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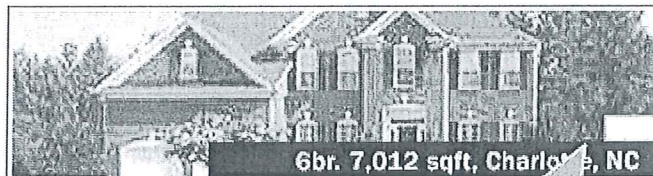
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C.I.A. Is Still Cagey About Oswald Mystery

By SCOTT SHANE
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WASHINGTON — Is the Central Intelligence Agency covering up some dark secret about the assassination of John F. Kennedy?

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Brendan Smialowski for The New York Times
Jefferson Morley, a journalist and writer, in his office in October. Mr. Morley has fought to have the C.I.A. release documents involving an agent who oversaw a group of dissident Cubans in 1963.

Probably not. But you would not know it from the C.I.A.'s behavior.

For six years, the agency has fought in federal court to keep secret hundreds of documents from 1963, when an anti-Castro Cuban group it paid clashed publicly with the soon-to-be assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald. The C.I.A. says it is only protecting legitimate secrets.

But because of the agency's history of stonewalling assassination inquiries, even researchers with no use for conspiracy thinking question its stance.

The files in question, some released under direction of the court and hundreds more that are still secret, involve the curious career of George E. Joannides, the case officer who oversaw the dissident Cubans in 1963. In 1978, the agency made Mr. Joannides the liaison to the House Select Committee on Assassinations — but never told the committee of his earlier role.

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That concealment has fueled suspicion that Mr. Joannides’s real assignment was to limit what the House committee could learn about C.I.A. activities. The agency’s deception was first reported in 2001 by Jefferson Morley, a journalist and author who has doggedly pursued the files ever since, represented by James H. Lesar, a Washington lawyer specializing in Freedom of Information Act lawsuits.

“The C.I.A.’s conduct is maddening,” said Mr. Morley, 51, a former Washington Post reporter and the author of a 2008 biography of a former C.I.A. station chief in Mexico. After years of meticulous reporting on Mr. Joannides, who died at age 68 in 1990, he is convinced that there is more to learn.

“I know there’s a story here,” Mr. Morley said. “The confirmation is that the C.I.A. treats these documents as extremely sensitive.”

Mr. Morley’s quest has gained prominent supporters, including John R. Tunheim, a federal judge in Minnesota who served in 1994 and 1995 as chairman of the Assassination Records Review Board, created by Congress to unearth documents related to the case.

“I think we were probably misled by the agency,” Judge Tunheim said, referring to the Joannides records. “This material should be released.”

Gerald Posner, the author of an anti-conspiracy account of the J.F.K. assassination, “Case Closed,” said the C.I.A.’s withholding such aged documents was “a perfect example of why nobody trusts the agency.”

“It feeds the conspiracy theorists who say, ‘You’re hiding something,’” Mr. Posner said.

After losing an appeals court decision in Mr. Morley’s lawsuit, the C.I.A. released material last year confirming Mr. Joannides’s deep involvement with the anti-Castro Cubans who confronted Oswald. But the agency is withholding 295 specific documents from the 1960s and ’70s, while refusing to confirm or deny the existence of many others, saying their release would cause “extremely grave damage” to national security.

“The methods of defeating or deterring covert action in the 1960s and 1970s can still be instructive to the United States’ current enemies,” a C.I.A. official wrote in a court filing.

An agency spokesman, Paul Gimigliano, said the C.I.A. had opened all files relevant to the assassination to Judge Tunheim’s review board and denied that it was trying to avoid embarrassment. “The record doesn’t support that, any more than it supports conspiracy theories, offensive on their face, that the C.I.A. had a hand in President Kennedy’s death,” Mr. Gimigliano said.

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C.I.A. secrecy has been hotly debated this year, with agency officials protesting the Obama administration's decision to release legal opinions describing brutal interrogation methods. The House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, came under attack from Republicans after she accused the C.I.A. of misleading Congress about waterboarding, adding, "They mislead us all the time."

On the Kennedy assassination, the deceptions began in 1964 with the Warren Commission. The C.I.A. concealed its unsuccessful schemes to kill Fidel Castro and its ties to the anti-Castro D.R.E., the Directorio Revolucionario Estudantil, or Cuban Student Directorate, which received \$50,000 a month in C.I.A. support during 1963.

In August 1963, Oswald visited a New Orleans shop owned by a D.R.E. official, feigning sympathy with the group's goal of overthrowing Castro. A few days later, D.R.E. members found Oswald handing out pro-Castro pamphlets and got into a brawl with him. Later that month, Oswald debated the anti-Castro Cubans on a local radio station.

In the years since Oswald was named as the assassin, speculation about who might have been behind him has never ended, with various theories focusing on Castro, the mob, rogue government agents or myriad combinations of the above. Mr. Morley, one of many writers to become entranced by the story, insists that he has no theory and is seeking only the facts.



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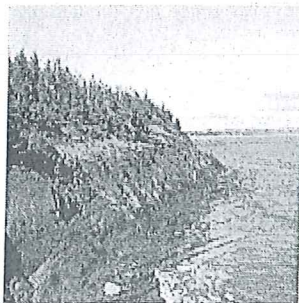
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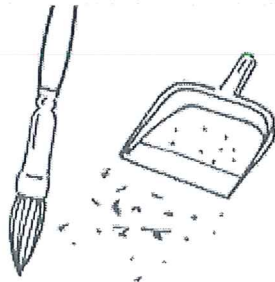
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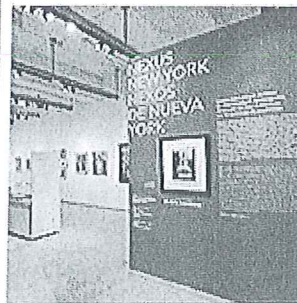
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