

'Beyond any question, the conspiracy can be

- Robert Groden, optics expert, and author of two conspiracy books

Conspiracy theories refuse

By Mark Potok
USA TODAY

DALLAS — For 30 of her 40 years, Rosemary Roach has lived trapped inside a few grainy frames of film, a little girl in a red, checked dress perpetually running across Dealey Plaza.

"I will never forget it as long as I live," Roach says of the day three decades ago when she watched the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and was captured running alongside the motorcade in a famous home movie of the tragedy. "It was the most frightening experience I ever had."

But Roach says she saw more than just the shot that killed Kennedy as his limousine passed the old Texas School Book Depository. She says she saw the gunsmoke of a second gunman — evidence of a conspiracy.

Thirty years after the assassination — and hundreds of books, movies and documentaries on the subject — conspiracy theories abound, undiluted even by a spate of new analyses that agree with the Warren Commission that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed the president.

Even in the week before Monday's anniversary, new theories were emerging. Fueled by the recent release of thousands of previously classified documents, there is a huge grab bag of proposed solutions to the mystery.

Conspiracy theorists — more than 600 of whom are meeting in Dallas for the third consecutive year this weekend — blame the CIA, the FBI, Lyndon Johnson, the military-industrial complex, the right, the left, and the Mob.

Panel discussions led by celebrities like Norman Mailer

and Gerald Posner range from the "Intelligence Community & Defectors" and "Oswald in Mexico City" to "Cuban Connections and Organized Crime" and "Eyewitnesses."

Anti-Castro Cuban exiles, corrupt police and reporters, altered autopsies, photos and weapons, disguised tramps and any number of bizarre twists will be offered by the legions of independent researchers.

"You've got a lot of very lonely people out there with nothing else to do but promote these crazy theories," says Jim Moore, author of *Conspiracy of One*. "It's like the (conspiracy) flavor of the month."

Still, a new USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll shows 75% of Americans today believe in a conspiracy.

"Beyond any question, the conspiracy can be proved," says Robert Groden, an optics expert who has written two books on the subject. "The evidence proves beyond any question that the timing of the shots is too rapid to (have all) come from the Oswald weapon."

Mark Lane, who wrote one of the first books alleging a conspiracy, is critical of the meeting in Dallas, saying intramural disputes between theorists are not the way to finally solve the assassination.

"What is required now is not

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proved'

to die

conferences to determine how many angels can dance on the head of a pin," he says. "What's required is to get all the available evidence, assemble it, and submit it to a grand jury."

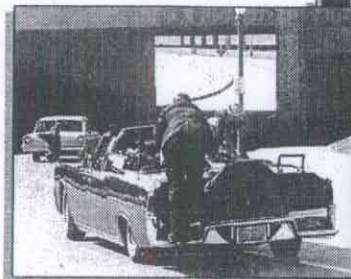
For her part, Roach is sure there was a conspiracy.

She says she heard four shots — not three, as was concluded by the Warren Commission. She believes she saw a

30 years later: Remembering JFK



Thirty years after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, debate continues about who killed him and why. Hundreds of books, a grand jury, Congress, newspapers, magazines and TV specials have re-examined the official Warren Commission finding that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. Images and opinions on the events that took place in Dallas in 1963:



By J.W. Altgens via AP

KENNEDY SHOT: President Kennedy slumps in back seat as Jacqueline Kennedy and Secret Service agent move toward him Nov. 22



By Capt. Cecil Stoughton via AP

JOHNSON SWORN IN: Vice President Lyndon Johnson is given oath of office Nov. 22 aboard presidential plane.

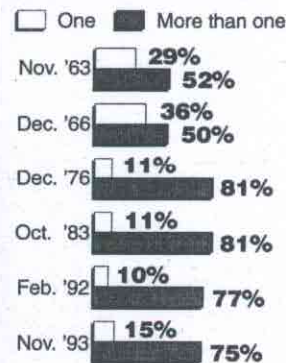


Copyright by Bob Jackson, Dallas Times-Herald via AP

OSWALD SHOT: Jack Ruby, right, kills Lee Harvey Oswald, center, outside Dallas police station Nov. 24.

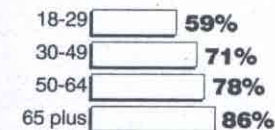


How opinion has changed on how many people were involved in the assassination:



More older Americans believe in conspiracy

Breakdown by age group of those saying more than one person was involved in the assassination:



JFK's ratings improve

When Kennedy was assassinated, 58% of Americans approved of the way he was handling the presidency. How Kennedy ranks over time?



THE FUNERAL: John F. Kennedy Jr. salutes his father's casket Nov. 25 at St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington.

USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup polls; Gallup/Newsweek polls; CBS/New York Times poll

By Nick Galifianakis, USA TODAY

Government may have withheld evidence

Most evidence still points to Lee Harvey Oswald as the lone assassin of President John F. Kennedy. But troubling contradictions remain, and growing questions about whether the government withheld some of what it knew after the killing.

Among latest developments:

▶ A PBS *Frontline* special revealed a CIA document that may indicate the agency, despite denials, interviewed Oswald after his return from Russia in 1962.

▶ James Johnston, counsel to the Senate's 1975 probe, told Congress this week that newly released CIA documents suggest the agency was hesitant to launch a full probe of possible Cuban involvement in the killing.

▶ Dallas police records indicate that after

the shooting, Oswald was held in a jail cell near John Franklin Elrod, a Dallas hobo picked up the same day.

Elrod told authorities in 1964 that Oswald recognized another prisoner, named Lawrence Miller, and that Oswald once met with Miller and Jack Ruby, the strip club proprietor who two days later killed Oswald.

The FBI has denied Elrod was in the jail at the time.

Adding to the intrigue: The FBI has declined to release a 14-page report about Donnell Whitter, a mechanic who serviced Ruby's car. Whitter was reportedly in a car driven by Miller before it crashed during a police chase. Found in the trunk: rifles and automatic weapons.

man in a storm sewer near the site, a man who some theorists say was a conspirator.

She insists at least one shot came from the grassy knoll, a hillock from which many believe a second gunman was firing. At the moment of the fatal head shot, she says, she spotted a puff of smoke atop the knoll.

"It was definitely gun-smoke," Roach says.

Case Closed, a new book by journalist-lawyer Posner, while critical of the Warren Commission, agrees with its basic findings and supports the idea that one bullet wounded Kennedy and Texas Gov. John Connally.

Posner's basic conclusion that Oswald acted alone has been supported by several media investigations of the newly released Kennedy files.

Still, many who were there

disagree.

Beverly Oliver was a 17-year-old singer at the Colony Club, competitor of Jack Ruby's Carousel Club, when Kennedy was killed. She said she knew Ruby well, and that — contrary to Warren Commission findings — he knew Oswald.

"I was introduced to Oswald, about two or three weeks prior to the assassination, by Jack Ruby," she says of the man who shot Oswald two days after Kennedy's death. "He said 'This is my friend, Lee Oswald. He's with the CIA.'"

Adds Jean Hill, a 62-year-old Dallas schoolteacher who says she was the closest spectator to Kennedy when he suffered the fatal head shot: "At the very instant that Kennedy's head exploded, I saw a rifle flash and a

puff of smoke on the grassy knoll behind the picket fence."

She says she saw "the outline" of the shooter, although no one reported spotting a second gunman at the time of the killing.

Bill Newman, 52, was also at the scene. He and his wife, Gayle, were captured on film covering their two young children with their bodies as gunfire rings out. He's not sure if there was a conspiracy, but he is certain the matter should be investigated further.

"There are people still researching Lincoln's assassination," he says. "So I'm not sure we'll have the answer in my lifetime. But I'm optimistic enough to hope that we will find it someday."

▶ JFK on TV, 3D

Plaza tapped as landmark

Dallas' Dealey Plaza, where John F. Kennedy was killed, becomes a National Historic Landmark in a sober ceremony Monday.

Nellie Connally, wife of the late John Connally, the former Texas governor wounded in the assassination, will speak at the event.

The bronze plaque marking the spot as a historic landmark without mentioning the assassination will be mounted on a slab of pink Texas granite.

Efforts to involve the Kennedy family would have been "inappropriate," says Kelly Leonard, spokeswoman for the Dallas County Historical Foundation.

The family usually does not make public appearances on Nov. 22, instead attending private Mass in Washington after laying flowers on Kennedy's grave in Arlington Cemetery.

Dallas felt a responsibility to mark the day because it changed the course of history, says Leonard. Every Nov. 22, nearly 3,000 people spontaneously gather at the plaza.

"We're trying to make this very positive by focusing on Kennedy's inspirational legacy," she says.