

Did Oswald act alone? Argument continues to rage 25 years later

By Sean Piccoli
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On a sunny Friday afternoon in Dallas, President John F. Kennedy's motorcade rolled through Dealey Plaza, past the old Texas School Book Depository and into the cross hairs of at least one sniper's gun. The argument over what happened next begins with the first shot.

After 25 years, questions about the public murders of a charismatic president and his assassin still taunt those who defend or deride the official story of what happened between Nov. 22 and 24, 1963.

The 1964 Warren Commission Report states that Lee Harvey Oswald, an erratic man acting on a lunatic impulse, shot and killed Mr. Kennedy from a sixth-floor window in the Texas School Book Depository, and two days later took a fatal bullet in the chest from a vigilante's gun. Adherents insist that version still stands.

But since 1963, conspiracy theorists have offered a rogues' gallery of second and third gunmen: Mafia hit men, KGB "liquidators," body doubles, vengeful veterans of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, or French mercenaries carrying out the CIA's most unspeakable covert operation.

Who's right?

■ The CIA theory:

"The CIA killed President Kennedy and we can prove it," said attorney Mark Lane, author of "Rush to Judgement," the 1966 best seller that blasted the Warren Commission for concluding that Oswald had acted alone and that Oswald's killer, Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby, was a vigilante.

According to Mr. Lane, Mr. Kennedy was furious with the CIA for twice lying to him and had vowed to dismantle the agency. The president also had begun pulling troops out of Vietnam.

The CIA, bent on self-preservation and partial to its "dirty little war" in Asia, dispatched assassins to Dallas after "setting down a series of blood-red footprints" that would lead to a hapless defector named Lee Harvey Oswald, Mr. Lane says.

Afterward Oswald "was allowed to live for 48 hours, then shot to death by Jack Ruby, who worked for the FBI," Mr. Lane explained.

The CIA then concocted a story



Jack Anderson



Mark Lane

about Oswald's meeting with a top Soviet assassination official in Mexico City shortly before Nov. 22, and fed it to the Warren Commission to convince Chief Justice Earl Warren to sit on the "truth," or risk World War III, he says.

■ The Mafia theory:

The scenario gaining currency in recent years implicates the Mafia, which felt the results of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy's ruthless crackdown on organized crime.

The Mafia angle, discussed by syndicated columnist Jack Anderson in the mid-1970s, exploded into public view with "Conspiracy," a 1980 book by British writer Anthony Summers.

Such theories generally hold that Carlos Marcello, head of the Mafia's New Orleans area, swore to kill the president for turning brother Bobby loose on them after the election, which the mob claimed it had helped carry for the Democrats by rigging votes in key states.

Marcello — now in federal prison — and fellow capos Sam Giancana and Santos Trafficante — now dead — hired mob hit men for the job and made Oswald their patsy; Oswald was silenced by another longtime Mafia hit man and occasional FBI stool pigeon, Jack Ruby, according to

theorists.

Mr. Anderson, a former supporter of the Warren Commission Report, endorses part of the theory. But in a thesis he advanced on television this month, Mr. Anderson charged the assassination was more the work of Cuba's Fidel Castro, enraged over the Bay of Pigs landing and the CIA's repeated attempts on his life.

"I don't have a smoking gun," Mr. Anderson said. "What I do have is ... overwhelming evidence that the attempts to kill Fidel Castro backfired." The mobsters the CIA had recruited to kill Mr. Castro somehow were turned around and sent to Dallas, Mr. Anderson said.

Initially, Mr. Anderson said, he "didn't think a conspirator cunning enough to ambush the president ... would be foolish enough to use a loner and a crackpot like Lee Harvey Oswald," either as an accomplice or a fall guy. The columnist later discovered that's precisely what happened.

Oswald "was either set up or awfully eager to be blamed," he said.

■ The KGB theory:

In another scenario, the KGB recruited a former U.S. Marine and young defector named Lee Harvey Oswald.

In 1959, after his dishonorable discharge from the Marines, Oswald