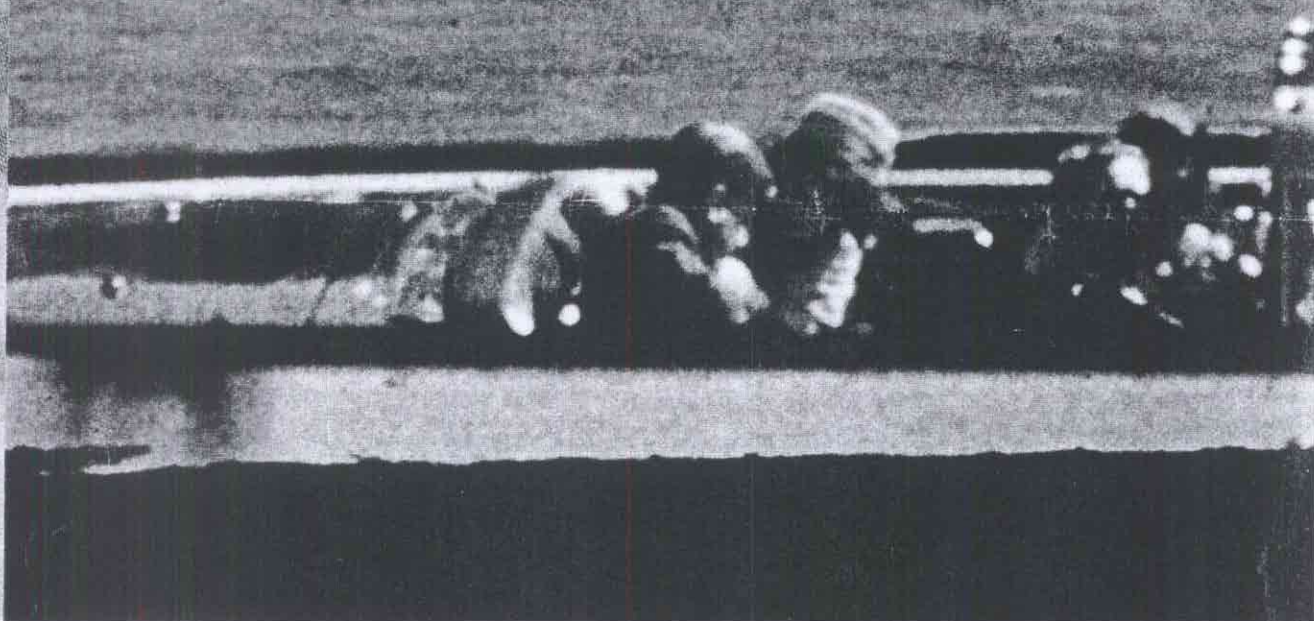


Who Shot JFK?

CIA: A trove of government documents brings out the conspiracy buffs again. They're right about a cover-up, but it wasn't a plot to kill the president.



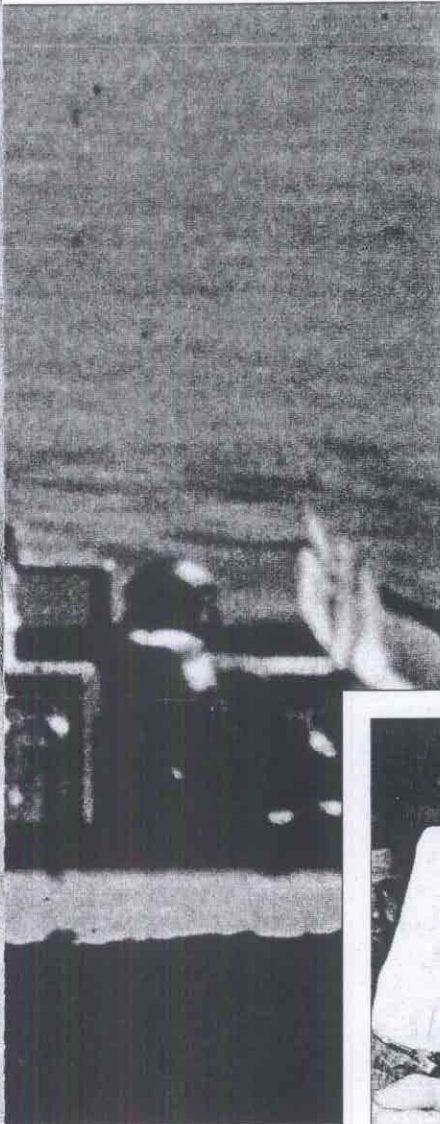
WEARING WHITE COTTON GLOVES, they pored over the murky pictures of "the Umbrella Man" of Dealey Plaza, read the top-secret CIA report allegedly placing Lee Harvey Oswald at a raucous twist party in Mexico City just before the shooting and recoiled from the gruesome autopsy close-ups of Oswald's wounds. Serious scholars, journalists, curious tourists and a few flakes had jammed into the East Research Room of the National Archives last week to explore a vast new trove of government documents on the assassination of John F. Kennedy. "Fidel was behind it!" exclaimed Stuart Wexler, a twentysome-

thing conspiracy freak wandering among the reporters and photographers who had come to record the scene. "I'm talking Mafia, exiles, some CIA, maybe some generals. They killed President Kennedy!"

Who really shot JFK? Many Americans actually believe the version offered by Oliver Stone's movie, "JFK": that a cabal of senior military and intelligence officials, backed by Lyndon Johnson, conspired to kill Kennedy before he could withdraw from Vietnam. In 1992 Congress hoped to finally set the record straight by ordering the federal government, including the CIA, the FBI and the Pentagon, to make public all records on the assassination with-

in 300 days. Last week, on day 301, the National Archives opened up a cache of some 800,000 pages of documents.

They do not, however, tell all. Many of the documents have been heavily blacked out or replaced by pink slips stamped RESTRICTED. According to the Assassination Archives & Research Center, a nonprofit organization run by conspiracy buffs, the CIA has withheld some 160,000 documents. The independent panel that is supposed to review withheld documents has yet to be appointed. It will be years before the entire truth comes out, and, in the meantime, the believers in the Fourth Shot and the Man on the Grassy



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A case not closed:
The fateful motorcade in Dallas in November 1963, the young president and the assassin (right)



ART RICKERBY—BLACK STAR



AP

Knoll will continue to spin their theories. In an effort to resolve these mysteries, NEWSWEEK, The Washington Post and CBS News have embarked on a joint project to examine just how the U.S. government reacted in the week immediately following the shooting. The results of this investigation, which will be published and broadcast around the time of

the 30th anniversary of the assassination in November, so far do not support the sinister conclusions of Stone and other conspiracy theorists. There was, to be sure, a cover-up—but probably not of a plot to kill the president. Far more likely is that officials at the CIA and FBI withheld evidence to conceal their own mistakes and keep hidden the CIA's hare-

brained schemes to assassinate foreign leaders.

The documents revealed last week show the CIA scrambling almost desperately to learn whether Lee Harvey Oswald was a communist agent. The first reports that November weekend were troubling. Only a few weeks earlier, Oswald had been seen entering the Soviet and Cuban embassies in Mexico City, and wiretaps heard him dealing with a consular official who was, in fact, a KGB officer who handled “wet affairs”—assassinations. But within a few days agency officials were reasonably satisfied that Oswald’s dealings with the KGB were nothing more than a “grim coincidence.” KGB officials routinely posed as lowly consular officials, and Oswald’s conversations amounted to nothing more than innocuous requests for a visa. The Soviet Union, U.S. intelligence officials reasoned, was not about to start World War III.

Lone gunman: The White House was understandably eager to reassure the public on that score, and Lyndon Johnson moved quickly to set up a commission that would—he hoped—find that Kennedy had been shot by a lone gunman. The CIA and FBI were ordered to cooperate, which they did—but only up to a point.

After the shooting, the FBI did a very professional job of tracking down Oswald’s movements and the gun he had used to shoot Kennedy. But the FBI’s legendary director, J. Edgar Hoover, was horrified to discover that his Dallas field office may have bungled an opportunity to head off the assassination. In early November Oswald sent a threatening note (the contents remain murky) to the FBI’s headquarters in Dallas, but the agents there failed to follow up on it. The agent who got the warning, James Hosty, was ordered to get rid of the evidence (he flushed it down the toilet). Hoover later lied to the Warren Commission, saying that the bureau had no warning that Oswald was dangerous.

The CIA was also guilty of holding back. For three years the agency had been trying

to kill Fidel Castro, even going so far as to hire the Mafia to do the job. This information was clearly relevant to any investigation of Kennedy's assassination. Suppose Castro had had Kennedy shot in revenge? Indeed, on the day Kennedy was killed a CIA agent was handing a poison pen to a Cuban dissident who claimed he could get to Castro. But the Warren Commission was never told. Why? Former agency officials disingenuously reply that they were never asked. They rationalize that Allen Dulles, the former director of the CIA who had launched the assassination plots, was a member of the Warren Commission.

'Rogue elephant': The CIA in those days did what it pleased with very little oversight. The agency worked for the president, but presidents wanted "plausible deniability." The picture of the agency as a "rogue elephant" has given rise to theories that it was the CIA itself that killed Kennedy. The spooks were mad at Kennedy, this theory goes, because he doomed the Bay of Pigs operation by refusing to order air support at the crucial moment—and then blamed the agency for the failure of the invasion. But if there was a nefarious plot, it could hardly have come from the upper levels. Richard Helms, who ran the agency's covert operations in 1963, was a shrewd and cautious bureaucrat who had opposed the Bay of Pigs. It is conceivable, of course, that some lower-level spook took revenge, perhaps in cahoots with right-wing Cubans who felt betrayed by the Bay of Pigs. The documents released last week will raise suspicions still further, because they suggest that the CIA may have mysteriously deep-sixed photos of Oswald taken while he was entering the Soviet

Embassy in Mexico City. Oswald came and went from the Soviet and Cuban embassies no fewer than five times; it seems unlikely that the hidden CIA cameras stationed outside could have missed him. The photos, the fantasists suggest, would have shown not only Oswald but a CIA conspirator.

But this remains far-out conjecture. More concrete is the evidence that the CIA covered up its plots to kill Castro. Indeed, there was a cover-up *within* the agency. James Angleton, the famously spooky counterintelligence chief who was charged with heading the agency's investigation of the Kennedy assassination, was never told of the poison-plot against Castro. The reason may have

been bureaucratic: the CIA is tightly compartmentalized. It is also likely that the official running the operation to overthrow Castro, Desmond FitzGerald, wanted to keep Angleton, a relentless conspiracy theorist himself, away from his domain. FitzGerald was personally embarrassed because a month before the assassination he had gone to meet a Cuban agent in Paris, against warnings from his own advisers that the man might be a double agent for Castro.

More fuel: The CIA was also loath to tell the Warren Commission about its mob ties. This is more fuel for the conspiracy theorists. Chicago don Sam Giancana thought that he had bought himself a measure of security by helping the CIA with its assassination plots (not to mention leaning on corrupt Chicago cops to support Jack Kennedy in Illinois in 1960). So he was infuriated when the Kennedys came into office and began cracking down on the mob. Did he order a "hit" on the president in revenge?

Top law-enforcement officials from the Kennedy era say that, at the time, the question never really came up. There was an investigation into the mob ties of Jack Ruby, the small-time hood who shot Oswald, but the trail led nowhere. It seems hard to believe that the Mafia angle was just overlooked. Bobby Kennedy, for one, is said to have worried that, as attorney general, he caused his brother's death by vigorously prosecuting the mob. But FBI officials say that there was no evidence to back Bobby's fears. According to William Roemer, the FBI agent who bugged Giancana's Chicago headquarters, the mobsters muttered

'You Wonder How It All Connects'

The Kennedy assassination has been the holy grail for a generation of conspiracy theorists. More than 200 books—including an additional 10 to be published this fall—have examined Kennedy's murder and raised questions about the Warren Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was his lone assassin. But none of the exotic scenarios stands up to scrutiny.



JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

LBJ, the CIA and the Pentagon

Theory: The CIA felt betrayed by JFK because of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion and because of his subsequent threats to break up the agency. In the film "JFK," writer-di-

LBJ is sworn in

rector Oliver Stone suggests that Lyndon Johnson and Pentagon hawks were in on the conspiracy because President Kennedy was thinking of pulling out of Vietnam.

Reality check: The CIA was clearly into assassination plots—documents show that it asked the mob to help knock off Fidel Castro—but there is no evidence of treason. Nor is there any solid evidence that JFK planned to pull out of Vietnam.



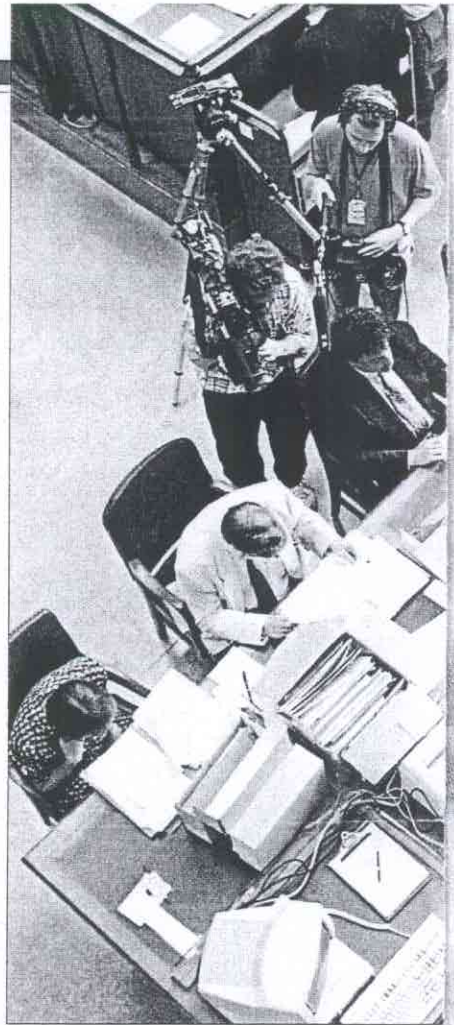
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Mafia don Giancana

The Mob

Theory: Mob bosses like Sam Giancana felt double-crossed: they helped get Kennedy elected in West Virginia and Chicago, and JFK's brother Robert over at the Justice Department thanked them by cracking down on organized crime.

Reality check: FBI wiretaps of Mafia headquarters show no active





KEN CEDENO—SIPA



UPI

Murky pictures, top-secret reports: Hoover and JFK, the National Archives (left)

plotting. Also, Oswald is an unlikely mafioso. Seven and a half months before the Kennedy assassination, he attempted to kill a retired right-wing general—with the same rifle he would later use in Dallas.



ARCHIVE PHOTOS

Cuba's Castro

Castro

Theory: Since the United States was apparently determined to kill him—the CIA made at least half a dozen attempts—the Cuban leader decided to shoot back.

Reality check: Fidel Castro knew that the United States could wipe Cuba off the map.

Cuban Anti-Communists

Theory: Survivors of the Cuban brigade that invaded the Bay of Pigs wanted revenge for being set up and abandoned. Secret paramilitary group

Alpha 66 joined with rogue CIA agents to shoot Kennedy.

Reality check: There is no evidence for this claim. The witness alleging the plot was discredited by a congressional investigation.

The Kremlin

Theory: The cold war was at its height, Khrushchev had been embarrassed by the Cuban missile crisis and the KGB had an assassination squad that had killed Western officials before. The KGB recruited Oswald while he was in Russia.



KGB's Nosenko

Reality check: The Kremlin did not want to start World War III. It also never recruited Oswald. Moreover, former KGB officer Yuri Nosenko told Gerald Posner, author of a compelling new assassination history ("Case Closed") that the emotionally unstable ex-marine was to be "avoided at all costs."

Kennedy, why did he first try to kill a retired right-wing general, Edwin Walker, on April 10, 1963, before Dallas? Lee Harvey Oswald was a pathetic mama's boy who beat his wife and dreamed of living in a socialist paradise. A new book, "Case

Closed," by Gerald Posner, vividly portrays the crazed Oswald and makes a strong argument that he was, in fact, Kennedy's lone assassin. But the case of the Kennedy assassination will probably never be closed. Last week, as Mike Hines, an amateur assassination buff from Minneapolis, sifted through documents in the National Archives, he knew he was not about to find the smoking gun. "You read one thing here, another there," he said. "The Warren Commission says this, a movie says something else . . . You wonder how it all connects. I'm waiting for someone to stand up and shout, 'Bingo! Here it is!' But that ain't gonna happen." Not even, in all likelihood, after the government opens up all its files.

EVAN THOMAS with
PATRICK ROGERS and
ADAM WOLFBURG in Washington