

The JFK Assassination: The Impossible “Assassin”. Defending the Gangster State

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Today in the much vaunted western democracies there exists a great deal of unaccountable state power whose primary function is to maintain the existing politico-economic structure, using surveillance, infiltration, sabotage, judicial harassment, disinformation, trumped-up charges and false arrests, tax harassment, blackmail, and even violence and assassination to make the world safe for those who own it.

“Buffs” and Cover-Ups

There exists a state within the state, known as the national security state, a component of misgovernment centering around top officers in the CIA, DIA, FBI, NSA, the Pentagon, and policymakers in the Executive Office of the White House. These elements have proven themselves capable of perpetrating terrible crimes against dissidents at home and abroad. National security state agencies like the CIA, in the service of dominant economic interests, have enlisted the efforts of mobsters, drug traffickers, assassins, and torturers, systematically targeting peasant leaders, intellectuals, journalists, student leaders, clergy, labor union leaders, workers, and community activists in numerous countries. Hundreds of thousands of people have been murdered to prevent social change, to destroy any government or social movement that manifests an unwillingness to reduce its people to economic fodder for the giant corporations that rule the world's economy. [1]

Occasionally an incident occurs that reveals in an unusually vivid manner the gangster nature of the state. The assassination of President John Kennedy in November 1963 is such an occasion. The dirty truth is that Kennedy was heartily hated by right-wing forces in this country, including many powerful people in the intelligence organizations. He had betrayed the national interest as they defined it, by refusing to go all out against Cuba, making overtures of rapprochement with Castro, and refusing to escalate the ground war in Vietnam. They also saw him as an anti-business liberal who was taking the country down the wrong path. Whether Kennedy really was all that liberal is another matter. I don't believe he was. But what the national security rightists saw him to be was what counted.

To know the truth about the assassination of John Kennedy is to call into question the state security system and the entire politico-economic order it protects. This is why for [fifty] years the corporate-owned press and numerous political leaders have suppressed or attacked the many revelations about the murder unearthed by independent investigators like Mark Lane, Carl Oglesby, Harold Weisberg, Anthony Summers, Philip Melanson, Jim Garrison, Cyril Wecht, Jim Marrs, Gaeton Fonzi, James DiEugenio, Peter Dale Scott, Sylvia

Meagher, Michael Canfield, Gary Aguilar, and still many others more recently.

These investigators have been described as “assassination buffs.” The term “buff” is a diminishing characterization, describing someone who pursues odd hobbies. For the same reason that we would not refer to “Holocaust buffs,” so should we not refer to these serious investigators as “assassination buffs.” Their efforts reveal a conspiracy to assassinate the president and an even more extensive conspiracy to hide the crime.

Sociologist David Simone compiled a study of the books published on the Kennedy assassination, some 600 titles, and found that 20 percent of them blamed either a lone assassin or the mafia or the Cubans or Russians. The other 80 percent ascribed the assassination to a conspiracy linked to U.S. intelligence agencies, some of these also saying that mobsters were involved at the operational level. 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 [Oliver Stone movie, JFK] is derived and ascribe the critical theme presented within the film solely to the imagination of a film maker. 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.

Like the Warren Commission itself, the press assumed a priori that Oswald was the killer. The only question it asked was: Did Oswald act alone? The answer was a loudly orchestrated YES. Meanwhile, almost every in-depth investigator had a different conclusion: Oswald did not act at all. He was not one of the people who shot Kennedy, although he was involved in another way, as a fall guy, in his own words “just a patsy.”

The U.S. mainstream media have been tireless in their efforts to suppress the truth about the gangster state. In 1978, when a House Select Committee concluded that there was more than one assassin involved in the Kennedy shooting, the Washington Post (1/6/79) editorialized:

“Could it have been some other malcontent who Mr. Oswald met casually? Could not as much as three or four societal outcasts with no ties to any one organization have developed in some spontaneous way a common determination to express their alienation in the killing of President Kennedy? It is possible that two persons acting independently attempted to shoot the President at the very same time.”

It is “possible,” but also most unlikely and barely imaginable. Instead of a conspiracy theory the Post creates a one-in-a-billion “coincidence theory” that is the most fanciful of all explanations.

Ignored Evidence, Unanswered Questions

David Garrow, author of a biography of Martin Luther King, condescendingly says: “A large majority of the American people do believe in assassination conspiracies. That allows events to have large mysterious causes instead of small idiosyncratic ones.” Contrary to Garrow, the question of whether a conspiracy exists in any particular situation has to be decided by an investigation of evidence, not by patronizing presumptions about the public

mind. Investigators who concluded there were conspiracies in the Kennedy and King murders did not fashion “large mysterious causes” but came to their conclusions through painstaking probes of troubling discrepancies, obvious lies, and blatant cover-ups. They have been impelled not by the need to fashion elaborate theories but by the search for particular explanations about some simple and compelling truths.

Many people talk about finding the “smoking gun” behind this or that mystery, the one evidentiary item that dramatically resolves the case and puts to rest all further questions. Unlike fictional mysteries, in real life there usually is no smoking gun. Historians work by a process of accretion, putting piece by piece together until a picture emerges. In the Kennedy murder the pieces make an imposing picture indeed, leaving one with the feeling that while there may not be a smoking gun there is a whole fusillade of impossibilities regarding the flight of bullets, the nature of the wounds, the ignored testimony of eye witnesses, the sudden and mysterious deaths of witnesses, the disappearance and deliberate destruction of evidence, and the repeated acts of official cover-up that continue to this day regarding the release of documents.

Let us focus on just a small part of the immense brief that has been assembled by investigators. Consider the background of Lee Harvey Oswald. Over the decades to this very day, mainstream commentators have been telling us that Oswald was an incompetent “loner” and not very bright. Gerald Posner, transforming himself into an instant psychiatric expert, announced that Oswald “had a very disturbed childhood, and he was a passive-aggressive.” A passive-aggressive assassin? He was also repeatedly labeled a “loner” and a “leftist.” The truth is something else.

Lee Harvey Oswald spent most of his adult life not as a lone drifter but directly linked to the U.S. intelligence community. All of his IQ tests show that he was above average in intelligence and a quick learner. At the age of eighteen in the U.S. Marines he had secret security clearance and was working at Marine Air Control in Atsugi Air Force Base in Japan, a top secret location from which the CIA launched U2 flights and performed other kinds of covert operations in China. The next year he was assigned to El Toro Air Station in California with security clearance to work radar.

Strange things began to happen. While at El Toro, Oswald emerged as a babbling Russophile and a “communist.” He started playing Russian language records at blast level in his barracks and addressing his fellow Marines in Russian, calling them “comrade.” He read Russian books and hailed Soviet Communism as “the best system in the world.” If Oswald was a Soviet or a Cuban spy, as some people now claim, he certainly had a novel way of building a cover.

Philip Melanson, author of *Spy Saga*, a book about Oswald’s links to intelligence, reminds us that the U.S. Marine Corps in 1958 was not exactly a bastion of liberal tolerance and freethinking. But in this instance, for some strange reason, Oswald’s Marine commanders did not seem to mind having a ranting commie sympathizer in their midst. In fact, he kept his security clearance and retained access to a wealth of sensitive radar information and classified data from secret facilities!

Other odd things happened. In February 1959, Oswald failed the Marine Corps proficiency test in Russian. Six months later he had developed some fluency in that language. In 1974, a document classified by the Warren Commission—and dislodged mostly by Harold

Weisberg's legal efforts—revealed that Oswald had attended the U.S. Army's School of Languages at Monterey. Monterey is not open to anyone who just happens to have a language hobby. One is sent by the government, for training in a specific language pertaining to a specific assignment. Oswald learned Russian at Monterey.

Another curious thing: Oswald applied for an early dependency discharge from the Marines because his mother had injured her foot—the accident had occurred a year earlier. He was released one week after putting in his request, a decision so swift as to astonish his fellow Marines.

Luxury Defection

Oswald then “defected” to the USSR, but how? Melanson notes that such a trip would have cost at least \$1,500 in those days, but Oswald's bank account showed a balance of \$203. And how did he get from London to Helsinki on October 11, 1959, when no available commercial flight could have made it in one day? He must have had some kind of private transportation to Helsinki.

Once in Russia, he went to the U.S. embassy and openly renounced his U.S. citizenship, declaring that he was going to give military secrets to the Soviets. Embassy officials made no effort to detain him. As the KGB files opened in 1991 show, the Soviets kept him under constant surveillance. KGB defector Yuri Nosenko, who had been responsible for investigating every contact Oswald made in the USSR, reported that the young American had never been associated with Soviet intelligence and that the KGB suspected he was connected with U.S. intelligence.

While in Russia Oswald belonged to a gun club at the factory in which he worked, though he showed no interest in guns. He reportedly used to join in rabbit shoots but could never score a hit. Someone would have to stand behind him and shoot the rabbit while he was firing. His performance became something of a joke among his co-workers. His marksmanship in the U.S. Marines had been no better.

U.S. intelligence mysteriously departed from normal procedure and made no damage assessment of Oswald's “defection,” or so they claimed. Another odd thing: after two-and-a-half years, Oswald's sudden request to return to the United States was immediately granted by U.S. officials—all this after he had threatened to give away state secrets to the Soviets. Instead of being arrested for treason, Oswald was accepted with open arms by U.S. authorities.

The CIA claimed it had no record of debriefing him and was never near him. Their explanation before the Warren Commission was that there were so many tourists coming in and out and there was nothing particularly unusual about Oswald that would have caught their attention. One might wonder what was needed to catch the CIA's attention.

Yet, CIA officials claimed they had suspected all along that he was a Soviet spy—which makes it even more curious that they did not debrief him. In fact, they did debrief him in Holland. But being so eager to cover up any association with Oswald, they could not recognize how in this instance the truth would have been a less suspicious cover than the improbable lie they told about never noticing his return.

State Department officials also behaved strangely. They paid all travel and moving

expenses back to the United States for Oswald and his wife. Without a moment's delay they gave him back his passport with full rights to travel anywhere in the world. Another curious thing: his wife was exempted from the usual immigration quotas and granted immediate entry. Years before she had belonged to the Soviet Komsomol, the Communist youth organization, which automatically would have barred her from the United States. Yet in violation of U.S. immigration laws, she was allowed into the country with Oswald.

The FBI/CIA "Leftist"

In Dallas, Lee Harvey Oswald settled under the wing of White Russian emigre' and former cavalry officer George de Mohrenschildt, an aristocratic reactionary and an associate of oil millionaires H. L. Hunt and Clint Murchinson and other Dallas economic elites. In de Mohrenschildt's telephone book was found the name of George "Pappy" Bush. A correspondence existed between Bush Sr. and de Mohrenschildt indicating that they were personal acquaintances.

De Mohrenschildt and his wife Jeanne were identified by the Warren Commission as the people closest to Oswald just before the assassination. An investigator for the House Select Committee, Gaeton Fonzi, noted, "Given his background, it seemed strange that de Mohrenschildt would have spontaneously befriended someone with the look of a working-class drifter like Lee Harvey Oswald." That was not the only strange thing about de Mohrenschildt. He also was part of a network of ex-Nazis contracted by the CIA.

A CIA memorandum written not long after Oswald returned from Russia advised de Mohrenschildt on how to handle the young "defector." De Mohrenschildt also had a close friendship with J. Walter Moore, who was an agent of the CIA's Domestic Contacts Division. As de Mohrenschildt told one investigator just before his sudden death, it was Moore who encouraged him to see Oswald. Investigator Jim Marrs observes in his book *Crossfire*: "The CIA memos, Moore's closeness, and de Mohrenschildt's own testimony all confirm that a certain relationship existed between the CIA and the man closest to Oswald in early 1963. While this does not necessarily involve the Agency in a plot to kill Kennedy, it raises questions about what Agency officials might have known regarding such a plot."

Oswald embarked on a series of short-lived public forays as a "leftist." He started a one-person Fair Play for Cuba chapter in New Orleans, without ever bothering to recruit another member. He never met with a single member of the Communist Party or any other left organization, although he wrote friendly letters to the Communist Party and to the Socialist Workers Party (two groups that were not even talking to each other) supposedly asking for instructions. Again, all this was a puzzling way for a Soviet agent and would-be assassin to act.

He blazed a highly visible trail as a "leftist" agitator: managing to get exposure on local T.V. in New Orleans after getting involved in some fistfights while leafleting. One of the leaflets he distributed showed that his organization was on Camp Street in the very same building that a former FBI bureau chief, Guy Banister, had his office. Banister retained close working relations with émigré' Cuban right-wing groups and with Lee Harvey Oswald.

When he wasn't playing the communist agitator, Oswald spent most of his time with rabid anti-communists, including émigré Cubans and CIA operatives. Besides Banister and de Mohrenschildt, there was David Ferrie. (In his book *First Hand Knowledge*, Robert Morrow, a conservative businessman and CIA operative, tells how he served as a pilot on CIA missions

with Ferrie.) Oswald also knew businessman Clay Shaw who was CIA, as later confirmed by the agency's director Richard Helms. These were hardly the sort of friends we would expect for a loudmouthed "Marxist revolutionary" just returned from giving away classified secrets in the USSR.

The attorney general of Texas, Waggoner Carr, told the Warren Commission that Oswald was an FBI informant or contract agent, with assigned number S-172 or S-179. For his services, Oswald was paid two hundred dollars a month by the FBI.[2] Orest Pena, a Cuban émigré and FBI informant, told Mark Lane that Oswald worked for the FBI and met with FBI personnel from time to time.

If not paid by security agencies, how did Oswald support himself during his forays into New Orleans and Dallas? He was employed for a brief time in 1962 by a printing company in Dallas that specialized in highly classified government work, including the making of secret maps of the Soviet Union for U.S. Army Intelligence—again hardly the sort of job to assign an openly pro-Soviet communist agitator. Oswald's overall employment record and income sources remain something of a mystery. To this day, the U.S. government refuses to release his tax returns, with no explanation as to what issue of national security is at stake.

The Impossible "Assassin"

We are asked to believe that Oswald just happened to get a job at the Texas School Book Depository five weeks before the assassination, when it had not yet been publicized that Kennedy's limousine was going to pass in front of that building. In fact, George de Moreschildt got him the job.

We are asked to believe that Oswald, who could not hit the side of a barn, chose a Mannlicher-Carcano to kill the president, a cheap, poor performance Italian rifle that the Italians jokingly said never killed anyone on purpose and caused them to lose World War II.

We are asked to believe that Oswald would forgo shooting President Kennedy when he had a perfect target of him as he rode right down Houston Street directly toward the Texas School Book Depository. Instead he supposedly waited until the car had turned down Elm Street and was a half-block away. With the President's head and shoulders barely visible through a tree, Oswald supposedly fired rapidly, getting off three shots in record time, one missing the limousine by twenty-five feet and the other two hitting their target with devastating accuracy and record rapid succession, a feat the best marksmen in the country found impossible to emulate even after much practice and after the sights on the Mannlicher-Carcano were properly reset in a laboratory. [3]

We are asked to believe that Oswald then left his rifle at the window, complete with a perfect palm print and, they now say, his fingerprints (but no fingerprints on the clip or handloaded cartridges), along with three spent shells placed on the floor neatly in a row, in a manner no spent shells would fall.

We are asked to believe that a bullet would go through John Kennedy, pause in mid-air, change direction, and wound Governor Connally in several places—something Connally never believed—and reappear perfectly intact wedged into the flap of a stretcher in Parkland Hospital, supposedly having fallen out of Connally's body but obviously pushed into the flap by hand. (It became known as the "magic bullet" among skeptics.)

We are asked to believe that only three shots were fired when in fact six bullets were noted: one that entered the president's throat and remained in his body; the second extracted from Governor Connally's thigh; a third discovered on the stretcher; a fourth found in fragments in the limousine; a fifth that missed the president's car by a wide margin, hitting the curb according to several witnesses, and wounding onlooker James Thomas Tague on his face; a sixth found in the grass by Dallas police directly across from where the president's vehicle had passed.

The Secret Service took possession of the presidential limousine, ignored reports in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch (12/1/63) that there was a bullet hole in the windshield, and rejected all requests to inspect the vehicle. The inside of the limousine, a trove of physical evidence, was then quickly torn out and rebuilt, supposedly with no thought of covering up anything.

We are asked to believe that Kennedy's autopsy was innocently botched and his brain just accidentally disappeared. The X-ray purporting to be Kennedy's head now shows a rear entry wound, different from the rear exit wound all the pathologists saw. Someone cropped the jaw out of the picture, so there is no opportunity to determine by dental identification if the X-ray really is the president's.

We are asked by people like Max Holland, writing in the Nation, to believe that the "infamous picture of Oswald posing with rifle in hand" is not a forgery. Actually there are two pictures, both proven composites, with bodies of different sizes but with the identical head that matches neither body, and with shadows going in incongruous directions. Who fabricated these well publicized photos?

Rubbing Out the Witnesses

The supposedly "lone leftist assassin," Lee Harvey Oswald, was a friend of Jack Ruby, a gangster with links to Cuban exiles and the FBI. Ruby once worked for Congressman Richard Nixon and the House Un-American Activities Committee in Chicago when his name was still Jack Rubenstein. He also worked for the FBI in Dallas during the years before the JFK assassination. Ruby claimed he was just an ordinary private citizen, moved to kill Oswald in order to avenge the suffering Oswald had inflicted upon the Kennedy family. [4]

While in prison Ruby pleaded with the Warren Commission to be taken to Washington where he could tell the whole story. He feared for his life and claimed "they are killing me here." Indeed, he died in jail, supposedly of natural causes.

We are asked to believe that when twenty-four persons who had information related to the case met violent deaths, this was a colossal coincidence. [5]

In 1978, after the House Select Committee investigation got underway, Anthony Summers records that another sixteen connected to the case died violently. This too supposedly was just a coincidence. This latter group included George de Mohrenschildt, killed by a gun blast to the head three hours after a House Assassinations Committee Investigator had tried to contact him. De Mohrenschildt had been worried that he would be murdered. His daughter Kressy Keardon believes it "impossible" that he shot himself. The sheriff's office in Palm County, Florida, found the shooting "very strange." But it was ruled a suicide. Generally, people who voice fears that they might be killed do not then kill themselves.

William Sullivan, number three man in the FBI, was secretly on the CIA payroll, according to

CIA operative Robert Morrow. He was scheduled to appear before the House Select Committee but before he could do so, he was shot outside his home by a man who claimed to have mistaken him for a deer. The killer was charged with a misdemeanor and released in custody of his father, a state policeman.

While under government protection, mobster Sam Giancana was shot dead a day before he was to testify before the House Select Committee about mob and CIA connections. One of the things that emerges from this whole story is the widespread linkages between the CIA and organized crime, between the gangsters and the gangster state.

When the House committee was putting its staff together, it was heavily pressured to employ only persons acceptable to the CIA, the very agency it was supposed to investigate. In his book *Plausible Denial*, Mark Lane reports that when Bernard Fensterwald, an independent minded Washington lawyer, was offered the job of general counsel, a CIA representative called on him and said that the Agency would hand him "his head on a platter" if he took the assignment. Fensterwald turned it down.

Is the Kennedy assassination conspiracy just a lot of hoopla kicked up by "conspiracy buffs"? Most of the independent investigators I have met seem to be serious politically literate people. Their struggle to arrive at the truth is not impelled by a love of conspiracies but by a concern for the political and historic importance of the case. They seek the truth no matter how dirty it might be. That process of confronting the machinations of the national security state is not a conspiracy hobby. It is an essential part of the struggle for democracy.

Let me end with a summary quotation by John Judge, which he was kind enough to send me by Gmail:

"85% of the American public reject the findings of the Warren Commission report, as did the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1978, finding instead a "probable conspiracy" in the murders of President Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King. No federal investigation or action followed. We are the mainstream, not the dissent. Oswald's role as a patsy, not a shooter, is supported by all the best evidence that has been released. The real evidence clearly points to a crime and a cover-up that reaches to the highest levels of the U.S. government and military."

Notes

1 Colonel L. Fletcher Prouty, a military intelligence chief closely connected with the CIA, tells of his visit to "a special 'village' in the Mediterranean where a highly select group of stateless 'mechanics' in the CIA are hit-men, assassins, and other related specialists. They are absolutely anonymous"; see his introduction to Mark Lane's *Plausible Denial* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991). For a further discussion on U.S. repression abroad, see "Making the World Safe for Hypocrisy," p. ; also my two books *Against Empire* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995); and *The Sword and the Dollar* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

2 The Warren Commission reacted with extreme alarm toward Carr's testimony. Its general counsel, J. Lee Rankin said that evidence linking Oswald to the FBI "is very damaging to the agencies that are involved in it, and it must be wiped out insofar as it is possible to do so by this commission." The "wipe out" consisted of a statement from Hoover reassuring the commission that Oswald never worked for the FBI. In the New York Times edition of the Warren Commission report, Waggoner

Carr's testimony is nowhere to be found.

3 In his political memoirs, Speaker of the House Tip O'Neil writes that Kenneth O'Donnell, a top JFK aide, said he was sure he had heard two shots that came from behind the fence on the grassy knoll. "I told the FBI what I had heard, but they said it couldn't have happened that way and that I must have been imagining things. So I testified the way they wanted me to." O'Neil reports that another top Kennedy aide, Dave Powers, who was present when O'Donnell made this statement, said he had the same recollection of the shots.

4 At a Washington, D.C. conference in October 1995, assassination investigator John M. Williams reported on an interview he had with Robert Morrow, March 10, 1994. Morrow said that on the day after JFK's assassination, Marshall Diggs, the man who recruited Morrow as a CIA operative, confided to him a warning of Oswald's impending assassination: "He won't be around to testify for his trial."

5 See Penn Jones, Jr., Pardon My Grief vols. 1 and 2 for details about the death of these twenty-four.

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