

History/Political Science # 315  
Dr. McKnight  
Off. Hrs. (TBA)

Spring 2004

## THE POLITICS OF ASSASSINATION

Texts for the course: Harold Weisberg, Whitewash I; Warren Commission, The Warren Commission Report; G. McKnight, (ed.), Documents Manual for Politics of Assassination; G. McKnight, The Last Crusade; Pease and DiEugenio (eds), The Assassinations.

Statement of Purpose: The purpose of this course is to examine how American institutions responded or failed to respond to two of the major assassinations of the 1960s---JFK and Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. The instructional content of the course includes a variety of materials: monographs, government documents, articles, TV cassettes, films, and, most important of all, class discussion. The instructor regards all these devices of importance for furthering understanding of the basic purpose of the course. The expectation is that by the end of the semester participants in the course will have a more meaningful understanding of the historic context with which to judge these momentous events and be better able to evaluate their continuing impact on our system of government, and will understand why a course like this is necessary.

Procedure: This is a course for citizens interested in teaching themselves about two of the most important political assassinations in the history of the American republic. It will require a good deal of reading in government documents, analysis of these documents, and active participation in class. The quality of the course depends largely upon assigned readings, which I have carefully assembled, and the quality of your participation over which I have no real control.

Requirements: You are responsible for the assigned weekly readings and will respond to these orally in class and in a written journal format that will be turned in at the end of each class. The weekly journal entries should be about 3 double-spaced typewritten pages. (If you go beyond three that is fine with me.) I will comment on these journals and return them the following week. The journal is not a book report; rather, it should reflect your personal responses---questions, intellectual or emotional---to what you have read and your efforts to respond to the questions posed by the instructor in the class syllabus with each weekly assignment. The suggested questions are to get you started on the material and serve as a basis for class discussion. However, they are not meant to restrict you in any way. For example, your entries might ask how the reading fits together with or contradicts what you have already read or think you know. Does it interest you, or move you in any way (e.g. fear, anger, surprise, etc.)? There are no "wrong" answers in the journal; the only failure is the failure to respond. In short, the journal should represent an ongoing dialogue between the student and the course curriculum.

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Grades and all that: Grades in this course will be arrived at roughly in the following manner:

Journals and class participation. . . . . 80%  
Final exam (comprehensive/take-home) . . . . 20%

**Note: Instructor strongly recommends that you bring your Manual to class every period.**

January 22nd . . . . . Orientation . . . . .

January 29th . . . . . Dallas in Perspective . . . . .

Readings: U.S. Senate Hearings (Church Committee) “Institutionalizing Assassination: The Executive Action Capability,” pp. 181-190, and also  
Senate Hearings: (Church Committee) “Executive Action Programs Against Castro” (Cuba), pp. 71-90; and “Operation Northwoods.” All are found in Manual under Session 1.

Read also: Robert Dallek’s “JFK’s Second Term” on Library Reserve

Newspaper exercise: JFK’s American University speech where he speaks publicly of a détente with the Soviet Union. For his speech see the New York Times for June 11, 1963 (Hood College microfilm room).

Some questions: Instructor’s note: This session will be the most difficult one for the course because the approach is so broad and deals w/ material that is open for different interpretations. Do your best; the instructor will try to put it all in some perspective.

To your mind what relevance does the material in the Church Committee hearings about the CIA’s “Executive Action” programs have in any discussion of the JFK assassination?

Reading carefully the language of JFK’s American University speech and think about it in terms of what it could mean to US-Soviet relations at the height of the Cold War. Clue: After the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis JFK and Khrushchev were in mutual search for some kind of détente to prevent any future head-to-head confrontation that could lead to a possible nuclear exchange. Instructor will talk about this in class. (If you have seen the new movie “The 13 days” it would help to understand their mutual urgency on this matter.

Operation Northwoods was generated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. What you have in the Manual is a declassified copy of the JCS’ recommendations to JFK for a regime change in Cuba. What are your reactions to these recommendations?

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Finally, according to Dallek what was the relationship between JFK and his top military advisers on hot button issues like Cuba and Vietnam. Why do you think your instructor assigned you to read Dallek?

February 5<sup>th</sup> . . . . . Warren Commission and Its Case . . . . .

Readings: Read chapters 1, 3 and 4 from the Warren Commission Report (WCR). Chapter 4 is really the heart of the Commission's case that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin. Be sure to read this carefully. (You are free, of course, to read Chapters 1 and 2 if you have the time). For example, Chapter 2 uses diagrams and photos of Dealey Plaza. The layout of the streets running past the Texas School Book Depository where the Warren Report claims all the shots originated. You may want to look these over to get a firm grasp of what the lawyers' call the *locus en quo*-----the scene of the crime.

Read also: Chapters 1 thru 4 from Weisberg's Whitewash. I have assigned this book because it is one of the first citizen's responsible dissent on the Warren Report. The book's critique of the Warren Report is based solely on a careful reading of the Warren Report and the 26 volumes (10,000,000 words) of the Commission Hearings that were published in October 1964.

Questions: See handout for questions 1, 3, and 4 from WCR

For Weisberg's Whitewash assignment I am not assigning any questions. Make your own judgments on the fairness and soundness of Weisberg's dissents or criticisms. Write up your opinions in this week's journal. We will look at this in class.

In addition to all of the above there are a few other documents I added to this session.

@ Two deal with how LBJ "persuaded" Chief Justice Earl Warren to head up the Commission to investigate the JFK assassination. Warren initially strongly refused the position for good reasons.

@ What is LBJ referring to when he talks about the possibility of 40 million dead Americans? What is this thing that has developed in Mexico? The "Mexico business" is little understood even today. If there is time the instructor will develop this.

@ There are a few FBI documents assigned for reading. The purpose of these is to show (1) How the FBI seized control of the investigation from the get-go without authorization from the newly installed President Johnson. (2) To show the "rush to judgment" by Hoover/FBI to "solve" the case and get its report to LBJ ASAP. (3) What do you make of Hoover's memo re: his 11/29/63 telephone conversation with Johnson? Read carefully where the nation's Top Cop explains to LBJ, a week after the assassination, his grasp of the details of the shooting.

Finally, I am assigning Don Gibson's "Creation of the 'Warren Commission,'" in Pease and DiEugenio's (ed.) The Assassinations (hereafter cited as The Assassinations).

Read the essay and be prepared to discuss next period. If you have any questions have them ready for the start of our session on 2/12. This is an excellent (if not fully complete) explanation of the formation of the Warren Commission.

Class: Showing of the Zapruder film. Class will also have the opportunity to work w/ a Mannlicher-Carcano rifle w/ same kind of Japanese scope that Oswald allegedly used that dark day in Dallas.

February 12<sup>th</sup> . . . . . Warren Commission in Action-----"Truth Was Our Only Client" . . .

Instructor's note: There is a good deal of material to cover for this session. The best advice is to get started ASAP.

Readings: Read the Warren Commission's January 22<sup>nd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> transcripts of its executive sessions found in D. Wrone (ed.), Freedom of Information and Political Assassinations (Distributed in class by instructor. These are to be returned so take care of them). Be sure to read them in chronological order.

Weisberg, Chpt. 10 is recommended if you have the time.

Some Questions: What is there in these executive sessions that persuaded the instructor to assign this material?

@ What is the nature of the "dirty rumor" that plagued the Commission from the very outset/ What agency or agencies stood to be compromised if this "dirty rumor" had some foundations in fact?

@ In reading the January 27<sup>th</sup> transcript the WC members will go around and around. They will make splendid Fourth of July speeches about their mandate and what their responsibilities are in this matter. . . on and on. But what course do they take finally in dealing with this terrible dilemma confronting them?

@ In these executive sessions the Commissioners wrestle with the rumors about Oswald's possible FBI connections. The number "S-172" comes up in discussions. A newspaper story by Lonnie Hudkins of the *Houston Post* clears up the origins of "S-172." But does Rankin or Warren ever bring up another number, "Number 110669" that was rumored about during the January 18<sup>th</sup> session? (Which you have not seen). All you need is a "Yes" or a "No" answer. The instructor will furnish a context for this during class. See Hudkin's 1975 explanation about "S-172" in document that is out of sequence.

@ Finally, how would you characterize the WC's collective attitude or posture toward FBI Director Hoover? Indifference? Great respect? Barely disguised fear? You make your own assessment and speculate on the reason for your answer.

Some more questions: Following a theme of the previous session of Hoover and Johnson's "rush to judgment," there are documents beginning with the "Tentative Outline" of the Commission's work ahead of it.

@ The "Tentative Outline" is dated 1/11/1964. It helps to understand that the WC does not interview its first witnesses until after this date. Most of the first round of key witnesses does not take place until March 1964. Read over these Commission documents in facsimile: The "Tentative Outline," Belin memo to Rankin, Redlich memo to Rankin, and Redlich's 4/27/64 memo to Rankin. What conclusions or observations come to mind?

@ There follows several FBI documents that indicate the White House and FBI would like the FBI Report on the assassination out as soon as possible. That Johnson and Hoover do not want a commission at all. They want the FBI Report out and simply turned over to the Justice Department and released to the public. Read these over. No comment necessary. Instructor will fill in the necessary details about what is going on.

@ Then there are several pages that deal with the FBI Report on the JFK assassination. This is the first Commission Document and is some times referred to as Commission Document 1 (or CD 1). The document was almost 900 pages. All I have given you is the page in which the FBI describes the assassination. It contains about 125 words. Read it carefully as to the number of shots that were fired and what shots hit JFK and what shots hit Connally. Write up these results and any other opinions you have about this part of CD 1.

@ Did the FBI ever bother to examine the official autopsy report on JFK? What is your answer? What is your reaction to your answer?

@ There is a document in which Secret Service agent John Howlett agrees or disagrees with the FBI's analysis of the shooting. Short answer will do.

@ What is Acting Attorney General Katzenbach's opinion about CD 1?

@ There are several documents that disclose the WC's initial reaction to the FBI Report. What was that reaction?

(You are now free to call Pizza Hut for a pizza with all the toppings and a well-earned break.)

February 19th . . . . The FBI and the Case-The Name of the Game is Control. . . .

Instructor's note: This session is crucial toward the understanding of how the federal authorities went about their investigation into the JFK assassination; especially how the Hoover Bureau took control of the investigation.

Readings: The first two documents originated with military intelligence, San Antonio, Texas, and went to FBI headquarters in Washington D.C. Hoover picked up what few "facts" he had about the alleged assassin from these releases. It was awhile before Hoover had the FBI's Oswald file updated Dallas field office file on his desk the day of the assassination.

@ Read these military intelligence files carefully to get a flavor of what kind of portrait they paint about the suspect Oswald.

@ Next is a series of memos re: Hoover phone calls on the assassination a week later. From what you know about the "facts" of the assassination presented in your readings from the Warren Report evaluate the FBI director's grasp of the situation on 11/22/1963, or Black Friday. How would you evaluate the Nation's top G-man. Was he on top of his game? Was he totally rattled and perhaps hysterical? What is your opinion and what facts would you use to support that opinion?

@ Next we look at what happens over assassination weekend. There were a series of short phone calls between LBJ, Hoover, and Katzenbach. See this in the Secret Service phone logs. Out of this comes the Katzenbach memo to LBJ via LBJ's aide Bill Moyers. Katzenbach wrote this memo in longhand on Sunday night, 11/24/1964 and it was typed Monday morning when he had secretarial help.

This memo lays out the "official truth" of Dallas. What is that "official truth"?

@ There is a document titled 12/9/1963 that reveals when the FBI's CD 1 was released to Commission members. Keep this date in mind.

@ Then there are a series of documents that disclose the leaking of the conclusions of the FBI Report to several selected newspapers. What are the dates of these leaks? Who did the leaking? What was the purpose of leaking these conclusions to the press? Think hard about this. Does anything that transpired during the January 22 and 27<sup>th</sup> WC executive sessions help you understand the politics of leaking? What is meant by "control is the name of the game"?

@ A very important document follows re: Renfro to SAC, Dallas 11/22/'63. Do you understand the meaning of this document? Take a stab. The instructor will discuss its meaning in class.

@ There are a series of documents that follow beginning with transcript of WC executive session for June 4<sup>th</sup>. This and next 7 pages tell you something about Congressman Jerry Ford's secret role on the Commission. What was that role?

@ There follow a series documents about Warren Olney. Olney was Warren's choice for Commission general counsel. As documents reveal Olney was not Hoover's choice nor did Katzenbach and others on the Commission want him. His appointment was scuttled. Do you have a clue as to why? Instructor will elaborate on this a little in class. It is an example of FBI control.

@ There are six documents that contain some insights on when CD 1 was to be released. Look them over. No written comment necessary. If you have any questions relating to these raise them in class.

@ There are three documents that deal with films and slides of the assassination taken by a Charles Bronson. They say something about the FBI's control of evidence. Make any comment you care to about the Bronson photographic account of the assassination. Instructor will add to this during class.

@ There is a FBI "tickler file" which the Bureau released by mistake. We will go over this in class. It is dynamite. It says volumes about the way the FBI approached the whole investigation. Instructor will walk you through this in class. You pick out what you think is important in document.

@ The remaining few documents are to be read but not commented upon unless you feel an impulse to do so.

February 26<sup>th</sup> . . . . .The JFK Autopsy: The Best Evidence (Part I). . . . .

Readings: Session V in Manual.

Read also: Weisberg, Chapters 12 and 13. I have placed on Library Reserve an early draft of a chapter from a manuscript I am working on at present. The title of the chapter is "The JFK Autopsy." If you want to get a firmer hold on this and the next section of the Manual, and you have the time, I would recommend that you read it. This is not a class assignment. It is meant to be completely OPTIONAL.

Class project: The best insight into the corruption of the evidence in the Warren Commission and its treatment of the assassination can be understood with this following exercise.

This section contains what the Commission represents as the data base for the official JFK autopsy. See Commission Exhibit 397. This is made up of 3 ½ pages. The first is one page of notes that Dr. Humes took during a phone conversation with Dr. Malcolm Perry who performed the tracheostomy on JFK. The next are three-pages of handwritten notes made by Dr. Humes, who was the chief prosecutor at the autopsy. Then there is a standard U.S. Navy body chart with some measurements and location of the headshot and the back shot in the president. The last is a sketch of the president's head.

None of you are forensic doctors trained in the business of doing autopsies of murdered victims. I just ask you to spend a little time reading over Exhibit 397. Try to get in your mind what this database included by way of measurements and description of the wounds, etc.

After you have spent about 15-20 minutes on this go to your copy of the Warren Report. Turn to page 538 or *Appendix IX* which is the official JFK autopsy. It is a six-page single-spaced document not counting Humes' Supplemental Report on pages 544-555. Spend a little time reading it and appreciate that all the detailed measurements and what can be called the autopsy "facts" that are included in the report.

One other fact to understand is that these prosecutors did not have available to them when this autopsy report was written the JFK X-rays or the medical autopsy pictures.

What observations or conclusions jump to mind?

What do the following documents tell us?

@ FBI report by agents Sibert and O'Neill of the Baltimore field office. Where did they place the wound in JFK's back?

@ Sibert and O'Neill report 11/26/1963. See page 3 of this document. What did the X-rays of JFK's head wound reveal?

@ Any civilians present at the autopsy?

@ Specter (now Senator Arlen Specter of Penna.) questions Humes. What did Humes do with the original draft of the autopsy report? Did Specter or any of the Commissioners ask him about this? Had you been a Commissioner would you have a question or two?

@ Page 353 Humes describes what X-ray of JFK's head revealed. What was it?

@ Next we have two certificates or affidavits by Humes attesting what?

@ Next there are two documents that give you some idea of how qualified these doctors were to perform a forensic autopsy. Any observations on this?

@ Next Dr. Humes explains to the 1978 House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) why he burned the first draft of the JFK autopsy. Was Cornwell, his questioner, shocked or moved in any way at this explanation?

@ Next, on page 257 Humes elaborates on the reasons why he burned the first autopsy draft. What do you think of this story?

@ Next on page 258 Humes discloses exactly the time he and his colleagues exactly the time they rewrote the JFK autopsy. When was that? Any comments on the importance of this?

@ Next is a partial transcript of Humes deposition by the Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB) at the National Archives in College Park in 1996. This is Humes' last opportunity to answer questions about the destruction of the autopsy report. He has since gone to his reward. What is your reaction to this exchange?

@ Humes's colleague and good friend, Dr. Boswell, explained to ARRB why Jim Humes burned the first draft. Does it work for you?

@ The last document is a few pages from the Medical Panel of the HSCA and its assessment of the autopsy JFK received at Bethesda Naval Hospital. See f. on page 193.

Was this an autopsy fit for a murdered president? For that matter, was it an autopsy fit for some poor skid row wino? How did the HSCA Medical Panel evaluate JFK's autopsy?

Class: Showing of the prize-winning film "Reasonable Doubt."

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**NOTE: There is a Part II session in Manual for JFK Autopsy with questions. NOTE: You are NOT responsible for this material for the 2/26 session. The instructor will point out the importance of some of this material in class. I am keeping the following questions so you can use them as a guide if you choose to review the documents in this session on your own. Time is a factor and I wanted to use our class time for other topics important to the understanding of the JFK assassination.**

Some questions:

@ The documents begin with the WC testimony of two of the doctors who worked on JFK at Parkland Memorial Hospital. The transcript of their testimony should reveal to you how the Commission (Arlen Specter who did the questioning) forced them to back away from their original observation that JFK's neck wound was the result of a shot from the front. I'll read parts of Dr. Malcolm Perry's Q & A with the press on 11/22/1963 before he knew what the "official truth" that the government was to release to the public. You can read it before class and raise questions. Or skip it and read it at some other time.

@ Next is a FBI report on Commissioner John McCloy's appearance on "Face The Nation," a TV talking-heads program that usually pulled in millions of viewers.

What point does McCloy make about the Commission and the JFK X-rays and medical photos?

@ The next is a partial transcript of the WC's January 21 executive session. What is discussed here that is relevant to McCloy's "Face The Nation" appearance?

@ FBI internal memo 10/7/1964, which tries to explain why the FBI Report and the WC Report (made public in September) differed on JFK's non-fatal wound. The FBI report has the wound in his back and the WC Report has the wound in his lower neck at a downward angle. See first document in Section IV. How does this report explain away the contradictions? Read Hoover's marginalia at the bottom of page two of this report. What is going on here?

@ Next we come to a series of documents that I call "Following the paper trail." Recall Humes' testimony before the WC, the HSCA, and the ARRB re: his burning of the original autopsy draft and the rewriting of the autopsy protocol right after he and his colleagues learned of Oswald's own assassination. But what do these documents tell us about the autopsy documents? How do you interpret Captain Stover's little memo to all those who were in the Bethesda morgue during the autopsy? Also note Secret Service agent Robert Bouck's inventory of JFK autopsy materials that were in the custody of the Secret Service. See especially at about mid-page the line item: "An original and six pink copies of Certificate of Death (Nav. Med. N). Just note this we will see the importance in just a moment.

@ Since JFK's murder occurred in Dallas County, Dallas, it was incumbent on the Dallas authorities to produce a death certificate. Where does Mr. Ward place the shot in JFK's rear.

@ Next are affidavits executed by Francis X. O'Neill and James W. Sibert. You may remember that they were the two FBI agents sent by FBI headquarters to observe and take notes on the autopsy. What is in their affidavits that might explain why they were never called as a witness before the Warren Commission? These are veteran FBI agents trained to be keen observers.

@ Next is Lt. Colonel Pierre Finck's secret report to General Blumberg about his role in the JFK autopsy. Do you find anything in this report that is worthy of comment?

@ Next is a partial transcript of Finck's testimony at the Clay Shaw trial in 1969. It is important to understand that in this transcript Finck is being interrogated by the prosecution when he was brought on board to testify for the defense. In short, what you are reading is Finck in an adversarial atmosphere. No soft questioning here. He is being questioned hard by a Mr. Oser. What is it that Oser is trying to pry out of him? Do

Finck's reluctant admissions (it was like pulling teeth) have any importance as far as you can determine?

@ Last, but certainly not least, is a copy of JFK's official death certificate signed by his personal White House physician, Admiral George G. Burkley. Check the date it was signed. What is there in Burkely's description of JFK's wounds that would persuade the Warren Commission not to include this document in its Report or in the 26 volumes. How could it happen that this document was not in the Report or in the 26 volumes? The 900 plus page Report and the 10,000,000 words in the 26 volumes were all generated because of JFK's assassination. But it happened. Why?

March 4 . . . . . Was Oswald a Government "Agent"?

Note: Who was really Lee Harvey Oswald? The Oswald enigma held and still holds a critical key to any understanding of the JFK assassination. If there is a "smoking gun" in this whole terrible business it may well be connected to Oswald's activities and associations.

Readings: There is a chapter from a manuscript of a book I hope to have published this year., "Was Oswald a Government Agent?" Compare what I have documented in this chapter with the picture the Warren Report paints of the alleged killer of JFK. To do this turn to Chapter VII in the Warren Report and read pp. 383 to the Conclusion of the chapter.

Read also: Weisberg, Whitewash, Chapters 11 & 12. John Newman, "Oswald, the CIA and Mexico City: Fingerprints of a Conspiracy," in The Assassinations.

Questions: Since we are drawing near our look into the Kennedy assassination I am asking you to undertake this assignment with just one question in mind: That is, to compare and contrast the picture of Oswald found in the Warren Report with the conflicting views found in the other assigned readings. This is sort of a "free-fall" assignment, in that I am asking you to develop this week's journal response any way you like.

Class: A film of "Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?"

**Note: I have yet to decide to have one or two sessions on the JFK case. Therefore, I am holding back on the remaining assignment(s) until I decide.**