

Illuminati

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The **Illuminati** (plural of Latin *illuminatus*, "enlightened") is a name given to several groups, both real and fictitious. Historically, the name refers to the **Bavarian Illuminati**, an Enlightenment-era secret society founded on May 1, 1776. The society's goals were to oppose superstition, prejudice, religious influence over public life and abuses of state power, and to support women's education and gender equality. The Illuminati—along with other secret societies—were outlawed by the Bavarian ruler, Charles Theodore, with the encouragement of the Roman Catholic Church, and were permanently disbanded in 1785. In the several years following, the group was vilified by conservative and religious critics who claimed that they had regrouped and were responsible for the French Revolution.

In subsequent use, "Illuminati" refers to various organisations which claim or are purported to have links to the original Bavarian Illuminati or similar secret societies, though these links are unsubstantiated. They are often alleged to conspire to control world affairs, by masterminding events and planting agents in government and corporations, in order to gain political power and influence and to establish a New World Order. Central to some of the most widely known and elaborate conspiracy theories, the Illuminati have been depicted as lurking in the shadows and pulling the strings and levers of power in dozens of novels, movies, television shows, comics, video games and music videos.



Adam Weishaupt (1748–1830), founder of the Bavarian Illuminati

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History

Adam Weishaupt (1748-1830) was a professor of Canon Law and Practical philosophy at the University of Ingolstadt. He was the only non-clerical professor at an institution run by Jesuits, whose order had been dissolved in 1773. The Jesuits of Ingolstadt, however, still retained the purse strings and some power at the University, which they continued to regard as their own. Constant attempts were made to

frustrate and discredit non-clerical staff, especially when course material contained anything they regarded as liberal or Protestant. Weishaupt became deeply anti-clerical, resolving to spread the ideals of the Enlightenment (Aufklärung) through some sort of secret society of like-minded individuals.^[1]

Finding Freemasonry to be expensive, and not open to his ideas, he founded his own society which was to have a gradal system based on Freemasonry, but his own agenda.^[1] On 1 May 1776 Weishaupt and four students formed the *Bund der Perfektibilisten*, or Covenant of Perfectibility, taking the Owl of Minerva as their symbol.^[2] The members were to use aliases within the society. Weishaupt became *Spartacus*. Law students Massenhausen, Bauhof, Merz and Sutor became respectively *Ajax*, *Agathon*, *Tiberius* and *Erasmus Roterodamus*. Weishaupt later expelled Sutor for indolence.^{[3][4]}

Illuminati members took a vow of secrecy and pledged obedience to their superiors. Members were divided into three main classes, each with several degrees, and many Illuminati chapters drew membership from existing Masonic lodges. The goals of the Illuminati were to eliminate superstition, prejudice and the domination of government, philosophy and science by the Roman Catholic Church, to reduce oppressive state abuses of power, and to support the education of women and encourage their treatment as intellectual equals.^[5] Weishaupt's original plan was for the Order to be named the "Perfectibilists".^[1] The group has also been called the Bavarian Illuminati and its ideology "Illuminism".

Many influential intellectuals and progressive politicians counted themselves as members, including Ferdinand of Brunswick and the diplomat Xavier von Zwack, who was the Order's second-in-command.^[6] The Order had branches in most European countries and reportedly had around 2,000 members over a span of ten years.^[5] It attracted literary men such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Johann Gottfried Herder and the reigning dukes of Gotha and Weimar.

Fundamental changes occurred in the wake of the acceptance of Adolph Freiherr Knigge into the order. Knigge was a young author and Freemason who was steeped in the Western mystery traditions from an early age. On his admission to the order, in 1780, he was charged with recruiting in five areas in the German states, and was soon in charge of hundreds of pupils. Asking for admission to the higher degrees of the order, to teach them to his recruits, he discovered that these degrees only existed in Weishaupt's mind. He was obliged (with Weishaupt's full authority) to write them himself. When Weishaupt attempted to retroactively edit Knigge's work, the two men fell out. Knigge left the order in 1783, depriving Weishaupt of his best theoretician, recruiter, and apologist.^[7]

In 1777, Karl Theodor became ruler of Bavaria. He was a proponent of Enlightened Despotism and his government banned all secret societies including the Illuminati. Internal rupture and panic over succession preceded the society's downfall.^[5] A government edict dated March 2, 1785 "seems to have



been deathblow to the Illuminati in Bavaria". Weishaupt had fled and documents and internal correspondence, seized in 1786 and 1787, were subsequently published by the government in 1787.^[8] Von Zwack's home was searched and much of the group's literature was disclosed.^[6]

Barruel and Robison

Between 1797 and 1798, Augustin Barruel's *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* and John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy* publicised the theory that the Illuminati had survived and represented an ongoing international conspiracy. This included the claim that it was behind the French Revolution. Both books proved to be very popular, spurring reprints and paraphrases by others.^[9] A prime example of this is *Proofs of the Real Existence, and Dangerous Tendency, Of Illuminism* by Reverend Seth Payson, published in 1802.^[10] Some of the response to this was critical, for example Jean-Joseph Mounier's *On the Influence Attributed to Philosophers, Free-Masons, and to the Illuminati on the Revolution of France*.^{[11][12]}

The works of Robison and Barruel made their way to the United States, and across New England, Reverend Jedidiah Morse and others gave sermons against the Illuminati. Their sermons were printed and the matter was followed in newspapers. Concern died down in the first decade of the 1800s, although it revived from time to time in the Anti-Masonic movement of the 1820s and 30s.^[1]

Modern Illuminati

Several recent and present-day fraternal organisations claim to be descended from the original Bavarian Illuminati and openly use the name "Illuminati". Some of these groups use a variation on the name "The Illuminati Order" in the name of their own organisations,^{[13][14]} while others, such as the Ordo Templi Orientis, have "Illuminati" as a level within their organisation's hierarchy. However, there is no evidence that these present-day groups have amassed significant political power or influence, and rather than trying to remain secret, they promote unsubstantiated links to the Bavarian Illuminati as a means of attracting membership.^[5]

Popular culture

Modern conspiracy theory

There is no evidence that the original Bavarian Illuminati society survived its suppression in 1785.^[5] However, writers such as Mark Dice,^[15] David Icke, Texe Marrs, Jüri Lina and Morgan Gricar have argued that the Bavarian Illuminati have survived, possibly to this day.

Many modern conspiracy theories propose that world events are being controlled and manipulated by a secret society calling itself the Illuminati.^{[16][17]} Conspiracy theorists have claimed that many notable people were or are members of the Illuminati. Presidents of the United States are a common target for such claims.^{[18][19]}

Other theorists contend that a variety of historical events were orchestrated by the Illuminati, from the Battle of Waterloo, the French Revolution and President John F. Kennedy's assassination to an alleged communist plot to hasten the New World Order by infiltrating the Hollywood film industry.^{[20][21]}

Some conspiracy theorists claim that the Illuminati observe Satanic rituals.^{[22][23]}

Novels

The Illuminati, or fictitious modern groups called the Illuminati, play a central role in the plots of novels, for example *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson. They also make an appearance in *Foucault's Pendulum* by Umberto Eco and *Angels and Demons* by Dan Brown. A mixture of historical fact and established conspiracy theory, or pure fiction, is used to portray them.

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Other reading

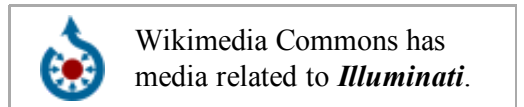
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