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# THE MAN WHO DIDN'T TALK

and other tales from the new  
**KENNEDY ASSASSINATION FILES**

By Jefferson Morley

Editor's note: Jefferson Morley, a former editor and staff writer for [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com), is the author of the forthcoming book, *Our Man in Mexico: Winston Scott and the Hidden History of the CIA*, published by the University Press of Kansas. He has written about the Kennedy assassination for *Reader's Digest*, the *New York Review of Books*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Salon*, *Washington Monthly* and the *Miami New Times*. He is now national editorial director for the Center for Independent Media in Washington D.C. which sponsors a network of online news sites in four states. In this piece, written with support from the Fund for Investigative Journalism, he offers an update on new findings related to the most shocking political murder in American history.

Bob Woodward, my former colleague at the *Washington Post*, once warned me in a collegial way that the story of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy was a journalistic "black hole," and so it is. The JFK story is literally a dark core of cultural energy that can swallow your time and sanity. At the same time, the black hole of Kennedy's assassination exercises a gravitational pull on the American imagination that cannot be ignored.

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In the 44 years since the assassination, there have been three critical milestones in the effort to explain this devastating crime. The first story was the report of the Warren Commission,



the official government body assigned to investigate the shooting. In September 1964, the Commission concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald, described as a pro-Castro Marxist, fired three shots at the presidential motorcade and killed Kennedy for reasons known only to him. They held that Oswald acted alone and unaided, and did not pay attention to the protests raised upon his arrest that he was "a patsy." He was shot to death, while in police custody, two days after his arrest by Jack Ruby, a Dallas nightclub owner who had ties to organized crime that the Commission chose not to share with the American people.

Within a week, 62 percent of respondents to a University of Chicago poll rejected the notion that Oswald had acted alone. Contrary to mainstream media mythology JFK conspiratorial suspicions were not whipped up years after the fact by cranks and fantasists. Those suspicions arose immediately, they spanned the political spectrum and they percolated in the Washington political elite. Both Robert Kennedy and Jackie Kennedy believed that JFK was the victim of a major domestic conspiracy. JFK's successor, Lyndon Johnson, suspected that the assassination resulted from the struggle for power in Cuba. Richard Nixon hounded the CIA for files on "the whole Bay of Pigs thing," which his aides understood to mean Kennedy's assassination.

The second official story came in 1979. After lengthy hearings, the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) concluded Kennedy had been killed by Oswald and co-conspirators who could not be identified. By then popular skepticism about the government's "lone nut" scenario was souring into cynicism. When the HSCA's final report declared that Kennedy had been killed in a conspiracy, TV talk show host Johnny Carson said he was shocked. "Next thing you know," Carson giped, "they'll be telling us Hitler started World War II."



Then came Oliver Stone. His box office smash *JFK*, released in 1991, offered an all-too-persuasive depiction of the murder of America's liberal 35th president as a virtual coup d'etat orchestrated at the highest levels of the Pentagon and the CIA. Stone endured much abuse at the hands of the Washington press corps for taking liberties with the historical record in his well-researched screenplay. The director delivered an incisive retort: If the government had nothing to hide on JFK's assassination, why was it hiding so many millions of pages of documents on the subject?

Congress was shamed into approving the John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act. The 1992 law mandated the "immediate" release of all government documents related to Kennedy's murder. Between 1994 and 1998, a civilian review panel oversaw the declassification of millions of pages of classified JFK records. Stone's cinematic agitation shook loose a library of records that conventional journalism never would have captured. Many of the most important new documents can be seen on the best JFK website, [www.maryferrell.org](http://www.maryferrell.org).

Neither individually nor together do these documents dramatically change our understanding of November 22, 1963. But they do enlighten the evidence, and pose important questions. First, the documents show that a handful of top CIA officials had far greater knowledge of Oswald in the weeks before Kennedy was killed than they ever let on, and at least one of these operatives remained quiet about what he knew to perhaps a criminal extent. Second, the scientific evidence supporting the lone gunman theory has weakened.



### I. An Intelligence Failure



After the ordeal of September 11, the American people became acquainted with the fine Washington phrase "intelligence failure." In a studiously neutral way, the term encompasses the failures of the Clinton and Bush White Houses and of the national security agencies to anticipate and/or prevent the catastrophic attacks. The concept of "intelligence failure" can be usefully applied to the overly polemicized JFK story. It captures a wider historical perspective on the Dallas ambush than the legal lens of "conspiracy." It reveals a more objective reality than the psychological lens of the "lone nut."

Perhaps the single most intriguing story to emerge from the JFK files concerns a career CIA officer named George Joannides. He died in 1990 at age 67, taking his JFK secrets to the grave in suburban Washington. His role in the events leading up to Kennedy's death and its confused investigatory aftermath goes utterly unmentioned in the vast literature of JFK's assassination. Vincent Bugliosi's otherwise impressive 1,600 page book debunking every JFK conspiracy theory known to man mentions him only in an inaccurate footnote. In 1998, the Agency declassified a handful of annual personnel evaluations that revealed Joannides was involved in the JFK assassination story, both before and after the event.

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