

A scholarly appraisal of American assassinations

By John Jacobs

University of California at Berkeley professor Peter Dale Scott's first love is writing poetry, teaching Chaucer and Dante and engaging in medieval scholarship.

But his concept of what a scholar should do in the 20th century has led him into far more current and controversial subjects over the last 15 years: the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the role of the CIA in the major events of our time.

And his work has become must reading for serious students of the assassinations in this country since 1963 and the role of the CIA.

A 1976 book he helped edit and contributed to is titled, "The Assassinations: Dallas and Beyond — A Guide to Cover-Ups and Investigations." A hot-selling paperback of a few years back, "They've Killed the President, They've Killed the President," written by journalist Robert Sam Anson, was based in large part on an unpublished manuscript by Scott. And he's narrated network specials on the assassination for the Canadian Broadcasting Corp.

A professorial looking man of 50, given to wearing corduroy and tweeds with elbow patches, Scott is of medium height and size, with brown hair, a gray-brown beard and sparkling blue eyes. He was born in Canada and spent four years in the Canadian foreign service, including two years with the High Commission in Warsaw, Poland.

He also has a Ph.D. in political science — an unusual credential for an English professor. But after publishing two essays on the "Medieval-Latin Pastoral," he moved from the Rhetoric Department to English, where he later became tenured.

Scott says the evolution of his thinking and research follows a logical progression, predicated on "what the role should be of a leisured scholar in society."

"One should use that leisure to combat ignorance," he said in an interview in his office on the fourth floor of Wheeler Hall on the UC campus, where he sat surrounded by books, notes, manuscripts, file cabinets and news clippings.

"There was a lot of ignorance about the Vietnam War, so it was right for the faculty to take a stand against it. Support for the war was based on ignorance, so it was correct for scholars to write books exposing conscious misstatements of fact...."

"I was very naive at first. I felt that if I wrote to the State Department and The New York



UC Professor Peter Dale Scott
Examiner/Paul Gilnes

Times and told them they had the negotiating position of the North Vietnamese wrong, they'd correct it. But they didn't and that led to the books."

Scott's first book on the subject, which he co-authored with UC professors Franz Schurmann and Rejzchard Zelnik, was called, "The Politics of Escalation in Vietnam." His research there, he said, led him to consider the role the CIA played in the war, particularly after the Kennedy assassination, and from there to the assassination itself.

The Kennedy administration, Scott says, had decided in October 1963 to withdraw 1,000 troops from Vietnam. On Nov. 20 the announcement was made. Two days later Kennedy was dead. And two days after that, Scott says, a secret Defense Department memo was approved — with heavy CIA participation — that significantly changed the nature of American commitment to Vietnam. He says the 1,000 troops were never withdrawn.

"The first real commitment to win the

Vietnam war was made on Nov. 24," he said. "It wasn't a 190-degree shift, but it was a significant shift in the language of commitment."

Scott also says that, before his death, Kennedy was also toying with the idea of a rapprochement with Fidel Castro, following the disaster of the Bay of Pigs, the tension of the Cuban missile crisis the year before and covert attempts by the CIA and Cuban nationals to subvert their revolution.

The professor says he doesn't believe there was any one single motive for the killing, but noted that both Vietnam and Cuba "were important symbols of prolonging the Cold War and most upsetting to interests in this country appalled by what Kennedy was doing."

Of all the assassinations of public figures in the '60s and early '70s, at least five were politically motivated, he says — John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and George Wallace.

"There was a period in U.S. history when assassinations were used to determine the outcome of elections," he says. "In 1964 John Kennedy was taken out. In 1968 Robert Kennedy was taken out. And in 1972 George Wallace was taken out."

Scott says critics of the way the Kennedy assassination investigation was handled are always pressed for evidence of cover-up. Pulling a freshly typed manuscript page from his file, Scott provided a glimpse into his current research. He writes that a British free-lance journalist was in jail in Havana, in 1959 with "an American gangster named Santos," presumably, Scott says, Santos Trafficante, who has been linked with CIA attempts to kill Castro. While there, the journalist said Santos was visited by a man named Ruby, presumably, according to Scott, Jack Ruby, who later killed Lee Harvey Oswald after Oswald killed Kennedy. The journalist, John Wilson-Hudson, offered to review photos of Jack Ruby for the FBI to determine whether he had been the visitor. The FBI's rejection, according to Scott, is key evidence of a cover-up.

"Prior information available at Bureau that Ruby in Havana, Cuba in 1959," said an urgent FBI cable to its representative in London, refusing the offer. "Bureau desires no further investigation re Wilson."

Scott is annoyed by editorial responses to the recent conclusions of the House Select Committee on Assassinations. That committee found, based on scientific and acoustical evidence, that there is "high probability that two gunmen fired at President John F. Kennedy."

The Washington Post editorialized that, "If the committee is right about a fourth shot from the grassy knoll, could it have been some other malcontent whom Mr. Oswald met casually? Could not as many as three or four societal outcasts... have developed in some spontaneous way a common determination to express their alienation in the killing of President Kennedy?"

The New York Times went further: "The word (conspiracy) is freighted with dark connotations of malevolence perpetrated by enemies, foreign or political. Yet two maniacs instead of one might be more like it."

Scott's response: "I'm personally satisfied that these men were not killed by lone maniacs... Meanwhile, the responsible press puts forth points of view it doesn't believe and which are obviously absurd. It's absurd to suggest that two lone maniacs instead of one could have engineered the government cover-up."

Turning to another corner of his office, Scott pulled out a copy of the Church Committee final report on its investigation of the CIA. It noted that almost half the grants to scholars to study foreign countries that were for more than \$10,000 and that weren't made by the Ford, Rockefeller or Carnegie foundations, were funded by the CIA.

"We have such a large academic establishment in this country that there is room for people to study not just the elites of Africa, but the elites of this country, and almost no one does this... The CIA has helped select the academic elites here by funding them. There should be some individuals who look at how this country is run — and that includes such embarrassing relations as the CIA and the university, or Vietnam or the Kennedy assassination."