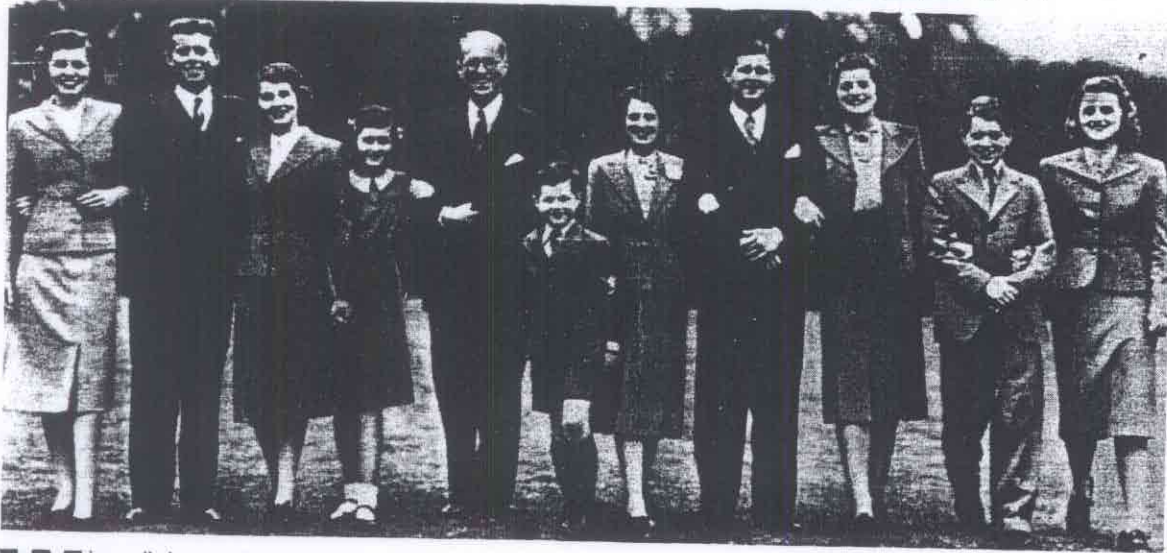


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## JFK AND *which* BULLET?



**W**hat really happened that November day in Dallas 30 years ago? Was the bullet that killed John F. Kennedy from the rifle of a lone nut assassin or was his death caused by a conspiracy at the highest level? To most New Zealanders, it's of mild interest, but to some it is an obsession.

"It's almost like the crime of the century," says Don Craig of Christchurch. "It's a bit like an Agatha Christie novel as well."

Craig runs an eight-week conspiracy theory course at the University of Canterbury, for wannabe conspiracy buffs who need to brush up on the arcane assassination facts. What happened to Kennedy's brain, which had disappeared by the time his body reached Washington? (Ronald Reagan's also evidently went missing on his arrival in Washington, but he carried on.) And how come Oswald was drinking a Coke in the second-floor cafeteria just 90 seconds after the last shot?

"At the end of the course none of the people in the class believed the official theory that there was a lone gunman," says Craig proudly.

As soon as Frank Macskasy of Wellington saw Oliver Stone's movie *JFK*, he knew that he had to investigate further. Macskasy regularly contacts conspiracy authors in the US to point out errors in their facts or logic. When Howard Donahue, a ballistics expert, suggested that Kennedy had been accidentally killed by a secret service agent in the car behind, Macskasy was on the phone. "We swapped ideas and he sent me some follow-up information."

Macskasy can talk about the subject for hours. "I think my friends are probably sick

*For conspiracy buffs, every mystery has a paranoid solution.*  
**BY NOEL O'HARE**

of it," he says. "Here's Frank going off on JFK again. We should buy him a time-machine and send him back there. We do have some good discussions, but I'm the one who's obsessed."

Auckland Beatles fan Ron Goldsmith sees the Kennedy assassination investigation as a clumsy attempt to set up Lee Harvey Oswald. But Goldsmith's real area of expertise is the conspiracy to kill John Lennon. Lennon, he asserts, was killed by the CIA, who programmed Mark Chapman to pull the trigger.

"Lennon was shot only days before he was becoming politically active again after a period of five years. That's way, way too much coincidence."

Goldsmith has sought out information from CIA/FBI files, and has corresponded twice with Chapman in prison. "But I've never been able to get back in touch with him, and I've been fobbed off with all sorts of things." Goldsmith thinks that if Chapman is ever released he will be shot by the CIA to keep him quiet. "It will be somebody like me – and I don't say me – who they will target to put Chapman away when he gets out," says Goldsmith with a touch of the paranoia that is often the conspiracy buff's occupational hazard.

Conspiracy theories, of course, are noth-

ing new. Probably the world's oldest conspiracy theory – that the Jews secretly and malevolently rule the world – was still potent enough to sweep the Nazis into power and bring death and misery to millions of Jews. Another popular theory was that US president Franklin D. Roosevelt knew the Japanese were going to attack Pearl Harbour. He didn't alert the navy because he thought a Japanese attack would change the opinion of those opposed to the US's entry into World War II. A recent variation has it that Churchill knew of the impending attack, but didn't inform Roosevelt, to drag the US into the war.

Fantastic as many conspiracy theories may seem, they cannot be dismissed out of hand. As US writer Stephen E. Ambrose puts it, "There is more than fantasy, politics and prejudice involved in the persistence of conspiracy theses. Perhaps the chief reason ... is that so much of world history has been caused by conspiracies."

The true conspiracy buff thrives on cover-ups and intrigue. At the time of the Arthur Allan Thomas case, Frank Macskasy didn't rely on newspaper reports: he waded through the royal commission's report. The details – as it happens – are fresh in his mind. "The interesting thing is that the area where the cartridge came from had already been sieve-searched by the police. After Thomas's rifle was taken by police, the garden was searched a second time and lo and behold they found the bullet ..."

**Relive the troubling traumas of THE KENNEDYS, TV1, Monday, 10.15pm**