

Lonely crusader

Paul Kangas on the mother of all conspiracy theories

PAUL KANGAS PULLS UP for an interview in an old green Volvo with a message in the window:

"JAIL BUSH FOR THE MURDER OF JFK. See the photos \$5."

He's wearing a T-shirt that says the same thing.

"The hats are coming next week," he announces.

These are exciting days for the beleaguered brotherhood of assassination buffs. For three decades they've bucked the official conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. For Kangas, the release of Oliver Stone's movie is reason to work even harder at getting out the message he's been stenciling on San Francisco sidewalks and plastering on walls for years: "CIA KILLED JFK." At last, he believes, the public may be ready to listen.

With satisfaction, Kangas points to *Life* magazine's cover story on the movie, which notes at one point that "even Stone does not go as far as some others, who trace a CIA plot from the Bay of Pigs to Watergate to George Bush."

"They're talking about me," he says. "I wish they'd used my name."

Kangas is a balding private investigator with a neatly curved mustache and an equivocal smile. He's successful at lining up reluctant witnesses for defense attorneys. And he's insistent that President John F. Kennedy's murder was no aberrant act of a lone misfit. His smile is the defense of a long-suffering man used to disbelief.

"The CIA killed Kennedy because he failed to support the invasion of Cuba and was planning to end Vietnam," he says from behind the smile. "Nixon was involved. Bush was involved. The shooters were E. Howard Hunt and Frank Sturgis, the same guys who broke into Democratic National Headquarters 10 years later. Watergate was a failed attempt to get incriminating evidence about the assassination away from the Democrats."

Kangas has photocopies of an article placing Richard Nixon in Dallas on November 22, 1963. Nixon denied this to the FBI. "He lied to the FBI," Kangas says. "He was there at a planning meeting for the assassination."

Kangas has an FBI document that shows Jack Ruby worked for Nixon as early as 1947. He has a White House memo dated October 11, 1963, which refers to plans to withdraw 1,000 troops from Vietnam by the end of that year. He has a copy of a memo from J. Edgar Hoover dated a week after the assassination referring to "Mr. George Bush of the CIA" and his familiarity with anti-Castro Cubans in Miami.

The Kangas scenario goes like this: Nixon's ties to the Bush family date from 1941 when George's father Preston Bush recruited young Dick to run for Congress. Preston Bush's group later put together the Eisenhower-Nixon ticket.

The Preston Bush group had by 1960 two key goals, Kangas believes: restore a pro-business government to Cuba and promote anti-communist wars, as in Vietnam, to make profitable work for the military-industrial complex. Kennedy resisted both ideas; Dallas was the result.

The CIA put Texas oil millionaire George Bush in charge of recruiting Cuban exiles for an invasion of their homeland. Frank Sturgis emerged from the exile group. Sturgis was a former Cuban official who would appear first with E. Howard Hunt as part of the assassination team at Dallas and a decade later again with Hunt at the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee.

The Watergate burglary was an attempt to retrieve incriminating pictures taken by news photographers in Dallas immediately after the assassination. The pictures show Sturgis and Hunt, disguised as tramps, under arrest by Dallas police. Kangas' copies of the photos come complete with transparent overlays of Sturgis and Hunt designed to confirm their identification.

Kangas has devised a board game he calls "Dallas 1963" to help people understand the bewildering elements in the plot. "Roll the dice," the instructions read. "Try to slip JFK past the Grassy Knoll before the CIA assassins move into place!"

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logged in his excellent *Esquire* cover story, it was one of 14 different hypothetical conspiracies Garrison had worked out, some of which featured the gay underground, the Dallas Police Department and Czarist Russians. He also believes there were nine gunmen in Dealey Plaza, including some firing from the sewer drains. (The umbrella man was shooting poisoned darts.) Once you develop a theory, there are no philosophical limits to its growth.

Fourteen plots and nine assassins obviously present a more fertile imaginative field than the bleak, rocky landscape of Lee Harvey Oswald's paranoid psychology (which strongly resembles the maladjusted stereotype of the conspiracy theorist). And the point is no longer to solve JFK's murder, if indeed it ever was. The point is to interpret the assassination to fit our particular dysfunctional world view; to prove to ourselves that there is order to the universe and that we understand it, even if others refuse to.

Stone speaks of himself in interviews as Hamlet trying to solve the mystery of his father's death, or as Shakespeare altering the outlines of English history to fit *Henry V*. As pompous as these analogies are, they underline the grotesque appropriateness of his project. America *does* imagine itself, like Hamlet, the damaged heir to a noble legacy; if we can make JFK conform to the dimensions of tragedy rather than of cruel and amoral farce, we will be avenged, and our angst relieved.

Even more importantly, we need to be able to read history as a *story*. Shakespeare's *Henry V* has a clear conflict, a dramatic resolution and a moral, along with ethnic jokes and a romantic subplot (whereas the historical Henry's French campaign was a bitter and pointless massacre, inspired by competing interpretations of an arcane treaty). Like the other main conspiracy theories, Garrison's has a strong narrative element: good guys (Jack and his innermost circle, except Lyndon) tricked by omnipotent and ruthlessly efficient bad guys (too numerous to mention); the hapless nation, left victimized and fatherless, destroying itself in paroxysms of grief; the intrepid investigator (Garrison, now played by Kevin Costner) who will lay bare the truth, and achieve mystical reunion between father and child.

Oliver Stone readily admits that he's trying to find out why he got so

fucked up in Vietnam, his being that had Kennedy lived would not have continued. The issue itself is problematic, mind. The real point is that all been fucked up by post-1963 declining America. We are our collective past for that matter, in the same way apist and neurotic patient rocks of memory for the horror that can explain even

America's trauma is real. But it doesn't stem from some cataclysm, from shadow with guns arrayed among drains and shade trees of Dealey Plaza. Its source is the untheatrical narrative slow grind of history, nothing intoxicating about it, it just hangs around us like fog in the air.



Blood-Stained Moment Lady Johnson takes the oath.

If you like morals, late 20th-century American life certainly offers them. You can say that the bad karma of our national sins — the slaughter of the Indians, the arrival of steamships, imperialism, international capitalism — has been visited upon us. Or that the loss of either in meaningful spirituality, science, has driven us into an empire that crumbles, we cling to the memory of martyred deities: Marilyn, James Dean, Elvis, and so on. Our republic's unresolutions, long held in check by the combination of forcible oppression and the unfulfilled but still-exciting promise of liberty for all, have emerged as fissures that now threaten to tear the continent apart. In some ways, miraculously they took so long.

The Kennedy assassination moment when we caught a glimpse of our republic's demise. Irony also brought Americans together