

Infobella: How Tacitus and Alex Jones Create Conspiracy through Natural Disaster

This paper compares the construction of conspiracy in Tacitus' Great Fire narrative from *Annales XV* and a post-Hurricane Katrina segment from the *Alex Jones Report* in order to further our understanding of conspiracy in the ancient and modern world. Although the mention of conspiracy theory often conjures up the image of a tin-foil hatted lunatic spouting off about JFK or crisis actors, conspiracies are often obsessively assembled, logically consistent (although not necessarily accurate) accounts of real-life events (Keeley 1999). Such obsessive narrative construction paired with deliberately restricted epistemological networks proves to be the basis for both conspiracies. On top of that, the pair use specific variations on persuasive rhetoric, including the "weighted alternative", attribution of information to unknown authors, and a deliberate manipulation of conspiratorial language, in order to win over their audience (Gibson 1998, Sullivan 1976). Finally, the pair blame the victims of disaster for their own destruction. This is a radical violation of one of the foundational tenets of conspiracy: the belief that the events explained by the conspiracy are the exclusive and unavoidable doing of the conspirators. Such a rare twist of the conspiratorial mindset is made doubly remarkable since both authors engage in it. Through these and other parallels, I show that despite their nearly 2000-year separation, both Alex Jones and Tacitus use national tragedy to build political conspiracy.

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