

Assassination research, “conspiracy theory” and a review of Oliver Stone’s *JFK*

by Dennis Riches October 2022

Michael Parenti, [*The JFK Assassination and the Gangster Nature of the State*](#), Berkley, California, November 22, 1993, 47:15~

Archbishop Romero of El Salvador was a member of the Salvadoran aristocracy... the minute he ... made some critical remarks and about the war, some favorable remarks about the poor, he was assassinated. I doubt, if he hadn't been assassinated, that Salvadoran history would have been much different. Does this mean that solidarity groups in this country and El Salvador should not have tried to make his murder an issue that revealed the homicidal gangster nature of the Salvadoran state? Instead of seizing the opportunity, some left writers condescendingly ascribe a host of mass psychology motivations and emotional needs to those of us who are concerned about the JFK assassination. They psychologize about our illusions of false dreams, our longings for messiahs and father figures, our inability to face unpleasant realities the way they can. They deliver patronizing admissions about our conspiracy captivation and Camelot yearnings. They urge us not to escape into fantasy. They are the cognoscenti who guide us and out-left us on the JFK assassination, a subject about which they don't know a goddamn thing and whose significance they will never be able and have not been able to grasp. I have a different name for our interests. It is not JFK worship. It's not Camelot yearnings, as the left critics would say. It's not big evils and conspiracy titillation, as the mainstream media would say. Our interest is born of democratic struggle, a desire to know what is going on, a desire to have rulers who are worthy of our name and the name of democracy.¹

Part 1

When Donald Trump became president of the United States, many Americans asked with fevered gasps whether the country is *on the verge of* fascism or *heading toward* totalitarianism. Is democracy dying? Has the Republic failed? The irony is that such questions have been asked at every pivotal point in the country's history—during the destruction of the original inhabitants of the land, during the Civil War, and at the end of the 19th century when the US occupied the Hawaiian Kingdom and waged wars overseas and became an empire. These questions arose again during WWI when military necessity crushed free speech, deported immigrants and put dissenters in jail, later when the atom bombs were dropped on Japan, when Nazi and Japanese war criminals were rehabilitated and used to fight against the Soviet Union. And the questions were raised most emphatically during the half decade of assassinations from 1963-1968: JFK, Malcolm X, MLK, and RFK. It is strange that Americans have this capacity to perpetually feel that totalitarianism is a threat just over the horizon but not yet upon them. They are incapable of recognizing the state of inverted totalitarianism that has already taken hold.² This essay, updated November 2021, looks back at the assassination of JFK fifty-eight years ago and also reviews the impact of Oliver Stone's film *JFK*, which appeared thirty years ago at about the mid-way point of these fifty-eight years.

Some people who were deeply affected by the assassination of President Kennedy say that every autumn reminds them of the strange days of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 and the assassination in November 1963. The assassination date falls close to American Thanksgiving when we should all give thanks to John F. Kennedy who, alone among all his advisors—even his brother Robert, thought it would be best not to invade Cuba and possibly start a nuclear war. We also have to forgive him for his role in escalating that danger in the first place.³ The autumn season is when we reap what we have sown. It is also the time of Armistice Day, Halloween, All Saints Day, and the Day of the Dead. It's only natural that in this twilight season before winter we think more about mortality and the dark deeds of a different kind of Black Friday that occurred in November 1963.

After 1962, there were other close encounters with nuclear war in other autumns. Exactly twenty years after the Kennedy assassination, a series of events in the autumn of 1983 reminded the world about the threat of nuclear war that had not been felt so keenly since 1962—a threat that was and still is always present. On September 26, 1983, three weeks after the Soviet military had shot down Korean Air Lines Flight 007, Stanislav Petrov, duty officer at a Soviet early-warning system noted the system reported six incoming missiles from the United States. He correctly judged the report to be a false alarm and is credited with having prevented a retaliatory nuclear attack—possibly, assuming officers up the chain of command wouldn't have come to the same conclusion. In November that year, the NATO war drills called Able Archer had an unprecedented level of realism that was noticed by Soviet military leaders. In response, they readied their nuclear forces and placed air units in East Germany and Poland on alert. On November 20, 1983, the fictional film *The Day After* depicted apocalyptic nuclear war for an audience of 100 million American television viewers. Much later, in 2018, the US government announced it would withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) that was signed in 1987, which prompted General Vladimir Shamanov, head of the Russian lower house of parliament's defense committee, to say Russia's response might be the reactivation of Russian military facilities in Cuba, if Cuba agreed.⁴ What could possibly go wrong?

It was my own studies of nuclear history that led me back to thinking about the JFK assassination and the experience of watching Oliver Stone's *JFK* in 1991. My interest was also renewed when I got a chance to visit Dealey Plaza in 2013 and spoke with a couple guys on the street who were selling pamphlets that countered the official version one can find in the 6th floor museum in the schoolbook depository. These guys were out there every day selling their pamphlets to the tourists and reminiscing about the time they were extras on the set of *JFK*.

The film left a big impression on me in 1991, but after a while it seemed like a hopeless rabbit hole to go down. There were too many obsessive kooks there, and there were more important things happening in the present. It would be foolish to spend much time debating the arcane details of the various theories about the assassination because while that might seem like the pursuit of justice, it also involves “playing their game.” The perpetrators of the assassination have been gaslighting “conspiracy buffs” for almost sixty years now with misdirection and misinformation. You can't prove the obvious to someone who is determined to deny the obvious, and the case will never be solved with “smoking gun” evidence. We are left with a few late-life and deathbed confessions of CIA agents, but most of the agents kept their omerta and died with their secrets. It's obvious that Oswald was a patsy, so why get obsessed about the details? Nonetheless, as Michael Parenti said, it is important to study the JFK assassination for what it reveals about the nature of the gangster state. I read several books about the development of nuclear arsenals

during the 20th century and eventually came to the same point as the veteran anti-nuclear activist James Douglass. One has to look into the JFK assassination, and the other assassinations of the 1960s, to understand the nature of the evil we are dealing with.

Jim Douglass, author of *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters*⁵

Jim Douglass was a prominent nuclear disarmament activist for decades before he turned his attention to the assassination of JFK and published one of the most thoroughly researched and powerful accounts of the JFK presidency and the assassination. He was interviewed on [TalkingstickTV in early 2000](#), commenting on the significance of the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X:

[They] allow us to see what's happening today in a way that is more profound than anything else I've found. How does it [the MLK assassination] relate to John Kennedy's assassination, or Robert Kennedy's, and then eventually Malcolm X's as well? And I found the same patterns in all four of them, but especially the same patterns in us, and I'm talking about myself personally. I'm talking about a collective reality, the way we see things in this country, and I began to realize there's an extraordinary denial in us as a people when it comes to dealing with the question of systemic evil within our system, right here, in much more profound ways than anybody on the left, for example, is going to acknowledge any more than any of the rest of us is going to acknowledge. I mean when it comes to the Central Intelligence Agency being involved in assassinations abroad, many people will acknowledge that. When it comes to them doing exactly the same thing in this country, that's another thing. We don't want to deal with that. So I think it's a key to seeing [George Orwell's] 1984 in action in 2000.

It has now been (in 2022) fifty-nine years since the Kennedy assassination, and thirty years since the release of the film *JFK*. The film recounts the events leading to the assassination, the murder of the president, and the one occasion when the assassination was examined in a court of law. It explains the crime through the non-fiction story of the former New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison (Kevin Costner) who, three years after the crime, began to “wake up” and realize he could build a case around people in New Orleans whom he believed had conspired with Lee Harvey Oswald (Gary Oldman) (the sole perpetrator, according to the official government line) in the year before the assassination.

The film is based upon Garrison's book *On the Trail of the Assassins* ⁶ and on Jim Marr's book *Crossfire*.⁷ Garrison filed charges against New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw (Tommy Lee Jones) for his alleged participation in a conspiracy to assassinate the president. Garrison convinced the jury that there was evidence of a conspiracy but did not convince them that Shaw was involved in it. Garrison lost the case but was regarded as a hero by many Americans who applauded him for having exposed the absurd claims underlying the “lone gunman” and “magic bullet” theory.

The Stones on the JFK assassination:

Oliver Stone: A conspiracy involving the CIA, the Pentagon, the FBI, the Secret Service, Cuban exiles, the Mafia, the oil industry, and the military industrial complex killed JFK and participated in the coverup of the crime.

Roger Stone: Same as above, with an added emphasis on the complicity of Lyndon Johnson.

Rolling Stones: I shouted out, “Who killed the Kennedys?” when after all it was you and me.

At one point in the film, Garrison seems to know he will lose, but assures his staff that even if that is so, the effort will have been worthwhile. They were bringing the assassination to light in a court of law, taking a first step of exposing the crime and the coverup that followed it. In fact, it is hard to see how Garrison could have got a conviction and proven definitively that Clay Shaw conspired with Lee Harvey Oswald to kill the president. He tried to show that Clay Shaw had links to the CIA. He brought forth witnesses who said they had seen Shaw and Oswald together talking angrily with Cuban exiles about JFK and vague plans to kill him, but he was not going to get plea bargains or confessions, or any evidence of Shaw paying assassins or giving logistical support to an assassination plot. Garrison must have known that he was writing history—speaking to the future by pulling the first strings in a very tangled knot. He was laying the ground for future investigations by using the fear of perjury charges to get sworn testimonies on the record. The best he could do was to get testimony that linked Oswald to Shaw and Shaw to the CIA, then that would be the first step for other investigations. If the trial had established that Shaw had links to both the CIA and Oswald, that could have led to other trials in which Shaw would be subpoenaed to testify. But such compelled witnesses had a tendency to suddenly be suicided or killed in car crashes on deserted highways. For a glimpse into the mind of the real Garrison in 1969—not the characterization of him created by Stone and Costner—see the long-lost interview with him republished in 2019 on the website *Kennedys and King*.⁸

The film was criticized for taking many creative liberties with reality, but with the passage of time its virtues and accomplishments have become more apparent. It provided a compelling history lesson for the large segment of the population that doesn't usually dive deep into history. Like the trial itself, it created a forum for a renewed public discourse about the assassination.

Through monologues dropped into the dramatic narrative, the film delivered what are, effectively, two long history lectures to audiences who were expecting to be entertained in the usual way, and this is the greatest and most original achievement of the film. Writers of dramas have always said their mission is to instruct and delight, but few Hollywood directors would dare to ask audiences to absorb so much instruction. One lecture is given in the form of a twenty-minute monologue by Mr. X, a fictionalized character resembling Fletcher Prouty, a high-ranking intelligence officer who resigned and became a critic of the intelligence establishment. He authored *JFK: The CIA, Vietnam, and the Plot to Assassinate John F. Kennedy*.⁹ The other lecture comes during Jim Garrison's thirty-three-minute climactic monologue during the trial of Clay Shaw. I call these lectures because in their substance that is what they are, but they are placed into the drama in a way that makes them flow seamlessly with the narrative.

Shaw was acquitted, but in 1979, after his death, Richard Helms, Director of Covert Operations in 1963 (Director of Central Intelligence 1966 to 1973), admitted under oath to the US Senate's Church Committee that Clay Shaw had worked for the CIA. This statement vindicated Garrison and showed that Shaw had committed perjury when he said during the trial that he had never had any association with the CIA.

Thucydides, Richard Crawley (translator), *The History of the Peloponnesian War* (Athens, 431 BC), CHAPTER XXV Oligarchical Coup d'Etat at Athens (Excerpt)

Meanwhile [the conspirators'] cry in public was that... not more than five thousand should share in the government, and those such as were most able to serve the state in person and in purse. But this was a mere catchword for the multitude, as the authors of the revolution were really to govern... they discussed nothing that was not approved of by the conspirators, who both supplied the speakers and reviewed in advance what they were to say. Fear, and the sight of the numbers of the conspirators, closed the mouths of the rest; or if any ventured to rise in opposition, he was presently put to death in some convenient way, and there was neither search for the murderers nor justice to be had against them if suspected; but the people remained motionless, being so thoroughly cowed that men thought themselves lucky to escape violence, even when they held their tongues... it was impossible for any one to open his grief to a neighbor and to concert measures to defend himself, as he would have had to speak either to one whom he did not know, or whom he knew but did not trust. Indeed all the popular party approached each other with suspicion, each thinking his neighbor concerned in what was going on, the conspirators having in their ranks persons whom no one could ever have believed capable of joining an oligarchy; and these it was who made the many so suspicious, and so helped to procure impunity for the few, by confirming the commons in their mistrust of one another.

Part 2

On the left of the American political spectrum there are generally two views about why Kennedy was assassinated. Some say his intent in 1963 to end the Cold War and seek peace with the communist world was the reason he was targeted. This view says that he became a different man after the missile crisis and wanted to drastically alter the course of the Cold War. He sought détente with Khrushchev and wanted to reform the CIA, end American involvement in Vietnam and reconcile with Cuba. He also intended to stop Israel from developing a nuclear arsenal. In Indonesia, where the CIA had been carrying out a destabilization project for many years, JFK wanted to help Sukarno stay in power and provide developmental aid. Inside the US, he wanted to advance civil rights and eradicate the pervasive influence of organized crime on American institutions. In June 1963, he made his famous speech at American University (published in *Pravda* but not in the American press) which seemed to indicate this new direction was sincere and radical. Many believe these are the reasons he was assassinated by enemies within the national security state.

The other view, criticized by Michael Parenti in the citation above, holds that this talk of a new direction was just talk, the elegant speechifying that Kennedy and other presidents tailor according to what an audience wants to hear. In 2009, we heard President Obama give a speech about ridding the world of nuclear weapons, and he won the Nobel Peace Prize soon afterward. Yet during his time as president, he approved the one-trillion-dollar plan to renew the US nuclear arsenal, and he made no progress on disarmament. If he had died shortly after his speech, like Kennedy, his early speeches might be held up endlessly as evidence that he was the last great hope for world peace.

In Kennedy's case, his aspirational speeches frightened his domestic enemies into plotting against him. He had not converted to Marxist-Leninist ideology, but his agenda was still too much for the enormous financial interests that were threatened. He was still anti-communist, but not anti-communist enough for extremists and arms makers who feared defense budget cuts and peaceful co-existence with ideological foes. Kennedy never got a chance to act on his plan to end the Cold War, so we will never know what he might have tried to accomplish or could have actually accomplished. His greatest achievements were avoiding nuclear war in October 1962 and the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963 that halted atmospheric nuclear tests. It is doubtful whether Richard Nixon or Lyndon Johnson would have been able to peacefully resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis or been interested in pursuing full ratification of the test ban treaty. Aside from these achievements, however, it is likely that in order to be re-elected in 1964, JFK would have spoken little about a transformative agenda. Nonetheless, just talking about it behind the scenes as a goal to pursue after re-election made him too much of a threat to tolerate.

Perhaps the most famous critique of Kennedy as the lost peacemaker is Noam Chomsky's *Rethinking Camelot*, written in 1993 as a response to Oliver Stone's film. Chomsky contended that Kennedy only talked peace from a position of strength which he thought he had gained from "staring down" Khrushchev during the missile crisis:

As for the internal record, it reveals only JFK's advocacy of withdrawal after victory [in Vietnam] is secure, and exhortations to everyone to "focus on winning the war." It reveals further that the failure of the Diem-Nhu regime to show sufficient enthusiasm for that task was a factor in the effort of JFK and his advisers to overthrow it, only enhanced by the Diem-Nhu gestures towards political settlement and the increasingly insistent calls for US withdrawal. These were regarded as a dangerous threat, not an opportunity to carry out the alleged intent to withdraw... It seems more than coincidental that fascination with tales of intrigue about Camelot lost reached their peak in 1992 just as discontent with all institutions reached historic peaks, along with a general sense of powerlessness and gloom about the future, and the traditional one-party, two-faction candidate-producing mechanism was challenged by a billionaire with a dubious past, a "blank slate" on which one's favorite dreams could be inscribed. The audiences differ, but the JFK-Perot movements share a millenarian cast, reminiscent of the cargo cults of South Sea islanders who await the return of the great ships with their bounty. These developments tell us a good bit about the state of American culture at a time of general malaise, unfocused anger and discontent, and effective dissolution of the means for the public to become engaged in a constructive way in determining their fate.¹⁰

As for the prospect that Kennedy's "third way" Alliance for Progress offered much of an alternative to developing countries, Chomsky cites Stephen Rabe to make the point that in spite of the lofty rhetoric,

Kennedy's softer, kinder, less anti-communist Third World development plan was accompanied by an increase in support for repressive anti-communist regimes in Latin America:

Through its recognition policy, internal security initiatives, and military and economic aid programs, the [Kennedy] Administration demonstrably bolstered regimes and groups that were undemocratic, conservative, and frequently repressive. The short-term security that anti-Communist elites could provide was purchased at the expense of long-term political and social democracy.¹¹

Christopher Hitchens, back in the days before he supported such aggression as the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, agreed with Chomsky that Kennedy was far from being a "Camelot" figure. In the early 1990s when the "Kennedy as lost savior" theory was in full swing, thanks in part to Oliver Stone's film, Christopher Hitchens commented wryly:

[The film *JFK*] opens with Eisenhower saying America should beware of the military industrial complex, but it fails to say that Kennedy ran against Eisenhower and Nixon from the right, accusing them of selling the country to the Russians, accusing them of giving Cuba away, inventing a missile gap that wasn't there, and moving into Vietnam... [The film said] the country lost its innocence by losing this man [Kennedy]... A country that had been through Hiroshima and McCarthyism hadn't any innocence to lose... like everyone else in my generation, I can remember exactly where I was standing on the fateful day when John Fitzgerald Kennedy nearly killed me because I can remember the Cuba crisis and I can remember him, so far from hating nuclear war and nuclear weapons, being prepared to risk nuclear war for a quarrel with Cuba that he was conducting by means of a hit team, originally, employing the Mafia to try and kill Castro.¹²

This theme was taken up later by Seymour Hersh in 1998 in his harsh critique *The Dark Side of Camelot* which covered mostly Kennedy's reckless behavior with women that compromised national security, left him open to blackmail, and would have ruined his political career, if the fawning press had stopped turning a blind eye to his behavior.¹³ Like Hitchens, Hersh was also critical of the film *JFK* for overlooking Kennedy's connections to organized crime. Hersh alleged that Joseph Kennedy had called on the organized crime figure Sam Giancana to help his son get elected, thus they expected to be left alone if JFK were elected. Instead, Robert Kennedy became attorney general and aggressively prosecuted the Teamsters and organized crime. The motives of organized crime for killing JFK are thus explained as an attempt primarily to eliminate RFK. If they killed only RFK, JFK would come after them even harder. If they killed JFK instead, RFK would also be out of power, and that is exactly what happened. Two birds with one stone.

No member of the Kennedy clan has spoken as frankly and critically as Robert F. Kennedy Junior about the involvement of the security state in the assassinations of the 1960s. He addressed Hersh's allegation in his book *American Values*, pointing out that it didn't stand up to logic. He stated that the story was largely a contrivance of Sam Halpern, a CIA official who "took on the career-long task of tarring the Kennedy name." He asks:

Is it possible that my father—his brother's control-every-detail campaign manager—would authorize his father to conspire with a fanatically vindictive villain [Giancana] to commit a federal

crime and fix a national election, having himself only a few months earlier, not only picked a fight with this murderous gangster but also humiliated him on national TV? ... Is it possible that my grandfather, with his abiding sense of propriety, would have gone behind the back of his two sons to negotiate a reckless scheme with their sworn enemy—a caper that would have brought down the entire campaign if Giancana chose to expose it?”¹⁴

Stone and Garrison addressed the question of the involvement of organized crime in the assassination. In the film when Jim Garrison is shown rejecting the notion that the assassination could have been *only* a Mafia hit, he states:

I don't doubt their involvement at a low level. Could the mob change the parade route? Or eliminate the protection for the President? Could the mob send Oswald to Russia and get him back? Get the FBI, the CIA and the Dallas Police to mess up the investigation? Get the Warren Commission appointed to cover it up? Wreck the autopsy? Influence the national media to go to sleep? Since when has the mob used anything but 38's for hits up close? The mob wouldn't have the guts or the power for something of this magnitude. Assassins need payrolls, schedules, times, orders. This was a military-style ambush (02:11:30~).

Nonetheless, Hitchens and Hersh were correct to point out that *JFK* was a little too hagiographic and sentimental, conveniently overlooking the side of Kennedy that was not so different from presidents who came before and after him. Yet one can still be outraged by the assassination conspiracy without having to hold onto the idealized vision of a “lost king.” One need not even like JFK to be outraged by his murder. The assassination removed the head of state chosen by the American people.

Sex Scandals and the Tabloid Press in the 1990s

Scandal reporting about the Kennedy brothers reached its peak, curiously, after the film *JFK* was released in 1991. Reports appeared in the tabloid press in these years after both men were dead and could not respond to allegations. Some of the tales were spread by unreliable sources motivated by the desire for money and attention. It is also likely that as time passed and fewer people accepted the findings of the Warren Report, elements within government agencies found it useful feed these tabloids, to carry out the posthumous second assassination of the Kennedys; that is, to knock the halo off their heads. It was a new way to muddy the waters and pile absurd conspiracy theories on top of sound conspiracy theories. Whatever truth there is to the allegations, if the Kennedy brothers had really had *all* the affairs and dirty deeds attributed to them, they would have had no time to sustain their political careers, perform their job duties or spend time with their families. And JFK apparently did it all with a bad back and Addison's disease. It's also doubtful that such excesses could have been hidden from the media and not used successfully by political rivals at the time, regardless of what people say about things being different then. Nonetheless, there is a great deal of corroboration in the accounts of persons close to the Kennedy men saying they were indeed notorious for reckless sexual behavior that limited their effectiveness in government. However, much of the “tabloid stuff” is obviously wild exaggeration—distracting, wild conspiracy theory that serves to discredit all attempts to discover what really happened in the political assassinations of the 1960s. Some dwell on the “dark side of Camelot,” while others (particularly the

Kennedy family) gloss it over, making an equal effort to create unnecessary halos over the Kennedy brothers' heads. See James DiEugenio's lengthy essay, [The Posthumous Assassination of JFK](#), for more on this topic.¹⁵

In Stone's documentary film and book *The Untold History of the United States*, co-authored with historian Peter Kuznick, the assessment of John Kennedy is more balanced than it is in his 1991 film. The authors note the numerous domestic enemies Kennedy had made, but do not focus much on who killed him or why. They simply state that the killers and their motives may never be known. They also cite many of the contradictory statements made by Kennedy, before and after the October 1962 crisis, as he discussed his foreign policy, plans for Vietnam, and strategy for re-election. These suggest Kennedy never gave up his personal belief that communism had to be challenged, and that he would not sacrifice political survival by giving up the anti-communist crusade—a stance which shifted blame to American voters. They note that he told journalist Charles Bartlett:

We don't have a prayer of staying in Vietnam. We don't have a prayer of prevailing there. Those people hate us. They are going to throw our tails out of there at almost any point. But I can't give up a piece of territory like that to the Communists and then get the American people to re-elect me.¹⁶

They go on to add:

In July 1963, [Kennedy] told a news conference that “for us to withdraw from that effort would mean a collapse not only of South Vietnam but Southeast Asia.” The fact that when he did discuss withdrawal, he made it contingent upon being able to depart victoriously, also fed the belief that he had no intention of changing course.¹⁷

Much of the confusion on this matter could be a result of people equating Kennedy's progressive agenda with a decision to stop fighting communism. In 1963, Kennedy and Khrushchev sought ways to avoid a repeat of the tensions that occurred during the 1962 missile crisis, but this does not mean Kennedy would have stood aside while Latin America, newly independent African nations, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and The Philippines chose socialism, or even a non-aligned form of economic nationalism that threatened the interests of American corporations. Nonetheless, I have to conclude, after having read the literature listed in the notes below over several years, that Parenti was right and Chomsky was wrong on this matter. Kennedy was indeed attempting what we can call in retrospect an American *glasnost*. He was threatening to move the world in a direction that terrified the establishment, even though he was not very radical and publicly he was saying every conventional thing he needed to say to get re-elected. Privately and quietly he was pushing a bolder agenda. The CIA knew about his backchannel “secret” talks with Castro and Khrushchev, assisted by the “uppity” female television journalist Lisa Howard, who would be “suicided” in 1965. Banks, oil companies, steel makers, the Teamsters, the automobile manufacturers, racial segregationists, and organized crime could not allow any drift in this direction. If Kennedy still seemed to be maintaining the usual American foreign policy, one must keep in mind that he was operating in a system with many checks and balances on his power, some of them constitutional, others not. The mighty ship of state is a massive oil tanker, and it cannot be easily steered to a new course. Throughout

his presidency, Kennedy navigated by making contradictory statements about his plans and continuing standard cold war policies.

The assassination stands as the crime of the century, as far as Americans should be concerned. It was the event that shattered illusions of American superior virtue on the world stage, and it illustrated what Lenin called “the trusts” would do to eliminate any threat to their power. They have done it every time they felt threatened in all the years of bourgeois democracy since the defeat of the Jacobins in 1794 (admittedly, an arbitrary cutoff point, but a significant turning point from feudalism to capitalism). The coverup led to what the common man and woman, on both the right and left, now call “fake news” in the establishment media. Their credibility is shot. The official explanation put forth in the Warren Commission, supported still by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, was just too ludicrous for most of the American public to swallow. There have been many subsequent state crimes against democracy since 1963, so the JFK assassination can be studied as an iteration of similar coups before 1963, or the mother of all state crimes in the modern era.¹⁸

Part 3

Many critics of the film *JFK* objected to the dramatic license it took with portraying the facts, but it was, after all, entertainment, not an academic study with pages of endnotes to support its hundreds of claims, though it was based on such academic research. Oliver Stone and other staff, and some of the cast, did enormous amounts of research. Yet they had to tell the story through actors playing the roles of real people involved in the investigation conducted by Jim Garrison. The dialogue had to be made up, and certain creative freedom had to be taken in creating dramatic tension among the characters and in creating composite characters. There are valid objections to raise about bending the truth of these people’s lives to fit the story into a three-hour film, but this should not take anything away from the great merit of the film.

The historian Grover Proctor wrote in his review of the film:

... what [Oliver Stone] has done is more subtle and literarily permissible than [a] simplistic response. In “fictionalizing” the story, Stone has collapsed long, laborious facts, witness lists, and theories into one speech or one character, a time-honored device dating to Shakespeare and beyond. Kevin Bacon plays New Orleans low-life Willie O’Keefe, a fictional character, but one whose words and actions are an accurate composite of testimony collected from several witnesses... what Stone has chosen to do is not to make a biography of DA (later Louisiana 4th Circuit Court of Appeal Judge) Jim Garrison, but to create in Costner’s character a mythological Everyman of the various critics and researchers throughout the years. When viewed that way, the myth comes round full circle, and Stone can be seen to have painted a crystal clear, if impressionistic, view of twenty-eight years in the lives of the researchers... And lest anyone forget, Stone has graphically and accurately portrayed most of the really significant conundrums faced by believers in the “lone nut” theory... On the other more symbolic or metaphorical level, Stone has fashioned a full view of the motivations, fears, triumphs, and despair of those who dared to question the official version. Following the Costner/Garrison character through his epiphany mirrors exactly the collective experiences of the critics through the years. Admittedly, not all of them are the saints of pure heart and unblemished motivation that Stone writes and Costner portrays. But the development, from initial doubt through startling revelation, on to emboldened crusader, all the while traversing

periods of doubt, fear, paranoia, frustration, and triumph, is one with which all the critics can identify.¹⁹

JFK reminded the older generation, and told a new generation, about an extraordinary period in world history, and it challenged people once again to wake up and stop denying the uncomfortable truth about the erosion of democracy everywhere, not only in the United States. In 2016, after having written a book about the CIA,²⁰ journalist David Talbot re-assessed his original criticism of the film by saying it should be appreciated for the “emotional truth” that it told.²¹ As Roger Ebert put it in 1991 in a rare positive review published in a major American newspaper:

The achievement of the film is not that it answers the mystery of the Kennedy assassination, because it does not, or even that it vindicates Garrison, who is seen here as a man often whistling in the dark. Its achievement is that it tries to marshal the anger which ever since 1963 has been gnawing away on some dark shelf of the national psyche.²²

A curious thing about *JFK* is that it failed to receive other positive reviews in the establishment media. The campaign against it was so obvious that it re-affirmed public perceptions of a CIA-led cover-up, with the CIA narrative being fed to its reliable assets in the mass media before the film’s release. Despite all the attempts to smear the film, it was favored with awards and financial success.

Michael Parenti, “[The JFK Assassination: Defending the Gangster State](#),” *Dirty Truths* (City Lights Publishing, 1996, 2001)

Ignoring this 80 percent of the literature, publications like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* have listed the various theories about the JFK assassination as follows: (a) lone assassin, (b) mafia, (c) Cubans/Soviets, and (d) the “Oliver Stone movie theory.” In other words, they ignore the existence of a vast literature from which the movie is derived and ascribe the critical theme presented within the film solely to the imagination of a filmmaker. The mainstream press would have us believe that the notion of a state-sponsored assassination conspiracy and cover-up came out of a movie—when actually the movie was based on a rich and revealing investigative literature.

An additional motivation for the assassination was put forward quite well by the comedian Bill Hicks in the early 1990s. He admitted being obsessed about the assassination because it was the pivotal moment that revealed to Americans they were now living under a totalitarian form of government, and he was amazed that so many people wanted to forget about it and stay asleep. His theory:

I love talking about the Kennedy assassination... You can actually go to the 6th floor of the schoolbook depository. It’s a museum called The Assassination Museum, I think, named that *after* the assassination. I can’t be too sure of the chronology here, but anyway they have the window set up to look exactly like it did on that day, and it’s really accurate because Oswald’s not in it! Painstaking accuracy. It’s true. It’s called the Sniper’s Nest. It’s glassed in. It’s got the boxes sitting there. You can’t actually get to the window itself, and the reason they did that, of course, is they

didn't want thousands of American tourists there each year going, "No fucking way! I can't even see the road..." (See video clip [here](#)).

There's a handful of people who actually run everything. That's true. It's provable. I'm not a conspiracy nut. It's provable—a handful, a very small elite running these corporations, which include the mainstream media. I had this feeling that whoever is elected president, like Clinton was, no matter what your promises on the campaign trail were, when you win, you go into this smoky room with the twelve industrialists, capitalists... who got you in there, and you're in this smoky room and this little film screen comes down and a big guy with a cigar says, "Roll the film." And it's a shot of the Kennedy assassination from an angle you've never seen before that looks suspiciously off the grassy knoll. And the screen goes up, and the lights come up, and they say to the new president, "Any questions?" (See the video clip [here](#)) 23

This joke speaks to one of the key objectives of political assassination. Just as in nuclear madman theory, a demonstrated willingness to engage in violence is meant to deter. There was no modern example of a deterring assassination for Kennedy to look back on, which explains why he was not more careful and more ruthless in dealing with those who threatened his power. If he rode in that open car, he must have thought assassination just wasn't possible. Instead of just firing Allen Dulles, head of the CIA, he should have followed up by prosecuting him for his crimes. This deterrence theory also explains why assassinations stopped after the 1960s. The deterrent was in place. Assassinations stopped, just like atmospheric nuclear testing was never re-started by the US, UK, and the USSR because it was too risky even to those in power and was no longer necessary to prove that the bombs worked. Every president since then has had the assassination in the back of his mind. As Jim Garrison says in the film:

The assassination reduced the president to a transient official. His job is to speak as often as possible of the nation's desire for peace while he acts as a business agent in the Congress for the military and their contractors.

Perhaps in the mid-21st century, when the Kennedy assassination is as remote as the Lincoln assassination was to Kennedy, there will be another reminder about who is in charge, but as Senator Gary Hart pointed out, "There are other ways to assassinate a leader these days. You can assassinate his character."²⁴ Hart experienced such assassination personally. Perhaps the CIA just realized there were too many hassles involved in what the mob calls "wet work." Furthermore, in the 1980s, covert operations went overt when the US government invested heavily in "democracy promotion" through the National Endowment for Democracy and other agencies that funneled money to foreign countries through layers of NGOs, publishers, and research foundations.²⁵

Domestic political assassinations were so passé, which is not to say that they ever stopped in foreign countries, or didn't find different low-profile domestic targets, and this leads finally to what is so disturbing about Americans who cry over their lost paragon of virtue, their shattered democracy. As in many books and public discussions of the assassination, in the film *JFK* many of the characters express their shock that an elected president could be assassinated *here, in America!* and they cry over this tragic assault on their democracy. But there is much less outrage about Arbenz in Guatemala, Mossadegh in Iran, or Lumumba in Congo, all overthrown and/or assassinated by the US before Kennedy became president.

In the film, Garrison concluded that a *coup d'état* had taken place in the United States, but the film, and many writers and scholars on the assassinations of the 1960s, portray this as something shocking and unbelievable, not as something that should have been viewed as the chickens coming home to roost (as Malcolm X said at the time)—the natural result of having run “black ops” in foreign lands for so long. In the film, Mr. X, the deep state source who quit after the assassination, mentions the CIA’s rehabilitation of Nazis after WWII, foreign coups, and black operations, but he expresses no regret about them. It was only the Kennedy assassination that prompted him to resign, and likewise only the Kennedy assassination that caused many Americans to feel that something very tragic had happened to *their* country. *JFK* makes a reference to the suffering inflicted abroad in the final scroll that comes after the last scene with the mention of “Two million Asian lives lost” in Southeast Asia.

After the 1960s, the wars, coups and assassinations continued elsewhere. When the film *JFK* was released, Gorbachev was still hanging on to power in the USSR. He resigned and folded up the Soviet Union on December 25th, 1991. The first Gulf War had occurred earlier that year, after President Bush had declared the new unipolar world order. Bill Clinton became president in January 1993 and oversaw the covert American takeover of Central Africa in pursuit of control of Congolese resources and strategic control of Africa. Two presidents, Juvénal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi, were assassinated by the American-backed Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) on April 6, 1994. Contrary to the accepted narrative of the time, it is becoming more accepted and understood that the mass killings of 1994 did not occur because of an American failure to act. They occurred because of American actions—the decision that the French-backed Rwandan government needed to be eliminated by supporting an invasion by the Uganda-based RPF.²⁶

Finally, one interesting question that arises from everything that has been published on the assassination is why the shocking allegations are allowed to be exposed at all. If the conspirators were capable of such a diabolical cover-up, why could they not cover up everything and intimidate or eliminate everyone who would shine light on the crime? If the situation is really as grim as Jim Garrison said it was, how could a film like *JFK* be unleashed on a mass audience without causing a fear that the masses would rise up and overthrow the security state? Some even say that that Stone’s version contained a lot of diversionary information (a “limited hangout,” in CIA lingo) that the CIA was actually happy to have in circulation. Francis Conolly asserts this in his film and book *JFK to 911 Everything is a Rich Man’s Trick*, and states as an example that Stone and most researchers miss the fact that the fatal head shot was fired from a sewer drain in the curb and not from the grassy knoll. Furthermore, while Stone’s film goes into great detail about the strange autopsy of JFK, Conolly adds something else that was missing in the film *JFK*: the even stranger story concerning the autopsy of J.D. Tippit, the Dallas police officer allegedly shot by Oswald. Conolly contends that Tippit was a JFK lookalike who was killed in case a body double was needed (and it was needed) to replace JFK in the autopsy.²⁷

A certain amount of openness allows for the growth of a confusing and wild array of disinformation and conspiracy theory that sensible and busy people avoid, which thereby advances the idea that interest in the assassinations of the 1960s is a concern only for “conspiracy whackos.” The CIA can pour its own distracting and confusing tales into this mix and all the while America still seems to be a land of free speech. The lack of obvious suppression is re-assuring to the public. Sometimes the best cover-up is no cover-up—the “hiding in plain sight” strategy. People like Oliver Stone can then be submitted to coordinated attacks to discredit their work and create perpetual doubt about it. They can also be

associated with truly delusional conspiracy theories to discredit them further. The CIA invented and spread the term “conspiracy theorist” in the mid-1960s precisely to deal with the mounting criticism of the Warren Report. This CIA invention is still proving useful to discredit anyone who has a dissenting view on the worldwide coordinated reaction to the corona virus pandemic.

One important factor is that in some cases the famous critics have too much light on them to be eliminated, and they were not directly involved in the assassination as witnesses or accessories to the crime. Their statements are not likely to become testimony in a trial. Jim Marrs, in his book *Crossfire*, noted a long list of non-famous people who were a threat, people who were “loose ends” that needed to be dealt with after the assassination. The list included eighteen “convenient deaths” of material witnesses, and eighty-two “early deaths” and “strange deaths” that consisted of gangsters, soldiers, FBI and CIA agents, police officers, journalists and passersby who just happened to witness something—all of them people who could bring incriminating evidence to a court or a congressional investigation. These people died by violence, accident, suspicious suicides, or apparent natural causes, many well before the average age of life expectancy. Judgment about what amounts to unlikely or meaningful coincidence is a matter of subjective interpretation, but what makes many of these deaths significant is that at the time of death, these people were about to testify or publish information.²⁸ It is the timing that is the statistical improbability.

Curiously, many male researchers and journalists who took on the CIA, such as Oliver Stone, survived, but some female colleagues who pursued the same lines of inquiry did not. Dorothy Kilgallen (1913-1965), Lisa Howard (1930-1965) (two high-profile television journalists in the early 1960s) ²⁹ and [Mary Meyer](#) (1920-1964) (ex-wife of high-ranking CIA officer Cord Meyer and JFK’s lover during his presidency) all died suspicious deaths in the prime of their lives. The first two died of suicidal poisonings because, don’t you know, tough, successful, and tenacious female journalists just have a tendency to suddenly, as soon as they are a threat to power, become despondent and suicidal for the first time in their lives. Mary Meyer was shot in daylight while walking through a Washington park shortly after she started to speak out about the flaws in the Warren Report.³⁰

There were many men in the list of “early deaths” compiled by Jim Marrs, but perhaps women were more likely to be killed because the people they threatened could not fight them out in the open as they would fight men. These women had high moral authority and were popular with a mass audience. A gentleman could not “drag women through the mud,” ridicule them as conspiracy nuts, or make them targets of character assassination, but quietly committing murder was always a possibility for “honorable men,” in the sense used by Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar*. Another such case that comes to mind is the death of Karen Silkwood, though in her case the issue was the nuclear weapons industry rather than the Kennedy assassination.

Related to the question above is the question of why an assassination plot that had so many risks of exposure still went ahead. The conspirators must have known there would be too many witnesses hearing the gunshots from multiple directions, too high a chance of amateur photographers filming the event, too high a chance of missing the shot or killing the wrong target, too much audacity in expecting people to accept the “magic bullet” and “lone nut” explanations. What were they thinking? They could have killed him out of public view, in a way that might have even seemed like natural causes. Yes, but then there would be no way to shift suspicion away from government insiders onto a “lonely, unknown drifter.” So

the execution was done in public, and to what must have been their own surprise, the killers learned that their outrageous lie had no serious consequences, even after they had missed the first few shots and been forced to sell the magic bullet theory and hide the Zapruder film from the American public. No matter how contrived their explanations became, there were still journalists and politicians of high standing who were willing to support the “lone gunman” explanation.³¹ It was a great mass psychology experiment that provided valuable lessons *about* and valuable benefits *of* mass psychological control. The gaslighting works. The public swallowed it. The cognitive dissonance was too much. The political establishment and the people were powerless to change the situation. The shadow government can let books and films expose the crime, and the assassins can stare back in smug silence, implying: “So whadayagonna do about?”

In a speech given in 2016, journalist David Talbot related the substance of his interviews with Gary Hart, one of the senators on the Church Committee that investigated the CIA in the 1970s:

One of the most aggressive investigators on the Church Committee was Senator Gary Hart... Hart said, “The whole atmosphere down there in South Florida was so yeasty. I don’t think Helms [head of the CIA] or anybody had control of the thing.” ... Hart, based on his participation on the Church Committee, as a member of Congress with access, [said], “There was a conspiracy of rabid anti-Castro elements, security state and mafia figures all intermingled. There were people clandestinely meeting people, the Mafia connections, the friendships between the Mafia and CIA agents, and this crazy Cuban exile community. There were more and more layers, and it was honeycombed with bizarre people. I don’t think anybody knew everything that was going on, and I think the Kennedys were racing to keep up with it all.” ... Hart too concluded that Kennedy was likely killed by a conspiracy involving some feverish cabal from the swamps of anti-Castro zealotry. When he ran for president in 1984, Hart says whenever he was asked about the assassination, “My consistent response was, based on my Church Committee experience, there are sufficient doubts to justify re-opening the files of the CIA, particularly in its relationship to the Mafia.”³²

“I don’t know why I come here, knowing as I do what you really think of me, what I really think of you. For the innermost decision that we cannot but obey, for what’s left of our religion, I lift my voice and pray: may the lights in The Land of Plenty shine on the truth someday.”

- Leonard Cohen, [*The Land of Plenty*](#) (2001)

Further Reading

1. Were Cuba and Vietnam distractions from the real motive for the assassination? Was the CIA more concerned about whether Kennedy might let Indonesia “go red”? See [The CIA’s Involvement in Indonesia and the Assassinations of JFK and Dag Hammarskjold](#).
2. How Stalin dealt with and survived an assassination crisis and power struggles within his own government. Did he have some survival instincts that Kennedy lacked? Read about [Stalin’s handling of the Kirov assassination](#).

Appendix

Information about the John F. Kennedy assassination conveyed in Oliver Stone’s *JFK*. As expressed by Michael Parenti in the quote above, this information is not the product of the fevered imagination of a Hollywood script writer. It is based on the cited works by Jim Marrs and Jim Garrison (notes 6 and 7 below), as well as on the research done by Oliver Stone and his staff.

1. The Warren Commission, the official government word on the assassination, claimed that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. The film explained the numerous reasons this claim was impossible to believe.
2. Fifty-one witnesses in Dealey Plaza said they heard shots from a second location, behind the white picket fence on the “grassy knoll.”
3. The parade route was diverted from its most logical route along Main Street, and instead turned right onto Houston Street then left onto Elm Street, where the president was shot.
4. Army and Secret Service Security were told to stand down that day.
5. Security presence in Dealey Plaza was unusually light.
6. Normally, a sniper in a window would have been spotted by Secret Service snipers.
7. Dallas officials and some police officers were known to be virulently opposed to Kennedy.
8. Oswald was alleged to have used an Italian rifle that would have been a poor choice for the job.
9. Oswald was known to have poor skills as a sniper.
10. Oswald couldn’t have fired all the shots that were heard within the timeframe established by the Zapruder film.
11. Oswald’s line of sight was blocked by a Texas live oak tree, which doesn’t lose its foliage until long after November.
12. Oswald had a better line of sight when the motorcade turned onto Houston Street, but Kennedy was not killed until the motorcade had turned the next corner onto Elm Street.
13. By waiting to shoot until after the motorcade made this final turn, Kennedy was in the line of sight of shooters in three positions. He was triangulated in the so-called “turkey shoot.”
14. The Zapruder film clearly showed a shot hitting Kennedy’s head from his front right side, consistent with a shot from the grassy knoll.
15. The Warren Commission accounted for all seven wounds on Kennedy and Connally by positing a “magic bullet” that changed direction several times.
16. Witnesses reported encountering Secret Service Agents in and around Dealey Plaza after the killing, but official records say none were present.

17. A witness in the lot behind the grassy knoll saw several suspicious people coming and going from the lot in the hour before the murder. He later died in suspicious circumstances.
18. The CIA destroyed files on Oswald after the assassination.
19. Oswald had had a strange career in which he was taught Russian during his military service, then he effortlessly defected to the USSR, then effortlessly returned with a Russian wife, after which time he worked with anti-Castro, anti-communist groups in New Orleans. Sometimes he posed as a pro-Castro activist, seemingly to spy on pro-Castro groups or to foster an identity as a communist.
20. Oswald may not have known for what purpose his reputation as a communist was being developed. After the assassination, witnesses gave reports of Oswald being in Dallas and Mexico. These imposters deliberately identified themselves as Oswald, allegedly to create an image of him as a communist with ties to Castro and a hatred for Kennedy. These imposters performed angry outbursts that witnesses would remember. He was being set up as a patsy.
21. Mafia figures were likely involved, but it would have been impossible for them to carry out the crime and the cover-up afterwards.
22. The operation was layered to deceive most of the participants or keep them in the dark about the overall objective. The “five bullets, one blank” strategy of a firing squad was implemented. No one would be responsible.
23. Kennedy’s body was quickly removed from Dallas. Under Texas law, the autopsy should have been done by the Dallas coroner. The autopsy was done badly at a military base in Bethesda, Maryland, supervised by generals and admirals. The doctor performing the autopsy was instructed not to fully examine the wounds and to burn his notes afterwards.
24. The Zapruder film was the unexpected element that the conspirators could not counter effectively.
25. The public was not allowed to see the Zapruder for many years.
26. The president’s limousine and Connally’s suit were both cleaned before being examined by forensic experts.
27. Two days after the assassination, Jack Ruby, a nightclub owner with Mafia connections, was given access to Dallas Police Headquarters in order to shoot Oswald.
28. If the leader of the Soviet Union had allegedly been killed by a “lone nut gunman,” and that suspect had been killed two days later, would anyone in the United States believe that a *coup d’etat* had not taken place?
29. The Warren Commission was viewed as fiction within the CIA.
30. Allen Dulles was fired by Kennedy but ended up as a leading figure on the Warren Commission.
31. Kennedy told General Lemnitzer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs that the Joint Chiefs would be wholly responsible for all covert paramilitary action in peacetime. This would have ended the reign of the CIA, but the policy was never successfully implemented.
32. A fictitious character, Mr. X, is a retired officer from an unidentified security agency. He is said to have been based on the veteran intelligence operative and author Fletcher Prouty. He refused to testify for Garrison, but he encouraged him to pursue his investigation because he must finish what he has started.
33. Mr. X tells Garrison he was diverted to another mission just before the assassination, in order to keep him from his duties that involved protecting the president while he was traveling.
34. On the day of the assassination, the entire federal cabinet was in Asia.
35. A combat division was returning to the US, possibly to manage internal security if social order broke down.

36. Telephones were down in Washington for an hour after the assassination.
37. A large volume of information about Oswald was available to foreign and domestic media immediately after his arrest. His guilt was announced before any investigation had begun.
38. It was common for the CIA to operate front businesses and have contacts with local businessmen like Clay Shaw.
39. Garrison accused President Johnson of being an accessory after the crime, and benefitting from it, alluding to the possibility that President Johnson had foreknowledge or was a conspirator.³³
40. The film mentioned the billions of dollars gained by the defense industry because of the war fought in Southeast Asia for the next ten years.
41. Garrison referred to the fact that there had been numerous political murders disguised as heart attacks, suicides, cancers, drug overdoses, and plane and car crashes.
42. English poet John Harington is quoted: "Treason doth never prosper. What's the reason? For if it prosper, none dare call it treason."
43. There was a notable divergence between public opinion and official views held by government and media companies.
44. In spite of government and media attempts to destroy Garrison's reputation, he had popular support. He was re-elected in 1978 and he was given financial support from thousands of small donors, and many witnesses took great risks to come forward and testify.
45. The American constitution was written with government in mind as the biggest threat to guard against.
46. The jury did not rule out the possibility of a conspiracy, but they found there was not enough evidence to show that Shaw was a part of a conspiracy.
47. Clay Shaw died in 1974 of lung cancer. No autopsy was allowed.
48. In 1979, Richard Helms, Director of Covert Operations in 1963, admitted under oath that Clay Shaw had worked for the CIA, which confirmed that Clay Shaw had committed perjury during his trial.
49. A Congressional Investigation from 1976-1979 found a "probable conspiracy" in the assassination of John F. Kennedy and recommended the Justice Department investigate further. As of 1991, the Justice Department had taken no action on this recommendation.
50. The files of the House Select Committee on Assassinations are locked away until the year 2029.
51. As a result of the film *JFK*, in 1992 Congress passed legislation to appoint a panel to review all files and determine which ones would be made available to the American public.

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Notes

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22 Roger Ebert, “[JFK](#)” (review), *rogerebert.com*, December 20, 1991. Originally published in *The Chicago Sun-Times*.

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24 David Talbot, at 27:40 in the video (note 21).

25 Sean Gervasi, “[How the US Caused the Breakup of the Soviet Union](#),” *Global Research*, November 24, 2017, based on a lecture delivered in 1992.

26 Christopher Black, “[Top Secret: Rwanda War Crimes Cover-Up](#),” *New Eastern Outlook*, October 22, 2018.

27 Francis Richard Conolly, *JFK to 911 Everything is a Rich Man’s Trick* (Trine Day LLC, 2018, 2021). The book version came after the success of [the film version](#) on YouTube. The film was repeatedly removed from YouTube channels, but it has been downloaded and uploaded many times by enthusiasts of the film and thus has reached an audience of millions. Conolly may be correct about everything he asserts, but he has dodged the old truism that remarkable claims require remarkable evidence. His work is compelling and insightful, but he did not do what every history undergraduate must do to get a passing grade: he provided no endnotes or precise citations that researchers could use to evaluate the sources of his astounding claims. He doesn’t tell us in-text what his primary sources are. Other historians would want to know if there is corroboration by reliable sources for some of the very original claims he makes. There is a bibliography that lists 18 authors and 33 books, nine of them books by Joachim Joesten, so those may be the source for most of his spectacular assertions (i.e. Mao Zedong was put in power by capitalists in order to create a necessary communist enemy), but this author is not mentioned in-text. It is strange that Conolly does not follow standard referencing practices yet writes of his work not being taken seriously.

28 Jim Marrs, 529-537.

29 Mark Lane, *Last Word: My Indictment of the CIA in the Murder of JFK* (Skyhorse, 2021), 28-30, 36-41. Mark Lane notes that Dorothy Kilgallen was in possession of explosive evidence she obtained at the trial of Jack Ruby, and she was determined to bring it to light soon. One might accept her death as accidental if her autopsy showed traces of alcohol and *one* type of barbiturate, but *three* types were found

in her blood in addition to traces of quinine, a substance which would have covered the bitter taste of the poisons. [Lisa Howard](#) had interviewed Castro for ABC News while JFK was still alive. She was also working for JFK as a back-channel facilitator of normalized relations. She was part of JFK's attempt to go around the CIA and hawks in other sectors of the government. She continued to work on this issue during the Johnson presidency and quit her job in journalism to work for Senator Eugene McCarthy. According to Lane, the CIA regarded her work advocating for peaceful relations with Cuba as an obstacle to the government's objectives. She died from an overdose of sedatives like Dorothy Kilgallen. In her case she died while struggling to walk to a pharmacy to get treatment for whatever poison was in her.

30 Peter Janney, *Mary's Mosaic: The CIA Conspiracy to Murder JFK, Mary Pinchot-Meyer and their Vision for World Peace* (Skyhorse, 2013, 2016). See the author's review of the book [here](#).

31 Philip Shenon, "[A Cruel and Shocking Act: The Secret History of the Kennedy Assassination](#)." *Sarah Lawrence College*, February 7, 2015. The speaker in this video discusses his book of the same title (Abacus, 2012). He is a former *New York Times* correspondent who says in the video he was able to retire from the *New York Times* after writing this best-seller about the Kennedy assassination. He is an example of the sort of highly placed, sophisticated intellectual who is willing to do the CIA's bidding by perpetuating the Warren Commission conclusion that Oswald acted alone. It must be just a coincidence that his career as an author started to pay so well that he could quit the *New York Times*. There could not have been a coordinated effort to make sure this book had 18 favorable editorial reviews by mainstream journals listed on Amazon under the Kindle edition of the book. Amazon, beneficiary of a \$600 million CIA contract, practically gives away this 641-page book for \$4.92 as a Kindle book (discounted from \$22). They really want you to read it. The author tells us that the Warren Commission—consisting of men of the highest legal training and government experience, and the CIA—the most effective intelligence agency in the world—were just a bunch of clumsy bad cops who couldn't shoot straight (except on 1963/11/22). They worked under time limits with so much pressure. They were busy men with other duties. Gosh darnit, how were they supposed to know that there were CIA files showing Oswald was in Mexico City in September 1963, visiting the Cuban and Soviet embassies and announcing plans to kill JFK? Shenon claims it was just a big bureaucratic oversight that caused them to miss this detail. However, he ignores the fact that David Atlee Phillips, one of the top people in the CIA at the time, admitted in a university lecture in the 1970s (contradicting his testimony to Congress) that the CIA never had any evidence that Oswald was in Mexico City. Because it was an Oswald imposter who was seen there, identifying himself as Oswald and advertising his Soviet connections and intent to kill JFK, it is clear that he was an imposter sent there in order to set Oswald up as the patsy. After the assassination, President Johnson warned the Warren Commission to not pursue the Soviet connection because he claimed it could enrage the world and start WWII. As a result, the CIA had to bury the contrived Mexico City story and the whole attempt to link Oswald to foreign powers, and the Warren Commission backed off also. Mark Lane, in *Final Word* (pages 223-235, note 27, \$14.09 for the paperback on Amazon, no Kindle version available, only one editorial review listed by *Library Journal Xpress Review*), describes all of this as well as the FBI files that he discovered that indicated that the FBI agents who interviewed Oswald after his arrest also heard the voice recordings of the Oswald imposter in Mexico City. They noted that the voices were definitely not the same. In spite of all this information being available for three decades, Shenon stated in the video lecture his firm belief that the real Oswald did go to Mexico City in September 1963, that while there he loudly expressed intent to kill JFK, and that he was the lone assassin. The CIA and the Warren Commission just screwed up and missed the Mexico City stuff. To come to such a conclusion requires deliberate neglect of a mountain of contradictory evidence about Oswald's career and Oswald's familiars in the FBI, the CIA, the military, and organized crime.

32 David Talbot, at 23:15 in [the video](#) (see note 21).

33 See Roger Stone's *The Man Who Killed Kennedy: The Case Against LBJ* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2013) for the more incendiary argument that President Johnson had the motive, means, and opportunity (which are not in themselves evidence of guilt) to participate in the conspiracy to kill JFK. Stone argues that LBJ blackmailed his way into the vice presidency in 1960 but was sure to be dumped in 1964 to face prosecution for corruption. Roger Stone uses fingerprint evidence and testimony to claim JFK was shot by someone with close ties to Johnson. Because this book alleges JFK succumbed to Johnson's blackmail over his sexual behavior, it is likely to be ignored by those who prefer to study the assassination without looking at the skeletons in the Kennedy family closet. See a 48-minute interview with the author: [LBJ and the Killing of JFK with Roger Stone](#) (LipTV, November 24, 2013).