

*JFK and the Unspeakable*  
by James W. Douglass

Reviewed by James DiEugenio

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This book is the first volume of a projected trilogy. Orbis Books has commissioned James W. Douglass to write three books on the assassinations of the 1960's. The second will be on the murders of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, while the third will be on the assassination of Bobby Kennedy.

This is one of the few books on the Kennedy case that I actually wished was longer. In the purest sense, Jim Douglass is not a natural writer. But it seems to me he has labored meticulously to fashion a well organized, thoroughly documented, and felicitously composed piece of workmanship that is both comprehensible and easy to read. These attributes do not extend from simplicity of design or lack of ambition. This book takes in quite a lot of territory. In some ways it actually extends the frontier. In others it actually opens new paths. To achieve that kind of scope with a relative economy of means, and to make the experience both fast and pleasant, is quite an achievement.

I should inform the reader at the outset: this is not just a book about JFK's assassination. I would estimate that the book is 2/3 about Kennedy's presidency and 1/3 about his assassination. And I didn't mind that at all, because Douglass almost seamlessly knits together descriptions of several of Kennedy's policies with an analysis of how those policies were both monitored and resisted, most significantly in Cuba and Vietnam. This is one of the things that makes the book enlightening and worthy of understanding.

One point of worthwhile comparison would be to David Talbot's previous volume *Brothers*. In my view, Douglass' book is better. One of my criticisms of Talbot's book was that I didn't think his analysis of certain foreign policy areas was rigorous or comprehensive enough. You can't say that about Douglass. I also criticized Talbot for using questionable witnesses like Angelo Murgado and Timothy Leary to further certain dubious episodes about Kennedy's life and/or programs. Douglass avoided that pitfall.

One way that Douglass achieves this textured effect is in his quest for new sources. One of the problems I had with many Kennedy assassination books for a long time is their insularity. That is, they all relied on pretty much the same general established bibliography. In my first book, *Destiny Betrayed*, I tried to break out of that mildewed and restrictive mold. I wanted to widen the lens in order to place the man and the crime in a larger perspective. Douglass picks up that ball and runs with it. There are sources he utilizes here that have been terribly underused, and some that haven't been used before. For instance, unlike Talbot, Douglass sources Richard Mahoney's extraordinary *JFK: Ordeal in Africa*, one of the finest books ever written on President Kennedy's foreign policy. To fill in the Kennedy-Castro back channel of 1963 he uses *In the Eye*

✓ Note

auspices of the FBI and CIA. Groth never had a regular police assignment, but always worked counter-intelligence, with an early focus on the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. (Ibid)

Thomas Vallee, the presumed patsy, is just as interesting. The Chicago version of Oswald had suffered a severe concussion during the Korean War. It was so debilitating, he was discharged and then collected disability payments. When he got home he was in a bad car crash and suffered serious head injuries, which caused him to slip into a two-month coma. (p. 205) He was later diagnosed as mentally disturbed with elements of schizophrenia and paranoia. The CIA later recruited him to train Cuban exiles to assassinate Castro. It was these connections which probably helped maneuver him to be in a warehouse overlooking President Kennedy's parade route for a scheduled visit to the Windy City. After his arrest, and the cancellation of the early November visit, the police tried to track down his license plate. They found out they couldn't. (p. 203) The information was "locked". Only the FBI could "unlock" it.

I should also note the author's probing of the enduring mystery of Carl Mather and Collins Radio. This originates from the sighting of an Oswald double about ten minutes and eight blocks from his arrest at the Texas Theater. Around 2:00 PM, auto mechanic T. F. White noticed a Ford Falcon that first drove past, and then parked oddly in the lot of El Chico Restaurant. Which was across the street from White's garage. He told his boss about the man in the car who seemed to be hiding. White walked over to get a closer look. About ten yards away from the car, he stopped as the man in the white T-shirt looked right at him. (p. 295) Before he left the lot, he wrote down the license plate number of the car. When he went home that night and saw Oswald's face on TV, he told his wife that this was the man he saw in the Falcon.

Local Dallas broadcaster and future mayor Wes Wise heard about White's experience. When he interviewed him, White gave him the license number. Wise called the FBI. The Bureau traced the license to one Carl Mather of Garland, Texas. But the license number was on Mather's Plymouth, not a Falcon.

Mather did high-security communications work for Collins Radio, a major contractor for the CIA. How major and sensitive? Collins had outfitted raider ships for sabotage missions off the coast of Cuba. They also installed communication towers in Vietnam. Further, Mather had installed electronics equipment on Air Force Two. (p. 297) After Wise's call, the Bureau wanted to talk to Mather. But Mather didn't want to talk to the Bureau. So they talked to his wife Barbara. She surprised the G-men by saying her husband had been a close friend of J. D. Tippit. How close? When Tippit was shot, his wife phoned them. Many years later, the HSCA also wanted to talk to Mather. He didn't want to talk to them either. They persisted. He relented upon one condition: he wanted a grant of immunity from prosecution. But he still had no explanation for how his license ended up on a car with an Oswald double in it right after Oswald's arrest. This is all interesting, even engrossing, on its own. But the author takes it further. Citing the valuable work of John Armstrong, he then builds a case that there were two Oswalds at the Texas Theater on November 22, 1963. One was arrested and taken out the front door. The second Oswald

was hiding in the balcony and later escorted out the back by the police. Before anyone gets too dismissive, there are *two* Dallas Police Department reports that refer to Oswald being in the balcony of the theater. (p. 293) And there are *two* witnesses who saw an Oswald lookalike escorted out the rear: Butch Burroughs and Bernard Haire. (I should add here, in a 4/8/08 interview I did with Armstrong for this review, he said there was a sheriff's officer who also saw this second Oswald on the stairs between the mezzanine and the first floor.) The author postulates that the man who exited the rear is the man who ended up in the Falcon. He then wraps this up by saying that this double was ultimately flown out of Dallas on a military transport plane. This is based on the testimony of retired Air Force officer Robert Vinson. It is contained in a 52-page affidavit given to his attorney James P. Johnston of Wichita, Kansas.

I would like to conclude this section by noting Douglass' attention to the pain and suffering inflicted upon those who have tried to tell the truth as they knew it about the JFK case. Their only misfortune being that what they saw and knew was not conducive to the Warren Commission's mythology.

Most of us are aware of what happened to Richard Case Nagell. How he was railroaded and incarcerated after he was arrested in El Paso, Texas on September 20, 1963. (pgs. 152-158) But Douglass sheds light on what happened to three other important witnesses. Jim Wilcott and his wife worked for the Agency out of the Tokyo station. On the day of the assassination, Wilcott pulled a 24-hour security shift. That evening, more than one employee told him that the CIA had to have been involved in Kennedy's killing. When Wilcott asked how they knew this, the response was that they had handled disbursements for him under a cryptonym. Also, he had been trained by the Agency as a double agent at Atsugi. (pgs. 146-147) Later, both Jim and his wife quit the Agency. They then went public with their knowledge. Jim lost his private sector job, started receiving threatening phone calls, and had the tires on his car slashed.

Abraham Bolden was a Secret Service agent who had asked to leave the White House in 1961. He did not care for the lackadaisical practices of the White House detail. (p. 200) On October 30, 1963 Bolden was in Chicago when the local agents were briefed on what they knew about an attempt being planned on JFK's life there. After Vallee's arrest and the foiling of the plot, Bolden felt a foreboding about Kennedy's upcoming trip to Dallas. When Kennedy was killed, Bolden noted the similarities between what had occurred in Dallas and what almost occurred in Chicago. In May of 1964 he was in Washington for a Secret Service training program. (p. 215) He tried to contact the Warren Commission about what he knew. The day after his call to J. Lee Rankin, he was sent back to Chicago. Upon his arrival he was arrested. The pretense was that he was trying to sell Secret Service files to a counterfeiter. Upon his arraignment he was formally charged with fraud, obstruction of justice, and conspiracy. (Ibid) Needless to say, Bolden was convicted based upon perjured testimony. (The phony witness later admitted this himself.) He was imprisoned at Springfield where he was placed in a psychiatric unit. (p. 216) He was given mind-numbing drugs. But other inmates alerted him to the nature of the drugs in advance. So he knew how to fake taking the pills. While in prison, his family endured a bombing of their home, setting fire to their garage, and a

sniper shooting through their window. Mark Lane, while working for Garrison, visited him in 1967. Lane then wrote about Bolden's knowledge of the plot in Chicago. When the prison authorities learned about this, they placed Bolden in solitary confinement. He was finally released in 1969.

Compared to the fate of Ralph Yates, Bolden did all right. On November 20, 1963 Yates was making his rounds as a refrigerator mechanic for the Texas Butcher Supply Company in Dallas. That morning he picked up a hitchhiker on the R. L. Thornton Expressway. The man had a package with him that was wrapped in brown paper. When Yates asked him if he would prefer to place it in the back of the pickup, the passenger said no. They were curtain rods and he would rather keep them in the cab. (p. 351) The conversation rolled around to the subject of Kennedy's upcoming visit. The man asked Yates if he thought it was possible to kill Kennedy while he was there. Yates said that yes, it was possible. The hitchhiker then asked if Yates knew the motorcade route. Yates said he did not, but it had been in the paper. The man asked if he thought it would now be changed. Yates said that he doubted it. The passenger asked to be let off at a stoplight near Elm and Houston. Yates then returned to his shop and told his colleague Dempsey Jones about the strange conversation. (p. 352)

After the assassination, Yates noted the hitchhiker's resemblance to Oswald. So he volunteered his experience with him to the FBI. They brought him back for a total of four interviews. It became clear they did not want to believe him. The reason being that Oswald was not supposed to be on the expressway at that time. They finally gave him a polygraph test. The agents then told Yates' wife that, according to the machine, her husband was telling the truth. But, they concluded, the reason was that "he had convinced himself that he was telling the truth. So that's how it came out." (p. 354) The FBI told Yates that he needed help. So they sent him to Woodlawn Hospital, where he was admitted as a psychiatric patient. To quote the author, "From that point on, he spent the remaining eleven years of his life as a patient in and out of mental health hospitals." (Ibid) Such was the price for disturbing the equilibrium of the official story.

## V

In this last section, I want to tie together four strands Douglass deals with. I also want to suggest how they fit together not just in a conspiratorial design, but a design against this particular president.

In addition to his elucidation of the Castro/Kennedy back channel, Douglass also deals with Kennedy's back channel to Khrushchev. Kennedy had gotten off to a rocky start with the Russians because of the Bay of Pigs debacle and the roughness of the 1961 Vienna summit. But toward the end of 1961, he and the Russian premier had established a secret correspondence. The first letter was delivered by Georgi Bolshakov to Pierre Salinger wrapped in a newspaper. (p. 23) Khrushchev seemed to be trying to tell Kennedy that although he may have seemed unreasonable in Vienna, he was dead set against going down a path to war that would lead to the death of millions. The letter was 26 pages long, and Khrushchev mentioned hot spots on the globe like Laos and Berlin. Kennedy dutifully responded. And the correspondence went on for a year. It was then

supplemented by two unlikely cohorts: Pope John XXIII, and *Saturday Review* editor Norman Cousins. Cousins had been the intermediary between John and the premier. When Kennedy heard of this, he decided to have Cousins carry messages to Khrushchev for him also. In fact, it seems that it was actually Cousins who provided the impetus for Kennedy to make his remarkable American University speech of June 10, 1963. (p. 346)

This speech is one of the centerpieces of the book. Douglass prints it in its entirety as an appendix. (pgs. 382-388) He also analyzes it at length in the text. (pgs. 41-45) Khrushchev was ecstatic about the speech. He called it, "the greatest speech by any American president since Roosevelt." (p. 45) So inspired was he that he countered the speech and the renewed correspondence in multiple terms: 1.) A limited test ban treaty 2.) A non-aggression treaty between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and 3.) He encouraged Castro in his back channel with Kennedy. Douglass places much importance on the last and he uses Russian sources, including Khrushchev's son, to bolster it. (pgs 68-69)

There was another person at the time tiring of the Cold War and his role in it. Except he had a much lower profile than the four luminaries depicted above. His name was Lee Harvey Oswald. As Marina once said, Oswald "liked and approved of the President and he believed that for the United States in 1963, John F. Kennedy was the best president the country could hope to have." (p. 331) At the New Orleans Public Library, he checked out William Manchester's profile of JFK, *Portrait of a President*, Kennedy's own *Profiles in Courage*, and a book called *The White Nile*. The last he read only because Manchester noted that Kennedy had read it recently. (Ibid) When Kennedy spoke on the radio about the test ban treaty, Lee listened intently and told Marina that he was making an appeal for disarmament. Curiously, he also informed his wife that Kennedy would actually like to pursue a more gentle policy with Cuba. But unfortunately he was not free to do so at the time. Doesn't sound like the Krazy Kid planning on murdering JFK does it?

The night after Kennedy's test ban speech, Oswald gave a speech of his own at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama. His cousin, Eugene Murret was a seminarian there and he invited him to talk about his experiences in the Russian system. Douglass uses Oswald's notes on the speech to inform us what he was thinking at the time. And, for the man depicted by the Warren Commission, its extraordinary. Away from New Orleans, away from his handlers, away from scripted situations arranged by others, Oswald said some surprising things. He first chided his audience. Sounding like JFK, the man he admired, he warned them that military coups are not a far away thing in some banana republic in South America. It could happen here, in the USA, their own country. (Ibid) Which organization could do such a thing? He said it could not come from the army, because of its many conscripts, its large and cumbersome structure, its huge network of bases. Amazingly, he specifically mentioned Kennedy relieving Edwin Walker of his command as evidence it would not come from there. Walker, the man he derisively dismisses here, is the man he was already supposed to have tried to shoot!

He then said that from his experience in both Russia and America, "Capitalism doesn't work, communism doesn't work. In the middle is socialism and that

doesn't work either." (p. 473) He concluded that by returning to the USA, he was choosing the lesser of two evils. This does not remotely suggest the ideological zealot debating Ed Butler about the merits of Marxism, who was passing out flyers begging for fair treatment for Cuba, who got into street fights with anti-Castro Cubans who perceived him as a defender of Fidel. Here, in a secluded place, many miles away from Clay Shaw, David Ferrie, and Guy Banister, he sounds like a spy ready to come in from the cold. Ready to retire to a desk job under the president he admired.

But his handlers weren't ready to retire him just yet. As Ruth Paine left her stay in Falls Church to head south to pick up Marina, Oswald allegedly embarked on what Philip Melanson called his Magical Mystery Tour to Mexico. The object of this final charade of course was to depict Oswald as trying to obtain visas for Cuba and the Soviet Union. As Douglass describes it, this utterly intriguing journey is multi-layered. What Oswald seems to think he is doing is the final act of what he did in New Orleans: discrediting the FPCC. Which had been an operation the CIA had that was ongoing. As John Newman has pointed out, David Phillips and James McCord were in on it. But there was also something else going on here. After the fact, the CIA seems to have tried to create a questionable trail, one that would suggest Oswald was trying to get into contact with Valery Kostikov. Kostikov worked at the Soviet consulate but was also a KGB agent who the FBI had discovered was involved in assassination plots. (p. 76) But as the author demonstrates here, the record of this trip is so fraught with inconsistencies, improbabilities, conflicting testimony and outright deception that it "inadvertently revealed more about the CIA" than about Oswald. (p. 75)

The author notes the witnesses at the Cuban embassy who could not identify the man they saw as Oswald. Using the fine work of Newman, Douglass shows that at least some of the calls attributed to Oswald are dubious. (p. 76) He also adroitly notes that, prior to the assassination, the CIA held this alleged Kostikov/Oswald association close to its vest. If they had not, then it is highly probable that Oswald would not have been on the president's motorcade route on 11/22. Which, shortly after his return, was insured by the Paines not telling Oswald about the other job offer. Douglass astutely relates the final way his presence there was ultimately clinched. A man at the Bureau, Marvin Gheesling, deactivated Oswald's FLASH warning on 10/9/63. This meant that Oswald was not placed on the Security Index in Dallas. Again, if he would have been on this list, it is very likely the Secret Service would have had him under surveillance prior to November 22nd. Hoover was furious when he found out what Gheesling had done. He had him censured and placed on probation. On the documents censuring him he wrote, "Yes, send this guy to Siberia!" (p. 178) Later, on the marginalia of another document, he wrote that the Bureau should not trust the CIA again because of the phony story the Agency had given them about Oswald in Mexico City. (Ibid)

As others have noted, the combination of Oswald moving around so much plus the late-breaking, dubious, but explosive details of the Mexico City trip, all caused the system to overload in the wake of the JFK assassination. On November 23rd, after talking to Hoover by phone and John McCone in person, Johnson was quite clear about his fear of nuclear war. He told his friend Richard Russell that the question of Kennedy's murder had to be removed from

the Mexico City arena. Why? Because "they're testifying that Khrushchev and Castro did this and did that and kicking us into a war that can kill forty million Americans in an hour." (p. 231) The manufactured trail in Mexico helped freeze any real attempt to search for the actual facts of this case. It was too dangerous.

And there was a second built-in element that curtailed any real investigation. The fact that the FBI was short changed on information about Oswald -- by the files not getting from New Orleans to Dallas quickly enough, and by the CIA withholding crucial information about Oswald in Mexico City -- this helped pitch the Bureau into a CYA mode. For clearly, their surveillance of Oswald had been faulty. His activities in New Orleans, his alleged attempts to contact Kostikov in Mexico, his threatening message left at the Dallas FBI office, all of these should have put him on the Security Index.

But as Donald Gibson has noted, the safety valve to all this soon emerged. First, Jock Whitney's *New York Herald Tribune* put out the cover story about a disturbed Oswald being a "crazed individual" with "homicidal fantasies". (*Probe*, Vol. 7 No. 1 p. 19) This, of course, began to detract from the Oswald as the Marxist-motivated, Kostikov-employed assassin. It created a new profile for Oswald. He was now the lonely and disturbed sociopath. As Gibson further showed, a day after this, the lobbying effort of Eugene Rostow, Dean Acheson, and Joe Alsop would convince Johnson to create the Warren Commission. (*Probe*, Vol. 3 No. 4 p. 8) And at one of its very early meetings, Allen Dulles passed out a book promoting this particular view of American assassinations.

If all Douglass had written about the technique of the cover-up was the above, he would have done a salutary and exceptional job. But he has gone further.

And this makes his writing on the subject both new and even more valuable. Carol Hewett once wrote a quite interesting article (*Probe*, Vol. 4 No. 3) about how Ruth Paine "discovered" Oswald's alleged letter to the Russian embassy in Washington. The date of this letter is November 9th. In the letter Oswald writes about "recent events" in Mexico with a man he calls Comrade Kostin.

(This has usually been taken to mean Kostikov, although Hewett pointed out that there actually was a Soviet agent named Kostin.) Oswald went on to write,

"I had not planned to contact the Soviet embassy in Mexico so they were unprepared, had I been able to reach the Soviet embassy in Havana as planned, the embassy there would have had time *to complete our business.*" (p. 228,

Douglass' italics.) The author comments, "here the letter deepens the Soviet involvement in the plot and extends the complicity to Cuba." In other words,

"the business" would have been part of a co-conspiracy between the two communist countries. Further, Oswald betrayed knowledge in the letter that Eusebio Azcue, an employee at the Cuban consulate, had been replaced. But this did not happen until November 18 --the day the letter arrived at the Soviet embassy. How Oswald knew this would happen in advance has never been adequately explained.

In his call to Johnson on November 23rd, Hoover mentioned the letter. But he played down its more explosive and conspiratorial elements. (p. 229) But it was not until 1999, when Boris Yeltsin turned over long-secret documents to President Clinton, that we got the contemporaneous Soviet reaction to the arrival of this letter. The Soviet diplomats considered it a clear provocation against them. (p. 230) They also considered it a deception, since they had no

such ties to Oswald. They also noted it was typed yet other letters that he wrote to them were handwritten. They thus concluded it was a forgery. Or perhaps someone had dictated it to him--perhaps as a completion of the FPCC counter-intelligence operation. But most significantly, the Soviets felt the letter was "concocted by those ... involved in the President's assassination." (p. 230) To disown it, they turned it over to the State Department on November 26th.

But, by then, the FBI already had two copies of the letter. One from a mail intercept program and one via Ruth Paine. Ruth Paine gave FBI agent Jim Hosty her handwritten copy of the letter on November 23rd. As Hewett pointed out, how and why she copied this letter was a matter of a long colloquy spread over three days between her and the Warren Commission. Altogether, she gave three different reasons as to why she copied the letter. She finally decided on this: since Oswald left it on her secretary desk, he *must* have wanted her to read it! The shifting and unconvincing excuses all seem a way to disguise and obfuscate one simple but revealing fact: she was spying on Oswald. And this spying went as far as copying his private correspondence without his permission. (For who she is spying and why is, of course, never broached.)

Further, her copy of the letter differs in some interesting ways from the typewritten one. As the author notes, it de-emphasizes Oswald's contacts with the communist embassies. Instead, it emphasizes his differences with the FBI.

It also replaces the pregnant phrase "time to complete our business" with phrases like "time to assist me" referring to a travel process. (p. 233) Amazingly, it was this Ruth Paine version of the letter -- not the one Oswald allegedly typed and mailed -- that the Warren Commission used in its analysis of what the correspondence meant. The Commission then returned Oswald's rough draft, the one Ruth copied, not to Marina, but to Ruth. According to Carol Hewett, Ruth's handwritten copy is nowhere to be found today. (Hewett interview, 4/8/08)

There are many fascinating aspects to Ruth Paine's role with this letter. So many that one could write a lengthy essay about it. One thing I wish to point out here. The FBI could not make their version of the letter public since it would have revealed their intercept program. Clearly, the State Department did not want to reveal their version. Because by November 26th, Johnson had decided to bury the allegations about Oswald in Mexico City to avoid the threat of conflagration. But by Ruth Paine's spying on Oswald, it was possible to circulate a softer version of the letter, thus further labeling him a communist who had problems with American authority. Douglass has finally brought this episode, and Ruth Paine's role in it, into bold relief.

I do have some reservations about the book. Let me note them briefly.

Douglass, like several others before him, couldn't resist mentioning and misinterpreting David Morales' remarks as quoted by Gaeton Fonzi in *The Last Investigation*. (p. 57) Second, he places more faith in some assassination witnesses than I do, e.g. Ed Hoffmann. And I disagree with his characterization of JFK as a 'cold warrior' who "turned" during the Missile Crisis. If Kennedy was actually a cold warrior when he entered office, he would have sent in the Navy and Marines to complete the job at the Bay of Pigs. Which is what a real cold warrior, Richard Nixon, told him to do. He also would have sent combat troops into Vietnam in 1961, when all of his advisers said it was necessary.



But overall, and overwhelmingly, this is a rich, rewarding, and reverberating book. One that does two things that very few volumes in the field do: it both illuminates and empowers the reader. I strongly recommend purchasing it. It is the best book in the field since *Breach of Trust*.

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**NOTE:** *This review is based on the publisher's advance, uncorrected proof. References to page numbers could change.*

[Return to Main Page](#)

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*of the Storm* by Carlos Lechuga and William Attwood's *The Twilight Struggle*. On Kennedy and Vietnam the author utilizes Anne Blair's *Lodge in Vietnam*, Ellen Hammer's *A Death in November*, and Zalin Grant's *Facing the Phoenix*. And these works allow Douglass to show us how men like Henry Cabot Lodge and Lucien Conein did not just obstruct, but actually subverted President Kennedy's wishes in Saigon. On the assassination side, Douglass makes good use of that extraordinary feat of research *Harvey and Lee* by John Armstrong, the difficult to get manuscript by Roger Craig, *When They Kill a President*, plus the work of little known authors in the field like Bruce Adamson and hard to get manuscripts like Edwin Black's exceptional essay on the Chicago plot. Further, he interviewed relatively new witnesses like Butch Burroughs and the survivors of deceased witnesses like Thomas Vallee, Bill Pitzer and Ralph Yates. In the use of these persons and sources, Douglass has pushed the envelope forward.

But it's not just what is in the book. It is how it is molded together that deserves attention. For instance, in the first chapter, Douglass is describing the Cuban Missile Crisis at length (using the newest transcription of the secretly recorded tapes by Sheldon Stern.) He then segues to Kennedy's American University speech. At this point, Douglass then introduces the figure of Lee Harvey Oswald and his relation to the U-2 (p. 37). This is beautifully done because he has been specifically discussing the U-2 flights over Cuba during the Missile Crisis, and he subliminally matches both Kennedy and Oswald in their most extreme Cold War backdrops. He then switches back to the American University speech, contrasting its rather non-descript reception in the *New York Times* with its joyous welcome in Russia, thus showing that Kennedy's efforts for détente were more appreciated by his presumed enemy than by the domestic pundit class.

These artful movements would be good enough. But the design of the book goes further. As mentioned above, in his first introduction of Oswald Douglass mentions the Nags Head, North Carolina military program which launched American soldiers into Russia as infiltrators. Near the end of the book (p. 365), with Oswald in jail about to be killed by Jack Ruby, Douglass returns to that military program with Oswald's famous thwarted phone call to Raleigh, North Carolina: the spy left out in the cold attempting to contact his handlers for information as how to proceed. But not realizing that his attempted call will now guarantee his execution. Thus the author closes a previously prepared arc. It isn't easy to do things like that. And it doesn't really take talent. One just has to be something of a literary craftsman: bending over the table, honing and refining. But it's the kind of detail work that pays off. It maintains the reader's attention along the way and increases his understanding by the end.

## II

One of the book's most notable achievements is the 3-D picture of the Castro-Kennedy back channel of 1963. Douglass' work on this episode is detailed, complete, and illuminating in more ways than one. From a multiplicity of books, periodicals, and interviews, the author produces not opinions or spin on what happened. And not after the fact, wishy-washy post-mortems. But actual first-hand knowledge of the negotiations by the people involved in them.

It started in January of 1963. Attorney John Donovan had been negotiating the release of the Bay of Pigs prisoners when Castro's physician and aide Rene Vallejo broached the subject of normalizing relations with the USA (p. 56). Right here, Douglass subtly tells us something important. For Vallejo would not have broached such a subject without Castro's permission. In approaching these talks, Dean Rusk and the State Department wanted to establish preconditions. Namely that Cuba would have to break its Sino/Soviet ties. Kennedy overruled this qualification with the following: "We don't want to present Castro with a condition that he obviously cannot fulfill." NSC assistant Gordon Chase explained Kennedy's intercession, "The President himself is very interested in this one." (pgs. 57-58)

Because the State Department was cut in at the start, the CIA got wind of the opening. Douglass makes the case that David Phillips and the Cuban exiles reacted by having the militant group Alpha 66 begin to raid Russian ships sailing toward Cuba. Antonio Veciana later stated that Phillips had arranged the raids because, "Kennedy would have to be forced to make a decision and the only way was to put him up against the wall." (p. 57) The initial raid was followed by another a week later.

Phillips did indeed force Kennedy into making a decision. At the end of March, the Justice Department began to stop Cuban exiles from performing these raids off of American territory. This resulted in crackdowns and arrests in Florida and Louisiana. And it was this crackdown that provoked a bitter falling out between the leaders of the CIA created Cuban Revolutionary Council and President Kennedy. Dr. Jose Miro Cardona stated that the "struggle for Cuba was in the process of being liquidated" for "every refugee has received his last allotment this month, forcing them to relocate." (p. 59) The CRC had been a special project of both Phillips and Howard Hunt. As the Associated Press further reported in April, "The dispute between the Cuban exile leaders and the Kennedy administration was symbolized here today by black crepe hung from the doors of exiles' homes." (Ibid)

Clearly, Kennedy was changing both speeds and direction. At this time, Donovan visited Castro and raised the point of Kennedy clamping down on the exile groups. Castro replied to this with the provocative statement that his "ideal government was not to be Soviet oriented." (p. 60) When newscaster Lisa Howard visited Castro in late April, she asked how a rapprochement between the USA and Cuba could be achieved. Castro replied that the "Steps were already being taken" and Kennedy's limitations on the exile raids was the first one. (p. 61)

As Douglass observes, every Castro overture for normalization up to that point had been noted by the CIA. And CIA Director John McCone urged "that no active steps be taken on the rapprochement matter at this time." (p. 61) Deftly, the author points out that-- almost simultaneous with this--Oswald inexplicably moves from Dallas to New Orleans to begin his high profile pro-Castro activities. And later that summer, CIA case officers will secretly meet with Rolando Cubela to begin another attempt on Castro's life.

Oblivious to this, the back channel was now picked up and furthered by Howard and William Attwood. Howard reported that Castro was even more explicit now about dealing with Kennedy over the Russian influence in Cuba. He was willing to discuss Soviet personnel and military hardware on the island and even compensation for American lands and investments. The article she wrote at this time concluded with a request that a government official be sent to negotiate these matters with Fidel. (p. 70) This is where former journalist and then diplomat Attwood stepped in. Knowing that Attwood had talked with Castro before, Kennedy instructed him to make contact with Carlos Lechuga. Lechuga was Cuba's ambassador at the United Nations, and Kennedy felt this would be a logical next step to continue the dialogue and perhaps set some kind of agenda and parameters. Howard arranged the meeting between the two opposing diplomats. Attwood told Lechuga that Kennedy felt relations could not be changed overnight, but something "had to be done about it and a start had to be made." (p. 71) Lechuga replied that Castro had liked Kennedy's American University speech and he felt that Castro might OK a visit by Attwood to Cuba. This, of course, would have been a significant milestone.

A funny and revealing thing happened next. Both sides alerted the other that they would be making boilerplate anti-Cuba and anti-America speeches. (Adlai Stevenson would be doing the anti-Cuba one at the UN.) This clearly implies that the players understood that while relations were warming in private, motions had to be gone through in public to please the pundit class.

Howard then requested that Vallejo ask Castro if Fidel would approve a visit by Attwood in the near future. Attwood believed this message never got through to Castro. So Kennedy decided to get the message to Castro via Attwood's friend, French journalist Jean Daniel. (p. 72) What Kennedy told Daniel is somewhat stunning. Thankfully, and I believe for the first time in such a book, Douglass quotes it at length. I will summarize it here.

Kennedy wanted Daniel to tell Castro that he understood the horrible exploitation, colonization, and humiliation the history of Cuba represented and that the people of Cuba had endured. He even painfully understood that the USA had been part of this during the Batista regime. Startlingly, he said he approved of Castro's declarations made in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. He added, "In the matter of the Batista regime, I am in agreement with the first Cuban revolutionaries. That is perfectly clear." Daniel was somewhat taken aback by these sentiments. But, Kennedy continued, the dilemma now was that Cuba -- because of its Soviet ties -- had become part of the Cold War. And this had led to the Missile Crisis. Kennedy felt that Khrushchev understood all these ramifications now, after that terrible thirteen days.

The president concluded with this, "...but so far as Fidel Castro is concerned, I must say I don't know whether he realizes this, or even if he cares about it." Kennedy smiled and then ended Daniel's instructions with this: "You can tell me whether he does when you come back."

Daniel then went to Havana. On November 19th Castro walked into his hotel. Fidel was fully aware of the Attwood/Lechuga meetings. He was also aware of

Kennedy's briefing of Daniel. He had found out about this through Howard. In fact, he had told her he did not think it would be a good idea for him to meet Attwood in New York. He suggested that the meeting could be arranged by picking up Attwood in Mexico and flying him to Cuba. Castro also agreed that Che Guevara should be left out of the talks since he opposed their ultimate aim. Attwood said that Lechuga and he should meet to discuss a full agenda for a later meeting between himself and Castro. This was done per Kennedy's instructions, and JFK wanted to brief Attwood beforehand on what the agenda should be. Things were heading into a higher gear.

Daniel was unaware of the above when Castro walked into his room for a six-hour talk about Kennedy. (pgs. 85-89) I won't even attempt to summarize this conversation. I will only quote Castro thusly, "Suddenly a president arrives on the scene who tries to support the interest of another class ... " Clearly elated by Daniel's message, Castro and the journalist spent a large part of the next three days together. Castro even stated that JFK could now become the greatest president since Lincoln.

On the third day, Daniel was having lunch with Fidel when the phone rang. The news about Kennedy being shot in Dallas had arrived. Stunned, Castro hung up the phone, sat down and then repeated over and over, "This is bad news ... This is bad news ... This is bad news." (p. 89) A few moments later when the radio broadcast the report stating that Kennedy was now dead, Castro stood up and said, "Everything is changed. Everything is going to change." (p. 90)

To say he was prophetic is putting it mildly. Attwood would later write that what it took 11 months to build was gone in about three weeks. By December 17th it was clear that President Johnson was brushing it all aside. Retroactively, Attwood came to conclude that it had all really ended in Dealey Plaza. He finalized his thoughts about the excellent progress made up to that point with this: "There is no doubt in my mind. If there had been no assassination we probably would have moved into negotiations leading toward normalization of relations with Cuba." (p. 177)

Douglass has done a real service here. Gus Russo will now have an even more difficult time in defending the thesis of his nonsensical book. No one can now say, as the authors of *Ultimate Sacrifice* do that these negotiations were "headed nowhere." And if they do, we will now know what to think of them.

### III

Equally as good as the above is Douglass' work on Kennedy and Vietnam. Especially in regards to the events leading up to the November coup against Ngo Dinh Diem and the eventual murder of both he and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu.

Taking a helpful cue from David Kaiser's *American Tragedy*, Douglass begins his discourse by analyzing Kennedy's single-minded pursuit of a neutralization policy in neighboring Laos. (pgs. 98-101) Douglass exemplifies just how single-minded JFK was on this by excerpting a phone call the president had with his point man on the 1962 Laos negotiations, Averill Harriman: "Did you

understand? I want a negotiated settlement in Laos. I don't want to put troops in." (p. 104)

Unfortunately, no one felt the same way about Vietnam. Except President Kennedy. The Pentagon, the CIA, Lyndon Johnson and the Nhu brothers all looked askance at Laos as a model for Vietnam. (p. 106) Even the one general that JFK favored, Maxwell Taylor, told him to send in combat troops as early as 1961. (Ibid) After Taylor's visit there, Ambassador Frederick Nolting wired Kennedy that "conversations over the past ten days with Vietnamese in various walks of life" showed a "virtually unanimous desire for introduction US forces in Viet Nam." (p. 107) In other words, his own ambassador was trying to sell him on the idea that the general populace wanted the American army introduced there. Finally, both Secretary of Defense Bob McNamara and his assistant Ros Gilpatric also joined the chorus. As Taylor later recalled, no one was actually against it except President Kennedy "The president just didn't want to be convinced ... . It was really the President's personal conviction that U.S. ground troops shouldn't go in." (Ibid) But in 1961, Kennedy was not yet ready to withdraw. So he threw a sop to the hawks and approved a new influx of 15, 000 advisers.

In April of 1962, John K. Galbraith sent a memo to Kennedy proposing a negotiated settlement with the North Vietnamese. The Joint Chiefs, State Department, and Harriman vigorously opposed the idea. It was too much like Laos. (pgs 118-119) But Kennedy liked the proposal. And in the spring of 1962 he instructed McNamara to initiate a plan to withdraw American forces from South Vietnam. In May of 1962, McNamara told the commanders on the scene to begin to plan for this as the president wanted to see the blueprint as soon as it was ready.

To put it mildly, the military dragged its heels. It took them a year to prepare the outline. In the meantime Kennedy was telling a number of friends and acquaintances that he was getting out of Vietnam. Douglass assembles quite an impressive list of witnesses to this fact: White House aide Malcolm Kilduff, journalist Larry Newman, Sen. Wayne Morse, Marine Corps Chief David Shoup, Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson, Asst. Sec. of State Roger Hilsman, Sen. Mike Mansfield, Congressman Tip O'Neill, and newspaper editor Charles Bartlett, among others. Mansfield, for one, wrote that Kennedy had become unequivocal on the subject of withdrawal by the end of 1962. (p. 124)

In May of 1963, at the so-called SecDef meeting in Honolulu, the generals in Vietnam finally presented their withdrawal plan. McNamara said it was too slow. He wanted it revised and speeded up. In September, Kennedy and McNamara announced the order -- NSAM 263 -- to begin the withdrawal. It consisted of the first thousand troops to be out by the end of the year. Which, of course, would be reversed almost immediately after his death. (See *Probe*, Vol. 5 No. 3 p. 18.)

The parallel story that Douglass tells -- with grim skill and painful detail -- is of the tragic demise of the Nhu brothers. It is the clearest and most moving synopsis of that sad tale that I can recall. It begins in May of 1963 with the

famous bombing of the Hue radio station during a Buddhist holiday. A Buddhist rally was in progress there to protest another discriminatory edict passed by the Catholic Diem. The importance of this bombing, and the subsequent firing into the crowd--which left seven dead and fifteen wounded--cannot be minimized. As many commentators have noted, this localized incident mushroomed into a full-blown political crisis, spawning huge strikes and large street demonstrations. The twin explosions that shook the building were first blamed on the Viet Cong. Then on the South Vietnamese police. Which enraged the Buddhist population against Diem even further since his brother Nhu was in charge of the security forces. It was a milestone in the collapse of faith by the State Department in Diem. And it eventually led them to back the coup of the generals against the Nhu brothers.

What Douglass does here is introduce a new analysis based on evidence developed at the scene. Because of the particular pattern of destruction on both the building and the victims, the local doctors and authorities came to the conclusion that it had to have been caused by a certain plastic explosive -- which only the CIA possessed at the time. A further investigation by a Vietnamese newspaper located the American agent who admitted to the bombing. (p. 131) This puts the event in a new context. Douglass then builds on this in a most interesting and compelling manner.

As mentioned above, the Hue atrocity caused even the liberals in the State Department to abandon Diem. So now Harriman and Hilsman united with the conservative hawks in an effort to oust him. In late August, they manipulated Kennedy into approving a cable that gave the go-ahead to a group of South Vietnamese generals to explore the possibility of a coup. (Afterwards, at least one high staffer offered to resign over misleading Kennedy about McNamara's previous approval of the cable.) The leading conservative mounting the effort to dethrone Diem was Henry Cabot Lodge. Kennedy had planned to recall Ambassador Nolting and appoint Edmund Gullion to the position. And, as readers of the Mahoney book will know, Gullion was much more in tune with Kennedy's thinking on Third World nationalism. He had actually tutored him on the subject in 1951 when Congressman Kennedy first visited Saigon. But Secretary of State Dean Rusk overruled this appointment, and suggested Lodge for the job. Lodge lobbied hard for the position because he wanted to use it as a springboard for a run for the presidency in 1964.

Many, including myself, have maintained that if there was a black-hatted villain in the drama of Saigon and the Nhu brothers in 1963, it was Lodge. Douglass makes an excellent case for that thesis here. Before moving to Saigon, Lodge consulted with, of all people, *Time-Life* publisher Henry Luce. He went to him for advice on what his approach to Diem should be. (p. 163) Kennedy's foe Luce advised Lodge not to negotiate with Diem. Referring him to the work of a journalist in his employ, he told Lodge to engage Diem in a "game of chicken". What this meant was that unless Diem capitulated on every point of contention between the two governments, support would be withdrawn. The ultimate endgame would be that there would be nothing to prop up his rule. And this is what Lodge did. With disastrous results.

From the time of the August cable, Lodge plotted with CIA officer Lucien Conein to encourage the coup and to undermine Diem by ignoring him. Even though, as Douglass makes clear, this is contrary to what JFK wanted. Kennedy grew so frustrated with Lodge that he sent his friend Torby McDonald on a secret mission to tell Diem that he must get rid of his brother Nhu. (p. 167)

It was Lodge who got John McCone to withdraw CIA station chief John Richardson who was sympathetic to Diem. Lodge wanted McCone to replace him with Ed Lansdale. Why? Because Lansdale was more experienced in changing governments. Richardson was withdrawn but no immediate replacement was named. So in September of 1963, this essentially left Lodge and Conein in charge of the CIA's interaction with the generals. And it was Conein who had been handling this assignment from the beginning, even before Lodge got on the scene. Around this time, stories began to emanate from Saigon by journalists Richard Starnes and Arthur Krock about the CIA being a power that was accountable to no one.

It was Lodge, along with establishment journalist Joe Alsop -- who would later help convince Johnson to create the Warren Commission -- who began the stories about Diem negotiating a secret treaty with Ho Chi Minh. (p. 191) This disclosure -- looked upon as capitulation-- further encouraged the efforts by the military for a coup. In September, Kennedy accidentally discovered that the CIA had cut off the Commodity Import Program for South Vietnam. He was taken aback. He knew this would do two things: 1.) It would send the South Vietnamese economy into a tailspin, and 2.) It would further encourage the generals because it would convey the message the USA was abandoning Diem. (p. 195)

On October 24th, the conspirators told Conein the coup was imminent. JFK told Lodge he wanted to be able to stop the coup at the last minute. (Conein later testified that he was getting conflicting cables from Washington: the State Department was telling him to proceed, the Kennedys were telling him to stop.) At this time Diem told Lodge he wanted Kennedy to know he was ready to carry out his wishes. (p. 202) But Lodge did not relay this crucial message to Kennedy until after the coup began.

The rest of Douglass' work here confirms what was only suggested in the Church Committee Report. Clearly, Conein and Lodge had sided with the generals to the ultimate degree. And, like Lenin with the Romanov family, the generals had decided that Diem and his brother had to be terminated. Lodge and Conein helped the coup plotters to facilitate the final bloody outcome. In turn, by using the Alsop-Lodge story about the Diem/Ho negotiations, the CIA egged on the murderous denouement. (p. 209) Not knowing Lodge was subverting Kennedy's actual wishes, Diem kept calling the ambassador even after the coup began. This allowed Lodge to supply his true location to Conein after the brothers had fled the bombed presidential castle. So when the brothers walked out of the Catholic Church they had taken refuge in, they thought the truck that awaited them was escorting them to the airport. But with the help of their two American allies, the generals had arranged for the truck themselves. And the unsuspecting Nhu brothers walked into the hands of their murderers.



Kennedy was so distraught by this outcome he decided to recall Lodge and fire him. He had arranged to do this on November 24th. Instead, President Johnson called the ambassador back with a different message: the US must not lose in Vietnam. (p. 375)

These are the best twin summaries on Kennedy's 1963 Vietnam and Cuba policies that I have seen between the covers of one book. After his death, the negotiations with Cuba would disappear forever. And, with even more alacrity, Lyndon Johnson now embarked on an escalation into a disastrous war in Southeast Asia whose price, even today, is incalculable. Douglass makes a convincing case that neither would have occurred if JFK had lived. I leave it to the reader to decide whether those two irrevocable alterations directly and negatively impacted the lives of tens of millions in America, Cuba, and Southeast Asia.

#### IV

Generally speaking, Douglass has done a good job of choosing some of the better evidence that has appeared of late to indicate a conspiracy. What he does with Ruth and Michael Paine, especially the former, is salutary.

Michael Paine did not just work at Bell Helicopter. He did not just have a security clearance there. His stepfather, Arthur Young, *invented* the Bell helicopter. His mother, Ruth Forbes Paine Young, was descended from the Boston Brahmin Forbes family -- one of the oldest in America. She was a close friend of Mary Bancroft. Mary Bancroft worked with Allen Dulles as a spy during World War II in Switzerland. This is where Dulles got many of his ideas on espionage, which he would incorporate as CIA Director under Eisenhower. Bancroft also became Dulles' friend and lover. She herself called Ruth Forbes, "a very good friend of mine." (p. 169) This may explain why, according to Walt Brown, the Paines were the most oft-questioned witnesses to appear before the Commission.

Ruth Paine's father was William Avery Hyde. Ruth described him before the Warren Commission as an insurance underwriter. (p. 170) But there was more to it than that. Just one month after the Warren Report was issued, Mr. Hyde received a three-year government contract from the Agency for International Development (AID). He became their regional adviser for all of Latin America. As was revealed in the seventies, AID was riddled with CIA operatives. To the point that some called it an extension of the Agency. Hyde's reports were forwarded both to the State Department and the CIA. (Ibid)

Ruth Paine's older sister was Sylvia Hyde Hoke. Sylvia was living in Falls Church, Virginia in 1963. Ruth stayed with Sylvia in September of 1963 while traveling across country. (p. 170) Falls Church adjoins Langley, which was then the new headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency, a prized project of Allen Dulles. It was from Falls Church that Ruth Paine journeyed to New Orleans to pick up Marina Oswald, who she had been introduced to by George DeMohrenschildt. After she picked Marina up, she deposited her in her home in Irving, Texas. Thereby separating Marina from Lee at the time of the assassination.

Some later discoveries made Ruth's itinerary in September quite interesting. It turned out that John Hoke, Sylvia's husband, also worked for AID. And her sister Sylvia worked directly for the CIA itself. By the time of Ruth's visit, Sylvia had been employed by the Agency for eight years. In regards to this interestingly timed visit to her sister, Jim Garrison asked Ruth some pointed questions when she appeared before a grand jury in 1968. He first asked her if she knew her sister had a file that was classified at that time in the National Archives. Ruth replied she did not. In fact, she was not aware of any classification matter at all. When the DA asked her if she had any idea why it was being kept secret, Ruth replied that she didn't. Then Garrison asked Ruth if she knew which government agency Sylvia worked for. The uninquiring Ruth said she did not know. (p. 171) This is the same woman who was seen at the National Archives pouring through her files in 1976, when the House Select Committee was gearing up.

When Marina Oswald was called before the same grand jury, a citizen asked her if she still associated with Ruth Paine. Marina replied that she didn't. When asked why not, Marina stated that it was upon the advice of the Secret Service. She then elaborated on this by explaining that they had told her it would look bad if the public found out the "connection between me and Ruth and CIA." An assistant DA then asked, "In other words, you were left with the distinct impression that she was in some way connected with the CIA?" Marina replied simply, "Yes." (p. 173)

Douglass interpolates the above with the why and how of Oswald ending up on the motorcade route on 11/22/63. Robert Adams of the Texas Employment Commission testified to having called the Paine household at about the time Oswald was referred by Ruth -- via a neighbor-- to the Texas School Book Depository (TSBD) for a position. He called and was told Oswald was not there. He left a message for Oswald to come down and see him since he had a position available as a cargo handler at a regional cargo airline. Interestingly, this job paid about 1/3 more than the job Oswald ended up with at the TSBD. He called again the next day to inquire about Oswald and the position again. He was now told that Lee had already taken a job. Ruth was questioned about the Adams call by the Warren Commission's Albert Jenner. At first she denied ever hearing of such a job offer. She said, "I do not recall that." (p. 172) She then backtracked, in a tactical way. She now said that she may have heard of the offer *from Lee*. This, of course, would seem to contradict both the Adams testimony and common sense. If Oswald was cognizant of the better offer, why would he take the lower paying job?

In addition to his work on the true background of the Paines, which I will return to later, Douglass' section on the aborted plot against Kennedy in Chicago is also exceptional. The difference between what Douglass does here and what was done in *Ultimate Sacrifice* is the difference between confusion and comprehension. After they were informed of a plot, the police arrested Thomas Vallee on a pretext. Interestingly Dan Groth, the suspicious officer in on the arrest of Vallee, was later part of the SWAT team that assassinated Black Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark in 1969. (p. 204) Groth took several lengthy leaves from Chicago to Washington for special training under the