

# From Dallas to Eternity

BY DICK RUSSELL

*f.y.i.*

*Steve Lewis*

The assassination of John F. Kennedy 30 years ago altered history. And for a few local men, that horrible moment has meant a lifetime obsession with the mystery of it.

**I**N THE WORLD of assassinology, it was a star-studded cast that went to Chicago last spring for the second annual Midwest Symposium on Assassination Politics. There were Judge Burt Griffin of the Warren Commission staff and a trio of investigators from the House Select Committee on Assassinations (1977-79). Oliver Stone's research director for the film *JFK*, Jane Rusconi, was on hand, as well as other writers and investigators. Even Stone himself, in Chicago on other business, dropped by one evening.

Outside the auditorium where he had just delivered the keynote speech, Cambridge's Carl Oglesby stood at one of the souvenir tables, laying out a few bucks for some buttons: "Hoover Knew," "Oswald Was a Pat-



STEVE LEWIS

STEVE LEWIS



**STILL ON THE CASE:**  
*Left, Cambridge writer  
Carl Oglesby; above left,  
author Dick Russell;  
above, political science  
professor Philip Melanson.*

GUIDO WYTT





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BEFORE AND AFTER: Above, moments before the shot that changed history; inset, Jack Ruby after shooting Lee Harvey Oswald

sy," "The CIA Did It."

President of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at the height of the Vietnam War, author of three well-received books on the Kennedy assassination, Oglesby at 57 still bore many trademarks of a sixties refugee: lean, bearded, bespectacled, intense, with a Red Sox ball cap tilted back on his head.

Why, a full generation since that terrible day in Dallas, was he still passionately calling for a new investigation into the murder of the nation's thirty-fifth president?

Oglesby grew thoughtful after I, a brother buff from Boston, posed the question. "I didn't ask for this," he said finally, "and I don't really like it. It seems to me that this preoccupation has screwed up my life, kept me from having the normal range of writers' interests. If there hadn't been a Kennedy assassination, I'd probably be writing literary criticism at a beautiful cottage on a lake somewhere."

Instead, Oglesby works out of a cramped second-floor office midway between Central and Harvard squares, his walls lined with all 26 volumes of the Warren Commission Report and dozens of the 600-some books written on the JFK case. Parked near them is the bicycle that is his primary means of transport into the nineties beyond.

Oglesby is not alone in being locked into a time and place—12:31 p.m., November 22, 1963, Dealey Plaza—nor in questioning the Warren Commission's conclusions. Philip Melanson, 49, professor of political science at the University of Massachusetts/Dartmouth, recalls a time when his family accused him of being more interested in David Ferrie (an Oswald associate) than he was in them. Matthew Coogan, 46, under secretary of transportation in the Dukakis administration, spent two years laboring nights and weekends on a monumental manuscript, "Thirty Years of Deception," which he says now stays under the bed, where the cats can play with it.

And I, after 17 years of on-again, off-again fixation, finally saw my 824-page tome, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, arrive on bookstore shelves last year, when I was 45 years old. Friends have called it "The Book That Grew Too Much."

## FOUR MEN AND

**Carl Oglesby** Scholar and writer who believes Oswald was a patriotic young American who thought he was carrying out orders for U.S. intelligence but was being manipulated into place by conspirators to take the fall as a "lone-gunman."



**Philip Melanson** Professor who believes Oswald was a patriot who was manipulated by intelligence agencies but does not believe him innocent of the assassination.

**Matthew Coogan** Transportation expert whose personal journey into the assassination and the nation's literature led to conclusions about a "secret government" that has been in place since the fifties.



**Dick Russell** Author who believes Oswald was a patriot who was manipulated by intelligence agencies but does not believe him innocent of the assassination on television.





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## THEORY



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What can I reply? Well . . . But did you read the part about the Oswald double or the possibility that Lee himself might have been a triple agent or that maybe some CIA Dr. Strangelove messed with his mind? And what about the Nazi/Mob/Big Oil connection trying to make it look as if Fidel and the KGB did it?

I do not mean to make light of the subject. We buffs do not know who conspired to assassinate John F. Kennedy, but we believe it's still vital that we find out. Judging by the 15 million people who went to see *JFK* in theaters, and by the 20 new conspiracy books plus 17 reissues that followed in the movie's wake last year, the assassination remains more than just our biggest unsolved mystery; it is an open wound in our national psyche, an axis on which our recent history turns.

It seems fitting that some of the most vital scholarship to probe the assassination's many open questions should emanate from Massachusetts. Professor Melanson, also the author of critical books on the Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy cases, is acknowledged by assassination researchers as having assembled the most cogent analysis of Oswald's likely intelligence connections (*Spy Saga*, 1990).

Oglesby's 1976 *Yankee and the Cowboy War* is still considered a pioneering study of how the battle between the eastern establishment and the West's "new money" forces may have led to JFK's death and then to Watergate.

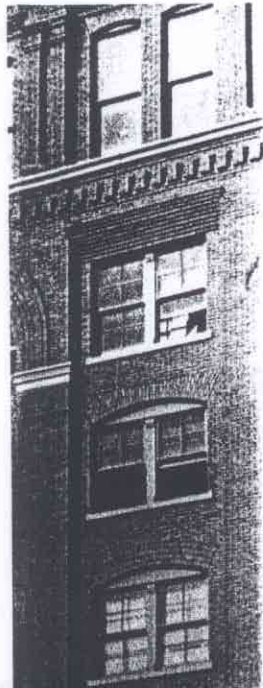
And Coogan's under-the-bed manuscript was described in 1991 by the late attorney Bernard Fensterwald, Jr., founder of the Assassination Archives Research Center, in Washington, as the most interesting, complex, and important document that he had seen in a quarter century.

So what are we all after? What is the mind-set that pursues clues toward a cathartic justice that will probably never be served? And upon what evidence do we base our mutual conviction of a cloaked "secret government" with its dagger aimed at our very system of representative democracy? To answer these and other questions, I sat down for a series of long, soul-searching talks with my three local compatriots.

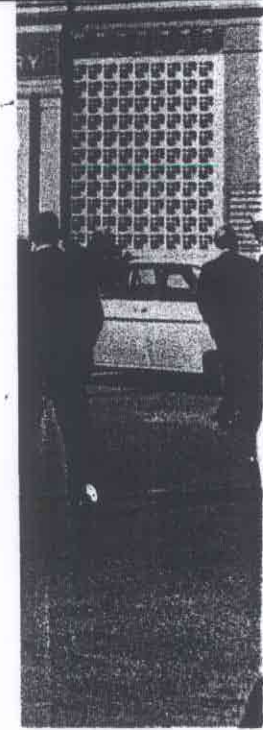
**G**ARL OGLESBY, SON OF A TIRE BUILDER from the former rubber capital of Akron, was working in the defense industry on November 22, 1963. As the man in charge of technical publications for the Bendix Aerospace Systems Division, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, one of the little corporate secrets to which he was privy concerned a communications relay device designed for fighting against an elusive insurgent foe—specifically, in the jungles of Vietnam and Laos.

Listening to the shocking news from Dallas over a radio in the art department, Oglesby glanced out a window and realized that the flag waving on the pole outside should properly be placed at half-mast. He went up the Bendix chain of command with his request. Despite the personnel director's advice—"This is not your call"—Oglesby finally arrived outside the swank offices of the general manager.

"First I heard chuckling," he recalls. "I could just see around the corner, and there was the GM (Continued on page 82)



Oswald's background had sp  
spy written all over it: a teen  
who studied Marx; a defector  
came back to Texas with a Ru





## Obsession

(Continued from page 65)

standing with a wineglass. I had never seen any kind of alcohol at Bendix; it was strictly illegal on the premises. With that much to clue me in as to the mood of the front office, I turned around, walked back, and worked. Worked overtime."

The Bendix flag was not lowered that day, he recalls. But something had happened to Oglesby. It did not surface when the official lone-assassin conclusion came out in 1964. ("I thought, Sure, Oswald did it, why would the Warren Commission lie?") Nor even when Oglesby quit Bendix, in 1965, and made the great leap from aerospace promoter to antiwar protester. Only as he later came to study the short life of the accused assassin did he realize that "Lee Harvey Oswald was me, at a certain age—an honest, patriotic working-class kid who had no idea of the ways he was being put to use."

From his youthful years when his favorite TV program was "I Led Three Lives," Oswald's background had spy versus spy written all over it. A teen marine who avidly studied the words of Karl Marx. An apparent defector to the Soviet Union who came back to Texas with a Russian wife and found work at a photo shop that did classified work for the Army Map Service. A Castro supporter who was often seen in the company of rabid right-wingers. Hoover's FBI, which staked its reputation on uncovering the slightest trace of subversion, did not even see fit to include Oswald among the some 32,000 individuals on what Hoover called its "Security Index." Clearly, something was wrong with this picture.

Oglesby didn't take up the Oswald enigma in earnest until 1974, when Bob Katz read one of his columns in the *Phoenix* and invited him to become part of a small group that soon became the Assassination Information Bureau (AIB). Katz, today the president of a national lecture agency (the Cambridge-based K & S Speakers), recalls that "what Carl brought to the movement to solve President Kennedy's murder was a particularly keen appreciation of how the assassination was part and parcel of an immense rightward political shift. He was able to assure people like myself that our fascination was not prurient, that it had a larger importance."

Although he refers to himself today as a sort of conservative liberal, Oglesby was by the mid-sixties among the leading figures on the political left. SDS, which invited him into its ranks after members at the University of Michigan saw one of his three professionally produced plays, ended up electing Oglesby its national president a few days shy of his thirtieth birthday.

After having invented the antiwar teach-

in, Oglesby eventually split away from a new, violence-prone SDS faction known as the Weathermen. He had a brief side career as a folksinger/guitarist, cutting two albums on the Vanguard label. His first book was *Containment and Change*, published in 1967, an analysis of America's plunge into Vietnam and other third-world countries. In 1971 he moved to Cambridge to teach a course at MIT called Through Politics, and he has lived there ever since except for a year in Washington, D.C., with the AIB.

IN WASHINGTON THAT YEAR, 1977, Oglesby found himself approached by a Soviet embassy official, a close encounter he later chronicled in *Playboy* as "My Dinners with Andrey." The fellow, clearly KGB, also "clearly wanted a relationship," Oglesby recalls. "I got wined and dined and thought, Well, what to do here? Is this maybe an op-

### **With the cold war over, there is the question whether the Russians possess additional information on Oswald and the assassination.**

portunity to make a point? I had been irritated no end at all those years of hearing I was supposedly on the other side, not a proper American. So I mentioned Andrey to an acquaintance who I thought would put me in touch with someone in the CIA. I got approached by an FBI guy instead. Yep, Oglesby informs to the FBI! Well, I actually felt Gus [the FBI guy] and Andrey were both wonderful people and kept thinking, Why can't they just have a beer, kick off their shoes together, and get real?"

Now that the cold war is over and presumably the United States and Russia can get real about the past, is Oglesby optimistic that the truth about the assassination will out? Not really, although he figures that the Russians could probably add considerably to our knowledge about Oswald and may even have conducted their own investigation into who killed JFK. "It's a very heavy catch-22," he notes. "As long as they were enemies of the United States, they wouldn't have been believed, and now that they're the docile home companions, they don't want to make any waves."

Unless an insider comes forward, Oglesby doubts the mystery will ever be resolved. He remains convinced that a "big, very big" homegrown conspiracy resulted in JFK's death. "Kennedy was killed in order that

the Vietnam War be escalated. I think you can boil it down to that."

While crediting JFK with moving toward a much more responsible foreign policy during his final days, Oglesby is not at all enamored of him as a moral leader. But he staunchly believes that the "secret government" residing within the military, the CIA, and the FBI must be exposed.

Two years ago, he even briefly flirted with the idea of taking on Joe Kennedy as the Libertarian candidate for Congress, strictly in order to provide a forum to challenge the Kennedy family's unwillingness to pursue all this. It was Norman Mailer who talked Oglesby out of it over a drink one night at the Ritz-Carlton. Politics, as the onetime unsuccessful candidate for mayor of New York put it, was not a suitable endeavor for a writer.

**P**HILIP MELANSON HAS WRITTEN three books that, he wryly concedes, "can't even be read by family members with dictionaries." They bear such titles as *Political Science and Political Knowledge: An Epistemological Analysis of Methodology in the Profession*. He has also made a highly reasoned argument that Sirhan Sirhan, slayer of Robert Kennedy, was a hypnotically controlled gunman.

As a Ph.D. whose specialty is studying transfers of power and the health of governments, Melanson sees no contradiction. "What happened to the Kennedys," he believes, "were not only watershed political events that affected our lives directly as we lived through them; they are also the Rosetta stone of what kind of democracy we were and subsequently became."

Raised in Stoneham, where his father worked for the phone company, Melanson became only the second member of his large family to get a college degree. "It was almost impossible to grow up in Massachusetts in that era without being fixated on the Kennedys," he recalls.

Of Melanson's 30 mentors at the University of Connecticut, 28 were part-time functionaries for the State Department or the CIA. He was a freshman there when the assassination happened, and he recalls hearing, two days afterward, "all this cheering and yelling in the dorm—because Ruby had shot Oswald. Great, somebody got the guy who got the president! I remember thinking, Yeah, so what, all right. Never knowing how long it would take me to figure out that (a) Oswald wasn't the guy who killed the president, and (b) he was being killed for an entirely different set of reasons that were part of a plot."

Sometime in the mid-seventies, Oglesby's AIB came to make a presentation at Melan-



## Obsession

son's school, UMass-Dartmouth, known at the time as Southeastern Massachusetts University. Melanson's students in Introduction to American Government sparked his own interest and, on a research trip to Washington, he began poring through some Warren Commission files in the National Archives. Today, Melanson estimates he has put a fingerprint on every one of the 600,000-odd pages in the Oswald, Ruby, and main-case files that have so far been released by the FBI. He teaches an entire course called Political Assassinations in America, and his university houses the world's largest collection on the murder of Robert Kennedy.

As one of the few conspiracy theorists with academic credentials, Melanson has found himself courted by tabloid TV. Interestingly, the mainstream network-news programs have largely ignored him, which Melanson views as part of an establishmentarian response that continues to support the Warren Commission. "I think the assassination is a Rorschach test: if you're a defender of the political system, you defend the lone-nut ideology."

Sitting in the downstairs den of his gray wood-frame Cape Cod-style home in Marion, about a 90-minute drive from Boston, Melanson mused: "Just by [their] putting Oswald out there as the centerpiece, you could almost predict this self-perpetuating momentum for cover-up. Say the CIA is innocent of involvement, but they can't expose their Cuban operations and the assassination attempts against Castro. The FBI cannot afford to expose the fact that they monitored Oswald and maybe used him as an informant. You didn't have to be a real genius to know that. But what this tells us, I think, is that the plotters were not ordinary citizens but people who knew how the CIA and FBI would react."

Unlike Oglesby, Melanson sees Oswald as a likely participant in the conspiracy, although probably not the shooter. But Oglesby and Melanson agree that the assassination was essentially a coup d'état. And the professor finds a higher percentage of truth in the best literature of the critical community "than in all the official documents put together," even though he concedes that there is also "a lot of junk and wild theories out there."

In the course of preparing his book *The Martin Luther King Assassination*, Melanson managed to track down a Toronto man who he is convinced brought James Earl Ray his initial getaway money. (Ray was captured in London two months after the King shooting and later convicted of the crime.) For *The Robert Kennedy Assassination*, Melanson broke considerable new ground in uncovering how Sirhan may have

been hypnotically "programmed" to shoot on that June 1968 night after RFK won the California primary.

SEEING THE FINGERPRINTS of the intelligence community in all three cases, Melanson finds it a "very real possibility" that the assassinations were somehow linked. "The sixties were the most politically violent, psychologically paranoid decade in modern history. At the time of their deaths, both Kennedys and King were taking what I would describe as radical issue stands, in terms of being diametrically opposed to very powerful interests. I think King's death was sealed not in the fight for integration but in his taking on the Vietnam War. With Bobby Kennedy, again, taking on the war, and going back to his hounding the gangsters when he was attorney general. To this day, I'm amazed to talk to intelligence

### Some investigators who have studied the three assassinations think the Kennedy killings may be linked to the King case.

officers and find, when they open up about their fears and perceptions of these three political leaders, that it's like George Bush talking about Saddam Hussein."

Melanson's hope is that study of the sixties assassinations may someday achieve the same level of respectability as historical analyses of, say, Pearl Harbor.

FOR MATTHEW A. COOGAN, then the Dukakis administration's under secretary of transportation, the quest began six years ago with a book he was reading. It was not about the assassination but a Peter Maas biography of convicted arms dealer Edwin Wilson (*Manhunt*). Finishing a paragraph about how casually Wilson hired hit men, Coogan says he dropped the book and said to himself: I didn't know our government used people like that. I wonder how this relates to November 22, 1963.

Coogan, whose father was a prominent lawyer and a law professor at Harvard, Yale, and elsewhere, was a student at Newton High when JFK was assassinated: "I've never seen grief as united as that day, ever." He went on to study social relations at Harvard, hiring on as a research assistant for the MBTA upon graduation in 1969. Within a year, he was advising Governor Frank

Sargent on highway policy.

At age 40, when he stumbled upon *Manhunt*, Coogan seemed the quintessential establishmentarian. By then he was directly responsible for the design of the \$6-billion Central Artery/Third Harbor Tunnel project. After Dukakis's gubernatorial departure, Coogan stayed on for six months and then became a vice president of Rackemann Environmental Services, specializing in international-transportation consultations. This past summer, he moved on to solo consulting and into a Vermont country home with his family.

When we first sat down together, Coogan was living in a North End townhouse, where the wall of his home office was lined with some 400 volumes on various aspects of the intelligence community. His own manuscript, bound in black leather with *Thirty Years of Deception* peering through a cover square, contains 400-plus pages and 30 chapters covering the years 1954 through 1986. It begins:

John F. Kennedy was murdered as part of a major political deception, in an attempt to force the United States into a major land war with Cuba. He was murdered in a *coup d'état* in which a small disloyal clique of government employees had determined that he was not going to carry out the foreign policy toward the Caribbean that they wanted. And so he had to die. To carry this out, the clique formed a bond with organized crime and exploited the passions of exiled Cubans who longed to retain their homeland. The pattern of the intelligence operatives combining with the managers of organized crime, and the passions of the Cuban exiles would influence the course of American politics for the three decades that followed.

Coogan's "black book" is an amazing compilation, tracing patterns and players from the CIA's 1954 overthrow of the Guatemalan government all the way through the Iran-contra scandal. Sometimes he refers to the process as "sort of Hegelian—you know, hypothesis, reaction, synthesis." Other times he draws analogies to Plato's cave, where what is taken for truth is merely shadows.

Coogan notes that his wife, Patricia, was remarkably understanding of the complexities of the pursuit. "Her interest was my sanity, not my politics. If she saw me at the typewriter at 3 in the morning, knowing I had to go to work at 7, she would call me insane."



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**Obsession**

Using a yellow highlighter to mark his reference texts, Coogan took no notes and ended up working entirely from memory. In his first draft, he had Oswald up there with the saints as a totally virtuous person who walked into a situation and got framed. "I don't believe that anymore at all," Coogan now says. Today, he views Oswald as a low-level intelligence operative—who was carrying out orders he believed to be legitimate, or had no method of cross-checking if he didn't—set up to take the rap in a classic deception scheme.

But the intellectually challenging question, as Coogan sees it, is not really whodunit but who caused the facts to be suppressed and why. "What I've decided is, the men and women who believed our nation needed a secret government for the cold war were probably right. The way nations interact with one another is far worse than my

**Some who study JFK's death think a secret government formed to fight communism played a role in the assassination.**

visits to the United Nations ever told me as a kid. So the people around Eisenhower created one government that we can look at, touch, vote for and against—and another that we can't even ask about.

"At each step, the secrecy was consistent with their vision of a barbarian world of communism and the need to defend the virtuous world of democracy. I think these were rational men. The question for us, as citizens, is whether, in our trust and belief in these men, we sanctioned the creation of institutions that we—and they—lost control of. It sure looks like it. This is not a conspiracy theory; I would argue it's a historical examination of a trend. And if those of us who are trying to understand this phenomenon are right, it has become a grave and overwhelming threat to democracy."

Coogan, however, insists he is not the least bit interested in having his assemblings made public. He wrote his book simply because of a personal need to separate out some thoughts in his mind. And the manuscript is serving that purpose right where it is, under the bed.

**A**S FOR MYSELF, I'M GLAD I grew up in Kansas City and not Dallas. When I started conducting interviews in 1975 for what eventually became my book, Oswald's friend George deMohrenschildt told me I bore a striking re-



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semblance to Lee. So is there something I don't know about the roots of my obsession? I did not intend for the assassination to preoccupy me for almost two decades. I was basically an apolitical teenage sports fanatic on November 22, 1963, son of an advertising executive who once dreamed up "Snap, Crackle, and Pop."

Only as the years passed did I look back in rising anger and realize that the country's fabric, if not its future, had been torn apart in Dealey Plaza. As a free-lance journalist, I roamed across the country for two years in the late seventies interviewing Cuban exiles, soldiers of fortune, and acquaintances of Oswald. Two of those men (including de-Mohrenschildt) ended up dead shortly after we met; another survived a gunshot to the head. It was, to say the least, an unsettling pursuit.

My mission had become, by the spring of 1978, a curious kind of journalistic double life. One day passed inside my office at TV Guide's Hollywood bureau, writing about taking a road trip with Bob Hope. At twilight, I found myself in a dimly lit Irish bar, sitting across from a tall, scarred man who kept a wary eye on the other patrons. Once, he had been an agent of the CIA—and the KGB.

I had first met Richard Case Nagell when I showed up three years earlier, unannounced, on his doorstep in suburban L.A., following up on a fellow researcher's tip. Later, he was to reveal one of history's greatest ironies: according to Nagell, the KGB tried to prevent the assassination, while the FBI and the CIA—also aware of a plot—allowed it to proceed. The intent of a small group of domestic conspirators was to falsely cast the blame upon Castro's Cuba. But Nagell, instead of obeying a KGB order that he kill the "patsy," Oswald, in September 1963 in Mexico, alerted the FBI before shooting two holes into the wall of an El Paso bank—thereby intentionally getting himself placed in federal custody two months before that fateful day in Dallas. After having been railroaded through prison for four and a half years, Nagell got out only to be arrested again, in 1968—in East Germany.

Nagell had been largely dismissed as a nut by numerous assassination researchers. Only Bernard Fensterwald, Jr., and Jim Garrison—both now deceased—believed as strongly as I did that he held the key to solving the mystery of the century. If only he would tell all . . .

That was why I waited so long, hoping that eventually Nagell would decide to produce his photographs and tapes, meet me in some secluded rendezvous, and come totally clean about his days as a double agent. I re-

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## Obsession

alize in retrospect that, since he was suing to get a big pension from the Pentagon, Nagell was just using the threat of full disclosure to me as a stick en route to that carrot. Once he won his case, in 1983, quoth the raven, "Nevermore."

I WAS JUST BACK FROM the Chicago assassinations conference last April when the phone call came. It was the former Marina Oswald, Mrs. Kevin Porter since she remarried, in 1965. "I've been chewing on your book," she began, "and I've got a bone to pick with you."

The bone, basically, was that Marina is now convinced that Lee was innocent. Well, that was a very different view from the one she provided the Warren Commission in her 1964 testimony, when she was probably the crucial witness in convincing the world that he had been a lone assassin. "I did not recognize my own testimony," she said now. "The way it was translated—I don't talk like that at all. They made it look like I did not even finish the fifth grade."

She continued: "I figured out for myself how Lee fit into it. I'm not going to tell you, because it would be misleading. You are on the right track if you think he's innocent. He was not just a plain Joe from the street—of course not. He was manipulated and he got caught. He tried to play with the big boys."

Marina very much wanted a new investigation, saying that if President Clinton "wants to do something for future generations, that is the place to start."

Or, she wondered, could she still bring legal action of some kind, based on the fact that Lee was shot while in protective custody? I said I didn't know, but that if she wished, I would ask a civil-libertarian lawyer friend.

Finally, Marina confessed that she was at the end of her rope. "Sometimes I don't want to live anymore. I think of my grandson, what he will have to live with, and I go into a deep depression. This is nothing heroic—just survival. But I'm 52 and I want to live a little."

It was a painful and unsettling conversation. When I hung up, the specter of Dealey Plaza was palpable in the room. For some—Carl Oglesby, Philip Melanson, Matthew Coogan, myself—the Kennedy assassination was a transfixing event. The great unsolved mystery of our time, it was also a window into our personal and collective history. For a few, like Marina, the Kennedy assassination was a moment from which they could not escape much as they might long to do so.

And the last lines of Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby* came back to me: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." ■

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