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## Great book reveals Kennedys' courage

David R. Wrone  
Special to The Capital Times — 5/18/2007 8:58 am

Based on wide-ranging interviews with associates of President John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert, David Talbot, the founder of Salon.com, gives us a hitherto hidden picture of the years 1960-1968. His just-released book, "Brothers: The Hidden History of the Kennedy Years," is a great work and beautifully written.

Talbot reveals that even as JFK took office, he confronted military and CIA forces that moved to control policies and thrust America into nuclear war. This continued throughout his 1,000 days as he, with his brother, fought to block the right wing, CIA and military's drive for a nuclear war and control of national policies. According to Talbot, the military had a covert plan to use the Bay of Pigs invasion to pull JFK into a major war, which he courageously blocked by standing up to the generals and CIA. In Laos and later in Berlin, the military sought nuclear war, but he resisted. JFK learned the military had designs for a sneak attack on Russia and China with nuclear weapons, which he also scuttled.

In the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, according to Talbot, JFK initially stood with only his brother Robert against the clamor of the Joint Chiefs, who wanted an invasion. Unbeknownst to the United States, the Soviet troops had scores of nuclear missiles on the island that, had Kennedy invaded, would have been fired at America and launched the world into a nuclear holocaust. Talbot says that the generals and admirals counted JFK's peaceful solution as the worst defeat in the nation's history and hated him with unbridled passion and that the CIA and FBI constantly surveilled him.

In the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Attorney General Robert Kennedy confronted a racist, reactionary institution. Talbot tells how Robert Kennedy had to assemble his own team of agents from other departments' scraps to carry out his and the president's policies. His life was constantly threatened by criminal elements, requiring him at times to bring in trusted personal friends from the marshal's service to guard him and his family. One great unsung accomplishment, Talbot says, was to cripple organized crime's movement to take over government functions, because they had become a growing force threatening the nation itself.

By November 1963, as JFK moved to disengage from Vietnam, abate Cuban tensions, restructure the CIA and establish detente, bullets cut him down.

Not for a minute, Talbot stresses, did Robert Kennedy believe Lee Harvey Oswald killed his brother; within hours, he came to believe reactionary American forces assassinated him. If Oswald was involved at all, it was as a minor player. Talbot tells how immediately after the funeral Robert Kennedy dispatched a family friend to the Kremlin to inform the Soviets not to believe the story of what happened circulating in federal circles. He informed his closest friends that it would require the power of the presidency to find the culprits, and his search for the murderers never ceased. He went to surprising lengths to seek out information, including a secret meeting with Teamster Jimmy Hoffa.

In a frightening point, Talbot convincingly shows how intelligence agencies have, since the death of the Kennedy brothers, insidiously fed untrue information about them to Congress and to happy conduit reporters like Seymour Hersh.

What is so striking in this remarkable volume is what is not there. At the national level, Robert Kennedy stood almost alone in his fight to find his brother's killers, while the prominent academicians, the intellectuals, JFK's aides, and the Democratic Party of the nation (and Wisconsin) either stood to the side or clasped the whitewash of the Warren Report. It was left to the remnants of the old progressives and the youth of the '60s, to the housewives and bartenders, to struggle to show that two or more riflemen shot JFK -- and that neither of them was Oswald.

Brothers: The Hidden History of the Kennedy Years By David Talbot; Free Press, 478 pages, \$28.

David R. Wrone, a retired history professor from UW-Stevens Point, has studied, published, lectured and debated about the JFK assassination for the past 40 years.

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- It's just a one-time thing, it doesn't signify any larger trend.
- Something like this is bound to happen in a city this size now and then.
- Madison's culture of alcohol is largely to blame
- Crime is out of control in Madison, especially downtown.

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