

How conspiracy theories in the U.S. became more personal, more cruel, and more mainstream after the Sandy Hook shootings | Nieman Journalism Lab

By Amanda J. Crawford

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Conspiracy theories are powerful forces in the U.S. They have damaged public health amid a global pandemic, shaken faith in the democratic process and helped spark a violent assault on the U.S. Capitol in January 2021.

These conspiracy theories are part of a dangerous misinformation crisis that has been building for years in the U.S.

American politics has long had a paranoid streak, and belief in conspiracy theories is nothing new. But as the news cycle reminds us daily, outlandish conspiracy theories born on social media now regularly achieve mainstream acceptance and are echoed by people in power.

As a journalism professor at the University of Connecticut, I have studied the misinformation around the mass shooting that took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School on Dec. 14, 2012. I consider it the first major conspiracy theory of the modern social media age, and I believe we can trace our current predicament to the tragedy's aftermath.

[...]

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