former staffer of the libertarian Ron Ernest Paul and the leader and founder of the American militia movement, the Oath Keepers and Michael Flynn, the U.S. National Security advisor during the first 22 days of the Trump administration. Flynn has pledged the “digital soldiers oath” that was drafted by the elusive person or group by the name of Q.⁴⁵ QAnon, a far right conspiracy movement, started after this person or group began posting on the messaging board, 4chan. Q, who was supposedly a high-ranking Trump government official has posted many cryptic messages throughout its online career that seem to have been posted with the goal of mobilizing an online army to fight in the war between Donald Trump and his allies and the almighty satanic Deep state network of cannibal and pedophile elites.⁴⁶

The existence of content appealing to average republicans as well to people with far-right beliefs is not the only element that points to the possible radicalizing influence Infowars’s activities can have but also the place where it is released, the internet, can possibly play a role. Many scholars agree that the internet has played at least a contributory role in many radicalization or self-radicalization processes.⁴⁷ Self-

Addresses Local Republican Party With An Emergency Message,” June 17, 2020, Banned video, 3:21, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5eea368fc7a607002f184163>.

⁴⁵ “Elmer Stewart Rhodes,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed November 17, 2020.

<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/elmer-stewart-rhodes-0>. ; Alex Jones, “n.t.,” The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, December 16, 2012, 1:21:40-1:53:40. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, “Veterans Group Responds To Trump Assassination Attempt,” October 18, 2019, Banned video, 28:24, <https://79days.news/watch?id=5da9026b8c78c500137f647f>. ; *War Room With Owen Shroyer*, “Emergency! Supreme Court Rules Against Second Amendment; Tries To Extinct Guns,” November 13, 2019, Banned video, 29:40, <https://79days.news/watch?id=5dcb9e7514c7b80027ba3035>. ; Marshall Cohen, “Michael Flynn Posts Video Featuring QAnon Slogans,” CNN, July 8, 2020, accessed August 8, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/07/07/politics/michael-flynn-qanon-video/index.html>. ; *The David Knight Show*, “Protecting Your Home During Violent Aftermath of Election,” October 8, 2020, Banned video, 11:27, <https://79days.news/watch?id=5f7f5931b6038410182987e1>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, “Oathkeepers Founder: Americans Need to Overcome their Fears and Join the March on DC,” November 11, 2020, Banned video, 23:52, <https://79days.news/watch?id=5fab1b880ad7422090a8242f>. ; Will Sommer, “Michael Flynn Goes Full QAnon in His Post-Pardon Media Tour,” *Daily Beast*, December 7, 2020, accessed August 8, 2020, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/michael-flynn-goes-full-qanon-in-his-post-pardon-media-tour>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, “ALEX JONES AND MICHAEL FLYNN: AMERICANS’ DNA IS 1776,” January 6, 2021, Banned video, 33:57, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5ff51a425a21233002a02d6c>.

⁴⁶ Isaac Kamola, “QAnon and the Digital Lumpenproletariat,” *New Political Science* 43, no. 2 (May 2021): 232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2021.1925835>.

⁴⁷ Tim Stevens, “Regulating The ‘Dark Web’: How a Two-Fold Approach Can Tackle Peer-to-Peer Radicalization,” *The RUSI Journal* 154, no. 2 (2009): 29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071840902965687>. ; Ines Van Behr et al., *Radicalisation In The Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism* (Brussels: RAND Europe, 2013), 16. ; Daniel Koehler, “The Radical Online: Individual Radicalization Processes and the Role of the Internet,” *Journal For Deradicalization* 1 (December 2014): 116. <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/8>.

radicalization refers to radicalization of an individual that takes place without being affiliated with an established radical group.⁴⁸ Academic opinions differ on the question how the internet specifically facilitates radicalization. One way was described in the report *American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating A Complex Threat* namely that the internet facilitates radicalization because it normalizes beliefs and behaviors that are ‘...unacceptable or inappropriate in real-world environments.’⁴⁹ Frequent exposure to the ideas of Jones and his colleagues may therefore lead to the normalization of them in the minds of passionate consumers of Infowars content. Research from Adam Bear, a doctor in Cognitive Psychology, and Joshua Knobe, a professor of Psychology, has shown that what people consider to be normal seems to be a combination of what they perceive to be typical and what they believe to be ideal.⁵⁰ A lot of exposure to Infowars content might lead to a different perception on what is typical.

Other hypotheses on how the Internet can facilitate radicalization can be found in the report *Radicalization In The Digital Era* which says that radicalization would be easier in echo chambers and echo chambers are easy to create in an internet environment.⁵¹ An echo chamber is a metaphor that is used to describe ‘...a situation where only certain ideas, information and beliefs are shared.’⁵² In accordance with this explanation, a loyal Alex Jones fan might end up in an echo chamber that is at least partially shaped by the many ideas that Jones has espoused throughout his career. A loyal Alex Jones fan, if he wishes to consume every episode of *The Alex Jones Show*, is exposed to Jones’s ideas for about three hours almost every day. Even more content produced by Jones or one’s of his colleagues is available on the many sites that are owned by Jones like Banned.video, Infowars.com, Newswars.com and Prisonplanet.com, for a passionate Alex Jones fan. Critiques exist about the true effects of echo chambers and ‘filter bubbles’ and about the best method to measure them.⁵³ Research of the Communication Studies scholar Elizabeth

⁴⁸ ‘self-radicalization,’ Lexico, accessed August 4, 2021, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/self-radicalization>.

⁴⁹ Jerome P. Bjelopera And Mark A. Randol, *American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2010), 19.

⁵⁰ Adam Bear And Joshua Knobe, ‘The Normalization Trap,’ *New York Times*, January 29, 2017, accessed August 4, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/28/opinion/sunday/the-normalization-trap.html>.

⁵¹ Ines Van Behr et al., *Radicalisation In The Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism* (Brussels: RAND Europe, 2013), 18-19.

⁵² Elizabeth Dubois and Grant Blank, ‘The Echo Chamber is Overstated: The Moderating Effect of Political Interest And Diverse Media,’ *Information, Communication & Society* 21, no.5 (2018): 729. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428656>.

⁵³ R. Kelly Garrett, ‘The ‘Echo Chamber’ Distraction: Disinformation Campaigns Are the Problem, Not Audience Fragmentation,’ *Journal of Applied Research in Memory And Cognition* 6, no. 4 (2017): 374. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jarmac.2017.09.011>.

Dubois and the sociologist Dr. Grant Blank, shows that if a person is politically active and has a diverse media diet, the likelihood reduces that this person will end up in an echo chamber.⁵⁴ The segment of the population who could be caught in an echo chamber would be low according to the same research.⁵⁵ However, this small segment of the population is probably especially vulnerable to figures like Jones because they dedicate large swaths of time to discrediting other not alternative news media sources, making it harder for passionate fans to have a diverse media diet.⁵⁶

Andrew Anglin, an American neo-Nazi, white supremacist and editor of the far right site, *The Daily Stormer*, is an example of someone who claims that Alex Jones has played a role in his political awakening.⁵⁷ Anglin told the story of his political awakening during an interview with Stephen Donald Black in 2015. Black is another American white supremacist, a former Grand Wizard in the Ku Klux Klan and the webmaster of the neo-Nazi website Stormfront Internet forum.⁵⁸ Black responded to Anglin's story by saying that he "...can appreciate Alex Jones because he is an entry point of a number of our people.". A number of these people would be regular callers to his radio show. David Neiwert, an American journalist that during his career has concentrated on tracking domestic terrorism, says that the pattern exist of a person first stepping into the conspiracy world and ending up in the world of white nationalism. According to Neiwert, the many different far-right extremist factions in America all functionally lived "...in the same alternative universe, the epistemological bubble, concocted and controlled by a mini-media industry of conspiracy theorists...". One of the biggest players in this mini-media industry was Alex Jones.⁵⁹ Bellingcat, an investigative journalism website which focuses

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Dubois and Grant Blank, "The Echo Chamber is Overstated: The Moderating Effect of Political Interest And Diverse Media," *Information, Communication & Society* 21, no.5 (2018): 740. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428656>.

⁵⁵ Dubois, "The Echo Chamber is Overstated," 741.

⁵⁶ *Whyte Sapphire*, "Alex Jones 'America Destroyed by Design' HQ Full Length Version!," March 31, 2012, Youtube video, 2:00:06, 11:20-11:36, <https://youtu.be/XcewpiMs1HU>. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2011, 12:20-13:59.

⁵⁷ Abby Ohlheiser, "The man behind the neo-Nazi Daily Stormer website is being sued by one of his 'troll storm' targets," *Washington Post*, April 18, 2017, accessed August 15, 2021,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2017/04/18/the-man-behind-the-neo-nazi-daily-stormer-website-is-being-sued-by-one-of-his-troll-storm-targets/>. ; "Andrew Anglin," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/andrew-anglin>. ; Aaron Sankin, "Andrew Anglin talking Infowars on Stormfront Radio," *Soundcloud*, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://soundcloud.com/user-361007340/andrew-anglin>.

⁵⁸ "Don Black," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/don-black>.

⁵⁹ Aaron Sankin And Will Carless, "The Hate Report: Infowars is the gateway drug for white supremacist," *Reveal*, August 17, 2018, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://revealnews.org/blog/the-hate-report-infowars-is-the-gateway-drug-for-white-supremacists/>.

on fact-checking and open-source intelligence, published an analysis of 75 ‘red-pilling’ stories of fascist activists where Infowars is similarly mentioned.⁶⁰ ‘Red-pilling’ is a term used in the online fascist community to refer to the conversion of someone to modern day fascism. The term originates from the popular 1999 film ‘The Matrix’ where the protagonist is forced to choose between taking a blue or a red pill. The taking of the blue pill would result in becoming ignorant of reality once again. The protagonist could however open his eyes to the reality of the world by taking the red pill. It should be noted that of the 75 stories analyzed by Bellingcat only 6 credited their red-pilling specifically to Jones. Two additional activists claim that the Infowars editor, Paul Joseph Watson, played a role. This is not a majority and apart from this many radicalized people, according to Bellingcat, tended to turn their back on Jones because he would be far too ‘milquetoast’.⁶¹ Stephen Donald Black, the host of a neo-nazi radio show, also described the regular callers that would have entered neo-nazism with the help of Infowars as ‘...formerly Jones listeners.’⁶² Jones not always amicable relationship with more radical members of the far right can also be seen in an interview he has conducted with Mike Dunn, the leader of a Virginia faction of the extremist anti-government boogaloo movement that aims at inciting a new civil war. Jones most likely planned to confront Dunn because he had blamed the boogaloo movement for the capitol riots that took place on January 6, 2021. The interview took a different turn however when Dunn turned the tables and confronted Jones. He stated that he and his group were taking action unlike Jones and the rest of the republican establishment who bended the knee.⁶³ In conclusion, Jones seems to reside on the border between mainstream conservatism and the far right. This specific position is one of the reasons why he could function as a gateway between these two factions.

The radicalization of an individual may result in them taking direct action against a group or person who they believe to be their enemy.⁶⁴ It is likely that Jones does not wish

⁶⁰ ‘About,’ Bellingcat, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://www.bellingcat.com/about/>.

⁶¹ Robert Evans, ‘From Memes to Infowars: How 75 Fascist Activists Were ‘Red-Pilled’,’ *Bellingcat*, October 11, 2018, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/americas/2018/10/11/memes-infowars-75-fascist-activists-red-pilled/>.

⁶² Aaron Sankin And Will Carless, ‘The Hate Report: Infowars is the gateway drug for white supremacist,’ *Reveal*, August 17, 2018, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://revealnews.org/blog/the-hate-report-infowars-is-the-gateway-drug-for-white-supremacists/>. ; Evans, ‘From Memes to Infowars: How 75 Fascist Activists Were ‘Red-Pilled’.’

⁶³ Katie Dowd, ‘‘No center of gravity’: Let down by Infowars, far right looks for more extreme media,’ *SFGATE*, February 9, 2021, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://www.sfgate.com/news/article/fox-news-infowars-right-wing-media-trump-15931978.php>.

⁶⁴ David Neiwert, *Alt America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump* (London: Verso Books, 2017), 251.

his followers to take direct action. This assumption can be made because of conversations Jones has had with followers like Rorke from Texas who call in during a number of episodes of *The Alex Jones Show*. Jones tries to discourage Rorke from attacking tv stations by saying that this would be used as an excuse by the elites for enacting their own nefarious plans.⁶⁵ This however does not mean that Jones's statements and online material cannot play a role in an individual's decision to take direct action against an person or group that has been described as a villain in Jones's conspiracy theories. One clear example of the influence of Jones's work is the large amount of harassment that the families of the victims of the Sandy Hook shooting have received. Several defamation cases have been started by the families. They state judicially that Jones's defaming statements have indeed encouraged harassment.⁶⁶ One precise example of an action of Jones that has very likely led to harassment is when he shared the addresses of several members of the Pozner family, the family of Sandy Hook victim, Noah Pozner, as a reaction to the campaign of the father of Noah, Leonard, focused on removing certain videos of Jones about Sandy Hook from YouTube.⁶⁷

If one person wishes to prevent another person from radicalizing than at least limited knowledge about the radical ideology in question is needed. Knowledge about Alex Jones's ideology will be presented in this thesis and therefore it could perhaps be useful if someone wishes persuade a loyal Alex Jones fan to change their mind. Certain negative effects that a persuasion attempt can have can be avoided by acquired knowledge about the specific radical ideology.. One possible negative effect that a person will want to avoid is the *worldview backfire effect*. This refers to the effect that directly confronting the validity of the central values of someone's worldview can have. It can easily lead the strengthening of the contested values.⁶⁸ The *worldview backfire effect* can be reduced by presenting ample evidence that can indeed threaten a person's worldview in a

⁶⁵ Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 29, 2008. 1:47:12-1:51:00.

⁶⁶ TOI Staff, "Parents of Jewish Sandy Hook Victim Forced to Move 7 Times Due to Harassment," *Times of Israel*, August 1, 2018, accessed June 23, 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/parents-of-jewish-sandy-hook-victim-forced-to-move-7-times-due-to-harassment/>. ; Rob Ryser, "Mastermind of Sandy Hook Denial Still Harassing Grieving Families," *News Times*, September 27, 2019, accessed June 23, 2020, <https://www.ctinsider.com/local/newstimes/article/Mastermind-of-Sandy-Hook-massacre-denial-flies-14471101.php>.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Williamson, "Judge Rules Against Alex Jones and Infowars in Sandy Hook Lawsuit," *New York Times*, August 30, 2018, accessed June 23, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/31/us/politics/alex-jones-defamation-suit-sandy-hook.html>.

⁶⁸ John Cook and Stephan Lewandowsky, *The Debunking Handbook* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland, 2011), 4, <http://sks.to/debunk>. ;

‘worldview-affirming manner’.⁶⁹

Moreover, the answers to the research questions are also relevant because they could be useful for both sides of the academic debate about conspiracy theories and why they become popular. One side of the academic debate often frames belief in conspiracy theories as being the result of the wrongful usage of scientific methods or of certain personality traits or even of mental disorders.⁷⁰ The wrongful usage of scientific method that can result in belief in conspiracy theories was highlighted by Michael Barkun, a professor of Political Science, according to him a high amount of resistance against possible falsification of conspiracy theories existed in circles of conspiracy theorists.⁷¹ The origin of the academic association between clinical paranoia and conspiracy theories can be found in the work of historian Richard Hofstadter.⁷² Hofstadter created the term ‘...paranoid style in American politics...’ in 1964 after he had observed the success of several movements like the one surrounding the Republican senator, Barry Goldwater, that would have been motivated to take political action because of their animosities. Hofstadter characterized the style as ‘...heated exaggeration, suspiciousness and conspiratorial fantasy.’⁷³ Hofstadter used this term to describe a rhetorical style that was in use long before the inception of the Goldwater movement. Other older movements like the anti-Masonic movement that was active between 1826 until approximately 1840 and the nativist movement in the United States during the period between the 1890s and 1920s, had already made use of the ‘paranoid style’.⁷⁴ This phenomenon was not confined to the United States.⁷⁵ Hofstadter himself stated that he borrowed the ‘...a clinical term for other purposes.’ but other academics have noted that he and some of the supporters of his ideas like the historian Daniel Pipes sometimes slipped between using it

⁶⁹ Stephan Lewandowsky et al., ‘Misinformation And Its Correction: Continued Influence And Successful Debiasing,’ *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 13, no. 3 (2012): 122-123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100612451018>.

⁷⁰ Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 92. ; Michael Butter And Peter Knight, ‘The History of Conspiracy Theory Research,’ in *Conspiracy Theories and the People Who Believe Them*, ed. Joseph E. Uscinski (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 35. ; Jaron Harambam, *Contemporary Conspiracy Culture: Truth And Knowledge In An Era Of Epistemic Instability* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 13-14.

⁷¹ Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 7.

⁷² Butter, ‘The History of Conspiracy Theory Research,’ 35.

⁷³ Richard Hofstadter, ‘The Paranoid Style in American Politics,’ *Harper’s Magazine* (November 1964): 77. <https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/>.

⁷⁴ Hofstadter, ‘The Paranoid Style,’ 78.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 86.

in a metaphorical and in a more clinical sense.⁷⁶ Sociologist Jaron Harambam claims that the two beliefs described above would often result in viewing conspiracy theories as a threat to society.⁷⁷ Senior lecturer in psychology, Jovan Byford described “conspiracism” as a “... staple ingredient of discriminatory, antidemocratic and populist politics, a trademark of the rhetoric of oppressive regimes and a faithful companion to antisemitism.”⁷⁸ Another example would be the investigate journalist and scholar Chip Berlet claims that conspiracy theories are contributing to “...dangerous social dynamics of demonization and scapegoating.”⁷⁹ This side of the academic debate about conspiracy theories sees conspiracy theories mainly as an aberration to the norm.

The other side of the academic debate differentiates itself by framing conspiracy theories mostly as the inevitable reaction to certain societal and political developments.⁸⁰ Mark Fenster, a professor of Law, described it as a “...a tactical response from the insignificant [...] for whom politics is inaccessible.”⁸¹ Sociologist Jaron Harambam connected the growth of belief in conspiracy theories with the decline in societal trust in major institutions.⁸² The information in this thesis will be useful for those who regard conspiracy theories as a dangerous aberration to the norm because it provides insights into the messages that have been spread by one of America’s most successful conspiracy theorists, Alex Jones. The information in this thesis will be useful for academics that believe that conspiracy theories are mainly a reaction to societal and political developments because it will highlight some of the developments that made it possible for Jones to have a thriving career.

Historical research into Jones is specifically valuable now because several primary sources related to Jones have been removed from big platforms such as Facebook and

⁷⁶ Daniel Pipes, *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 24. ; Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 122. ; Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012), 3.

⁷⁷ Jaron Harambam, *Contemporary Conspiracy Culture: Truth And Knowledge In An Era Of Epistemic Instability* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 16.

⁷⁸ Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 144.

⁷⁹ Chip Berlet, *Toxic to Democracy: Conspiracy Theories, Demonization & Scapegoating* (Somerville: Political Research Associates, 2009), 7.

⁸⁰ Harambam, *Contemporary Conspiracy Culture*, 20.

⁸¹ Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), xiii. ; Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 14.

⁸² Harambam, *Contemporary Conspiracy Culture*, 207-209.

YouTube.⁸³ There is a big change more primary sources will disappear and therefore it is important to archive some of Jones's ideas, so that he and his impact can properly be considered and researched in the future.

Finally, this thesis is relevant since it shows how one entrepreneur has been able to profit from the obsession with security that has started to dominate American culture since the early years of the Cold War, which was observed by historian Elaine Tyler May.⁸⁴ May described that there never was a true "...golden age" of security." wherein American citizens felt that they and their rights were safe from degradation. There would however have been moments within in the 20th century when the idea prevailed that the government should play a role in creating better condition for average Americans so they could achieve "...safety and a decent standard of living." This prevailing idea would have played a role during the implementation of the New Deal after the Great Depression of the 1930s.⁸⁵ A rift started to grow in the relationship between the United States government and many citizens in the early years of the Cold War partially because it became clear that the government could not protect its own citizens against a possible atomic attack. Certain values and ideas that were central to Cold War ideology such as self-sufficiency, belief in individual freedom, unfettered capitalism and the sanctity of the home became an entrenched part of the identities of many citizens during this period.⁸⁶ Many of them decided that they needed to take direct action to protect their own and safety and that of their family. They did this not just as a response to the dangers of the Cold War but also later in the 1960s in response to the threat posed by internal enemies to the traditional domestic order such as a criminal "...roving mob...", civil right activists and feminists.⁸⁷

Half a century later, Donald Trump used comparable stereotyping when he explicitly promised that he would protect his voters from the minorities and other designated outsiders that they might feared. This appealed to a subsection of mostly white people who still feared for their security.⁸⁸ The scared and often resentful citizens described by May have been willing to invest a lot of money since the Cold War in products or projects

⁸³ Jack Nicas, "Alex Jones and Infowars Content is Removed From Apple, Facebook and YouTube," *New York Times*, August 6, 2018, accessed June 24, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/06/technology/infowars-alex-jones-apple-facebook-spotify.html>.

⁸⁴ Elaine Tyler May, *Fortress America: How We Embraced Fear And Abandoned Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 1.

⁸⁵ May, *Fortress America*, 2.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, 3-4.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, 5.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, 158.

that could or promised to help with regaining their lost sense of security. Clever entrepreneurs could profit from this quest for security by investing in products like SUVs or the projects such as the development of gated communities.⁸⁹ Another still existing market that has expanded since the Cold War, people interested in survivalism, is one that is exploited by Jones and the people that buy advertisement time during *The Alex Jones Show*.⁹⁰ According to May, the general prepper phenomenon can be viewed as an example of how the fears of many Americans turned inward after the Cold War.⁹¹ In this thesis, I will argue that Jones does not just profit of existing fears from group such as preppers about security but also tries to maintain and sometimes introduce new ones possibly with the hope that it offers opportunities for future profit.

0.3. Methodology

In this thesis, the content of Jones's conspiracy theories and other reoccurring elements of his films and his radio show, *The Alex Jones Show*, will be analyzed. This is done in order for reader to understand how one of America's most famous conspiracy theorists has treated a major topic within his repertoire between 1998 and 2016 but also because it is a way to locate certain elements that have contributed to his ability to have a long and successful career as a media personality.

The first type of primary source that will be used in the analysis are Jones's films. Jones has directed and produced 18 films in the period between 1998 and 2019. 7 films from his oeuvre are being analyzed. The oldest film that will be examined is the first film that he ever directed and produced, *America Destroyed By Design*, released in 1998.⁹² *America Destroyed By Design* offers insights into Jones's conspiracy theories from the period before he started Infowars. Other sources that will be included are newer. Jones published a tetralogy about how America was being turned into a police state by the New World Order and their accomplices. The first movie of this series *Police State 2000* was released

⁸⁹ Elaine Tyler May, *Fortress America: How We Embraced Fear And Abandoned Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 142 & 148

⁹⁰ Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 29, 2008, 20:00-21:00. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2011, 18:59-19:58, 29:00-30:00, 46:00-47:00 & 1:16:59-1:17:59. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 7, 2012, 53:03-54:10. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April 24, 2013, 20:00-21:05, 51:11-52:00 & 1:05:50-1:06:50.

⁹¹ May, *Fortress America*, 153.

⁹² Whyte Sapphire, "Alex Jones 'America Destroyed by Design' HQ Full Length Version!," March 31, 2012, YouTube video, 2:00:06, <https://youtu.be/XcewpiMs1HU>.

in 1999, the second *Police State 2: The Takeover* in 2000, the third *Police State 3: Total Enslavement* in 2003 and the last *Police State 4: The Rise of FEMA* in 2010.⁹³ The tetralogy is analyzed because of the possibility it offers to examine a possible evolution of Jones's ideas because all films in the series discuss the same subject. Furthermore, this narrative is often repeated by Jones outside of these films.⁹⁴ Another reoccurring narrative within Jones's content, the government is orchestrating false flag operations, is explained in the film *Terrorstorm* that was released in 2006 and that is why this film shall also be included.⁹⁵ One group, the New World Order, has repeatedly been described within Jones's conspiracy theories as the ultimate evil threatening the soul of humanity.⁹⁶ The 2007 film *Engame: Blueprint For Global Enslavement* will be analyzed because this is the film wherein Jones describes the history and motivations of his almighty archenemy, the New World Order, in more detail. The last film analyzed is the in 2005 released film with the title *Martial Law 9/11: Rise of the Police State*.⁹⁷ This film has been chosen mainly because Jones is one of the more famous adherents of the 9/11 Truth movement.⁹⁸ In this film, he has elaborated on his precise thoughts about the 9/11 attacks.

The second type of primary sources that have been used to answer the research questions are episodes of Jones radio show, *The Alex Jones Show*. 7 episodes that were published in the period when a noteworthy event happened will be used because research has shown that a link exists between societal crisis situations and belief in conspiracy

⁹³ *TriCorneredHat*, "Police State 2000 Alex Jones FULL LENGTH," November 16, 2012, YouTube video, 2:02:18, <https://youtu.be/V9HGfRrfv-Q>. ; *DocX*, "Police State 2 The Takeover (Documentary by Alex Jones)," April 11, 2017, YouTube video, 2:02:48, <https://youtu.be/DRuHedUXtR8>. ; *TriCorneredHat*, "Police State 3 – Total Enslavement – Alex Jones – FULL LENGTH," November 17, 2012, YouTube video, 1:55:40, <https://youtu.be/o8RbOVC7Id4>. ; *ChangeDaChannel*, "Police State 4: The Rise of FEMA Full Length," April 23, 2010, YouTube video, 2:20:38, <https://youtu.be/Klqv9t1zVww>.

⁹⁴ Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2001, 39:05-40:00. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2011, 65:00-66:00.

⁹⁵ *ChangeDaChannel*, "TerrorStorm Full length version," February 20, 2010, YouTube video, 2:14:28, <https://youtu.be/vrXgLhkv21Y>. ; Jacob Airey, "Alex Jones Thinks 9/11 Was A False Flag, But Not The Alexandria Shooting," *Daily Wire*, June 12, 2017, accessed June 30, 2020, <https://www.dailywire.com/news/alex-jones-thinks-911-was-false-flag-not-jacob-airey>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Failed False Flag: High Level Military Intel Source: DC Capitol Riot Was Meant To Be Much Larger," January 10, 2021, Banned video, 11:07, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5ffb84394f4c5b397cb42b0f>.

⁹⁶ *forestgamertube*, "Endgame Blueprint for Global Enslavement (Documentary Film by Alex Jones, 2007)," October 22, 2011, YouTube video, 2:19:30, <https://youtu.be/tZcR5M-j0YE>. ; *TriCorneredHat*, "Police State 3," 2:45-3:33. ; Emillie de Keulenaar, "A Dialogue-Driven Approach to Address the Partisan Dynamics of Online Misinformation," *Security and Human Right Monitor*, November 17, 2019, accessed August 4, 2020, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/misinformation-a-dialogue-driven-approach/>.

⁹⁷ *ChangeDaChannel*, "Martial Law 9/11: Rise of the Police State," June 3, 2014, YouTube video, 3:00:07, <https://youtu.be/uzo9IAgyOr0>.

⁹⁸ Hilde Van den Bulck And Aaron Hyzen, "Of Lizards and Ideological Entrepreneurs: Alex Jones and Infowars in the Relationship between Populist Nationalism and the Post-Global Media Ecology," *The International Communication Gazette* 82, no 1 (October 2019): 49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048519880726>.

theories. Professor of Experimental and Applied Psychology, Jan-Willem Van Prooijen and professor of Social Psychology Karen M. Douglas claim that people in response to the anxiety and uncertainty caused by societal crisis situations often start a sense-making process. This sense-making process sometimes results in people believing in conspiracy theories.⁹⁹ Jones and his colleagues could potentially use the anxiety and uncertainty after societal crises to gain new listeners or viewers by offering clear answers in the form of specific conspiracy theories. This makes the episodes that were broadcasted after developments that could be experienced as societal crises extra relevant. If people start to believe that Jones and his colleagues can offer clear explanation about the causes behind many societal crises than they might be willing to invest money to keep the Infowars operation running.

The first *The Alex Jones Show* episode that has been analyzed was published on the date of 9/11 attacks.¹⁰⁰ The second episode that was chosen was the one that was published on the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.¹⁰¹ Another older episode that will be included in the analysis central to this dissertation is the one that was published on September 29, 2008, a notable day during the 2007-2008 financial crisis.¹⁰² September 29, 2008 was remarkable because on this day the largest single-point drop of the Dow Jones in the crisis was observed. One of the causes of this drop was the fact that the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 was rejected in the House of Representatives. The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 was a bailout measure aimed at repairing some of the damage that was caused by the 2007-2008 financial crisis to certain major financial institutions.¹⁰³ Two episodes about United States presidential elections have been analyzed: one that was released the day after the 2012 reelection of Barack Obama and one that was released on the day that Donald Trump won the 2016 election.¹⁰⁴ One of the

⁹⁹ Jan-Willem van Prooijen And Karen M. Douglas, "Conspiracy Theories as part of History: The Role of Societal Crisis Situations," *Memory Studies* 10, no. 3 (June 2017): 330. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698017701615>.

¹⁰⁰ Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2001.

¹⁰¹ Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2011.

¹⁰² Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 29, 2008.

¹⁰³ Alexandra Twin, "Stocks Crushed: Approximately 1.2 Trillion in Market Value is Gone After The House Rejects the \$700 Billion Bailout Plan," *CNN Money*, September 29, 2008, accessed July 10, 2020, https://money.cnn.com/2008/09/29/markets/markets_newyork/index.htm.

¹⁰⁴ Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 7, 2012. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 9, 2016.

many episodes that Jones has dedicated to discussing the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting has been analyzed.¹⁰⁵ The episode that Jones released a year later a few days after another tragic event, the Boston Marathon bombing, is another one that was included in my analysis.¹⁰⁶ The perpetrators of the Boston Marathon bombing were two Chechen Kyrgyz-American brothers: Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev. They planted and detonated two pressure cooker bombs near the finish line of the Boston Marathon that took place on April 15, 2013. The detonation of the bombs caused 3 fatalities and 264 casualties.¹⁰⁷ The last episode that was chosen for analysis was published one day after violence escalated during the Baltimore protests on April 25, 2015. The Baltimore Protests started as a reaction to the death of a 25 year-old African-American man named Freddie Gray, caused by the injuries he sustained during his arrest.¹⁰⁸ This was one of the many protests that were attended by Black Lives Matter protesters. All of these events have been experienced by certain subsections of Americans as societal crises and they could therefore consciously or unconsciously be exploited by Jones.¹⁰⁹ It should be noted however that the

¹⁰⁵ Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, December 16, 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April 24, 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Ali Guerhazi et al., ‘Imaging of Blast Injuries to the Lower Extremities Sustained in the Boston Marathon Bombing,’ *Arthritis Care & Research* 65, no. 12 (December 2013): 1893. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acr.22113>.

¹⁰⁸ Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April 26, 2015, 1:10-2:30.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Traugott et al., ‘How American Responded: A Study of Public Reaction to 9/11/01,’ *Political Science and Politics* 35, no. 3 (September 2002): 511. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096502000768>. ; David John Marley, *Pat Robertson: An American Life* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 273. ; ‘Remarks from the NRA press conference on Sandy Hook school shooting, delivered on Dec. 21, 2012 (Transcript),’ Washington Post, accessed August 5, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/remarks-from-the-nra-press-conference-on-sandy-hook-school-shooting-delivered-on-dec-21-2012-transcript/2012/12/21/bd1841fe-4b88-11e2-a6a6-aabac85e8036_story.html. ; John Dombrink, *The Twilight of Social Conservatism: American Culture Wars in the Obama Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 67. ; Dana Rose Garfin, E. Alison Holman and Roxane Cohen Silver, ‘Cumulative Exposure to Prior Collective Trauma and Acute Stress Responses to the Boston Marathon Bombings,’ *Psychological Science* 26, no. 6 (April 2015): 678-682. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614561043>. ; Andrew Clark And Elena Stancanelli, ‘The Effects of Terrorism on Well-Being and Economic Activity,’ *Vox EU*, April 26, 2016, accessed August 5, 2021, <https://voxeu.org/article/well-being-and-economic-activity-after-boston-marathon-bombing>. ; Ben Leubsdorf, ‘The Recession’s Economic Trauma Has Left Enduring Scars,’ *Wall Street Journal*, May 9, 2016, accessed August 5, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-recessions-economic-trauma-has-left-enduring-scars-1462809318>. ; Chip Berlet and Spencer Sunshine, ‘Rural Rage: The Roots of Right-Wing Populism in the United States,’ *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 46, no. 3 (May 2019): 494. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2019.1572603>. ; *Fox News*, ‘Tucker: Black Lives Matter is Now a Political Party,’ June 8, 2020, YouTube video, 25:26, <https://youtu.be/17aQ02YX7qo>. ; Shawn Boburg And Dalton Bennett, ‘Militias Flocked to Gettysburg to Foil a Supposed Antifa Flag Burning, An Apparent Hoax Created on Social Media,’ *Washington Post*, July 4, 2020, accessed August 5, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/hundreds-of-armed-men-went-to-gettysburg-to-defend-it-from-a-phantom-antifa-flag-burner-created-on-social-media/2020/07/04/206ee4da-bb05-11ea-86d5-3b9b3863273b_story.html. ; Lorna Bracewell, ‘Gender, Populism, and the QAnon Conspiracy Movement,’ *Frontiers in Sociology* (January 2021): 3. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2020.615727>.

election of Trump has been traumatic for some people but certainly not for Jones's target audience.¹¹⁰ This episode was included because of Jones's special relationship with Trump.

Other primary sources were chosen for analysis because they could make it easier to place the Jones phenomenon in a wider context. Articles published by other news organizations is the first example of such a source. The second example of sources that will be used to help place Jones in a wider context is other material that has been released by Infowars media personalities on the internet. This last category shall be also be consulted to observe whether patterns that have been observed in my main primary sources, the films and the episodes of the radio show, exist outside of them.

The first step in my analysis process entailed listening to the *The Alex Jones Show* episodes and watching the films that were selected for analysis. I also listened to four random *The Alex Jones Show* episodes that were released in 2007, 2009, 2012 and 2014 and watched 10 video's that featured Jones that have been published on the site Banned.video.¹¹¹ The episodes that are part of my main primary sources had to be consulted in the form of audio because not all of the episodes are not available as video's.

¹¹⁰ Eeva Sointu And David W. Hill, "Trump Therapy: Personal Identity, Political Trauma And The Contradictions of Therapeutic Practice," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2020): 1-2. <https://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/4801/>; Anna North, "'People are not okay': The Mental Health Impact of the Trump Era," *Vox*, January 28, 2021, accessed August 5, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/2021/1/28/22249273/trump-presidency-trauma-covid-19-2020-election>.

¹¹¹ Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, March 21, 2007. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, May 11, 2009. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, June 14, 2012. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, October 7, 2014. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Secrets Of The 2018 Election Released By Alex Jones," November 5, 2018, Banned video, 15:28, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5bdf97c3246cca4bf97332af>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Globalists Pave Way For Antichrist As Patriots Fight Back," January 8, 2019, Banned video, 19:34, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5c34efea77cd9e2a63a168c4>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Deep State Shift Blame of Intelligence Failure to Obama," March 26, 2019, Banned video, 21:35, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5c9a723096f802002664df82>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Reporter Breaks Down Nightmare Conditions in Europe," September 12, 2019, Banned video, 32:13, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5d7980c35d88bc0013f46ab1>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Eddie Bravo Debate Alex Jones On The Flat Earth Controversy," September 21, 2019, Banned video, 12:52, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5d8558832565c100131eed76>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Patriots To Be Blamed For Leftist Engineered False Flag Attacks," October 21, 2019, Banned video, 30:14, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5dae28de7d42c20012a625b4>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Alex Jones Debates White Nationalist Richard Spencer," January 14, 2020, Banned video, 47:45, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5e1cf753d3d266001d920fc1>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "UN Confirms Corona Lockdown Killing More Than Virus After 30 Million Now Starving," April 23, 2020, Banned video, 13:34, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5ea0d75cda56330040bbfc96>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "MUST SEE: Wayfair/Amazon Child Trafficking Allegations Investigated," July 13, 2020, Banned video, 31:18, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5f0bab1f677a7f01e91f0bbd>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Millie Weaver Exposes Biden's Green Plan to Sell America Out to Authoritarianism," July 18, 2020, Banned video, 31:52, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5f12329a677a7f01e929e5fd>.

The additional sources have been consulted together with the main primary sources so that I could familiarize myself with Jones, his rhetoric and the general structure of his content.

The second step of the analysis consisted of relistening and rewatching my main primary sources and pausing so that I could make notes of what was actually happening in source. It enable me to get an insight of the form an nature of the pattern in Jones' conspiracy theories. The notes were accompanied with times. Additional notes have been made about the places where Jones was, the interviews he conducted, the calls he received, the advertisements and his self-presentation. The calls and interviews were summarized and additional information was written down about the identity of the caller or interviewee and sometimes noteworthy statements that were made in the conversations.

Because the advertisements in Jones's programs are relevant to the specific audience, I made notes on the company, the advertised product and the affective tone. In this context, the affective tone refers to the "...overall feeling of the advertisement."¹¹² My notes also pertain to Jones's self-presentation specifically to what he claims to be his values, his general demeanor and his appearance. Information about advertisements and about the calls Jones received when on air will be included because it can offer insight into Jones's general audience. It is important to grasp what kind of people his audience are because Jones would not have been able to have a successful career without keeping close to them. Jones's interviews and general self-presentation are important to consider because the decisions Jones made in regard to these subjects may indicate why a certain group is attracted to him. If Jones would for example show confrontational behavior to a certain interviewee who was disliked by a subsection of American then the change would increase that they might possibly feel a bond with Jones.

When the term conspiracy theories is used in this thesis, it refers to the definition of the term that was given by Michael Barkun in his book, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, namely "...the belief that an organization made up of individuals or groups was or is acting covertly to achieve some malevolent ends."¹¹³ In the research notes, I made during the second step of my analysis, I took down when Jones mentioned or referred to such a conspiracy theory, who the perpetrators were, what they were accused of doing and planning, what their final goal was, who was being

¹¹² Ekant Veer And Simon Pervan, "How The Tone And Wording of Advertisements Interact," *International Journal of Advertising* 27, no. 2 (January 2015): 191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2008.11073051>.

¹¹³ Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, Second Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 3.

victimized, if there were any accomplices or accessories and their possible identities.

I have also researched whether certain academic concepts or terms related to conspiracy theories can be applied to the theories that were found in my primary sources. This has been done so that more aspects and characteristics of Jones's conspiracy theories may become clear. The first notions that I will apply to Jones's conspiracy theories are the several subcategories of conspiracy theories that are given by Barkun in *A Culture of Conspiracy*. The question then is what type of subcategory most often appears within my primary sources. The first subcategory of conspiracy theories are event conspiracies and they describe malevolent groups that are focused on reaching limited objectives. The second subcategory is that of systematic conspiracies. This group consists of conspiracies where malevolent groups are working on reaching broader goals than the ones they would be focused on achieving if they were part of an event conspiracy. The last subcategory of conspiracy theories are called super-conspiracies. These conspiracy theories involve one secret invisible organization that manipulates many smaller actors who are all involved in an interlinked system of conspiracies.¹¹⁴ The second academic concept that will be researched in relation to Jones's conspiracy theories is the new conspiracism phenomenon that has been described by political scientists Russel Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum in their book *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy*. New conspiracism can be distinguished from old conspiracism because it abandons the need to provide evidence.¹¹⁵ An assertion would instead increase in value if it is repeated several times. An example of new conspiracism is Trump's claim that the 2016 election was rigged.¹¹⁶ According to Muirhead and Rosenblum, new conspiracism is worth researching because it may pose a potential threat to already weakened political institutions.¹¹⁷ The potential threat that new conspiracism can pose would increase if it was fully embraced by one of America's most famous conspiracy theorists.

When the second step of my analysis is conducted, I will start constructing answers to my research questions. The first research question: "How has the content of Jones's conspiracy theories evolved between 1998 and 2016?" will be answered by means of examining whether the characteristics that I have noted about Jones's conspiracy theories

¹¹⁴ Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, Second Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 6.

¹¹⁵ Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum, *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 19-20.

¹¹⁶ Muirhead, *A Lot of People Are Saying*, 25-26.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 176.

have evolved. The characteristics then forming a systematization. An answer to the second research question: “What elements of Jones’s films and radio show have contributed to the success of his career as a media personality in the period between 1998 and 2016?” will be found by locating the elements within my primary sources that constantly appear over many years. Sometimes other material released by Jones shall be consulted to check if an element is truly a real reoccurring part of Jones’s oeuvre. It is important to find reoccurring elements because these might be the reason that Jones has been able to have a long-lasting thriving career as an alternative media personality. After locating the reoccurring elements, research will be done into secondary sources to see if they have played a role in the success of other people’s careers or if they are popular with what seems to be Jones’s target audience.

In this thesis, I will also examine whether Jones’s beliefs and rhetorical style belong to the wider tradition of what has been described by historians such as Richard Hofstadter as the “paranoid style”. Some academics reject the idea that a “paranoid style” exists. The term would only frame conspiracy theories “...as the delusional allegation of paranoid and extremist minds.”¹¹⁸ Another concern is that terms such as “the paranoid style” but also “conspiracism” as it has been described by the historian, Daniel Pipes obscure the differences that exist between the many beliefs, practices and outlooks that are grouped together under these kind of terms.¹¹⁹ I understand these concerns but I still believe that it is valuable to use this term in my research because it might mean that Jones, a person who is often perceived as a radical aberration, can be placed in a wider tradition. It might also partly explain why Jones has been able to be as successful as he is. One argument, I do wish to bring against the first concern that has been expressed by some academics, is that also mentally stable people can feel paranoid. Someone only receives a serious diagnosis like paranoid personality disorder if more criteria are met than just the existence of paranoid feelings.¹²⁰ I would argue that people like Jones who rely considerably on the money they earn through the selling of products, could potentially try to increase their revenue by playing on the emotions of their audience whether that is

¹¹⁸ Jaron Harambam, *Contemporary Conspiracy Culture: Truth And Knowledge In An Era Of Epistemic Instability* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 15.

¹¹⁹ Harambam, *Contemporary Conspiracy Culture*, 24.

¹²⁰ Daniel J. Winarick, “Diagnosing Paranoid Personality Disorder,” *Psychology Today*, November 13, 2019, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/personality-quotient/201911/diagnosing-paranoid-personality-disorder>; Janelle Martel, “Paranoid Personality Disorder (PPD),” *Healthline*, April 21, 2021, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://www.healthline.com/health/paranoid-personality-disorder>.

anxiety or paranoia.¹²¹ I also want to highlight that the originator of the connection that has been made between clinical paranoia and belief in conspiracy theories in academic discourse, Richard Hofstadter, stated in the original text that conspiracy theories aren't just the result of an individual paranoid mind. The "paranoid style" was specifically a rhetorical style that was likely to be used during "...a confrontation of opposed interests which are (or are felt to be) totally irreconcilable, and thus by nature not susceptible to the normal political processes of bargain and compromise."¹²² Another academic, Professor of Political Science, Thomas Ellington also noted that usage of the term the "paranoid style" does not need to be accompanied with portraying people that use it as mentally ill. The style would specifically be significant because of its adoption "... by more or less normal people...".¹²³ The second concern, that the usage of terms like "the paranoid style" would possible obscure differences between beliefs, is reasonable but I think that research that highlights the differences and the similarities between beliefs held throughout history may very well coexist. The first part of chapter 2 deals with possible evolution of Jones' conspiracy theories between 1998 and 2016. This means that I will offer enough details, thus making it possible to differentiate between Alex Jones's conspiratorial beliefs in this period and those that were held by other modern conspiracy theorists. I do however want to emphasize that usage of the "paranoid style" should not immediately delegitimize the underlying concerns that the user is trying to communicate.¹²⁴

The "paranoid style" is not just a rhetorical style, a way to advocate for a political position, but also related to someone's general belief system, their views on political positions. Professor of linguistics, Adam Hodges, also highlighted that the "paranoid style" as a belief system can have a communal element.¹²⁵ In general, the "paranoid

¹²¹ Douglas Van Praet, "How Marketers Manipulate You Without Your Knowing," *Psychology Today*, June 3, 2013, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/unconscious-branding/201306/how-marketers-manipulate-you-without-your-knowing>. ; Carly Miller, "The Dangerous Power of Emotional Advertising," *The Content Strategist*, April 14, 2016, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://contently.com/2016/04/14/dangerous-power-emotional-advertising/>.

¹²² Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012), 3.

¹²³ Thomas C. Ellington, "Won't Get Fooled Again: The Paranoid Style in the National Security State," *Government and Opposition* 38, no. 4 (September 2003): 438. [https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1111/1477-7053.t01-1-00023](https://doi.org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1111/1477-7053.t01-1-00023).

¹²⁴ Kurtis Hagan, "Conspiracy Theories And The Paranoid Style: Do Conspiracy Theories Posit Implausibly Vast And Evil Conspiracies?," *Social Epistemology: A Journal of Knowledge, Culture And Policy* 32, no. 1 (August 2017) 35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2017.1352625>.

¹²⁵ Adam Hodges, "The Paranoid Style In Politics: Ideological Underpinnings Of The Discourse of Second Amendment Absolutism," *Journal of Language Aggression And Conflict* 3, no. 1 (October 2015): 93-94. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlac.3.1.04hod>.

style” can be recognized by how the user or group describe how a vast and sinister conspiracy is being carried out with the objective of undermining or destroying “... a way of life.”¹²⁶ The people behind the vast and sinister conspiracy are often described as almighty and absolutely evil. The immense influence of the enemy is proven by the many eminent public figures who would be involved with the enemy. The other side of the conflict that is fighting to preserve their way of life is portrayed as absolutely good. The user of the “paranoid style” emphasized often that the current point of history was when the last battle could be won in apocalyptic fight between good and evil.¹²⁷ A person might employ the “paranoid style” because it may give them a higher position within an ingroup as the one person who is able to recognize looming threats. If the person already had a leading position in his group, the “paranoid style” may be used as a solution to political gridlock by providing a scapegoat and as a way to justify more radical strategies because the almighty enemy is portrayed as essentially being on top all the time.¹²⁸ If the absolute enemy would be victorious, it would mean the end of the ingroup and of its way of life.

The approach I have described has several limitations. To begin with, the sample size of my primary sources is small if you compare it with the vast amount of lengthy content that Jones has released throughout his career. The sample size is also limited so that my analysis can fit within the word limit that has been allowed for this assignment. I chose analyze complete episodes, each of an average duration of three hours. This was done because I wanted to examine if certain elements of the structure of the episodes evolved. This structure might not be recognizable when researching only fragments of Jones’s content. I compensate for the relative small sample size by including both films and radio show episodes that have been published in a specific part of his career. Another limitation of this thesis lies in the media that will be employed.. The research I have done can essentially be characterized as qualitative. The decision has been made to do qualitative research because not a lot of academic research has been done into Alex Jones. Quantitative research is easier to conduct when more precise information is known about

¹²⁶ Adam Hodges, “The Paranoid Style In Politics: Ideological Underpinnings Of The Discourse of Second Amendment Absolutism,” *Journal of Language Aggression And Conflict* 3, no. 1 (October 2015): 95. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlac.3.1.04hod>.

¹²⁷ Ryan Neville-Shepard, “Paranoid Style and Subtextual Form in Modern Conspiracy Rhetoric,” *Southern Communication Journal* 83, no. 2 (January 2018): 121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1041794X.2017.1423106>.

¹²⁸ Hodges, “The Paranoid Style In Politics,” 95. ; Neville-Shepard, “Paranoid Style and Subtextual Form,” 121.

the subject.¹²⁹ Quantitative research is besides more applicable to other academic fields such as the field of communications. I have personally as a history student not received enough training in quantitative research. It is possible that if quantitative research would take place into Jones's repertoire that even more definite conclusions can be drawn. Some or all of my conclusions might be disproven if more research is done into different sources or other methods are used but I hope that this thesis could still be useful because it contains knowledge about a specific period of Jones's career.

0.4. Structure And Limitations

Chapter 1 of this thesis deals with the state of relevant academic discussions and with the question of what my research could contribute. Chapter 2 describes the results of my analysis and provides answers to my research.

One limitation of my source research should be pointed out before continuing to chapter 1. This limitation is person who has produced the material, Alex Jones himself. In these sources, Jones has not provided the precise sources for his ideas meaning that outside research is necessary if we wish to know how influential Jones is as the originator of conspiracy theories. Jones is also a salesman selling not just ideas but also himself. The salesman shows sides of himself and his products in order to make them attractive to the biggest audience possible. This all means that this thesis will not be able to provide definitive conclusions about either his real personality or motivations. This could only truly be assessed if he himself or people close to him participated.

¹²⁹ Martin Terre Blanche And Kevin Kelly, "Why Qualitative Research?," in *Research in Practice: Applied Methods for the Social Media*, Second Edition, ed. Martin J. Terre Blanche, Kevin Durrheim And Desmond Painter (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2006), 272.

Chapter 1: Academic Debates

The first academic debate that will be introduced in this chapter is the limited one that exists about Alex Jones, himself. The most relevant ideas from this debate for this thesis are that Jones is an ideological entrepreneur and that Jones's persona has played a crucial role in the success of his content. The second academic debate I will describe in this chapter is about the bigger political movement wherein Jones and most of his target audience can be placed, American conservatism. My thesis is specifically part of a third wave of scholarship about American conservatism that focuses on detailing agreements and conflicts between the many American conservative factions. The next part of this chapter shall be dedicated to detailing some of the academic debates about the American media eco-system that has allowed figures like Jones to have thriving careers. My thesis is relevant to one of these debates because Jones is a relatively unresearched part of the smaller media ecosystem that played a role in the radicalization of American politics. Jones is also a subject worthy of study because of the parasocial relationships he seems to have tried to foster with his audience. The last section of this chapter will be about one academic debate that exists about a feature that keeps appearing in Jones's content; conspiracy theories. The question central to the debate that will be describe is whether conspiracy theories are currently a stigmatized form of knowledge.

1.1. The Man

I can add to the only two academic articles on Alex Jones that I have been able to find because this thesis will go into detail about Jones's conspiracy theories in a specific period. This is one of the ideological products Jones, an *ideological entrepreneur*, has tried to sell throughout his career.

The two article by Van Den Bulck and Hyzen introduce many ideas that need to be considered if you wish to understand Jones's position and success. The most relevant idea for this thesis is that Jones is an *ideological entrepreneur*.¹³⁰ The term was first defined by the economist and economic historian, Douglas North, as an entrepreneur who wants to change formal and informal institutions. The ultimate goal of this kind of entrepreneur, changes within formal and/or informal institutions, can only be achieved if he gains

¹³⁰ Hilde Van den Bulck And Aaron Hyzen, "Of Lizards and Ideological Entrepreneurs: Alex Jones and Infowars in the Relationship between Populist Nationalism and the Post-Global Media Ecology," *The International Communication Gazette* 82, no 1 (October 2019): 43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048519880726>.

enough support from other people.¹³¹ Economist Virgil Henry Storr expands on the term ideological entrepreneur by integrating the definitions of entrepreneur as given by the economists Israel Kirzner and Joseph Schumpeter.¹³² The ideological entrepreneur, after integrating the definitions given by Kirzner and Schumpeter, is then just like any businessman, an innovator initiating change within the market and searching for opportunities to exploit to maximize profits.¹³³ This thesis supports the idea that Jones is an ideological entrepreneur because to a certain extent he indeed treats his main message namely that the world is ruled by secret conspiratorial forces, as a product, that needs to be adapted to the changing market. The primary sources used show that Jones used almost every new piece of content in order to incorporate new events or people into a theory. This way he can keep his conspiracy theories credible for at least a subsection of his target audience.

Another relevant idea that is described in the work of Van Den Bulck and Hyzen is about Jones's persona which might have been an element of his content that has contributed to his ability to have thriving career. Van Den Bulck and Hyzen point out that Jones has maintained a very specific celebrity persona that merges the public persona of a famous disc jockey and conspiracy theorist, with the most likely partly constructed "private" persona of a confident man that meets some of the physical and psychological demands of traditional masculinity. One physical demand sometimes associated with traditional masculinity that Jones boasts about, is that he would be very fit physically and successful in his sexual endeavors. He furthermore showed in his work that he can be regarded as a true traditional masculine man because of some of the values that he holds. He for example stated many times that he is willing and prepared to defend his country and family against any threat.¹³⁴ The specific celebrity persona that Jones has created is a

¹³¹ Virgil Henry Storr, "North's Underdeveloped Ideological Entrepreneur," in *Annual Proceedings of the Wealth and Well-Being of Nations*. Vol. 1, ed. Emily Chamlee-Wright (Wisconsin: Beloit College, 2009), 100.

¹³² Storr, "North's Underdeveloped Ideological Entrepreneur," 105.

¹³³ *Ibidem*, 106-107.

¹³⁴ Ronald F. Levant, Rosalie J. Hall And Thomas J. Rankin, "Male Role Norms Inventory – Short Form (MRNI-SF): Development, Confirmatory Factor Analytic Investigation of Structure and Measurement Invariance Across Gender," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 60, no. 2 (February 2013): 228-229. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031545>. ; Sam Barsanti, "Alex Jones Brags About His Sexual Prowess Presents Chart on How to be a "Real Man"," *AV Club*, April 24, 2017, accessed July 10, 2020, <https://news.avclub.com/alex-jones-brags-about-his-sexual-prowess-presents-cha-1798261068>. ; Ronn Blitzer, "'I' Already Had Over 150 Women": Alex Jones Takes Break From Custody Battle to Brag About Teenage Sexual Exploits," *Law & Crime: A Dan Abrams Production*, April 24, 2017, accessed July 10, 2020, <https://lawandcrime.com/opinion/id-already-had-over-150-women-alex-jones-takes-break-from-custody-battle-to-brag-about-sexual-exploits/>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Alex Jones Exposes Why Pro-Liberty Patriots Sell Out To The Globalists' Corrupt System," December 5, 2018, Banned video, 12:50, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5c08563067fcdd773c4f26c5>. ; *The Alex*

perfect man, an ideal conduit for affective attunement with mostly conservative audiences.¹³⁵ Affective attunement allows the sharing of deep experiences between two people. During the process of affective attunement, both people reflect their shared inner state through different communication techniques like talking or touching.¹³⁶ Mostly members of several, sometimes radically opposed, conservative factions that feel let down by the government and media establishment, will be able to attune to Jones and his colleagues because they often proclaim that they share these feelings.¹³⁷ This sentiment many Infowars personalities claim to share with many disillusioned conservatives is for example reflected in the sentences you will hear in the beginning of many *The Alex Jones Show* episodes: “Big brother, mainstream media, government coverups. You want answers, well so does he”.¹³⁸ The specific persona that Jones cultivated for himself is also beneficial for him according to Hyzen and Van Den Bulck because people who do not share his viewpoints often regard him as an “innocent wacko”, as a performance artist rather than an alt-right activist.¹³⁹ His reputation as an entertaining figure rather than as a political actor would give him additional opportunities to be introduced to a mainstream audience through memes and podcasts such as the Joe Rogan Experience.¹⁴⁰ By embracing

Jones Show, “Patriots Stand Up To Governor Abbott’s Mandatory Mask Tyranny,” June 28, 2020, Banned video, 6:17, 2:59-4:41, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5ef90c13672706002f339ecc>. ;

¹³⁵ Aaron Hyzen And Hilde Van Den Bulck, “The Most Paranoid Man in America’: Alex Jones as Celebrity Populist,” *Celebrity Studies* (November 2019): 2-3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2019.1691756>. ; Katie L. Gibson & Amy L. Heyse, “‘The Difference Between A Hockey Mom and a Pitt Bull’: Sarah Palin’s Faux Maternal Persona And Performance Of Hegemonic Masculinity At The 2008 Republican National Convention,” *Communication Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (August 2010): 237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2010.503151>.

¹³⁶ nirit, “Stern’s affect attunement,” *Advanced Psychopathology*, April 23, 2006, last modified April 23, 2006, https://psychopathology2.blogspot.com/2006/04/sterns-affect-attunement_23.html.

¹³⁷ *War Room With Owen Shroyer*, “Roger Stone And Owen Shroyer Expose The Mainstream Media Hypocrisy,” January 12, 2019, Banned video, 11:33,

<https://banned.video/watch?id=5c39231fd9f242100523ea37>. ; *The David Knight Show*, “Deplorables Now Demons: GOP Base Exorcised by Establishment,” July 19, 2019, Banned video, 19:06, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5d321ad2640b3b0012c6dd62>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, “Are Mainstream News TV Hosts Covering Up Child Sex Trafficking?,” July 25, 2019, Banned video, 12:53, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5d3a1be434f8e20012677682>. ; *Bowne Report*, “The Democratic Party Should Be Impeached.” September 29, 2019. Banned video, 6:59. <https://banned.video/watch?id=5d9108db94d767001360a378>.

¹³⁸ Alex Jones, “n.t.,” *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2001, 0:29-0:49. ; Alex Jones, “n.t.,” *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 29, 2008, 0:00-0:28. ; Alex Jones, “n.t.,” *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 7, 2012, 0:00-0:28. ; Alex Jones, “n.t.,” *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April 24, 2013, 0:00-0:15.

¹³⁹ Hyzen, “The Most Paranoid Man in America,” 3.

¹⁴⁰ *placeboing*, “Gay Frogs (Alex Jones REMIX),” June 22, 2017, YouTube video, 1:09, <https://youtu.be/9JRLCbb7qK8>. ; *Everything Trending 101*, “Best Alex Jones Memes EVER ! 🤖 Warning ! Extremely Funny 😂,” July 22, 2019, YouTube video, 6:03, <https://youtu.be/S85JaIzIQMs>. ; *PowerfulJRE*, “Joe Rogan Experience #1255 – Alex Jones Returns!,” February 27, 2019, YouTube video, 4:40:27, <https://youtu.be/-5yh2HcIlkU>.

his wackier side he may also avoid scandals that might end the careers of more serious political commentators.¹⁴¹

1.2. The Movement

American conservatism has been the subject of a lot of academic research from several disciplines. This thesis shall add to the third wave of historical scholarship about American conservatism that has been described by historian Julian E. Zelizer in his article ‘Reflections: Rethinking the History of American Conservatism’. This wave concentrates on detailing the agreements and conflicts that happened between several conservative factions within the movement.¹⁴² Historian, Timothy J. Lombardo, believes that when writing about the development of American conservatism not just the role of moderate factions should be taken into account but also the role of fringe conservative figures and factions.¹⁴³ This thesis deals with a modern conservative fringe figure and could be useful for future researchers who wish to analyze the most likely limited role Jones played in the development of American conservatism.¹⁴⁴

Historian Alan Brinkley stated that before 1944, American conservatism was mostly treated by historians as ‘a marginal, irrational or irrelevant force’. Historians of the first wave began to reevaluate the importance of American conservatism around the same time that Brinkley made this statement.¹⁴⁵ The first wave was mostly focused on identifying the intellectual traditions behind American conservatism. One famous book created by George Nash, a historian who was part of this wave, is *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*. Nash describes in this book three American conservative intellectual streams: libertarian, traditionalist and ‘militant, evangelistic anti-Communism’. These streams together represented most of the values held by the

¹⁴¹ Aaron Hyzen And Hilde Van Den Bulck, ‘The Most Paranoid Man in America’: Alex Jones as Celebrity Populist,’ *Celebrity Studies* (November 2019): 3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2019.1691756>.

¹⁴² Julian E. Zelizer, ‘Reflections: Rethinking the History of American Conservatism,’ *Reviews in American History* 38, no. 2 (June 2010): 387. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40865368>.

¹⁴³ Timothy Lombardo, ‘New Right, Far Right, Alt-Right? Donald Trump and the Historiography of Conservatism,’ *Tropics of Meta: Historiography for the Masses*, November 3, 2016, accessed July 10, 2020, <https://tropicsofmeta.com/2016/11/03/new-right-far-right-alt-right-donald-trump-and-the-historiography-of-conservatism/>.

¹⁴⁴ Tim Murphy, ‘Conspiracy Theorist in Chief: Donald Trump Hasn’t Just Resurrected the Paranoid Style of American Politics – He’s Made It Go Mainstream,’ *Mother Jones*, November/December 2016, accessed July 10, 2020, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/10/trump-infowars-alex-jones-clinton-conspiracy-theories/>.

¹⁴⁵ Zelizer, ‘Reflections,’ 367.

people adopting the label of conservative in the United States since 1945.¹⁴⁶

The second wave of historical scholarship about American conservatism was dedicated mostly to finding the causes behind the reemergence of a major American conservative movement in the period between the end of the Second World War and the 1980s. The general consensus is that the success of then upcoming conservative figureheads, like Ronald Reagan, can be explained to a great extent by the grass-roots movements that emerged around them.¹⁴⁷ A discussion exists however about the primary motivation of the members of these emerging grass-roots movements. Historians such as Dan T. Carter showed that some members were motivated by resentment and/or anger towards the civil rights movement.¹⁴⁸ Other potential reasons, like anticommunism are emphasized by historians such as Lisa McGirr.¹⁴⁹

A third wave of historical scholarship about American conservatism would be starting to develop around 2010 and it was focused on analyzing the growing amount of alliances and conflicts within the movement and the compromises and struggles conservatives had to grapple with while they obtained higher positions of power throughout the postwar period.¹⁵⁰ Historian Daniel Critchlow's wrote *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History*. This is one example of a book that is part of this third wave.¹⁵¹ In this book Critchlow argues that the election of George W. Bush was a triumph for conservatism but that they still had to compromise on the liberal welfare state, the "...lasting legacy of New Deal liberalism."¹⁵² Now that the united fight against communism was over, a new period of power struggles between conservative factions began. There was not a figure such as Ronald Reagan who could promote unity among the many bickering conservative factions.¹⁵³ New conservative fringe factions such as the alt-

¹⁴⁶ Nelson W. Polsby, "The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America: Since 1945, by George H. Nash; Up from Communism, by John P. Diggins," *Commentary Magazine*, August, 1976, accessed July 10, 2020, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/nelson-polsby/the-conservative-intellectual-movement-in-america-since-1945-by-george-h-nash-up-from-communism-by-john-p-diggins/>.

¹⁴⁷ Julian E. Zelizer, "Reflections: Rethinking the History of American Conservatism," *Reviews in American History* 38, no. 2 (June 2010): 368. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40865368>.

¹⁴⁸ Dan T. Carter, *From Georg Wallace to New Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Louisiana: LSU Press, 1996).

¹⁴⁹ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 176.

¹⁵⁰ Zelizer, "Reflections," 387.

¹⁵¹ Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How The GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹⁵² Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy*, 286.

¹⁵³ George H. Nash, "Populism, I: American Conservatism & The Problem of Populism," *The New Criterion*, September, 2016, 7-8. <https://newcriterion.com/issues/2016/9/populism-i-american-conservatism-and-the-problem-of-populism>.

right, paleo-conservatism and the Tea Party also came into being and gained power during the period when the many power struggles took place. Over the years, Jones associated himself with many of the new conservative fringe factions and partially seems to have been able to have a thriving career because he tried to adapt his content in a way so that it was appealing to as many members of these factions as possible. I shall provide evidence to this claim in the next chapter of this thesis.¹⁵⁴ My thesis is relevant for academics outside the field of history if they are researching the relationship between new media and American conservatism. New media like websites and videogames are related to each other because they only became possible because the development of digital technology.¹⁵⁵ New media forms should be considered when studying political movements for several reasons like their popularity with the younger generation and because of the new forms of political participation they promote.¹⁵⁶ New media companies such as Infowars are also worth analyzing because they played a role in the radicalization of modern American conservative politics. The role they played is highlighted in the book *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation And Radicalization in American Politics*.¹⁵⁷

1.3. The Medium

Three themes are prevailing in the current academic debate about mass culture; the institutional and economic history of mass media, political communication and the development and effects of conservative media outlets in the last seventy-five years that mobilized often previously politically dormant people.¹⁵⁸ My thesis is relevant for academics interested in this last theme because Infowars is a recent and not yet widely researched conservative media outlet, that employed a political tool, conspiracy theories,

¹⁵⁴ George H. Nash, "Populism, I: American Conservatism & The Problem of Populism," *The New Criterion*, September, 2016, 8-10. <https://newcriterion.com/issues/2016/9/populism-i-american-conservatism-and-the-problem-of-populism>. ; Joe Sommerlad, "Alex Jones: Who is the ranting alt-right radio host and what are his craziest conspiracy theories?," *Independent*, August 9, 2018, accessed July 10, 2020,

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/alex-jones-radio-show-us-alt-right-conspiracy-theories-youtube-infowars-illuminati-frogs-a8483986.html>. ; Alex Jones' Infowars: *There's a war on for your mind!*. United States, 2002. Archived Web Site. <https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0018380/>.

¹⁵⁵ Gwen Schurgin O'Keeffe, "Overview: New Media." *Pediatric Clinics of North America* 59, no 3 (June 2012): 590. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcl.2012.03.024>.

¹⁵⁶ Manuela Caiani And Linda Parenti, *European And American Extreme Right Groups And The Internet* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 145.

¹⁵⁷ Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris and Hal Robert, *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation and Radicalization in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 14.

¹⁵⁸ Bruce J. Schulman And Julian E. Zelizer, "Introduction," in *Media Nation: The Political History of News in America*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman And Julian E. Zelizer (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 4-5.

while trying to mobilize their audience during the 2016 and 2020 United States presidential elections for Trump. Some evidence has shown that conspiracy theories can stimulate a certain level of political engagement.¹⁵⁹

This thesis wishes to find some of the elements that have made it possible for Jones, a fringe media personality, to have a thriving career. These can better be discovered if we compare Jones's career trajectory and content with that of other successful conservative media personalities. This will be valuable to the wider academic discussion because it can place Jones, a person who is sometimes perceived as an aberration, in a wider tradition of conservative media personalities.

One recently published historical book, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* describes the rise of a network of conservative media activists beginning in the late 1940s and 1950s. This is the first group that will be considered while searching for an explanation for Jones's thriving career. This decision has been made because some of the ideas that were introduced by this first generation of media activists can still be found in the content released by some parts of the current-day conservative media establishment and fringe media personalities such as Jones. One of these ideas is that almost all mainstream media institutions have deep-seated liberal biases. Another thing that current day conservative media activists would have inherited from their predecessors is an oppositional identity. This identity was also fostered in their audience and it allowed conservatives to identify themselves as oppressed outsiders. This phenomenon, that was cultivated by the first generation of media activists was defined as elite populism.¹⁶⁰ The presence of these ideas in the content of current day successful conservative media personalities points to the possible role they still play in making content that is appealing to a conservative audience.

A second generation of conservative media activists that could unlike the first generation successfully profit of their content started to emerge in the 1990s.¹⁶¹ The first generation had turned to media because they believed it was the only way they could effectively fight the enormous and growing influence of liberalism. The tide had turned by

¹⁵⁹ Yongkwang Kim, "How Conspiracy Theories Can Stimulate Political Engagement," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* (August 2019): 18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2019.1651321>. Roland Imhoff, Lea Dieterle and Pia Lamberty, "Resolving the Puzzle of Conspiracy Worldview and Political Activism: Belief in Secret Plots Decreases Normative but Increases Nonnormative Political Engagement," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (March 2020): 7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550619896491>.

¹⁶⁰ Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), xiii-xiv.

¹⁶¹ Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right*, 296.

the 1980s and 1990s when many institutions were in a position to enact conservative policies. In this changed atmosphere, conservative media started to recruit from a different pool of talent. Many of the most influential actors from the second generation like the talk show host Rush Limbaugh and the cable news channel, Fox News, were either themselves or staffed by media personalities that were often “...entertainers first, conservatives second.”¹⁶²

Jeffrey P. Jones, professor of Media Studies, has offered one explanation for the success of Fox News that is possibly relevant for this MA Thesis. He states that Roger Ailes, the president of Fox News Corporation, could finally attract an audience by combining a team with star power, explicit conservative programming and the news genre.¹⁶³ It became more important after the shift that took place from the multichannel era to the cable news channel era that channels engaged in branding and community building strategies.¹⁶⁴ Fox News has specifically engaged in community building strategies on basis of a shared ideology.¹⁶⁵ The shared ideology of conservatism is performed by Fox news in that news is portrayed as a politicized conservative narrative. The threat that might be posed by certain groups to conservative values is dramatized through interviews, guest, sound bites and so forth. The presenting of news as often a narrative about a conflict that was taking place between patriots and their enemies made it so that people that felt commitment to the shared ideology, felt committed to watching Fox news where the truth of the conflict would always be exposed.¹⁶⁶ The dramatic narrative gained believability because of certain aspects of the genre wherein it was presented, the news genre. Aspects such as the use of authoritative language and access to political players made it so that audiences became even more receptive to the messages broadcasted by the channel.¹⁶⁷

In general, a growth has been witnessed since the 1990s not just of partisan media catering to conservatives but also to people on the other side of the political aisle.¹⁶⁸ The growth of for example partisan news organizations such as Infowars in the United States

¹⁶² Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 264.

¹⁶³ Jeffrey P. Jones, “Fox News and the Performance of Ideology,” *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 178. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23253592>.

¹⁶⁴ Justin Lewis and Stephen Cushion, *The Rise of 24-Hour News Television* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

¹⁶⁵ Jones, “The Performance of Ideology,” 180.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 182-183.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 179.

¹⁶⁸ Kevin Arceneaux And Martin Johnson, “More A Symptom Than A Cause: Polarization And Partisan News Media In America,” in *American Gridlock: The Sources, Character And Impact Of Polarization*, ed. James A. Thurber And Antoine Yoshinaka (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2015), 310.

has been attributed to several developments such as growing polarization of the political parties.¹⁶⁹ Alex Jones and Infowars both are interesting case studies to analyze because they can be connected to this and other developments that facilitated the growth of partisan media. According to historian Nicole Hemmer, the growth of partisan news can also be connected to the advent of the first generation of conservative media activists who relentlessly attacked the idea that a true objective media establishment existed.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, the existence of media outlets like Infowars can be seen as being the result of changing technology and the repealing of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987.¹⁷¹ The Fairness Doctrine had required that all views were represented on television and radio if there was a discussion on issues that were relevant to the public interest. The politicized style that became popular after the ending of the Fairness Doctrine was reproduced on new platforms like the internet by figures such as Alex Jones.¹⁷²

Research into partisan media organization like Infowars can also be valuable because some research has shown that the audience of different sources of news and information develop diverging views on the many problems that might be faced by a society. The developing of widely diverging views between people has been connected to what issues are emphasized and reported on by the person's partisan media source of choice. A person who engaged in partisan selective exposure, who choose to watch media outlets that confirmed their political beliefs, would in particular be more likely to view the world in partisan terms.¹⁷³ Other research has shown that people who identified as "very conservative", people who if they are inclined to conspiratorial beliefs might be part of Jones's target audience, would have engaged in more partisan selective exposure than any other group in the period between 2000 and 2012.¹⁷⁴ People who believe that partisan selective exposure is prevalent fear that it on the long term could contribute to political

¹⁶⁹ Kevin Arceneaux And Martin Johnson, "More A Symptom Than A Cause: Polarization And Partisan News Media In America," in *American Gridlock: The Sources, Character And Impact Of Polarization*, ed. James A. Thurber And Antoine Yoshinaka (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2015), 309.

¹⁷⁰ Nicole Hemmer, "From "Faith in Facts" to "Fair and Balanced": Conservative Media, Liberal Bias, and the Origins of Balance," in *American Gridlock: The Sources, Character And Impact of Polarization*, ed. James A. Thurber And Antoine Yoshinaka (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2015), 142-143.

¹⁷¹ Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris and Hal Robert, *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation and Radicalization in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 321.

¹⁷² Julian E. Zelizer, "How Washington Helped Create The Contemporary Media: Ending the Fairness Doctrine in 1987," in *Media Nation: The Political History Of News In Modern America*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman And Julian E. Zelizer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 177 & 188-189.

¹⁷³ Natalie Jomini Stroud, *Niche News: The Politics of News Choice* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 2011), 164.

¹⁷⁴ Christian G. Rodriguez et al, "Partisan Selective Exposure: The Role of Party, Ideology and Ideological Extremity Over Time," *Translational Issues in Psychological Science* 3, no. 3 (September 2007): 264. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000121>.

polarization and conflict.¹⁷⁵ Evidence has however been found that contradicts the idea that partisan selective exposure is especially prevalent.¹⁷⁶ Research of the PhD candidate Jacob L. Nelson and the communication studies Professor James G. Webster specifically found that conservatives and liberals visited similar sites for their news but that conservatives spent twice the time on Drudge Report, three times the time on Google News Search and liberals twice the time on the website of *The New York Times*.¹⁷⁷ The debate about the precise effects of the consumption of partisan media has clearly not been settled.¹⁷⁸ Research into even more fringe partisan media organizations such as Infowars can still be valuable even if they have a minimal influence on the views of a consumer because they offer insight into the part of their audience that gravitates towards fringe partisan news organizations like Infowars because they perceive it as a politically like-minded news source.¹⁷⁹

Events such as the election of Trump led to a growth of research into alternative right-wing internet figures like Jones with the goal of identifying the precise role they played in Trump's victory.¹⁸⁰ Agreement just as in the academic debate about partisan selective exposure has not yet been reached. Academics like anthropologist Gabriella Coleman warn that the influence of online anonymous alt-right trolls should not be overstated.¹⁸¹ Coleman elaborates that the heterogenous group of trolls had an influence only because of

¹⁷⁵ Christian G. Rodriguez et al, "Partisan Selective Exposure: The Role of Party, Ideology and Ideological Extremity Over Time," *Translational Issues in Psychological Science* 3, no. 3 (September 2007): 254. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000121>.

¹⁷⁶ Eytan Bakshy, Solomon Messing and Lada A. Adamic, "Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook," *Science* 348, no. 6239 (June 2015): 1131-1132.

<https://science.sciencemag.org/content/348/6239/1130>. ; Brain E. Weeks, Thomas B. Ksiazek and Lance Holbert, "Partisan Enclaves or Shared Media Experience?: A Network Approach to Understanding Citizens' Political News Environments," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 60, no. 2 (2016): 248.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2016.1164170>. ; Jacob L. Nelson and James G. Webster, "The Myth of Partisan Selective Exposure: A Portrait of the Online Political News Audience," *Social Media + Society* (July/September 2017): 10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117729314>.

¹⁷⁷ Jacob L. Nelson and James G. Webster, "The Myth of Partisan Selective Exposure: A Portrait of the Online Political News Audience," *Social Media + Society* (July/September 2017): 6-7.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117729314>.

¹⁷⁸ Susanna Dilliplane, "Activation, Conversion or Reinforcement?: The Impact of Partisan News Exposure on Vote Choice," *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 1 (January 2014): 79-80.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12046>.

¹⁷⁹ W. Lance Bennett and Shanto Iyengar, "A New Era of Minimal Effects?: The Changing Foundations of Political Communication," *Journal of Communication* 58, no. 4 (December 2008): 724-725.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00410.x>.

¹⁸⁰ Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris and Hal Robert, *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation and Radicalization in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 4.

¹⁸¹ Whitney Phillips, Jessica Beyer and Gabriella Coleman, "Trolling Scholars Debunk the Idea That the Alt-Right's Shitposters Have Magic Powers," *Motherboard: Teach by Vice*, March 22, 2017, accessed July 10, 2020, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/z4k549/trolling-scholars-debunk-the-idea-that-the-alt-rights-trolls-have-magic-powers.

the media environment that was shaped by more influential actors such as Breitbart.¹⁸² The book *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation and Radicalization in American Politics* also wishes to add nuance to the discussion about the state of the media landscape before and after Trump's election. One of the main points of the book was that the internet does not have a singular effect on every country's media industry. The broken new media industry in the United States that let actors like Breitbart influence the entire new media landscape can only be understood if you look at the equally broken American old media industry. The old and new media industries provide for two ecosystems. The smaller ecosystem is the echo chamber where misinformation is shared and rarely challenged. Misinformation is also present in the larger second ecosystem, but it is less harmful because people within this ecosystem dedicate time to challenging misinformation.¹⁸³ This thesis deals with Alex Jones, a not yet widely discussed figure from the smaller ecosystem.

Many old but also new media personalities like most likely Alex Jones have benefitted from the parasocial relationships they have been able to foster with some members of their audience.¹⁸⁴ The term parasocial relationship refers to "a cross-situational relationship that a viewer or user hold to a media person, which includes specific cognitive and affective component."¹⁸⁵ The term originated from psychology but has been most extensively studied and used by media studies scholars. Research has for example been done on the parasocial relationships people have had with comedians, fictional characters, royalty and TV shopping hosts.¹⁸⁶ The introduction of the internet and social media offered both old media celebrities and a new type of celebrity more opportunities for the development of parasocial relationships.¹⁸⁷ This thesis adds to the already existing academic debates by

¹⁸² Yochai Benkler et al., "Study: Breitbart-led right-wing media ecosystem altered broader media agenda," *Columbia Journalism Review*, March 3, 2017, accessed July 16, 2020, <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/breitbart-media-trump-harvard-study.php>.

¹⁸³ Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris and Hal Robert, *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation and Radicalization in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 386.

¹⁸⁴ Yadvinder Parmar and Bikram Jit Singh Mann, "Consumer-Celebrity Parasocial Interaction: A Conditional Process Analysis," *Global Business Review* (May 2021): 2. <https://doi.org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1177/09721509211010358>.

¹⁸⁵ Alan M. Rubin And Mary M. Step, "Impact of Motivation, Attraction, and Parasocial Interaction on Talk Radio listening," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 44, no. 4 (June 2010): 636. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4404_7.

¹⁸⁶ Hannah Schmid and Christoph Klimmt, "A magically nice guy: Parasocial relationships with Harry Potter across different cultures," *The International Communication Gazette* 73, no. 3 (April 2011): 253-254. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1177/1748048510393658>. ; Siyoung Chung and Hichang Cho, "Fostering Parasocial Relationships with Celebrities on Social Media: Implications for Celebrity Endorsement," *Psychology and Marketing* 34, no. 4 (April 2017): 483. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21001>.

¹⁸⁷ Alex P. Leith, "Parasocial cues: The ubiquity of parasocial relationship on Twitch," *Communication Monographs* 88, no. 1 (January 2021): 113-114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2020.1868544>.

presenting the hypothesis that Jones's success can partly be explained by the parasocial relationships he has with his audience. A parasocial relationship may offer some of the same benefits as interpersonal relationships. The media personality is often seen by his parasocial friend as one of the few sources of security and trustworthy information in a constantly changing and threatening world.¹⁸⁸ A parasocial relationship can only be formed if the viewer or user has enough opportunities for parasocial interaction. Parasocial interaction is defined as "...interpersonal processes between persona and user that take place during media exposure."¹⁸⁹ As Jones weekly releases many hours of content, people have many opportunities for parasocial interaction with him. They can even directly interact with Jones by calling in to his live broadcasts. A media personality can foster parasocial relationships not just by releasing lot of content but also by engaging in self-disclosure. A media personality that is engaging in self-disclosure shares seemingly "...hidden, personal ideas and feelings..." with his or her audience which is in turn interpreted by his or her audience as a sign of friendship.¹⁹⁰ These disclosures are easily interpreted as signs of friendship because the disclosure of personal information implies vulnerability because it might have a possible negative effect on the person who shared it. The information shared can for example be misunderstood or become fuel for rumors.¹⁹¹ Another factor that plays a role in the development of a parasocial relationship is attraction to the media personality.¹⁹² This is not only attraction to the physical appearance of the media personality but also to their personality or perceived commonalities.¹⁹³ The physical or personality traits might be aspirational for the consumer in the parasocial relationship.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ Alan M. Rubin And Mary M. Step, "Impact of Motivation, Attraction, and Parasocial Interaction on Talk Radio listening," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 44, no. 4 (June 2010): 643 & 649-651. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4404_7.

¹⁸⁹ Rubin, "Impact of Motivation," 636.

¹⁹⁰ Siyoung Chung and Hichang Cho, "Fostering Parasocial Relationships with Celebrities on Social Media: Implications for Celebrity Endorsement," *Psychology and Marketing* 34, no. 4 (April 2017): 485. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21001>.

¹⁹¹ Chung, "Fostering Parasocial Relationships," 493.

¹⁹² Rebecca B. Rubin and Michael P. McHugh, "Development of Parasocial Interaction Relationship," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 31, no. 3 (April 1987): 288-289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838158709386664>.

¹⁹³ Hannah Schmid and Christoph Klimmt, "A magically nice guy: Parasocial relationships with Harry Potter across different cultures," *The International Communication Gazette* 73, no. 3 (April 2011): 254-255 & 263. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1177/1748048510393658>.

¹⁹⁴ Leslie Rasmussen, "Parasocial Interaction in the Digital Age: An Examination of Relationship Building and the Effectiveness of YouTube Celebrities," *The Journal of Social Media in Society* 7, no. 1 (2018): 283. <https://thejsms.org/index.php/JSMS/article/view/364>.

1.4. The Message

Many academic discussions exist about conspiracy theories, a significant part of the messages that Jones has espoused throughout his career, involving scholars from a varied range of academic fields.¹⁹⁵ This thesis adds to the academic discussion that exists about whether conspiracy theories can be regarded as stigmatized knowledge. I will indicate whether Jones, one of America's most famous modern conspiracy theorist, believes that conspiracy theories are stigmatized

American Studies scholar, Michael Butter, argues that conspiracy theories were once a accepted form of knowledge but that nowadays public defenders are often marginalized.¹⁹⁶ Political scientist, Michael Barkun, argues that conspiracy theories were indeed once marginalized but this changed when the process of "mainstreaming the fringe" started.¹⁹⁷ This process weakened the barrier between mainstream and fringe ideas, making the latter a more accepted part of mainstream political discourse. This began to take place because of technological developments such as the introduction of the internet and sociopolitical developments like the growth in distrust towards authority figures.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Michael Butter And Peter Knight, "Bridging the Great Divide: Conspiracy Theory Research for the 21st Century," *Diogenes* (October 2016): 2. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192116669289>.

¹⁹⁶ Michael Butter, *Plots, Designs, and Schemes: American Conspiracy Theories from the Puritans to the Present* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 297-299.

¹⁹⁷ Michael Barkun, "President Trump and the 'Fringe'," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 3 (April 2017): 437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1313649>.

¹⁹⁸ Michael Barkun, "Conspiracy Theories as Stigmatized Knowledge," *Diogenes* (October 2016): 3-4. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192116669288>.

Chapter 2: Analysis

In this chapter first the question ‘‘How has the content of Jones’s conspiracy theories evolved between 1998 and 2016?’’ will be answered. The specific elements that have been researched are the alleged perpetrators, the identity of their possible accomplices, their actions, their final goals and the people who were being victimized by the perpetrators behind the conspiracy. This chapter will also deal with the question of categorization of Jones. Can he be regarded as part of the new conspiracism phenomenon as described by political scientists Russel Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum and in what categories of conspiracy theories from the book *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, do Jones’s conspiracy theories belong?. The second part of this chapter shall be dedicated to answering my second research question: ‘‘What elements of Jones’s films and radio show have contributed to the success of his career as a media personality in the period between 1998 and 2016?’’.

2.1. Jones’s Conspiracy Theories

The main principle of Jones’s conspiracy theories, as noticeable in my primary sources, did not truly evolve in the period between 1998 and 2016. The core of Jones’s conspiracy theories is that the political and media elites or establishments work together to undermine national sovereignty and to destroy certain values like individual freedom, held dear by many conservatives.¹⁹⁹ The story he told about the global or globalist elites when they were mentioned has been consistent throughout the defined period, just as the one he told about the national elites. The treacherous national political and media elites would either explicitly be stated or implied to be members or tools of the globalist elite that was working towards creating a one world government also referred to as the New World Order.²⁰⁰ The global elite is often referred to by the name of the goal they are trying to

¹⁹⁹ *TriCorneredHat*, ‘‘Police State 3 – Total Enslavement – Alex Jones – FULL LENGTH,’’ November 17, 2012, YouTube video, 1:55:40. 2:45-3:33, <https://youtu.be/o8RbOVC7Id4>. ; *forestgamertube*, ‘‘Endgame Blueprint for Global Enslavement (Documentary Film by Alex Jones, 2007),’’ October 22, 2011, YouTube video, 2:19:30, 2:09:00-2:11:23, <https://youtu.be/tZcR5M-j0YE>. ; *TriCorneredHat*, ‘‘Police State 3,’’ 8:01-9:04. ; Alex Jones, ‘‘n.t.,’’ The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2011, 20:30-22:10. ; Alex Jones, ‘‘n.t.,’’ The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April, 26, 2015, 10:00-13:35.

²⁰⁰ The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 9, 2016, 9:20-11:20. ; *ChangeDaChannel*, ‘‘TerrorStorm Full length version,’’ February 20, 2010, YouTube video, 2:14:28, 2:08:07-2:09:28, <https://youtu.be/vrXgLhkv21Y>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, ‘‘America Is Being Butchered By The Globalists,’’ April 15, 2020, Banned video, 9:35, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5e96449f68447f00cbca4051>.

achieve.²⁰¹ Jones, as an American citizen, mostly focused on reporting on stories that he maintained proved that the elites, the globalist New World Order and the treacherous American Deep state, were working together to undermine specifically his beloved home country of the United States. He for example detailed in his Police State tetralogy all the proof that would exist such as the presence of foreign troops on American soil and the creation of FEMA camps for the idea that the United States was slowly being turned into a ‘...nightmarish police state.’. The was a first step of the assimilation of the United States into the New World Order.²⁰²

The New World Order would either have infiltrated or created international organizations like the United Nations so they could be utilized to their benefit.²⁰³ According to Jones, all actions undertaken by the elites are done with the objective to brainwash the common man into accepting the all-encompassing governmental control of their future overlords.²⁰⁴ One often employed New World strategy according to Jones would be false flag operations. I have already mentioned two events that were described as false flag operations undertaken by the elites in the introduction, 9/11 and the Sandy Hook shooting. Other events he described as false-flag operations are: the 2015 Charleston church shooting, the 2016 Pulse Nightclub shooting and the 2017 Las Vegas shooting. Jones consistently stated that these false-flag operations were undertaken with the goal of turning the American population against the idea of having gun rights.²⁰⁵ An American population without the right to defend itself would be

²⁰¹ *DocX*, “Police State 2 The Takeover (Documentary by Alex Jones,” April 11, 2017, YouTube video, 2:02:48, 4:00-4:21, <https://youtu.be/DRuHedUXtR8>. ; *TriCorneredHat*, “Police State 3 – Total Enslavement – Alex Jones – FULL LENGTH,” November 17, 2012, YouTube video, 1:55:40, 14:13-14:43, <https://youtu.be/o8RbOVc7Id4>. ; Alex Jones, “n.t.,” The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 7, 2012, 29:59-30:57.

²⁰² *TriCorneredHat*, “Police State 2000 Alex Jones FULL LENGTH,” November 16, 2012, YouTube video, 2:02:18, 3:20-6:12, 1:02:28-1:03:40 & 1:05:00-1:05:43, <https://youtu.be/V9HGfRrfv-Q>. ; *DocX*, “Police State 2.” 24:10-24:47. ; *TriCorneredHat*, “Police State 3.” 2:45-3:33 & 2:22:50-2:25:30. ; *ChangeDaChannel*, “Police State 4: The Rise of FEMA Full Length,” April 23, 2010, YouTube video, 2:20:38, 14:50-15:39, 1:19:41-1:21:20 & 1:24:50-1:25:43, <https://youtu.be/Klqv9t1zVww>. ; Nina Burleigh, “Donald Trump and the FEMA Camps Crowd,” *Newsweek*, August 19, 2016, accessed July 19, 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-fema-camps-crowd-491841>.

²⁰³ *TriCorneredHat*, “Police State 2000,” 1:58:02-1:59:00. ; *TriCorneredHat*, “Police State 3,” 17:20-18:31.

²⁰⁴ Alex Jones, “n.t.,” The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April, 26, 2015, 1:10:10-1:12:20.

²⁰⁵ Brian Tashman, “Alex Jones: Charleston Shooting A Government Plot to Start a Race War, Persecute Conservatives,” *Right Wing Watch*, June 19, 2015, accessed June 21, 2020, <https://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/alex-jones-charleston-shooting-a-government-plot-to-start-a-race-war-persecute-conservatives/>. ; *The Majority Report w/ Sam Seder*, “Alex Jones: Orlando Shooting is a False Flag,” June 19, 2016, YouTube video, 4:03, 1:10-2:52, <https://youtu.be/17k9LPKJRQk>. ; *NewsBlip*, “Alex Jones on Las Vegas Shooting,” October 17, 2017, YouTube video, 13:16, https://youtu.be/fitR_aEPu8s. ; Thomas Milan Konda, *Conspiracies of Conspiracies: How Delusions Have Overrun America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 294-295.

easier to enslave.²⁰⁶ Another example of how the elites would try to make the common man more easy to control was by crashing the economy so that people would lose their jobs and need to rely on food stamps. Jones also used the idea of an apparent war that was being waged against people's property rights by the United States government as proof for his theory that the elites were working on achieving their objective of a brainwashed and dependent population.²⁰⁷

Jones mentions some specific groups and individuals several times in the period between 1998 and 2016 and frames them as being either tools or members of the global elites. Two reoccurring villains within Jones's conspiracy theories are Bill and Hillary Clinton.²⁰⁸ Hillary and people like her were once described by Jones as a cancer that needed to be removed so that the republic could be restored to its former glory.²⁰⁹ Another person that was casted as the villain several times is the Hungarian-born American billionaire George Soros.²¹⁰ Soros was not only accused of having funded corrupt groups such as Black Lives Matter but also of financing Nazi's.²¹¹ Another famous person that Jones has frequently associated with plots of global elites is the business magnate and philanthropist, Bill Gates. Gates would have played a role in the 2015-2016 Zika virus epidemic and in 2020 he similarly was accused of being a leading eugenicist and a member of the globalist elite that is behind the planned COVID pandemic.²¹² New possible tools or members of the global elites have been introduced in the period. One person who got introduced in the period that was research as a major tool and member was the 44th president of the United States, Barack Obama.²¹³ Barack Obama was

²⁰⁶ DocX, "Police State 2 The Takeover (Documentary by Alex Jones)," April 11, 2017, YouTube video, 2:02:48, 6:20-7:25, <https://youtu.be/DRuHedUXtR8>.

²⁰⁷ Whyte Sapphire, "Alex Jones 'America Destroyed by Design' HQ Full Length Version!," March 31, 2012, Youtube video, 2:00:06, 43:10-44:10, <https://youtu.be/XcewpiMs1HU>. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 7, 2012, 1:00:10-1:02:55.

²⁰⁸ TriCorneredHat, "Police State 2000 Alex Jones FULL LENGTH," November 16, 2012, YouTube video, 2:02:18, 1:02:28-1:03:40, <https://youtu.be/V9HGfRrfv-Q>. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 9, 2016, 1:09:00-1:10:35.

²⁰⁹ Alex Jones, November 9, 2016, 38:00-39:24

²¹⁰ Ibidem, 40:44-42:20.

²¹¹ TriCorneredHat, "Police State 2000," 1:02:28-1:03:40 & 1:58:02-1:59:00. ; Infowars Archives, "George Soros Admits Working With The NAZIs Was The Happiest Time Of His Life," October 25, 2019, Banned video, 3:15, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5db353a420c83f001e99191f>.

²¹² Shawn Smallman, "Conspiracy Theories and the Zika Epidemic," *Journal of International and Global Studies* 9, no. 2 (June 2018): 10-11. https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/is_fac/21/. ; The Alex Jones Show, "Bill Gates Caught Funding Netflix Docu-series PANDEMIC Where He Is The Hero," January 28, 2020, Banned video, 14:56, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5e2fa69bdde459001e3b4e05>. ; The Alex Jones Show, "Bill Gates In His Own Words," May 13, 2020, Banned video, 12:02, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5ebb3fd0244ac5001d21ee47>.

²¹³ Robert Dorčić, "Obama Deception 2009 pevendo," July 9, 2012, YouTube video, 1:51:21, <https://youtu.be/LA0dSo7WW70>.

specifically described by Jones as “...a creature of the New World Order...”.²¹⁴

The rest of humanity can be seen as the largest group that is victimized by the plots of the globalist elite, according to Jones. They would be enslaved in prison cities if the New World Order would achieve their goals.²¹⁵ Jones however does not always show sympathy to the general public since many of them would be ignorant of the truth. Jones described the population of the United States as mostly zombies and “...pathetic jellyfish...” that would not resist the collectivization that would take place under Obama.²¹⁶ He also emphasized that many people were braindead or indoctrinated.²¹⁷ The one exception to Jones’s general pessimistic outlook on most of the United States public was the one he displayed when Trump won the 2016 election. This election victory was explained by Jones as an essential victory in the war for the soul of humanity that was only possible because many people were becoming aware of the plans of the New World Order.²¹⁸ Jones’s audience and other people that were currently trying to defeat the New World Order and all its allies would suffer an even worst fate than the ignorant masses. The few true patriots who were brave enough to resist globalist control would be forced to fight if they wished to retain their God-given constitutional rights. If not, they would either be killed or imprisoned in the FEMA camps.²¹⁹

An academic debate arose about whether conspiracy theories are a stigmatized form of knowledge.²²⁰ Jones generally does not refer to the knowledge that he shares within his content as conspiracy theories. The purpose of Jones’s work and that of other Infowars personalities was not reporting on theoretical conspiracies but on factual ones. Jones would have predicted for example that social media censorship would happen in 2015 and it did happen.²²¹ The sharing of the truth about the crimes of the elites would have made

²¹⁴ Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 29, 2008, 1:18:50-1:19:51

²¹⁵ *forestgamertube*, ‘Endgame Blueprint for Global Enslavement (Documentary Film by Alex Jones, 2007),’ October 22, 2011, YouTube video, 2:19:30, 4:00-6:29, <https://youtu.be/tZcR5M-j0YE>.

²¹⁶ Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 7, 2012, 57:00-58:18.

²¹⁷ Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, December 16, 2012, 1:00:11-1:03:31. ; Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April 24, 2013, 1:13:20-1:13:48. ; Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 9, 2016, 10:30-11:30. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, ‘Useful Idiot Dems Duped Into Voting For The Instrument of Their Own Collapse,’ November 5, 2020, Banned video, 38:58, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5fa341bc1ece5117fe82ee5c>.

²¹⁸ Alex Jones, November 9, 2016, 10:30-11:30.

²¹⁹ Alex Jones, November 7, 2012, 18:18-18:42

²²⁰ Michael Butter, *Plots, Designs, and Schemes: American Conspiracy Theories from the Puritans to the Present* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 5-9.

²²¹ Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2001, 3:30-3:50. ; ‘Who is Alex Jones And What Is The Infowar? ...And Why Should You

Jones and his colleagues a target of elitist plots.²²² One example of such a plot is the long-term campaign that would have taken place to ruin Jones's reputation by spreading lies like that the brothers, Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, who were responsible for the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing were *The Alex Jones Show* listeners and that Jones would have beaten up kids.²²³ To summarize, Jones in general does not refer to the knowledge that he shares within his content as conspiracy theories but he does believe that he and his colleagues have been stigmatized because of their mission to share the truth.²²⁴

2.2. Jones's Conspiracy Theories And Academia

Political scientist, Michael Barkun, identifies three categories of conspiracy theories: event, systemic and superconspiracies. Jones's conspiracy theories belong in the systemic or superconspiracy category or both. All the conspiratorial actors that are described by Jones are work together to achieve a clear goal: the establishment of a New World Order.²²⁵ Some of Jones's conspiracy theories belong in the superconspiracy category because he has accused the New World Order of manipulating many smaller actors like: Adolf Hitler, the banker David Rockefeller, the International Monetary Fund and the politician Mitt Romney.²²⁶ The New World Order is besides this described as being

Care?" Infowars, accessed August 3, 2021, <https://archive.is/itfhG#selection-1113.123-1113.127>. ; *War Room With Owen Shroyer*, "Alex Jones Predicted Social Media Censorship in 2015," May 18, 2019, Banned video, 13:35, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5cdf431191d23500173f8e66>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Conservative Censorship Conspiracy is REAL, Not Just A Theory," September 13, 2018, Banned video, 6:15, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5b9ad380391334001c06d406>.

²²² *War Room With Owen Shroyer*, "If They Destroy Infowars, Infowars Wins," January 25, 2019, Banned video, 20:13, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5c4a44b8366f2e0fca358687>. ; *Bowne Report*, "Infowars Will Not Back Down," June 22, 2020, Banned video, 7:27, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5ef0df1ec7a607002f1f626e>.

²²³ Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April 24, 2013, 1:01:30-1:02:20. ; *War Room With Owen Shroyer*, "Alex Jones Debunks Blatant Lies Told By Twitter Lawyer," May 6, 2019, Banned video, 25:43, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5c7f574196f802002664d950>.

²²⁴ Menno H. Reijven and Sarah Chose, "Conspiracy Religion, and the Public Sphere: The Discourses of Far Right Counterpublics in the U.S. and South Korea," *International Journal of Communication* 14 (2020): 5345. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/13385>.

²²⁵ *TriCorneredHat*, "Police State 3 – Total Enslavement – Alex Jones – FULL LENGTH," November 17, 2012, YouTube video, 1:55:40, 8:01-9:04, <https://youtu.be/o8RbOVC7Id4>. ; Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, Second Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 6.

²²⁶ *TriCorneredHat*, "Police State 3." 14:44-16:00 & 17:20-18:31. ; *forestgamertube*, "Endgame Blueprint for Global Enslavement (Documentary Film by Alex Jones, 2007)," October 22, 2011, YouTube video, 2:19:30, 23:32-23:33 & 34:21-35:50, <https://youtu.be/tZcR5M-j0YE>. ; *ChangeDaChannel*, "Martial Law 9/11: Rise of the Police State," June 3, 2014, YouTube video, 3:00:07, 2:18:18-2:23:33, <https://youtu.be/uzo9IAgyOr0>. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 7, 2012, 26:00-27:30. ; Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, 6.

practically invisible for the normal brainwashed sheeplike populace.²²⁷

New conspiracism is a phenomenon described by the political scientists Russell Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum. It refers to a type of conspiracism that persists not because of evidence but because of repetition.²²⁸ Jones does not provide evidence for every theory that he shares.²²⁹ Outrageous claims like the one where he states that the Rothschild family had bought up the English economy after the Napoleonic wars and ruled the country ever since are made without proof.²³⁰ On other occasions, he specifically presented evidence. In almost every The Alex Jones Show episode, you can see the many stacks of paper on Jones's desk.²³¹ These stacks seem to consist mostly of mainstream media articles that he uses to prove that conspiratorial forces work in broad daylight. Mainstream media articles were also used in his films when he for example wanted to prove that the FBI had trained Iraqis since the Gulf war. He claimed that these Iraqis were trained to function as terror cells that would assist the FBI in false flag operations like the Oklahoma City Bombing.²³² The Oklahoma City Bombing was the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City that took place April 19, 1995. The perpetrators were Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. McVeigh and Nichols were connected to the Patriot movement, a movement that is made up by several groups that are unified by a shared distrust towards the central government.²³³ The Oklahoma Bombing was the deadliest terrorist attack in the United States prior to 9/11. Other examples of evidence he used to prove his theories are: documents published by the conservative

²²⁷ Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April 26, 2015, 6:50-8:08 & 53:40-55:53. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Globalist New World Order Death Cult Exposed," April 10, 2020, Banned video, 13:53, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5e8fad7273a28600311f47d2>. ; *Bowne Report*, "The Pre Conditioning of NOW Horror," June 14, 2021, Banned video, 4:39, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=60c7a468b632c606a6cde8ce>.

²²⁸ Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum, *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 49-50.

²²⁹ Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2001, 1:20:44-1:22:00.

²³⁰ *forestgamertube*, "Endgame Blueprint for Global Enslavement (Documentary Film by Alex Jones, 2007)," October 22, 2011, Youtube video, 2:19:30, 8:20-11:05, <https://youtu.be/tZcR5M-j0YE>.

²³¹ *ClydeSho2124*, "Vintage Alex Jones," June 29, 2007, YouTube video, 3:45, 0:02 & 1:43, https://youtu.be/mzYvu1Z_DBw. ; *Project Liberty Defined Two*, "The Alex Jones Show – Friday, April 11, 2008 (Full Show): Bob Chapman," April 6, 2013, YouTube video, 1:02:55, 10:13 & 35:41, <https://youtu.be/eFJtj79fwG4>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Joe Hoft: Meet The Man who First Exposed the Covid-19 Hoax," July 15, 2020, Banned video, 33:00, 12:12 & 15:26, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5f0e3830677a7f01e9230a55>.

²³² *TriCorneredHat*, "Police State 3 – Total Enslavement – Alex Jones – FULL LENGTH," November 17, 2012, YouTube video, 1:55:40, 33:37-34:30, <https://youtu.be/o8RbOVC7Id4>.

²³³ Stuart A. Wright, *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 129 & 177. ; Kathleen Belew, *Bring The War Home: The White Power Movement And Paramilitary America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 215.

thinktank, Project for the New American Century, that he used to prove that a New World Order existed, the fact that firefighters had told people to get back from building 7 before the collapse of this building was used as proof for the theory that the collapse of building 7 was an inside-job and stories he was told by a member of his family with spy connections functioned as proof for the claim that the American government was involved with many drugs deals.²³⁴ Building 7 was another skyscraper that collapsed on the day of September 11, 2001. The official explanation for the collapse of this building is that it was caused by fires. Many 9/11 theorists like Jones believe however that the American government was behind the collapse and that it was really caused by a controlled demolition.²³⁵ Jones because of the evidence that he often provides for his theories cannot be regarded as being part of the new conspiracism phenomenon.

2.3. Jones's Success

Jones has needed many things to have a thriving career. One essential thing for Jones's success is an audience that is willing to invest into the Infowars project. His audience needed to be substantial so that he and other people could advertise a wide variety of products and services to them like t-shirts, documentary films and a subscription service. Around 2013, a shift has been observed of the type of products that Jones specifically has advertised to his audience. An examination of Infowars now shows that they mainly gain their revenue through the selling of all kinds of vitamin supplements. These supplements, according to multiple former Infowars employees, would have changed a media operation into a media empire.²³⁶ Several elements that can be observed in Jones's conspiracy theories but also in the rest of his content have contributed to his ability to build and to

²³⁴ *ChangeDaChannel*, "TerrorStorm Full length version," February 20, 2010, YouTube video, 2:14:28, 2:04:00-2:05:05, <https://youtu.be/vrXgLhkv21Y>. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2011, 24:10-26:20. ; *TriCornersHat*, "Police State 3 – Total Enslavement – Alex Jones – FULL LENGTH," November 17, 2012, YouTube video, 1:55:40, 12:30-3:55 <https://youtu.be/o8RbOVC7Id4>.

²³⁵ Albert Jack, "9/11 Conspiracy – World Trade Center Building 7," Albert Jackson, accessed May 19, 2021, <https://albertjack.com/2021/02/08/911-conspiracy-world-trade-centre-building-seven/>. ; Eunji Kim, "Building 7: Why Conspiracy Theorists Get It Wrong," *Mic*, September 11, 2013, accessed May 19, 2021, <https://www.mic.com/articles/63215/building-7-why-conspiracy-theorists-get-it-wrong>. ; *ChangeDaChannel*, "Martial Law 9/11: Rise of the Police State," June 3, 2014, YouTube video, 3:00:07, 1:00:24-1:02:45, <https://youtu.be/uzo9IAgyOr0>. ; Arianne Cohen, "World Trade Center 7 Report Puts 9/11 Conspiracy Theory To Rest," *Popular Mechanics*, August 1, 2017, accessed May 19, 2021, <https://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/design/a3524/4278874/>.

²³⁶ Charlie Warzel, "Alex Jones Just Can't Help Himself," *BuzzFeed News*, May 3, 2017, accessed August 18, 2021, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/charliwarzel/alex-jones-will-never-stop-being-alex-jones>. ; Seth Brown, "Alex Jones's Media Empire Is a Machine Built to Sell Snake-Oil Diet Supplements," *Intelligencer*, May 4, 2017, accessed August 18, 2021, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/05/how-does-alex-jones-make-money.html>.

maintain a loyal audience.

The first thing that most likely played a role in Jones's success is that the ideology that he has embraced over the year has stayed relatively consistent. The New World Order and their many allies including the federal government and several international organizations threaten fundamental rights that were granted to humankind via sacred documents such as the bill of rights or the United States constitution.²³⁷ The performance aspect of Jones's content can be seen in for example his often loud and dramatic tone.²³⁸ He also often used music to enhance the mood he tried to communicate to his audience.²³⁹ This existence of a performance of an ideology and the fact that Jones's and his colleagues present their content as news are both factors that they share with Fox News and according to the Media Studies professor Jeffrey P. Jones they played a role in the success of Fox News.²⁴⁰ It is likely that they similarly played a role in Jones's success as a media personality.

In the content that Jones has released in the period between 1998 and 2016 certain persistent elements can be found that have been present in a lot of popular conservative media since the advent of the first generation of conservative media activists, described by the historian Nicole Hemmer.²⁴¹ Jones repeatedly described mainstream media as having deep-seated liberal biases and specifically framed himself and people with beliefs like his like "...oppressed outsiders...". The liberal bias that could be witnessed in mainstream media was introduced by the globalists who used the media according to Jones as their own personal propaganda machine.²⁴² Another factor that possibly played a role in

²³⁷ Alex Jones, 'n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2011, 28:18-28:49 & 34:23-35:00.

²³⁸ Alex Jones, 'n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, December 16, 2012, 56:25-57:51. ; Alex Jones, 'n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 9, 2016, 48:10-49:30. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Alex Jones Explains Epic Abortion Rant On Joe Rogan," February 28, 2019, Banned video, 12:44, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5c7833a0f7c188001c3d9053>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Emergency Broadcast! Opposition To COVID Measures Defined As Terrorism By Biden DHS," August 15, 2021, Banned video, 34:53, 31:25-33:43, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=611845d24d3ef950d2c4e4f1>.

²³⁹ Alex Jones, 'n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 29, 2008, 0:00-0:28. *Whyte Sapphire*, "Alex Jones 'America Destroyed by Design' HQ Full Length Version!," March 31, 2012, YouTube video, 2:00:06, 0:00-2:25, <https://youtu.be/XcewpiMs1HU>. ; *TriCorneredHat*, "Police State 3 – Total Enslavement – Alex Jones – FULL LENGTH," November 17, 2012, YouTube video, 1:55:40, 22:51-24:21. <https://youtu.be/o8RbOVC7Id4>. ; *ChangeDaChannel*, "Police State 4: The Rise of FEMA Full Length," April 23, 2010, YouTube video, 2:20:38, 03:05-03:27, <https://youtu.be/Klqv9t1zVww>.

²⁴⁰ Jeffrey P. Jones, "Fox News and the Performance of Ideology," *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 181-184. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23253592>.

²⁴¹ Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), xiii-xiv.

²⁴² *RT America*, "Alex Jones: 'US Media doesn't speak for us'," March 3, 2011, YouTube video, 4:17, https://youtu.be/1WLy4R_Cbbs. ; Alex Jones, 'n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 7, 2012, 28:00-29:33. ; *Whyte Sapphire*, "America Destroyed by Design,"

Jones's success was the fact that values that were threatened by Jones's archenemies were ones that were held dear by many American conservatives. Not just the American constitution, gun rights and the future of the United States would be in peril because of the globalist's plots but also the traditional western family structure, freedom of religion and the ideal of a small government.²⁴³ Jones either consciously or unconsciously seems to have exploited certain Cold War values that were now entrenched parts of the identities of many citizens.²⁴⁴ One of these values was an undying love for individual freedom and Jones has emphasized many times that individual liberty will cease to exist if the globalist elites were to win.²⁴⁵ In general, Jones either consciously or unconsciously seems to have exploited the fear many Americans have for their general security that has become widespread since the Cold War.²⁴⁶ This general fear could have been exploited because a lot of developments that possibly could be experienced as symptoms of societal crises or dramatic turning points in modern history like the assassination of the 35th president of the United States, John F. Kennedy and the continuing existence of terrorist organizations like Al-Qaida has been incorporated by Jones into a grander narrative that reinforced that

2:25-3:18. ; Maxwell Tani, "Outlandish Infowars chart attempts to classify media outlets by how 'tyrannical' or 'independent' they are," *Insider*, December 14, 2016, accessed August 18, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/infowars-chart-media-organizations-2016-12?international=true&r=US&IR=T>. ; *Infowars Archives*, "Media Matters Claims Alex Jones Tells Supporters To Get Battle Rifles Ready For Media," September 27, 2018, Banned video, 2:12, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5bac16091ca6c01fe8a398e7>. ; *Special Reports*, "Deep State Media Money Runs Out!," February 4, 2019, Banned video, 6:00, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5c58743a38c608001f11048a>. ; *War Room With Owen Shroyer*, "Alex Jones Predicted Social Media Censorship in 2015," May 18, 2019, Banned video, 13:35, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5cdf431191d23500173f8e66>. ; *Mike Hanson Archives*, "Classic Alex Jones Exposing Mass Media," July 21, 2021, Banned video, 2:13:03, <https://www.banned.video/watch?id=60f75457f8bcf7002fc933ca>.

²⁴³ Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 29, 2008, 1:09:08-1:10:00. ; *forestgamertube*, "Endgame Blueprint for Global Enslavement (Documentary Film by Alex Jones, 2007)," October 22, 2011, YouTube video, 2:19:30, 1:54:13-1:56:42, <https://youtu.be/tZcR5M-j0YE>. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 7, 2012, 13:21-14:04. ; Christopher S. Parker and Matt A. Barreto, *Change They Can't Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America – Updated Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 6. ; Eoin Higgins, "Alex Jones' War for White, Christian America," *Paste*, April 24, 2017, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.pastemagazine.com/politics/alex-jones/alex-jones-war-for-white-christian-america/>. ; *Special Reports*, "War On Christianity Hidden From The Public," April 22, 2019, Banned video, 4:53, <https://www.banned.video/watch?id=5cbde567d4e1e2002cf4aec4>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Millie Weaver Exposes Biden's Green Plan to Sell America Out to Authoritarianism," July 18, 2020, Banned video, 31:52, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5f12329a677a7f01e929e5fd>.

²⁴⁴ Elaine Tyler May, *Fortress America: How We Embraced Fear And Abandoned Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 3-4.

²⁴⁵ Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 29, 2008, 1:21:00-1:22:00. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 9, 2016, 12:10-14:22. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "In The Fight For Our Freedoms, Who Amongst Us Are Fighting Against US?," June 1, 2020, Banned video, 1:02:43, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5ed43f14b1c7d4002fb523bf>.

²⁴⁶ May, *Fortress America*, 3-4.

feelings of dread for the future that might have been felt by his audience were justified.²⁴⁷ He emphasized the threat that many bigger players such as the International Monetary Fund and United Nations posed to not just their values but also their security and introduced newer villains to fear like the left-wing anti-fascist movement, Antifa.²⁴⁸ Jones made it clear to his audience many times that should not just fear for the future but also for their own health. The elites were trying to ensure future victory by feeding your children genetically modified organisms (GMOs).²⁴⁹ Many of the items you would need to ensure a long and healthy life were of course available in the Infowarsstore.²⁵⁰

A disillusioned conservative can easily feel attracted to what Jones says because he has incorporated almost all conspiracy theories that have been popular among mostly American conservatives. The archenemy of Jones, the elites, is given many names by Jones. The names like the Deep state, the New World Order and the globalists are also used by other conservative conspiracy theorists to describe the villain in their conspiratorial narratives.²⁵¹ Jones did not just embrace a commonly used terms to describe his enemy but also other Christian conspiracy theories about for example the antichrist and Satan and more secular conspiracy theories about for example bioweapons, black

²⁴⁷ Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2001, 3:30-3:50. ; Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2011, 20:30-22:10. Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April 24, 2013, 1:11:20-1:12:40. ; *ChangeDaChannel*, ‘Police State 4: The Rise of FEMA Full Length,’ April 23, 2010, YouTube video, 2:20:38, 1:39:10-1:41:40, <https://youtu.be/Klqv9t1zVww>. ; Jan-Willem van Prooijen And Karen M. Douglas, ‘Conspiracy Theories as part of History: The Role of Societal Crisis Situations,’ *Memory Studies* 10, no. 3 (June 2017): 330. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698017701615>.

²⁴⁸ *Whyte Sapphire*, ‘Alex Jones ‘America Destroyed by Design’ HQ Full Length Version!’, March 31, 2012, YouTube video, 2:00:06, 1:42:43-1:43:27, <https://youtu.be/XcewpiMs1HU>. ; *TriCorneredHat*, ‘Police State 2000 Alex Jones FULL LENGTH,’ November 16, 2012, YouTube video, 2:02:18, 1:58:02-1:59:00, <https://youtu.be/V9HGfRrfv-Q>. ; *ChangeDaChannel*, ‘Police State 4,’ 1:32:18-1:33:20. ; Abby Ohlheiser, ‘A short history of Alex Jones claiming that the left is about to start a second Civil War,’ *Washington Post*, July 3, 2018, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2018/07/03/a-short-history-of-alex-jones-claiming-that-the-left-is-about-to-start-a-second-civil-war/>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, ‘Emergency Report: Conservative Leadership Targeted By Democrats/Antifa for Execution In Their Homes,’ October 1, 2018, Banned video, 15:23, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5bb2583e39f8fc001c1c9b7e>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, ‘BREAKING: Antifa Plans To Stage Terror And Blame Trump,’ October 21, 2019, Banned video, 28:06, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5dacefd31461630021707bdf>.

²⁴⁹ Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April 24, 2013, 1:01:30-1:02:20. ; Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April 26, 2015, 1:25:20-1:26:10.

²⁵⁰ Alex Jones, April 24, 2013, 36:20-42:00. ; Alex Jones, April 26, 2015, 1:42:20-1:46:27.

²⁵¹ Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, Second Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 39. ; Liam Stack, ‘Globalism: A Far Right Conspiracy Theory Buoyed By Trump,’ *New York Times*, November 15, 2016, accessed July 28, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/15/us/politics/globalism-right-trump.html>. ; S. Jonathon O’Donnell, ‘Demon of the deep state: how evangelicals and conspiracy theories combine in Trump’s America,’ *Conversation*, September 14, 2020, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/demons-of-the-deep-state-how-evangelicals-and-conspiracy-theories-combine-in-trumps-america-144898>.

helicopters, chemtrails, the skull and bones secret Yale student society and weather weapons.²⁵² He has also embraced certain specific conspiracy theories like that the 1992 Ruby Ridge standoff, the 1993 Waco siege, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing were false flag attacks orchestrated by the federal government or the New World Order that are specifically popular among some of the more radical factions of the militia movement.²⁵³ The Ruby Ridge standoff took place between August 21 and 31 in 1992 when the United States Marshals Service wanted to arrest Randy Weaver after he did not appear in court to respond to firearms charges. Randy Weaver was a white supremacist and separatist. He and his family and friends kept resisting arrest and because of this other governmental forces such as the FBI started being involved. The standoff ended with the deaths of the U.S. Marshal, W.F. Degan, the wife of Randy Weaver, Vicki, and their son, Samuel. The Waco Siege was the siege on the compound of the Branch Davidians, a Christian religious sect, that took place between February 28 and April 19, 1993. The siege started after the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) had obtained search and arrest warrants because certain members like leader David Koresh were suspected of stockpiling illegal weapons. 76 Branch Davidians died during the siege. The militia movement consists of several smaller diverse localized militias that share at least a desire to protect the second amendment and

²⁵² *Whyte Sapphire*, "Alex Jones 'America Destroyed by Design' HQ Full Length Version!," March 31, 2012, YouTube video, 2:00:06, 1:48:40-1:49:40, <https://youtu.be/XcewpiMs1HU>. ; *TriCorneredHat*, "Police State 2000 Alex Jones FULL LENGTH," November 16, 2012, YouTube video, 2:02:18, 1:10:00-1:10:12, <https://youtu.be/V9HGfRrfv-Q>. ; *ChangeDaChannel*, "Martial Law 9/11: Rise of the Police State," June 3, 2014, YouTube video, 3:00:07, 5:00-5:20, 1:25:20-1:26:35, 1:34:20-1:34:24 & 1:39:30-1:41:06, <https://youtu.be/uzo9IAgyOr0>. ; *overunitydotcom*, "Chemtrails Are Real Alex Jones TV," April 25, 2010, YouTube video, 10:58, <https://youtu.be/0qHDIwbBLhM>. ; Oliver Willis and Ben Dimiero, "Alex Jones Explains How Government 'Weather Weapon' Could Have Been Behind Oklahoma Tornado," *Media Matters For America*, May 21, 2013, accessed July 28, 2020, <https://www.mediamatters.org/alex-jones/alex-jones-explains-how-government-weather-weapon-could-have-been-behind-oklahoma>. ; *Special Reports*, "Inside the Satanic Trans Cult Recruitment Program for Children," November 22, 2018, Banned video, 27:52, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5bf61b7064b610452853c10b>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Globalists Pave Way For Antichrist As Patriots Fight Back," January 8, 2019, Banned video, 19:34, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5c34efea77cd9e2a63a168c4>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Is Hurricane Dorian A Weather Weapon?," September 4, 2019, Banned video, 13:19, 4:04-6:50, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5d6ee92e230eeb0013b6cff2>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Coronavirus Is An Offensive Bioweapon Says Expert," March 5, 2020, Banned video, 3:19, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5e6176136deb11006d6224d1>.

²⁵³ D.J. Mulloy, *American Extremism: History, Politics and the Militia Movement* (London/New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 1 & 12-16. ; Stuart A. Wright, *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 163 & 194-195. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 29, 2008, 2:28:30-2:29:00. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, December 16, 2012, 1:50:00-1:51:40. ; Sam Jackson, "Conspiracy Theories In The Patriot/Militia Movement," *GW Program on Extremism* (May 2017): 5-7. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/downloads/Jackson%20%20Conspiracy%20Theories%20Final.pdf>.

a general distrust towards the federal government.²⁵⁴ The militia movement can be placed together with other movements like for example the sovereign citizen movement within the wider Patriot movement.²⁵⁵ The sovereign citizen movement contains several groups that believe they are only subject to a particular interpretation of common law. Not only members of several fringe factions of the militia movement could possibly find Jones appealing because he proclaimed to believe in the same conspiracy theories as they did but this is also true for the more radical members of the Tea Party movement. Jones has frequently repeated conspiracy theories about for example the birthplace of the former president, Barack Obama.²⁵⁶ The modern Tea Party movement was formed in 2009 and three of its defining features are support for small-government principles and lower taxation and opposition against the idea of socialized universal health care.²⁵⁷ The extensive campaign that developed around the proving of the conspiracy theory that Obama had lied about his true place of birth was eventually known as the birther movement. The Tea Party was one of the many actors that played a role in the birther movement.²⁵⁸

Jones seems to be unsure about theories relating to the existence of aliens and about the earth being flat. There have been times when he entertained the possibility of these theories being true and at other times he described these ideas as creations of the New World Order meant to manipulate the masses. He however still allows people that do passionately believe in these theories to use his platforms.²⁵⁹ The only conspiracy theorists

²⁵⁴ Stuart A. Wright, *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 163 & 194-195. ; Alex Jones, “n.t.,” The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 29, 2008, 2:28:30-2:29:00. ; Alex Jones, “n.t.,” The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, December 16, 2012, 1:50:00-1:51:40. ; Sam Jackson, “Conspiracy Theories In The Patriot/Militia Movement,” *GW Program on Extremism* (May 2017): 5-7. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/downloads/Jackson%2C%20Conspiracy%20Theories%20Final.pdf>.

²⁵⁵ Sam Jackson, “”Nullification Through Armed Civil Disobedience”: A Case Study Of Strategic Framing In The Patriot/Militia Movement,” *Dynamics Of Asymmetric Conflict* 12, no. 1 (February 2019) 92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2018.1563904>. ; “”Patriot” Movement,” Anti-Defamation League, accessed May 16, 2021, <https://www.adl.org/resources/glossary-terms/patriot-movement>.

²⁵⁶ Alex Jones, September 29, 2008. 1:01:27-1:02:26 & 1:12:50-1:14:00. ; Brian Tashman, “Alex Jones: Birth Certificate Is A False Flag To Divert From Obama’s (Non-existent) Islamic Ring,” *Right Wing Watch*, December 19, 2016, accessed August 18, 2021, <https://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/alex-jones-obama-birth-certificate-is-a-false-flag-to-divert-from-obamas-non-existent-islamic-ring/>.

²⁵⁷ D.J Mulloy, *Enemies of the State: The Radical Right In America From FDR to Trump* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 151.

²⁵⁸ Mulloy, *Enemies of the State*, 159 & 171-172.

²⁵⁹ obamadocuments, “Globalist Elite – Guidance by Machine Elves Contacted Thorough DMT,” Internet Archive, last modified May 14, 2012, accessed July 28, 2020, <https://archive.org/details/GlobalistElite-GuidanceByMachineElvesContactedThoroughDmt/01-AlexJonesExposesElitesChattingWithlittleGreyElvesUsingDmtSpiritualistGateway.flv>. ; *JRE Clips*, “Alex Jones Asks Eddie Bravo About Flat Earth & the Moon Landings | Joe Rogan,” February 28, 2019, YouTube

that are not extensively pandered to by Infowars are proud neo-Nazi's and QAnon supporters. Jones often compared and or connected events and developments that he perceived as being negative such as: the yearly meetings of some of the most prominent men in the world at Bohemian Grove in California, the developing police state in the United States and Arnold Schwarzenegger success as a celebrity and politician, with both past and modern Nazism.²⁶⁰ The agency of both Hitler and neo-Nazi groups was also often diminished in Jones's work. They were often portrayed as just assets of the New World Order.²⁶¹ However, he has expressed support for some conspiracy theories about, the real Jewish forces behind the current banking system, that are also supported by some neo-Nazi's.²⁶² Jones might partially ignore or reject neo-Nazi groups so he can maintain his perfect patriotic persona of a true American man who will defend the United States against any foreign enemy.²⁶³

Because of the specific values Jones had reported to be in peril, the many popular conspiracies he has embraced and because of the few politicians that he has promoted throughout his career has Jones been able to create content that is appealing to a large market of disaffected conservatives. Jones specifically portrayed former president Donald

video, 14:08, 0:00-7:00, <https://youtu.be/S-ku4zIJeSs>; *JRE Clips*, "JRE on Aliens (Compilation)," May 13, 2019, YouTube video, 26:47, 6:50-8:10, <https://youtu.be/bcwFRtCvAzg/>; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Eddie Bravo Debate Alex Jones On The Flat Earth Controversy," September 21, 2019, Banned video, 12:52, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5d8558832565c100131eed76>; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Flat Earth Guru Dave Weiss: Lays Out His Evidence That The Earth is Flat," September 21, 2019, Banned video, 48:14, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5d85562954d75d0013c8fa21>; *The David Knight Show*, "What Do We Really Know About UFO's," October 4, 2019, Banned video, 42:46, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5d979c6a70b7b10013e679f8>; *Celebrate Truth*, "Alex Jones Now Endorsing Flat Earth Investigation! Infowars Antarctica Special," October 30, 2019, YouTube video, 10:45, <https://youtu.be/YLSOoIDKfic>; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Project Bluebeam: Alien Invasion!," May 14, 2020, Banned video, 4:00, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5ebc7fcd244ac5001d245820>.

²⁶⁰ *TriCorneredHat*, "Police State 2000 Alex Jones FULL LENGTH," November 16, 2012, YouTube video, 2:02:18, 19:24-20:12 & 33:45-34:50, <https://youtu.be/V9HGfRrfv-Q>; *ChangeDaChannel*, "Martial Law 9/11: Rise of the Police State," June 3, 2014, YouTube video, 3:00:07, 1:53:33-1:56:24 & 2:18:18-2:23:33, <https://youtu.be/uzo9IAgyOr0>.

²⁶¹ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 283 & 291; Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2001, 1:27:00-1:27:40; *TriCorneredHat*, "Police State 3 – Total Enslavement – Alex Jones – FULL LENGTH," November 17, 2012, YouTube video, 1:55:40, 8:01-9:04, <https://youtu.be/o8RbOV7Id4>, 14:44-16:00; Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April, 26, 2015, 4:00-4:20.

²⁶² *TriCorneredHat*, "Police State 3," 16:30-17:06; *ChangeDaChannel*, "Martial Law 9/11," 8:20-11:05; *forestgamertube*, "Endgame Blueprint for Global Enslavement (Documentary Film by Alex Jones, 2007)," October 22, 2011, YouTube video, 2:19:30, 2:01:40-2:04:50, <https://youtu.be/tZcR5M-j0YE>; Dvir Abramovich, "Why I Campaigned to Ban David Icke," *Australian Jewish News*, March 1, 2019, accessed July 28, 2020, <https://ajn.timesofisrael.com/why-i-campaigned-to-ban-david-icke/>; Michael Colborne, "Neo-Nazis from Across Europe Rally in Budapest," *Al Jazeera*, February 8, 2020, accessed July 28, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/neo-nazis-europe-rally-budapest-200207083707437.html>.

²⁶³ Andrew J. Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture From the Second World War to the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 48.

Trump and the now retired libertarian politician Ron Paul frequently as the few allies Jones's side had that worked within the political establishment.²⁶⁴ These two politicians have both appeared on *The Alex Jones Show* and they both can be characterized as anti-establishment politicians.²⁶⁵ New disaffected conservatives could be reached by Jones simply by highlighting a specific relevant value that would be in peril, by vocalizing his support for a new widely popular conspiracy or by updating his core conspiracy with new allies such as Trump.

It is likely that some conservatives that have watched Jones over the years have established and maintained a parasocial relationship, "a cross-situational relationship that a viewer or user hold to a media person, which includes specific cognitive and affective component.", with him.²⁶⁶ I believe that we can assume that Jones at least has a parasocial relationship with part of his audience partially because of the many opportunities there are for parasocial interaction and because he has disclosed several times in my primary sources seemingly personal information with his audience.²⁶⁷ A media personality engaging in self-disclosure has been described as playing a role in the forming of parasocial relationships.²⁶⁸ Jones has engaged in self-disclosure several times by for example sharing with his audience in 2013 that he did not want to die but that he still fought the New World Order because he knew that otherwise his family would not have a future.²⁶⁹ The assumption that some audience members have a parasocial relationship can

²⁶⁴ Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 7, 2012, 1:03:30-1:03:50. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, December 16, 2012, 14:09-14:14.

²⁶⁵ Brandon Loran Maxwell, "The establishment vs. Ron Paul," *Hill*, December 21, 2011, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/campaign/200707-the-establishment-vs-ron-paul>. ; *Factbase Videos*, "Infowars: Alex Jones Interviews Donald Trump – December 2, 2015," November 3, 2017, YouTube video, 33:33, <https://youtu.be/4LeChPL0sLE>. ; *NewsBlip*, "Ron Paul Visits Alex Jones," May 24, 2018, YouTube video, 13:29, <https://youtu.be/T2Vybi7IkCo>. ; Rob York, "Trump, Paul and US anti-establishment leadership," *Asia Times*, November 26, 2020, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/11/trump-paul-and-us-anti-establishment-leadership/>. ; Adam M. Enders and Joseph E. Uscinski, "The Role of Anti-Establishment: Orientations During The Trump Presidency," *The Forum* 19, no. 1 (July 2021): 51. <https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2021-0003>.

²⁶⁶ Alan M. Rubin And Mary M. Step, "Impact of Motivation, Attraction, and Parasocial Interaction on Talk Radio listening," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 44, no. 4 (June 2010): 636. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4404_7.

²⁶⁷ Rubin, "Impact of Motivation," 636.

²⁶⁸ Siyoung Chung and Hichang Cho, "Fostering Parasocial Relationships with Celebrities on Social Media: Implications for Celebrity Endorsement," *Psychology and Marketing* 34, no. 4 (April 2017): 485. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21001>.

²⁶⁹ Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2011, 48:00-49:58 & 1:40:23-1:40:55. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April 24, 2013, 1:39:22-1:39:50, 1:41:00-1:41:47 & 1:56:06-1:56:31. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, "Globalist Shill Steven Colbert Call for Returning Troops from Afghanistan Be Used Against American Citizens," August 17, 2021, Banned video, 12:22, 2:00-2:26, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=611c08d77f69a4580127df0e>.

also be made because of the way many callers to his show interacted with him. Mario, from South Carolina shared his deepest fears about a FEMA drill that was taking place in Nevada.²⁷⁰ A parasocial relationship is also dependent on if the consumer of the product feels socially attracted to the media personality. Admiration might exist among Jones's audience of his bravery. He dares to stand up for what he believes in. Commonalities between the consumer and the media personality would also play a role in a parasocial relationship. Jones tried to show a large conservative audience that he valued the same conservative principles. The assumption that parasocial relationships exist can besides this be validated by the fact that two-thirds of his funding is apparently gained through the sale of products on the Infowars store. Research has shown that a connection exists between a person having a parasocial relationship with a media personality and the need an audience members feels to purchase products that are advertised by them. Being in a parasocial relationship would also positively affect the frequency of purchases of advertised items.²⁷¹ Jones is dependent on the demand and on the generosity of the Infowars audience if he wishes to keep his company running and he repeats this often. Infowars needs their help in the fight against the forces of darkness.²⁷² It is likely that some of them are willing to do this because of their parasocial relationship with him or one of his colleagues.

I would argue that leaving a parasocial relationship with Jones is made harder because of his usage of what has been described as the "paranoid style". "The paranoid style" can be recognized within a rhetoric if you can find an almighty enemy that is orchestrating a vast and sinister conspiracy "...to undermine or destroy a way of life.". Two other ideas that are often present when the "paranoid style" is used is that many eminent public figures are involved in the plots of the almighty enemy and that the current point in history is actually the turning point in the war that is being waged between an absolute good ingroup and the absolute evil almighty enemy. All these characteristics of the "paranoid style" can be found in my primary sources. The reoccurring almighty enemy is

²⁷⁰ Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, September 11, 2011, 78:26-81:19. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April 24, 2013, 1:25:10-1:29:40.

²⁷¹ Karina Sokolova And Hajer Kefi, "Instagram and YouTube Bloggers Promote it, Why Should I Buy? How Credibility And Parasocial Interaction Influence Purchase Intentions," *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 53 (March 2020): 6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.01.011>.

²⁷² "Support Us," Infowars Store, accessed August 18, 2021, <https://www.infowarsstore.com/support-infowars>. ; Alex Jones, September 11, 2011, 16:00-16:55. ; Alex Jones, "n.t.," The Alex Jones Show, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, November 7, 2012, 29:59-30:57. ; Alex Jones, April 24, 2013, 29:10-31:01. ; *War Room With Owen Shroyer*, "Emergency! Supreme Court Rules Against Second Amendment; Tries To Extinct Guns," November 13, 2019, Banned video, 29:40, 27:27-27:47, <https://79days.news/watch?id=5dcb9e7514c7b80027ba3035>.

the New World Order who are trying to establish a one-world dictatorship.²⁷³ The majority of people who hold any position of power and can be connected with the many conspiracies Jones has promoted are accused of being either members or tools of the ‘elites’.²⁷⁴ One side in the Infowars, the one for which Infowars would function as ‘...the tip of the spear...’, was described as essentially all good and the other side as absolute evil.²⁷⁵ Warlike language is a constant within Jones’s repertoire.²⁷⁶ Jones and his company have been involved in a war over the control of the media, the information wars also known as the Infowars.²⁷⁷ The idea that the current point of history was a turning point in the war for the future of humanity was often seen in Infowars advertisements. You needed to get your orders during the lull before the storm before the New World Order would start making its move.²⁷⁸ Jones did not just have value for true believers because he provided cheap necessary products but also because he would be able to predict all the globalist plots. This was also a possible motive for others who have employed the ‘paranoid style’.²⁷⁹

Jones’s constant use of the paranoid style makes it hard for a person to end the parasocial relationship because the threat posed by the almighty enemy seems all too real and the endless Infowars too important to walk away from because the notion of living under the New World Order was too frightening.

²⁷³ *TriCorneredHat*, “Police State 3 – Total Enslavement – Alex Jones – FULL LENGTH,” November 17, 2012, YouTube video, 1:55:40, 52:30-53:00, <https://youtu.be/o8RbOVC7Id4>.

²⁷⁴ *The Alex Jones Show*, “Politicians Caught Publicly Pledging Allegiance to the NWO,” May 16, 2020, Banned video, 40:52, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=5ebf23a7244ac5001d27e0b9>.

²⁷⁵ *DocX*, “Police State 2 The Takeover (Documentary by Alex Jones,” April 11, 2017, YouTube video, 2:02:48, 2:00:00-2:02:35, <https://youtu.be/DRuHedUXtR8>. ; Alex Jones, ‘n.t.’, *The Alex Jones Show*, Genesis Communication Network, Texas: Austin, GCN, April 26, 2015, 57:10-58:00. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, “Humanity Must Transcend the New World Order,” April 26, 2021, Banned video, 8:49, <https://freeworldnews.tv/watch?id=60872a4f9a697a0c4361935c>.

²⁷⁶ *forestgamertube*, “Endgame Blueprint for Global Enslavement (Documentary Film by Alex Jones, 2007),” October 22, 2011, YouTube video, 2:19:30, 2:16:52-2:17:50. ; *DocX*, “Police State 2,” 6:20-7:25. ; Alex Jones, April 26, 2015, 53:40-55:53 & 1:33:40-1:34:12.

²⁷⁷ *DocX*, “Police State 2.” 2:00:00-2:02:35. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, April 26, 2015, 57:10-58:00.

²⁷⁸ *The Alex Jones Show*, “MUST SEE: Wayfair/Amazon Child Trafficking Allegations Investigated,” July 13, 2020, Banned video, 31:18, 29:23-31:18, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5f0bab1f677a7f01e91f0bbd>. ; *The Alex Jones Show*, “UN Confirms Corona Lockdown Killing More Than Virus After 30 Million Now Starving,” April 23, 2020, Banned video, 13:34, 12:00-13:34, <https://banned.video/watch?id=5ea0d75cda56330040bbfc96>.

²⁷⁹ Adam Hodges, “The Paranoid Style In Politics: Ideological Underpinnings Of The Discourse of Second Amendment Absolutism,” *Journal of Language Aggression And Conflict* 3, no. 1 (October 2015): 95. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlac.3.1.04hod>. ; Ryan Neville-Shepard, “Paranoid Style and Subtextual Form in Modern Conspiracy Rhetoric,” *Southern Communication Journal* 83, no. 2 (January 2018): 121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1041794X.2017.1423106>.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have tried to answer two questions: ‘‘How has the content of Jones’s conspiracy theories evolved between 1998 and 2016?’’ and ‘‘What elements of Jones’s films and radio show, that can be observed between 1998 and 2016, have contributed to his ability to have a successful career as a media personality?’’. These questions were posed with the goal of providing insights into a not yet widely researched media personality who might have played a role in the radicalization of individuals. The questions are also relevant since they can offer insights that are useful for both sides of an academic debate about why conspiracy theories have become popular. Jones is an interesting figure, not only because of his theatrical performances, but also because he gained so many followers. He even got into contact with Donald Trump, one of the few politicians he has ever supported publicly. Trump and Jones have both profited widely from the growth of fear for security among a certain subsection of the American populace.

Jones’s success has always been partially dependent on his ability to find loyal audiences that were willing to invest in the Infowars operations. Several elements of Jones’s content have contributed to this ability. Firstly, Jones’s content shares certain characteristics with other popular conservative media. These are for example the presence of several accusations towards mainstream media about their deep-seated liberal bias. There is also the great number of times that Jones framed himself and his fellows as ‘oppressed outsiders.’ Thirdly, Jones’s content shares specific characteristics with the successful Fox news. Not unlike Fox news, Jones has always stucked to a consistent ideology that he presented as news.

Jones was able to build a big audience because the content that he released was appealing to a large market of disillusioned and/or dissatisfied conservatives. Values like gun rights and freedom of religion that were threatened by the villains in Jones’s conspiracy theories were all held very dear by the American conservatives. Besides this, Jones became specifically appealing to more extreme sub-factions within American conservatism. He incorporated many conspiracy theories into his own grand narrative such as the false flag theory that was applicable to the Waco siege and the Ruby Ridge standoff as being orchestrated by the government. Generally speaking, Jones claims to distrust most politicians. Exceptions like Ron Paul and Donald Trump spring from their being anti-establishment and their fitting in the mainstream of his target audience.

Because Jones publishes a lot of material every week, he is able to form and adapt his

grand narrative by adding new values, new popular conspiracy theories and new allies. His ability to maintain his audience can partially be explained by the parasocial relationships that a number of his followers are engaged in. Jones creates ample opportunity for these parasocial relationships in frequent radio shows and online. Self-disclosure is an important means to this goal. Social attraction and commonalities between the consumer and the media personality also played a role. Jones's constant usage of the "paranoid style" made it harder to end the parasocial relationship because of how almost everyone outside of the ingroup was portrayed as a mortal enemy and the world as extremely frightening.

Further quantitative analysis may shed more light on the precise influence of parasocial relationships on the buying behavior of Jones's clients. This will attribute to the understanding of Alex Jones and of his capability to build a career.

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