

Letter to the editor
The Jerusalem Post
6 Oholiav St.,
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Prof. David Ritchie of Hebrew University does not know what a conspiracy is, political scientist that he is, when he says as quoted in your November 30 issue:

"Prof. Ritchie doesn't believe in conspiracy theories, 'because I'm used to making up my mind on the basis of hard facts, and even 33 years later there are no hard facts to back up the [sic] JFK conspiracy theory. But I simply don't buy the scenario that (Lee Harvey) Oswald got off three shots from that \$25 rifle he had picked up and have killed Kennedy alone from that distance.'"

If one man could not have done the job, then on that basis alone there was a conspiracy.

Aside from this and more that it wrong with what Ritchie says, the rifle did not ~~cost~~ cost \$25 and distance was not a factor. Time was.

It is clear that Ritchie, despite what he says, did make his mind up not "on the basis of hard facts," which have been available since 1965 and of which he has kept himself in ignorance.

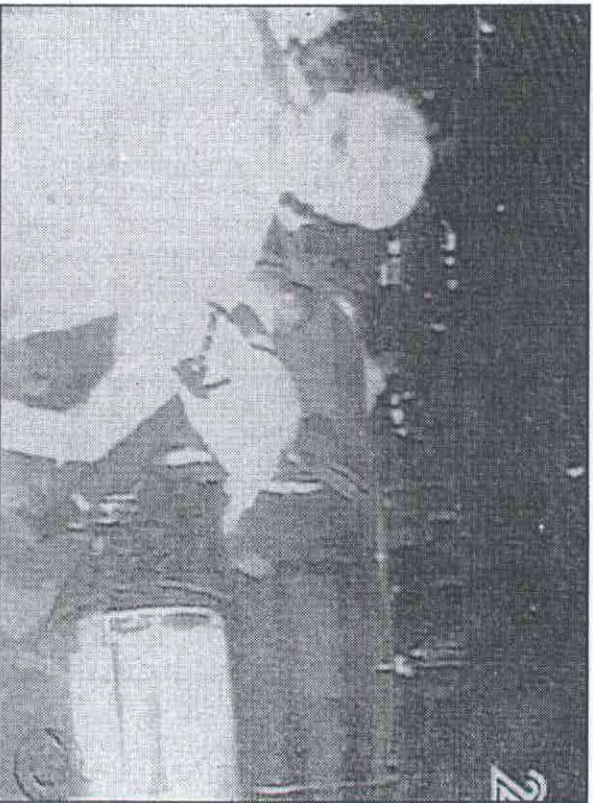
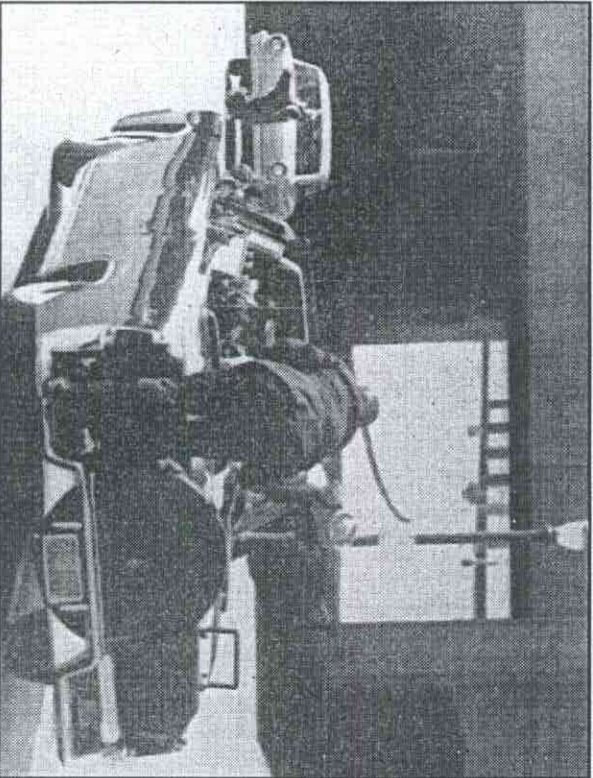
My nine books on the JFK assassination and its investigations are based entirely on the official evidence that was ignored or merely lied about. The first of the "Whitewash" series was published in 1965. In all those years and after all those books I have yet to get a letter or a call from any of those of whom I was so critical complaining that I'd been unfair to him or written about him inaccurately. Those books have always been and still are freely available to those, political scientists included, who give a damn about fact, care enough to learn before making fools of themselves and deceiving the people even more.

That was a crime that turned the world around. There is no country in which it should be addressed without the utmost care and factuality.

Please excuse my typing. I'm 83 and unwell and it can't be any better. FYI, I sued the government a dozen or more times under the "Freedom of Information Act, got about a third of a million pages of records that had been withheld, and they will be a permanent public archive at local Hood College. They have always been freely available to all writing in the field most of whom write what I do not agree with. In one of those lawsuits the government told the court that I knew more about the JFK assassination and its investigations than anyone working for the FBI. The fact is there. The pontificating professors are not.

Harold Weisberg





In both the Kennedy assassination (left) and the Rabin murder (right), a pivotal leader was eliminated near the climax of a traumatic national experience.

It happened 33 years ago

US immigrants draw parallels between the Rabin and Kennedy assassinations.

Yosef Goell reports

I cried and cried and cried. The last time I recalled crying that hard for a public figure was when president Roosevelt died."

Elaine Kallet, a poet and artist from Jerusalem who made aliya in 1988, was recalling her reactions to the news of president John F. Kennedy's assassination, 33 years ago last week. The crying, the devastation and fear, figured in the reminiscences of four former Americans living in Israel, all of whom drew a possible analogy between the reactions to JFK's assassination and to that of

Yitzhak Rabin's last year.

All four remembered the circumstances under which they had learned of the two assassinations. Why did the JFK assassination elicit such widespread fear? What were they frightened of?

Kallet says there was talk that the underworld had had Kennedy killed. And then there was the fear of the Russians. (The JFK assassination came about a year after the confrontation over Soviet missiles in Cuba).

Prof. David Ritchie of the Hebrew University Political Science Department was in Caesar Hall at Harvard, where he was a graduate student. He recalls people crying and church bells ringing and that same fear. As a political science student, he remembers thinking that just because Kennedy was shot, it didn't necessarily mean that he would die. Previous presidents who had been shot, from Lincoln, through Garfield and McKinley, had died because of the botched-up ministrations of doctors.

"What were we frightened of? The fact that something so unexpected had happened to suddenly remove the person who was looking after the store for the rest of us. I was never that committed to Kennedy. He was not terribly effective, but he made the right noises.

"I believe that the analogy to the effect on the public that the Rabin assassination had does hold water. Many of us feel similarly devastated over Rabin's murder because of that same feeling of the sudden and violent removal of the major actor who was taking care of things."

Barbara Heller, a Jerusalem real-estate agent, recalls hearing of the JFK assassination on the radio while teaching at the exper-

imental school in Harlem, New York. "I went into the streets and saw other people who were as horrified as I was. We felt cut off, alone, devastated. As if someone had stuck a knife into us.

"I felt the same way about the Rabin assassination. In both cases I felt, 'What is the world coming to?' I still feel that way about Kennedy, although I no longer believe he was a great president. In his style, however, he was a true representative of a new generation of Americans."

Dov Levy, who came on aliya 18 years ago and is now retired in the Jerusalem suburb of Mevasseret Zion, recalls going out into the streets in Detroit and finding them empty. "It was like after an earthquake. I remember feeling that nothing was ever going to be the same again.

"I had grown up in Boston and was familiar with JFK as a rough-and-tumble politician. But I admired his youth and his style. It was his oratory and the spirit of the times that he represented that persuaded me to go into public service with the Civil Rights Commission."

Judy Nussbaum, formerly of the Hebrew University's School for Overseas Students, recalls learning about the JFK assassination when she was pregnant with her second child and shopping in a New Jersey suburb.

"I saw all the salesgirls crying. I wasn't emotionally committed to Kennedy, but I was just as shocked. I can't help thinking that just as we still don't know the full truth about the JFK assassination, we also don't know the full truth behind the Rabin assassination. For example, we do know that [Avishai] Raviv was a planted [General Security Service] provocateur in the groups around the assassin Yigal Amir."

Prof. Ritchie doesn't believe in conspiracy theories, "because I am used to making up my mind on the basis of hard facts, and even 33 years later there are no hard facts to back up the JFK conspiracy theory. But I simply don't

buy the scenario that [Lee Harvey] Oswald could have got off three shots from the \$25 rifle he had picked up and have killed Kennedy alone from that distance.

"I think one of the differences between the two cases is that even if we never got an entirely satisfactory explanation for Oswald's motives and actions, we can definitely think of him as some sort of weirdo; in the case of Yigal Amir something quite definitely went wrong with Judaism itself.

"What bothers me about the country's reaction to the Rabin assassination is that while some rabbis initially admitted that Amir's background showed that there were some real problems in Judaism, leading religious politicians refused to say so.

"Admittedly, Rabin supporters did come out too strongly against the entire national religious camp, but it would have helped if [NRP leader Zevulun] Hammer and others in his camp would have come out openly and admitted to the dangers inherent in taking religious politics to extremes."

Elaine Kallet says, "I was never a Rabin fan because I am somewhat right wing in my politics here. What especially shocked me was the thought that it was a fellow Jew who killed him.

"One of the differences between the two cases and our two countries is that here all of us are so profoundly and personally involved in the big political issues of the day. In this regard I believe that our leaders definitely flubbed the possibility of 'using' the Rabin assassination to try to forge a greater sense of national unity and bind up the nation's wounds. The election campaign and Netanyahu's election didn't help.

"But I mostly blame Peres and his crowd for failing to overcome the deep divisions in our society. It would have taken a lot of doing, but had they put their mind to it I would have applauded them."

HOWEVER, despite the Rabin/Kennedy analogy that some of these interviewees draw, the assassination of president Lincoln in 1865 is perhaps a

more apt comparison.

There are, of course, no longer eye-witnesses to attest to their feelings at the time. But, what the Lincoln and Rabin assassinations have in common is the aura of the martyrdom of a national leader gunned down near the climax of a traumatic national experience: the Civil War in the case of the US; the divisive peace process in Israel's.

The bad news, if the analogy is appropriate, is that the wounds, divisions and hatred of the Civil War aggravated by the Lincoln assassination were still a poisonously divisive factor in US politics a century and a quarter later.

Then again, some commentators think that all analogies with the US are misleading. They say that the US has always been a much more murderously violent society than Israel (as opposed to our prowess at verbal violence) and the facile talk that Yigal Amir's "first" political assassination has opened the floodgates to future repeats does not have to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.