

Test Your Grassy Knoll-edge

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A fun-filled guide to the murky world of JFK conspiracy theories

By Alex Heard

There was a time when almost any hip person could discuss, in impressively minute detail, the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy and the dense tangle of conspiracy theory that has sprouted around it. As the decades roll on, and more people grow up who don't remember where they were on that dreadful day—because they were in training pants or were merely hypothetical constructs—this stand-up folk art is vanishing. It will soon be needed again.

Oliver Stone's *JFK* is coming into view like a controversy juggernaut (it arrives this week in local theaters, later in the boonies), giving you a difficult choice. Namely, do you hunker down, hide from it, and hope the storm passes quickly? Or do you make a frenzied attempt to get up to speed argumentatively?

Normally, option one is the way to go; this is what I do following the release of every summer's "explosive" Spike Lee film or any cultural outcropping—like *When Harry Met Sally...* or *You Just Don't Understand*—that deals bravely, frankly, or honestly with men, women, and relationships.

But that won't work this time. Forget for a moment what several thousand thoughtful newspaper columnists will shortly be calling the assassination's haunting resonance in American life, and simply note the fact that the movie arrives at holiday time. That means lots of party jabber, which places you at risk of proximity to windbags who "know" everything about the case. Do you really want to stand there, mute, powerless, your teeth grinding, as might-as-well-be-Greek facts, opinions, and declarations assault your joyousness?

"We know Nixon was in Dallas for a Pepsi-Cola board meeting on the weekend of the slaying, and that he lied about it..."

"Eyewitnesses at Bethesda say at least two caskets arrived that night..."

"Ultimately, JFK was felled by the very demons his policies created."

No. Young people who like to be topically prepared need primers, while old-timers need a review. OK. But hundreds of books on the subject exist. Which ones are must-reads? Which are nutto? Who can you believe? That depends on who you ask. As the first step in my cramming regimen, I lobbed those questions at two dozen currently active assassination buffs and received at least that many answers. Consider this array of views from three generations of sleuths, which starkly illustrate the weird elusiveness of "truth" in this subject area.

Oswald as Robot?

Harold Weisberg—at 78 a patriarch among anti-Warren Report hecklers and author of the four-volume *White-wash* series and *Post Mortem: JFK As-*

sassination Cover-up Smashed—delivers a message of gloom and warning. Twenty-eight years into this, the basement of his rural home near Frederick, Md., is crowded by 60 file cabinets groaning with documents on the JFK case.

Weisberg is today convinced that the official cover-up muddied the waters so thoroughly that the truth will never be known. He's sure there was a conspiracy. But he's also sure that many of his colleagues are sloppy sensationalists—"nuts," he calls them—who leapfrog the evidence and engage in unsupportable speculation. If you want facts, he says, study his work and that of the late, great Sylvia Meagher (*Accessories After the Fact*, 1967, a blistering attack on the Report).

Do not believe Stone, he says. Be especially leery of two books Stone optioned as source material—Jim Garrison's *On the Trail of the Assassins* and Jim Marrs' *Crossfire*.

On the Trail is a 1988 memoir by the former New Orleans district attorney who, in the late '60s, indicted and tried but failed to convict an alleged assassination co-conspirator. (Garrison's story provides *JFK's* dramatic framework.) *Crossfire* summarizes 25

years of research into the case. Weisberg says both are junk, so *JFK*—as he phrased it in an angry June 3 letter to Stone—amounts to "Mack Sennett producing a Keystone Kops with a Pink Panther star making a Mardis Gras of one of the greatest of our national tragedies."

In September, during a lengthy indoctrination session near his home in Fort Worth, I told Jim Marrs—a friendly, bearded, veteran journalist—what Weisberg said about him. He graciously responded that Weisberg is, no doubt about it, one of the greats. But he's flawed. All those years of noodling in the documents have rendered him "unable to see the entire mosaic."

Thus, theory-wise, he comes up short. The fact is, says Marrs, almost 30 years of research "have proved the basic facts of the conspiracy," which, he insists, involved the highest levels of the United States government and the power elite.

Sure, neophytes ought to maintain healthy skepticism about that claim—*Crossfire* opens with a plea to the reader not to put blind faith in any one source when it comes to this most Byzantine of subjects—but fundamentally they should trust the case made by the men and women who have "done the digging." Marrs advises you to start with the best of the recent books, which reveal far more than works by

the early buffs. *Crossfire*, for one, and Anthony Summers' *Conspiracy*. Don't waste time with the Warren Report, even as a starting point. It's a **Big Lie** that will only confuse you.

Finally, meet Ulric Shannon, a 17-year-old Montrealer who's determined to be the Grand Synthesizer of the case. Shannon started at age 13, when he wrote a history theme on Kennedy. Since then, he claims to have read 50 books that debunk the official story, and to him, getting-of-wisdom requires total print immersion. Over the next 15 years, Shannon says in a phone interview, he plans to read *everything* written on the case, including all the available relevant documents. The tyro (or his mother, who actively encourages his interest and once took him on a dream vacation to the hallowed JFK assassination shrines in Dallas) recently paid \$1,000 for the hard-to-find 26 volumes of hearings and exhibits released by the Warren Commission in 1964.

Good luck, brave **Frostback**. The 26 vols. alone come to an eye-bulging 20,000 pages, and they are, in a sense, merely a summary of the humongous holdings at the **National Archives** (which also owns gruesome 3-D artifacts, such as JFK's clothing and the rifle used to kill him). Weisberg's document holdings come to some 250,000 pages. **Jim Lesar** of the **Assassination Archives Research Center** in Washington, DC, whose collection overlaps Weisberg's somewhat, estimates that he has 500,000 pages of documents, newsclips, and letters on the JFK case.

Famed Dallas archivist **Mary Ferrell**, an elderly housewife who has meticulously saved clips and facts since The Day Of, now has over 40,000 index cards jammed with essential info. Her unique collection is housed in a backyard office/shed guarded by a small but tenacious **black chow dog**. Fortunately for Shannon, Ferrell is

spending her golden years whapping this data into a computer, for ultimate access by buffs around the world, using a custom-designed archiving program that she calls, understatedly, **JFK: Index**.

And while young Shannon is at it, he needs to read some of the "lesser-known" books that the allegedly exhaustive **Library of Congress**, with its slight bias against crank literature, might not have. Among the more obscure entries he really shouldn't miss are:

- *Sherlock Holmes in Dallas*. ("Scarce novel on JFK assassination.")
- *The Kennedy Tapes*. ("This mint audio tape contains a docudrama of deathbed confession by a **second gunman** who allegedly assassinated JFK.")
- *Were We Controlled?* ("Possibility of Oswald as robot.")
- *Assassination Rhapsody*. ("An artistic/literary interpretation of the Warren Report.")
- *Heartland*. (By **Mort Sahl**, "First entertainer to question official accounts of JFK, RFK deaths.")
- *Satan's Assassins*. ("Oswald & Sirhan controlled by **occult?**")
- *The Illuminoids*. ("History of Illuminati & role in JFK assassination & other plots.")

Soviet Doubles

As you're probably gathering, JFK assassination is a dense jungle full of many different tribes—some at peace, some at war—and it's riddled with paths that swallow up entire lives. **Oliver Stone** and his staff had to enter boldly into this crowded marketplace of ideas and make selections. Stone's detractors, of course, say he picked all the rotten and hollow melons, but before we get to all that, we need to undergo a basic intelligence briefing of our own. Let's start with a speedy review of the crucial 1963-1979 era.

All hands can agree on this statement: On Nov. 22, 1963, at 12:30 p.m., while riding in an open limousine through **Dealey Plaza** in Dallas, Texas, JFK was killed. But beyond that it's hard to broaden the consensus. Can't one at least state that Lee Harvey Oswald was *in* Dallas that day? With an ecumenical spirit, no. One researcher faction says Oswald never came back from his 1959 defection to the **Soviet Union** and was replaced by the "Oswald" we knew, a Soviet double named **Alek Hidell**. (Standing virtually alone on this, the late **Mae Brussell** said the real Oswald still lives in **Akron, Ohio**, using the name **Dan Norton**.)

A week after the crime **LBJ** created the Warren Commission—among the seven members were **Chief Justice Earl Warren** and two men whose names reverberate suspiciously even now: **Rep. Gerald Ford** (a factor in the

Nixon-did-it scenarios), and longtime CIA Director Allen Dulles (whom JFK fired after the Bay of Pigs disaster). Early in the proceedings, Dulles helpfully brought in a history book, which argued that most American assassins were lone nuts. The following September, the commission reported its finding that Oswald, a lone nut, killed Kennedy, firing a 6.5 mm Mannlicher-Carcano rifle three times from a sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository. One shot hit JFK in the neck; one missed; and the third, deadly shot struck him in the head. During his flight from the Depository to the eventual scene of his arrest, Oswald encountered and killed an unlucky Dallas patrolman, J.D. Tippit.

When Jack Ruby killed Oswald two days later, he acted alone, motivated by patriotism and a desire to spare Jackie K a traumatizing return to Dallas for Oswald's trial. The commission found no evidence of a conspiracy. It dismissed rumors that Oswald and Ruby knew each other, or that Oswald was an agent, employee, or in-

Numerous cross-fire scenarios have been cooked up, naming dozens of possible gunmen. The number of shots generally ranges from three to nine, with riflemen studding Dealey Plaza like cloves on a Christmas ham.

formant of the FBI or the CIA. In perhaps its most controversial finding, it said that there was "very persuasive evidence...to indicate" that JFK and Gov. John Connally (who rode beside his wife in a jump seat directly in front of the president and was also hit) were struck by the same bullet, Commission Exhibit 399, which allegedly

traversed the president's neck, then ripped through Connally's chest and wrist and on into his thigh. Bullet 399 was found, scarcely scratched or deformed, on Connally's stretcher at Parkland Hospital. (Many critics say it was planted there.)

The **Single-Bullet Theory** was championed by commission assistant counsel (later U.S. senator) Arlen Specter, who has been a routinely demonized figure because of his role in formulating it. In *Post Mortem*, the ever-wrathful Weisberg writes that the commission staff pinned down The Truth while young Specter "indulged his guilty lust to sire" this "parthenogenic monster."

The earliest conspiracy-theory surge came from Europe. Thomas Buchanan, an expatriate American living

in England, devised one of the first widely known suspicious scenarios. In *Who Killed Kennedy?*, 1964, he said that a Mr. X, a Texas oil baron, had JFK murdered as part of a larger plot to gain control of the global oil market. A panel of British and French intellectuals, including Bertrand Russell, Hugh Trevor-Roper, and Jean Paul Sartre, signed on to a European "Who Killed Kennedy Committee." (When Jean Paul's involvement came to the attention of J. Edgar Hoover in a 1964 FBI memo, our domestic-intelligence czar scribbled in the margin, "Find out who Sartre is.")

In the U.S., a new wave of doubt followed the release of the Warren Report. Mark Lane, a New York lawyer, positioned himself as Oswald's defense attorney, pestered the commission with highly publicized antics, and published *Rush to Judgment* in 1966. This critique was a best seller, as was Edward Jay Epstein's *Inquest*, which offered a peek at the workings and behind-the-scenes squabbles of the commission. (Among other things, *Inquest* showed that the commission was divided on the Single-Bullet Theory.) By the end of 1966, enough controversy was afloat to inspire *Esquire* to publish a theory roundup.

Rednecks Whacked Him

The first-generation researchers tended toward police-detective analysis of the flaws and evidentiary puzzles of the Warren Report. (A few major topics: whether the Single-Bullet Theory squared with the images in the Zapruder film, the famous home movie of JFK's murder, shot during the grisly moments by Abraham Zapruder, a small businessman who

stood on a concrete wall on the grassy knoll as the motorcade went by; the strange, seemingly bungled autopsy of JFK performed at Bethesda Naval Hospital that night; and reports by eyewitnesses who claimed to have heard shots coming from the knoll.)

Even so, plenty of full-blown conspiracy theories were around back then. *Esquire* listed, among others: **Racist Theory** (anti-Civil Rights rednecks whacked JFK); **Cuba-Framed Theory** (proposed by Fidel Castro, who said Oswald, who had reportedly tried to defect to Cuba, was used to make him look bad); **Manchurian-Candidate Theory** (the Soviets brainwashed Oswald); **Fall-Guy Theory** (CIA-FBI-Army puppeteers used O); and **Mafia Theory** (a French writer, Serge Groussard, speculated on a conspiracy involving "the Al Capone gang," Ruby, Oswald, and Tippit).

In 1967 news of Jim Garrison's probe hit the papers, causing a major media sensation. Garrison charged that Clay Shaw, a New Orleans businessman, plotted with anti-Castro Cubans and right-wingers—including a freaky, totally bald man named David Ferrie, who sported a monkey-hair wig and painted-on eyebrows—to kill the president. Ferrie would have been indicted too, but he was killed, or committed suicide, or died of natural causes (it depends on who's talking) a week after Garrison's investigation was made public. Garrison said the CIA was deeply involved in JFK's death. Citing **Cui Bono Theory** ("Who Benefits?"), he strongly suggested that LBJ was in on it as well. American journalists turned against Garrison over the next two years—his

enemies called him a publicity hound who brought a fraudulent case to trial—and in 1969, Shaw was acquitted after a speedy deliberation.

The Garrison trial hurt the critics' credibility. The buffs made a comeback by the mid-'70s, though, thanks to several factors. Wide public exposure to the Zapruder film (*Geraldo* will keep biting. Cut off its head; and screened it on *Good Night, America* in 1975) convinced many citizens and members of Congress that the fatal head shot had to come from the front and right of the president—i.e., from the grassy knoll—because it shows JFK's head lurching backward and to the left. Congressional investigations (notably the **Church Committee**, which exposed the strange CIA-Mafia plots to kill Castro) and **Watergate** (which made anything seem possible) ushered in the modern era of theorizing, which is often marked by exceedingly complex talk of high-level, multi-player, intelligence-agency-driven cabals.

The theorists' big payoff came in 1977, when the House Select Committee on Assassinations began to reinvestigate the murders of Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Over the next two years, the committee took hits from many directions—Warren Report boosters thought it was a waste of time; anti-Warren Report forces thought its work was watered down by congressional enemies.

In 1979, the House Select reported its findings. Among the most important: It chided American intelligence agencies for withholding information

from the Warren Commission but concluded that neither the Secret Service nor the FBI or CIA were involved, as organizations, in the assassination. Relying on acoustic analysis of a police Dictabelt recording that had been made when the shots rang out, it concluded that a fourth shot had been fired at JFK by a second gunman (possibly from a spot high on the grassy knoll), but it missed. (A different scientific panel reversed this in 1982. The matter now is in a state of perpetual dispute.) It also said, however, that Oswald fired all the shots that hit JFK, and that the Single-Bullet Theory was correct after all.

House Select named a possible suspect for the Man Behind It All: **Carlos Marcello**, a New Orleans Mafia kingpin who had been harassed by Robert F. Kennedy's Justice Department. His probable motive dated to 1962, when mob-busting RFK had U.S. immigration officials hijack Marcello and dump him in Guatemala. From there he was bounced to El Salvador and suffered a painful, two-month odyssey before making it back to the states. Ed Becker, a Las Vegas private investigator, told the committee that in September of 1962 Marcello told him, "Don't worry about that little Bobby sonofabitch. He's going to be taken care of." But why go after JFK? Marcello allegedly cited **Tail-of-the-Dog Theory**: If you cut off the dog's tail, the dog will keep biting. Cut off its head; and the whole dog dies, tail and all.

The committee found "credible" but "tenuous" evidence linking

Oswald to figures (including Ferrie) "having a relationship...with Marcello's crime family," and it passed the detective's hat to the Justice Department, which didn't do much and officially closed the books on the case in 1988.

Or Maybe Jimmy Hoffa

Critics have mixed feelings about the assassinations committee. Some call it a vindication of their efforts; others dismiss it as a second whitewash that put all the blame on the Mafia to deflect attention from the CIA. Since then, Mafia Theory—and the even more popular *Renegade Intelligence Agents/Mafia/Anti-Castro Cubans/Disgruntled Military Men Theory*—have become the theory equivalents of Bigfoot. They've flattened everything in their path but remain essentially unprovable.

Over the years, many individuals have been blamed for JFK's death: Howard Hughes, Jimmy Hoffa, Khrushchev, French drug kingpins, mob figure Santos Trafficante, and mob figure John Roselli, among others. Numerous cross-fire scenarios have been cooked up, naming dozens of possible gunmen (by real name or code name). The number of shots generally ranges from three to nine, with riflemen studding Dealey Plaza like cloves on a Christmas ham.

One buff, Massachusetts architect Robert Cutler, regularly publishes an elaborate drawing of who stood where when the shots were fired. But as a general rule, it is now more fashionable to concentrate on the bigger picture than on Dealey Plaza arcana. For some buffs, this sort of thing has been forever tainted by the overzealous efforts of too many lovable crackpots like Cutler.

Another common tendency among researchers is to look dimly on revisionist histories of JFK that portray him as a gung-ho Cold Warrior, an unprincipled cocksman, or an otherwise less-than-perfect figure. Last summer, for example, Ulric Shannon—the Great Rosy-Cheeked Canadian Hope—chided a reporter who asked him if JFK's affairs with the likes of mobster Sam Giancana's girlfriend Judith Exner or Marilyn Monroe might be relevant to his assassination. "You mean his *alleged* affairs," Shannon snapped.

Oliver Stone, of course, picked *Grand-Cabal Theory*, which subordinates the mob to evil intelligence operatives. *Crossfire* is a grand-cabalist text, and while you really should read all of it to judge Marris' evidence on its merits, a peek at his summary chapter gives you the basic idea. Marris believes Kennedy was so chastened by the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the unpromising prospects in Vietnam that he had decided to stop his aggressive Cold Warriorin' and bring the boys home by 1965, work toward detente with the Soviet Union, and even extend peace feelers to Cuba.

By the beginning of 1963, Marris writes, JFK's overly liberal policies had angered too many powerful forces—the military, the CIA, anti-Castro Cubans, big business, right-wingers, the mob—and a "decision was made at the highest level of the American business-banking-politics-military-crime power structure" to kill him "by means of a public execu-

tion." This civics lesson would serve notice to future presidents with similar ideas.

On Nov. 22, JFK stumbled into an elaborate ambush, with three volleys of shots—at least six bullets in all, possibly nine—fired by riflemen in the Texas School Book Depository, on the grassy knoll, and perhaps on the roof of the Dallas County Records Building. Oswald was exactly what he claimed to be during his incarceration: a "patsy" who did not comprehend the bizarre drama swirling around him. He probably didn't fire any shots. Jack Ruby, who murdered Oswald during O's transfer from city jail to the county jail, prevented him from telling what he knew, on orders from above. Who was the mastermind? Marris ducks that, but his belief in Kennedy's Nam repentance leads him to suspect the man who oversaw that war's tragic escalation.

"One can almost hear the sad spirit of John F. Kennedy whispering from Dealey Plaza," Marris concludes. "Et tu, Lyndon?"

Oliver's Stoned

Obviously, toying with that theme alone would have assured Stone plenty of attention, but what really upset his critics was his decision to use Jim Garrison as his hero.

The Garrison case, for all its fame at the time, has faded from most people's memories by now, and those needing an objective refresher course have no choice but to actually read pro- and anti-Garrison texts from the past. See *On the Trail of the Assassins* and, of course, *JFK* for the pro-Garrison view. The anti-G shelf consists of contemporary accounts of the investigation (Edward Jay Epstein's *Counterplot*, 1969) and trial (*American Grotesque*, by novelist/playwright James Kirkwood, 1970).

Now, according to *Garrison*, why was Clay Shaw indicted? It all has to do with the long, strange summer of 1963, which Lee Harvey Oswald spent in New Orleans passing out "Fair Play for Cuba" leaflets on street corners. In *Counterplot*, Garrison tells Epstein that this pro-Castro stance was merely a pose. Oswald was working out of an office building, 544 Camp Street, which housed a motley crew of right-wingers and anti-Castro exiles. One dark figure was the late Guy Banister, a former FBI agent who had drifted far to the right—he was a Bircher, a Minuteman, a member of Louisiana's Committee on Un-American Activities, and he produced a racist

and during a famous Jan. 31, 1968, *Tonight Show* appearance (arranged at the urging of the leading celebrity JFK buff of the day—yes, Mort Sahl), Garrison told Johnny that "the Central Intelligence Agency was deeply involved in the assassination." Shaw, he believed, was a CIA operative.

As the jury saw it, the witnesses weren't convincing. Shaw was acquitted in about an hour.

Of the more recent anti-Garrison diatribes, George Lardner's in the *Washington Post* was mainly a recap of Garrison's past atrocities and a harsh critique of *JFK*'s script (leaked to him by our friend Weisberg). The one in the November 1991 *Esquire* by Robert Sam Anson, author of a 1975 buff book—*They've Killed the President*—

is the most compelling. Anson calls the Garrison investigation a "paranoid charade" and quotes Stone in a long, drunken ramble that indicates this experience has made him go slightly batty: "You call yourselves journalists? You're caricatures of journalism!... You could be a Russian working for Stalin in *Pravda* in 1955. You are liars! You just invent history! You should go back to school and learn honesty! That's where it starts! *Honesty!*"

Anson focuses at length on another of Stone's advisers for JFK, former Air Force Col. L. Fletcher Prouty, author of *The Secret Team: The CIA and Its Allies in Control of the United States and the World*. Prouty claims to have performed various intelligence jobs during his career and pushes the basic Grand-Cabal Theory found in *Crossfire*. He places particular emphasis (as does Marrs) on the existence of National Security Action Memorandum 263, drafted six weeks prior to the JFK assassination. "In it," Anson writes, "Kennedy formally endorsed a recommendation that 1,000 U.S. advisers be pulled out by the end of 1963, with a complete withdrawal of advisers to follow no later than...1965. Once NSAM 263 was signed, said Prouty, Kennedy was, for all intents, a dead man."

Shortly after the assassination, Grand Cabalists insist, LBJ approved another top-secret memo, which "presented a forthright plan for escalation." Anson says that Stone worked a Prouty-type character into the script (also known as Mr. X.), who Deep

Throat-ishly tells Garrison about the plot's darkest aspects. The only problem, Anson alleges, is that Prouty is a crank who is affiliated with Willis Carto's Liberty Lobby, the unhinged depository of right-right-wing thought that, among other areas of nifty public service, peddles Holocaust-revisionism books.

Surgeons Removed His Brain

Stone is aware of these criticisms but told me, in a telephone interview that featured no ranting, that nothing he's seen or heard has changed his mind. Time has proven Garrison more right than wrong, and Garrison's early crit-

ics had their own agendas. (Was I aware, for example, that the late James Kirkwood was gay, as was Clay Shaw, so Kirkwood's natural empathy for Shaw led him astray?) *Post* reporter George Lardner has been compromised by too many years on the CIA beat—Stone is careful not to say Lardner is a CIA "asset" but says Lardner can be relied on to be non-critical of the agency.

I was only able to obtain a long-outdated first draft of the script, so I don't know whose ideas will make the final cut, but be aware that there's a lot more going on in "the field" than Stone will have time to put on screen. Mafia- and Grand-Cabal Theory remain the biggest tents, but inside both are pup-size dwellings manned by specialists, feuders, and a few people who can justly be called lone nuts. Here are some hot themes and active players.

A 1988 British documentary, *The Men Who Killed Kennedy* (recently broadcast for the first time in the U.S. on A&E, in an expanded version), prominently displays Los Angeles researcher Steve Rivele's not-wildly-popular theory that three French gangsters offered JFK under orders from Marseilles crime bosses.

The early theorists were upset by the autopsy performed at Bethesda Naval Hospital on the night of Nov. 22 by Navy pathologist James J. Humes. From the relatively humble anomalies that alarmed them, charges of ghoulish autopsy tampering have ballooned into a cottage industry. David Lifton, a Los Angeles researcher, spent 15 years assembling his theory—explained in his

successful 1981 book, *Best Evidence* (updated in '88)—that conspirators aboard Air Force One stole JFK's body and ferried it to Walter Reed Hospital, where surgeons removed his brain and altered his head to support the shot-from-behind story.

Lifton's archfoe, Robert J. Groden, mocks this theory in *High Treason* (with Harrison Edward Livingstone, 1988). He says the truth is much simpler: The autopsy photos and X-rays were faked. Lifton is reportedly working on a new video. Groden is writing a new book.

Even Dan Rather

Over the years, the experts have enlarged and analyzed pictures of scads of mystery figures who show up in photos and films taken Nov. 22. Some have dropped off the charts. You don't hear much about **Black-Dog Man** anymore—a shadowy, canine-looking "blob" who in a couple of photos appears on a concrete wall midway up the grassy knoll—but he was a star during the House Select days. The bigger fish now are **Umbrella Man**, the **Accomplice**, **Badge Man**, and **Hard-Hat Man**. U.M. is a slender white male who is seen pumping a black umbrella while JFK's limo glides into the killing zone. The Accomplice is a dark companion who looks to be holding a walkie-talkie.

Dallas insurance salesman **Louis Witt** told the House committee he was the U.M., but among the many critics who don't believe him, three theories compete. **Buff Gary Shaw**, of Cleburne, Texas, has said U.M. was mocking JFK for failing to authorize an umbrella of air support at the Bay of Pigs. Others say he provided coordinating signals for scattered gunmen. The boldest theory is by Robert Cutler. He argues in his self-published monograph, *The Day of the Umbrella Man* (1980), that U.M. held a spy umbrella, which fired darts tipped with a toxin that paralyzed JFK for the head shot.

Badge Man shows up in extreme blowups of a famous Polaroid shot taken by **Mary Moorman** just as JFK was fatally hit. Since 1983, Fort Worth researchers **Gary Mack** and **Jack White** have said that it shows a man in a Dallas policeman's uniform firing a rifle from a locale behind the stockade fence. Beside him is a man in a hard hat, and in the foreground is a figure who appears to be (at least in the colorized version) a soldier taking a home movie. This fits the account of **Gordon Arnold**, who came forward a few years back and admitted he was there that day, in uniform, with a movie camera. He says a shot whistled past him, and that a **Pushy Man** confiscated his film. Mack and White say the Badge Man image will soon benefit from state-of-the-art computer enhancement by a top group of experts in Europe, whom they aren't at liberty to name at the moment.

Mack's and White's archfoe, **Larry Howard**, of the Dallas JFK Assassination Information Center (Stone retained the center with a \$80,000 consulting fee), says the theory is bogus: Badge Man's line of fire would be blocked by the low concrete wall. Mack and his ally, **Dave Perry**, are getting in licks of their own, with an attack on Howard's pet theory, the **Ricky White** story.

At a press conference last August, the JFK AIC introduced its candidate

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for the stockade rifleman, Roscoe White, a deceased Dallas policeman who served in the Marines with Oswald. His son, Ricky, said he found a diary in which his father confessed, "I was Mandarin, the man behind the stockade fence who fired two shots." This story has caused a huge rupture in the research community. Among other problems, Ricky doesn't have the diary anymore (he claims the FBI stole it).

Also still rumbling around: the **Three Tramps**. The Tramps are three hobos or winos, captured either shortly after or 90 minutes after the shooting (it depends on who's talking) in a railroad yard. The problem is that they don't look hobo enough—they have hobo clothes, but nice haircuts and passable shaves. Buffs' attempts to ID two of the tramps as E. Howard Hunt and Frank Sturgis, have been refuted. Shaw is working on a book that will "definitively" identify the short tramp. Weisberg considers the Tramps one of the lamest "mysteries" of the case. "They were winos, pure and simple," he snorts.

Many GOP-haters still say Nixon's the one, with help from Ford and Bush. This theme was bigger in the '70s, of course, but lately it's been making a comeback. The theory relies on weird connect-the-dots associations and a nagging suspicion that Nixon, somehow, still controls everything. (An often-cited source is H.R. Halde-**man's** *The Ends of Power*, which reveals that Bay of Pigs was Nixon's code phrase for the JFK assassination.)

A few theorists even think **Dan Rather** knows more than he's saying. This dates back to the Day Of, when Rather—then working for CBS in

Texas—went on the air and wrongly reported that the Zapruder film showed JFK's head move forward at the moment of impact. The September 1990 issue of the *Third Decade* had a piece called "Dan Rather in Dallas," which brooded on key discrepancies in *The Camera Never Blinks*, Dan's autobiography, and his known movements during the assassination weekend.

Nixon and Rather Theories don't earn much respect among serious buffs, but proponents can still get a hearing at conferences, because JFK researchers pride themselves on open-mindedness. But it forces to mind a question: Has anyone gone far enough to earn **pariah** status?

Yes. Almost everyone disdains **Bill Cooper**. His detractors say he's using a blurry eighth- or ninth-generation copy of the Zapruder film to make his case, in paid lectures, that JFK's driver, **Bill Greer**, turned and killed the president with a handgun.

"He's got a copy that is so bad, you can see almost anything you want in it," says a clearly disgusted Robert Groden.

Reached by telephone in Arizona, Cooper said, "I used to serve in Naval Intelligence. Between 1970 and 1973, I saw documents which led to my discovery that the coup de grace on JFK was administered by Greer, who turned and fired—with his left hand over his right shoulder—a gas-powered pistol that shot a pellet loaded with **shellfish toxin**. At the time, this was the most toxic substance known to man other than plutonium."

That, I remarked, is one fascinating theory.

"This is not 'theory,'" he stressed. "It is fact." ■