Illuminati

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This article is about the secret society. For the conspiracy theory, see New World Order (conspiracy theory). For other uses, see Illuminati (disambiguation).

The **Illuminati**[1] (plural of Latin *Illuminatus*, lit.{illuminated}) is a name given to several groups, both real and fictitious, that have been said to control the world behind the scenes for their own benefit. The Illuminati has been alleged to control most of the world's major institutions, including the media, education, religion, government, finance, and the entertainment industry.[2] Many conspiracy theorists claim that the Illuminati is a secret society that controls the world behind the scenes for its own benefit.[3]

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In subsequent use, "Illuminati" has been used when referring to various organizations which are alleged to be a continuation of the original Bavarian Illuminati or to have inherited its aims or have been unsolicited imitations. These organizations have often been accused of conspiring to control world affairs, by masterminding events and planting agents in government and corporations, in order to gain political power and influence and to promote a New World Order.[4] Many of these groups have been the subject of conspiracy theories and fictitious descriptions. Historians, the Illuminati as described in the literature and politics, the strange and bizarre in popular culture, the uses of the Illuminati has found its way into popular culture, appearing in dozens of movies, books, television series, video games, and music videos.

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History

Origins

Adam Weishaupt (1748–1830) became professor of Canon Law and practical philosophy at the University of Ingolstadt in 1775. He was the only non-clerical professor at an institution run by Jesuits whose teaching was based on Scholasticism. Weishaupt was a student of Scholasticism, but was also a student of philosophy and conspiracy and the occasional, and bizarre, conspiracy theory. Weishaupt was also a student of the Jesuits, who had created attempts to frustrate and discredit non-clerical staff, especially when course material contained conspiracy theories. Weishaupt was also a student of the Freemasons, who had been accused of being a secret society and conspiracy theorists.[5] Weishaupt was a student of several schools of thought and conspiracy theories.[6]

Finding Freemasonry expensive, and not open to his ideas, he founded his own society which was a system of series in grades based on those in Freemasonry, but with his own agenda.[7] His original society was to be a society of atheists, free thinkers, and those who had been persecuted by the Jesuits and other religious institutions. Weishaupt wanted the original society to be called "Perfectibilists", but he was persuaded to change it to "Order of Perfectibility". Later, Weishaupt and four students formed the Perfectibilists, taking the Order of Mercury as their symbol.[8] The members were to use aliases within the society, and Weishaupt was known as Spartacus. Weishaupt was the only member who was known to the other members. Each member was to recruit two members, but only Weishaupt knew the identities of the members he recruited. Weishaupt also required Roman Catholic converts to recruit Protestants.[9] In spring 1776, the order became known as the Illuminati, and was officially established on May 1, 1776.[10]

Weishaupt proposed initially the most ancient of mysteries, the Egyptian mysteries, which he had learned about from Freemasonry, and the Illuminati was to be a society of Egyptian priests. Weishaupt was also a student of the Jesuits, who had created attempts to frustrate and discredit non-clerical staff, especially when course material contained conspiracy theories. Weishaupt was also a student of several schools of thought and conspiracy theories.[6]

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Transition

Initially, with difficulty, discreet similar to the members from joining the Freemasons. Weishaupt decided to join the older order to acquire material to expand his own order. He was admitted to lodge "Theodore" of the Rite of Strict Observance early in February 1777. His progress through the three degrees of the lodge was rapid. Weishaupt was given the opportunity to be taught in secrecy the Egyptian mysteries by a great called Abbé Maximilian Lenoxa that these were secret rituals and knowledge of the older religion and the primitive church. Jesuits persecuted Lenoxa, and he was a friend of Weishaupt's father. Lenoxa was a student of Freemasonry, and was a member of the Rite of Strict Observance. Lenoxa, Baron Ditfurth, Weishaupt and Baron Bassus were the only members of the Illuminati who were not students.[11]

With little difficulty, it seemed was obtained from the Grand Lodge of Prussia called the Royal York for Friendship, and the new lodge was called Theodore of the Good Counsel. With the creation of Theodore, Baron Bassus became the Provincial Master of Bavaria. Bassus was the Provincial Master and quickly passed with Illuminati. The first initiates, a man called Nast, was persuaded to return home to Baden, and by July Weishaupt's order had 12 members.[12]

The next day, Lenoxa was initiated into the Illuminati Lodge. By establishing relationship with Lenoxa, Weishaupt was able to obtain material from the Grand Lodge of England, lodge Theodore became independently recognized, and able to declare its independence. As a new mother lodge, it could now receive lodges of its own. The recruiting drive amongst the Freemason masons also claimed the allegiance of Adolph Knigge.[13]

Attempt at revival

Convent of Wilhelmsbad

Anton Knigge

Knigge was introduced into 1780 in a convent of the Rite of Strict Observance by Costanzo Malvasia of Cremona, an infantry captain in the Bavarian army and a fellow Freemason. Knigge, still in his twenties, had already been a member of several lodges and was a well-known author. Knigge was a student of Freemasonry, and was