

Illuminati

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This article is about the secret society. For the film, see [Illuminata \(film\)](#). For the Muslim esoteric school, see [Illuminationism](#). For other uses, see [Illuminati \(disambiguation\)](#).



This article includes a [list of references](#), but **its sources remain unclear because it has insufficient [inline citations](#)**. Please help to [improve](#) this article by [introducing](#) more precise citations. *(April 2012)*



[Adam Weishaupt](#), founder of the Bavarian Illuminati.

The **Illuminati** (plural of [Latin](#) *illuminatus*, "enlightened") is a name given to several groups, both real (historical) and fictitious. Historically the name refers to the **Bavarian Illuminati**, an [Enlightenment](#)-era [secret society](#) founded on May 1, 1776. In more modern contexts the name refers to a purported conspiratorial organization which is alleged to mastermind events and control world affairs through [governments](#) and [corporations](#) to establish a [New World Order](#). In this context the *Illuminati* are usually represented as a modern version or continuation of the [Bavarian](#) Illuminati.

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History

The movement was founded on May 1, 1776, in [Ingolstadt](#) ([Upper Bavaria](#)) as the Order of the Illuminati, with an initial membership of five,^[1] by Jesuit-taught [Adam Weishaupt](#) (d. 1830),^[2] who was the first [lay](#) professor of [canon law](#) at the [University of Ingolstadt](#).^[3] It was made up of [freethinkers](#) as an offshoot of the [Enlightenment](#) and seems to have been modeled on the [Freemasons](#).^[4] The Illuminati's 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.

Originally Weishaupt had planned the order to be named the "Perfectibilists".^[1] The group has also been called the Bavarian Illuminati and its ideology has been called "Illuminism". Many influential intellectuals and [progressive](#) politicians counted themselves as members, including [Ferdinand of Brunswick](#) and the diplomat [Xavier von Zwack](#), the second-in-command of the order.^[5] The order had branches in most European countries: it reportedly had around 2,000 members over the span of ten years.^[3] It attracted literary men such as [Johann Wolfgang von Goethe](#) and [Johann Gottfried Herder](#) and the reigning dukes of [Gotha](#) and [Weimar](#).

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 its downfall, which was affected by the [Secular Edict](#) made by the Bavarian government.^[3] The March 2, 1785 edict "seems to have been deathblow to the Illuminati in Bavaria." Weishaupt had fled and documents and internal correspondences, seized in 1786 and 1787, were subsequently published by the government in 1787.^[6] Von Zwack's home was searched to disclose much of the group's literature.^[5]

Barruel and Robison

Between 1797 and 1798 [Augustin Barruel](#)'s *[Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism](#)* and [John Robison](#)'s *[Proofs of a Conspiracy](#)* both publicized the theory that the Illuminati had survived and represented an ongoing international conspiracy, including the claim that it was behind the [French Revolution](#). Both books proved to be very popular, spurring reprints and paraphrases by others^[7] (a prime example is *[Proofs of the Real Existence, and Dangerous Tendency, Of Illuminism](#)* by Reverend Seth Payson, published in 1802).^[8] Some response was critical, such as [Jean-Joseph Mounier](#)'s *[On the Influence Attributed to Philosophers, Free-Masons, and to the Illuminati on the Revolution of France](#)*.^[citation needed]

Robison and Barruel's works made their way to the United States. Across [New England](#), Reverend [Jedidiah Morse](#) and others sermonized against the Illuminati, their sermons were printed, and the matter followed in newspapers. The concern died down in the first decade of the 1800s, though had some revival during the [Anti-Masonic movement](#) of the 1820s and 30s.^[11]

Modern Illuminati

In addition to the supposed shadowy and secret organization several modern fraternal groups claim to be the "heirs" of the Bavarian Illuminati and have openly used the name "Illuminati" in founding their own rites. Some, such as the multiple groups that call themselves by some variation on "The Illuminati Order",^{[9][10]} use the name directly in the name of their organization, while others, such as the [Ordo Templi Orientis](#), use the name as a grade of initiation within their organization.

See also [The Family](#).

Popular culture

Main article: [Illuminati in popular culture](#)

Modern conspiracy theory

Main article: [New World Order \(conspiracy theory\) - Illuminati](#)

Writers such as [Mark Dice](#),^[11] [David Icke](#), [Texe Marrs](#), Jüri Lina and Morgan Gricar have argued that the Bavarian Illuminati survived, possibly to this day. Many of these theories propose that world events are being controlled and manipulated by a [secret society](#) calling itself the Illuminati.^{[12][13]} [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.^{[14][15]}

A key figure in the [conspiracy theory](#) movement, [Myron Fagan](#), devoted his latter years to finding evidence that a variety of historical events from [Waterloo](#), [The French Revolution](#), President [John F. Kennedy's assassination](#) and an alleged communist plot to hasten the [New World Order](#) by infiltrating the [Hollywood](#) film industry, were all orchestrated by the Illuminati.^{[16][17]}

Novels

The Illuminati (or fictitious modern groups called the Illuminati) play a central role in the plots of novels, such as [The Illuminatus! Trilogy](#) by [Robert Shea](#) and [Robert Anton Wilson](#); in [Foucault's Pendulum](#) by [Umberto Eco](#); and [Angels and Demons](#) by [Dan Brown](#). A mixture of historical fact, established conspiracy theory, or pure fiction, is used to portray them.

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External links



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