

Mr. Tom McNichol
1765 Swann St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20009

12/8/83

Dear Mr. McNichol,

Mine are not "the tools of the conspiracy theorist's trade" and I suffered thrombosis in 1975, not a stroke. For the benefit of those who compile official files for misuse I'd appreciate correction of the first statement and for my old friends still around in Washington, the latter.

I'm sorry you did not, perhaps from space considerations, make it clear that useful public purposes are served by studying how our basic institutions worked - or failed to work - at the time of the great stress of the JFK assassination and thereafter, really ever since.

I enclose a list of our books. Two are out of print. We have a few copies, some perhaps not in perfect condition, of these two.

Thanks and best wishes,

DEAR MR. WEISBERG -

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME
IN GRANTING ME AN INTERVIEW
FOR THE JFK ASSASSINATION STORY.
Continued good luck in your efforts -

Sincerely,

TOM M'NICHOE

P.S. - Where can I get a copy
of Photographic Whitewash?
I lent mine out but it WAS
NEVER RETURNED - A MEASURE OF
its popularity -

City Paper

Washington's Free Weekly

Vol. 3, No. 44

November 11-17, 1983

JOURNALISTIC INSULT

I was not pleased to read your recent piece (CP, 10/7) about the *Almanac of American Politics*. Though I am clearly listed as a co-author on the book's jacket, I was not extended the courtesy reflecting that simple reality in your newspaper's reviewing space.

As for factual errors. If by "brainchild" you mean the very idea for the book—its invention, its purpose and format, its editorial style and thrust—that part of the *Almanac*, as most knowledgeable people in

**TO THE
EDITOR**



JFK: The Assassination

*Reflecting on One of America's
Darkest Moments*

By Tom McNichol

"I DON'T THINK I GOT MORE THAN four hours sleep a night from the time Kennedy was killed until 1975, when I had a stroke," says Harold Weisberg. "I had to slow down after that."

Weisberg, a former poultry farmer and Senate investigator, has spent the better part of the last 20 years wrestling with the "Who killed Kennedy?" question. Even now, in semi-retirement on a farm near Frederick, Md., Weisberg eagerly picks up the tools of the conspiracy theorist's trade. The grassy knoll, the single bullet, and the chipped curbstone still command further attention and re-evaluation.

"I was suspicious right off the bat," Weisberg says of the events following JFK's assassination. "Everything the Dallas police and others were saying was making a fair trial for Oswald impossible."

What started as a suspicion turned into an obsession. Weisberg's research has taken him to Dallas and New Orleans, and into the mountain of paper in the National Archives. Six books and many sleepless nights later, Weisberg has taken his place as an unofficial dean of the scholarly wing of assassination researchers—one of a handful of experts amidst millions of armchair participants.

Perhaps the question should be not "Who killed Kennedy," but "Why do we still wonder?" JFK has died a thousand deaths at the hands of anti-Castro Cubans, the CIA, the FBI, the Dallas police department, the Texas mafia, the Russians, organized labor, and more, and still, the

search for the final conspiracy theory continues.

Initially, the interest in JFK's death was passed off as an attempt by some to regain the lost Camelot, keeping JFK alive by becoming absorbed in his death. Clearly, interest in Kennedy the man had something to do with it, just as historians still pour over Lincoln's assassination. The greatest compliment we give our presidents is to deny their death by becoming lost in it, which is why there isn't a massive "Who killed McKinley" movement. The conventional wisdom, that McKinley was shot by anarchist Leon Czolgosz, goes unchallenged, probably because no one thinks enough of McKinley to bother.

But the interest in the Kennedy case has remained, even after the mystical Camelot has either faded or been debunked. It has become the ultimate whodunnit, with enough clues scattered around to allow for a thousand possible answers. For those in the thick of the "Who killed Kennedy?" movement, the reason for all the interest is simple: the evidence. As far as assassinations are concerned, the Kennedy theorists have a tremendous advantage over their Lincoln counterparts by the sheer volume of evidence available to them. The photographic evidence alone puts the Kennedy assassination in a league of its own—it was like having Matthew Brady at Ford's Theater. The most useful photographic evidence were the home movies taken by Dallas businessman Abraham Zapruder. Zapruder's film has allowed researchers to conduct the most intensive micro-study of any 6 seconds in human history. 8▶

JFK: The Legacy

*The Other Side of
Camelot*

By Chuck Fager

"In the White House, character and personality are extremely important, because there are no other limitations which govern a man's conduct. Restraint must come from within the presidential soul and prudence from within the presidential mind."

—George Reedy, *The Twilight of the Presidency*



IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS WE WILL BE hearing too much about the character and personality of John Kennedy, on the 20th anniversary of his assassination. Almost a generation after Dallas, the mystique of Camelot and the "Kennedy Style" is still an enduring fixture of our public consciousness, portending a plethora of media attention to this melancholy marker.

Most of the coverage will have the effect of bolstering the myth. There have been debunkers, of course, but their overall impact seems like little more than pigeon droppings on a statue: the features may be discolored a bit, but the image still stands, solid and monumental as ever.

Among the revisionist sorties against Camelot, the most entertaining has been the gradual revelation of the late President's compulsive satyriasis. These disclosures have now advanced to the point where most of the outlines of this ceaseless, sordid pattern of behavior are widely known.

Yet even here, the resiliency of the myth is remarkable. For instance, from one of the most recent of Camelot's hagiographers, the veteran writer Ralph Martin, we learn how on many nights during his tenure the 35th President of the United States prowled through steam tunnels beneath the streets of Manhattan, accompanied by two Secret Service agents bearing flashlights and a map, to various extramarital assignations. 8▶

"The motorcade passes the Texas School Book Depository and moves toward the Triple Underpass. At the sixth floor window, Lee Harvey Oswald sights carefully through the Carcano—Mannlicher: his mouth is dry...Now: He recalls the military formula BASS: Breathe, aim, slack, squeeze. He breathes, he aims, he slacks, he starts to squeeze, as a dog barks suddenly—And his mouth falls open in astonishment as three shots ring out, obviously from the Grassy Knoll and Triple Underpass.

"'Son of a bitch,' he said softly...."

**—ROBERT ANTON WILSON and
RICHARD SHEA**

in their novel *Illuminatus; part I: The Eye and the Pyramid*



JFK: The Assassination Reflecting on One of America's Darkest Moments

By Tom McNichol

WITH this wealth of information, it was not surprising that there would be so many ways to put the evidence together, to build alternative theories or to challenge existing ones. But the zeal many displayed in the Quest is surprising. For some, it has become something resembling an organized religion, with its own shrines, gods, and false prophets. It is a religion with a bible that no one believes—the Warren Commission Reports. And, like most religions, it had a birthplace.

It is said that the thing that separates the buffs from the serious theorists is having been to Dallas. Big D is the undisputed mecca for the movement, the keeper of the holy ground. Its one thing to talk about Dealey Plaza, but quite another to be there, to see it in front of you.

The critical part of Dealey Plaza is the grassy knoll, for many years the symbolic rallying point for many who refuse to believe in a single gunman. Theorists cite a number of eyewitnesses who heard shots come from the

knoll, in front, and to the right of the president. They point out the fence and the semicircular monument which borders the knoll, and say a second gunman would have ample opportunity to squeeze off a few shots undetected. The intrigue associated with this small patch of green on the outskirts of Dallas gives rise to "conspiracy clubs" like the Grassy Knoll Debating Society, which gives slide shows and lectures for students and church groups.

Other icons abound. For awhile, the owners of 1025 N. Beckley Street, where Oswald rented a room, offered tours of the building to writers and researchers. The price quoted was \$300 for a look, \$500 for a tour with commentary. Jack Ruby's memory is similarly honored, although some of his sites are fading—a parking lot now sits where Ruby's strip joint, the Carousel Club, once stood.

When the club was razed in 1972, all of the furniture and fixtures were put up for auction, as a sort of an assassination relic sale. Ruby's kitchen sink brought in over \$20; similar bargains were to be found on vacuum cleaners, beer coolers, bar fixtures, and empty file

cabinets.

Pilgrims to Dallas are unlikely to escape the trappings of the John F. Kennedy Museum, across from the book depository on Elm Street. There, JFK relics are displayed in a manner consistent with the worst sort of religious profiteering—JFK postcards, pennants, chinaware and ashtrays. Outside, tour buses run along the motorcade route and along the path followed by Oswald after the shooting, ending at the Texas theater.

The Texas school book depository, from where Oswald allegedly fired the shots, remains the toughest nut to crack. The only safe way to get inside is to be hired as an employee, which at least one resourceful researcher has done successfully. From time to time, there is talk about buying the depository, and making it into a museum, but city officials already think there is too much of the wrong kind of interest in Dallas. "You can see them still, right up to this day, hanging around the book depository," a former Dallas assistant district attorney once growled to a reporter. "Fat ass yankees in shorts and cameras getting the roof of their mouths sunburned."

The city fathers, needless to say, take a dim view of their town being turned into a ghoulish holy spot.

For those who can't make it to Dallas, there's always Washington. The paper evidence, including most of the Warren Commission's exhibits, is housed in the National Archives, enough items to fill a 160 page catalogue. The entire collection is in the hands of Marion Johnson, who has presided over the exhibits since 1965.

"Generally, I see a lot of younger people now, people who were barely aware of the Kennedy assassination when it happened," said Johnson. "Interest in the archives tends to run in cycles. There was a certain revival of interest during the years of the House Committee on Assassinations (1976-78), but it has declined since then."

As keeper of the evidence, Johnson has inevitably been the culprit in at least one conspiracy cover-up theory.

"One of the great myths of the Kennedy assassination is that the National Archives lost Kennedy's brain," Johnson explained. "In fact, a black box containing gross material was turned over to Robert Kennedy through his brother's secretary, Evelyn Lincoln. But I still hear people talk about the missing brain."

Conspiracy theorist David Lifton was beaming when he emerged one day from a House Assassinations Committee hearing. Since the committee was admitting the likelihood of a second gunman, a publisher had agreed to publish his book about the medical evidence in the case. Lifton's book, *Best Evidence*, said that Kennedy's wounds had been altered to cover-up a conspiracy of undetermined origin. It spent three months on the *New York Times'* best seller list.

"There's a formula on assassination books," comments Harold Weisberg, who has written six, none of them best sellers. "Conspiracy will sell. Straight books won't."

That simple fact has shadowed the popular history of the assassination since the first published doubts. To some degree, the vested interests of authors and publishers to come up with new multi-gunner theories is as much a conspiracy as the ones supposedly being uncovered. Even well-intentioned writers soon discovered that the nation's appetite for the big Conspiracy was nearly insatiable, and that in America, the distinction between prophet and profit was a very thin line indeed.

Others, like Mark Lane, were opportunists. Lane fired the first shot across the bow of the lone gunman explanation, in an article printed in the *National Guardian* less than a month after the assassination. After the Warren Commission embraced the single shooter, Lane became the unofficial spokesman for the doubters. He toured the U.S. and Europe as a sort of traveling conspiracy show. Despite the theatrics, Lane's premise was sound. The Warren Commission had started with the assumption that Lee Harvey Oswald was guilty, and worked back from there, consciously or unconsciously molding the evidence to fit the pre-determined conclusion. It's unfortunate that Lane and some of his publicity-conscious colleagues have often fallen into the same trap. The conspiracy best seller began with the assumption that Oswald wasn't the only gunman—from there, the author worked back to an alternate theory.

The assassination racketeering has clouded some of the best work done in collecting evidence and analyzing it. Among the best is Josiah Thompson's *Six Seconds in Dallas*, which provides a detailed study of photographic evidence, including a chart which lists the location of 268 eyewitnesses to an aspect of the shooting. Harold Weisberg's "Whitewash" series follows an equally painstaking approach, which is probably why they are popular mostly with the serious researchers.

The best selling theory is often the simplest. Authors have taken the same photographs that Weisberg analyzed in his books, and found new, outlandish conspiracies. Dark spots became hidden riflemen. A blur or bush became a puff of smoke. And the man holding the open umbrella became a legend.

The umbrella man's fame was spread by a number of authors who had begun to treat the Kennedy assassination like a spy novel. The umbrella man was said to be the look-out for the gunman—the open umbrella was the signal for the assassination to proceed as planned. More elaborate theories had the umbrella man coordinating three riflemen by a two-way radio in the handle.

The umbrella man turned out to be an easy sell. Here was a figure straight out of the spy paperbacks and the late movies on television—something familiar, yet intriguing enough to satisfy a desire for the big Conspiracy. The umbrella man was an attempt to ascribe meaning to an event that may have none besides the lessons of brute force. The umbrella man surfaced in 1978.

"I'm a conservative, and I understand that a black umbrella was a sore spot for the Kennedy family," the umbrella man told the House Assassinations Committee. "I heard you could use it to heckle him."

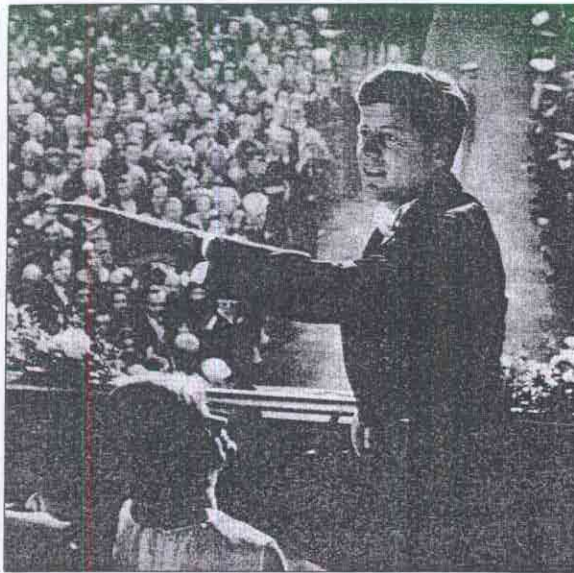
Exit another promising conspiracy theory.

administration, displayed an almost eerie contrapuntal set of stylistic parallels with life inside Camelot: the sexual predation by leading males, their persistent tendency toward manipulation of "participatory democracy" for covert elite ends; the cumulative load of hypocrisy that went along with concealing both these traits; and, not least, the derisive laughter and scorn with which they hooted down the many early attempts by activist women to raise feminist concerns within movement groups.

One thinks, for instance, of Stokely Carmichael's famous comment on a 1964 statement by women staffers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee protesting the fact that even the toughest and most experienced among them (and there were many such women in SNCC then) were expected to concentrate on routine office work and to defer to less experienced male staff. Carmichael opined in response that the "only" position for women in SNCC was "prone." Mark how his wisecrack almost exactly reproduced the attitude ascribed to JFK by the woman reporter; and mark too that it evoked gales of laughter. No wonder that a SNCC woman volunteer was moved to comment in another report that "his attitude around here toward keeping the house neat (as well as the general attitude toward the inferiority and 'proper place' of women) is disgusting and also terribly depressing. I never saw a cooperative enterprise that was less cooperative."

One thinks also of the resentments nursed by SNCC staff in general against Dr. King and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference. They charged SCLC with being manipulative and elitist in their operations in black communities. By 1966, this resentment issued in an open break over SNCC's adoption of Black Power as its guiding slogan.

Although King's style had worked well in some campaigns, notably in Birmingham in 1963 and Selma in 1965, there was much truth in the SNCC charges. Indeed, Dr. King and his circle may offer the classic set of parallels with the Camelot style among the movement groups of those years. (At least, thanks to the FBI's ubiquitous wiretaps, it is among the best documented.) There were



Kennedy at his inauguration: adventurism in more ways than one.

similar pretensions to a genteel lifestyle; a tight inner circle of advisers and intimates who, with King, made decisions and deals for their constituency behind closed doors; and, not least, a pattern of sexual indulgence at wide variance with their public identity as ministers, thus making necessary the same debilitating tangle of lies and hypocrisy.

I don't want to push these parallels too far. After all, Kennedy did not invent satyrism, and much of Dr. King's manner derived from his personal makeup interacting with patterns that were widespread in black communities. Still, the connection

was there: it was from one of King's inner circle that I first heard, as a junior civil rights worker, of JFK's adventurism (I didn't believe it right away); and the telling came in the context of rationalizing the similar behavior of some of Dr. King's men.

The same patterns held for much of the New Left. In her book *Personal Politics*, Sara Evans tells how her interviews with women who had been early SDSers revealed a widespread trend of dominance by male cliques in local chapters. Further, in many early SDS community projects, Evans found that the male leaders

"brought to the movement the aggressiveness and competitiveness they might have been expected to exercise as successful professionals. They struggled among themselves for leadership, dominated meetings with their verbal abilities, actively sought positions of authority, and in addition adopted the aggressive characteristics of those they sought to organize... And a major arena for male self-assertion proved again to be sexual conquest... Some of the men were known for bringing one girlfriend after another into the projects. Women were aware that when they became involved with a man in the inner circles, they were privy to many conversations and decisions central to the project's development. Thus at times a woman's status could rise or fall according to the changes in her sex life." To me, both in the reading and remembering, this sounds like little more than another version of the best and brightest mentality, filtered through a viewing of early James Bond movies, which were John Kennedy's favorite White House film fare.

It didn't take many years for this kind of movement machismo to have its impact: it laid the groundwork for the street gang terrorism that was Weatherman, and the associated sectarianism that tore SDS to pieces by 1969; along the way, it made SDS and many other movement groups such unpleasant and alienating places to be that their cadre began to evaporate, if not by burnout or dropouts, then simply by turning off. And not least, it also guaranteed that the ultimately irrepressible feminist resurgence would, when it finally burst forth, begin as a hostile, separatist phenomenon, further hastening the New Left's demise, instead of being one of its most important and creative outcomes.

All of which adds up to a big caveat to the coming apotheosis of Camelot and its martyred leader, namely that for Americans who care about change that will enhance human freedom, social justice and the prospects for peace, the character and personality of the man who occupied the White House from 1961 to 1963 were not only important inside its fences, but outside them as well. Camelot has truly cast a long shadow over our recent history; and much of its umbra is dark indeed.

THE KAFFAYA
FOR MEN
AND WOMEN
100% cotton. 45"
sq. A popular
fashion item in
Europe and New
York. Ideal as
scarf, shawl,
sash, head
scarf. Only
\$10.00. Come
and get your
Kaffaya and
many other international clothes and
accessories from TRADEWINDS 243
18th St., NW (Back section of BLUE
MOON).

**LIGHT 'n UP
NEON**

Design • Fabrication • Repair
For business or for fun

529-8899

**VANITY
FLAIR**

VINTAGE
CLOTHING
338-8224

1077 Wisconsin Ave., N.W.
Near M and Wisconsin
in Georgetown
above Off The Cliff

GREAT PARTY CLOTHES

**HUTTON
DESIGNS**

custom made
pottery and sculpture
handbuilt articles

■ ashtrays ■ candle holders ■
■ paperweights ■ cookie jars ■
■ jewelry ■ pipes ■ cups ■ mugs ■
■ bowls ■ human & animal
■ sculpture

331-8783

PSYCHOTHERAPY
Individual and Group

TREATMENT CENTER
Washington School of
Psychiatry

SLIDING SCALE
2 blocks from
Dupont Circle Metro

APPOINTMENTS: 797-8740

UP TO 30% OFF

UZZOLO
FOR EVERY SPECIAL HOME

WALL SYSTEMS
Uzzolo's imported pine and white laminate wall
systems offers clean, crisp European styling at
terrific prices. Each piece is durable, high quality
furniture made from the finest materials. Mix and
match individual, easy to assemble pieces for the
perfect space saving design.

2-Shelf Base 29 x 30 x 15 Reg. \$119 SPECIAL \$ 89
2-Door Cabinet 29 x 30 x 15 Reg. \$129 SPECIAL \$ 99
2-Shelf Top 42 x 30 x 15 Reg. \$129 SPECIAL \$ 99
2-Shelf Top 48 x 30 x 15 Reg. \$129 SPECIAL \$ 99
4-Drawer Dresser 29 x 30 x 15 Reg. \$109 SPECIAL \$149
6-Drawer Dresser 42 x 30 x 15 Reg. \$ 89 SPECIAL \$ 75
Glass Doors Reg. \$ 89 SPECIAL \$ 88
Glass Doors with Pine Frame Reg. \$ 49 SPECIAL \$ 35
2 Extra Shelves Reg. \$ 39
Album Rack Shelf
White Supply Lasts

DUPONT CIRCLE
1718 CONNECTICUT AVE., N.W.
(202) 328-0900
11 AM - 8 PM, Monday - Saturday
12 Noon - 5 PM, Sunday

**AS
TIME
GOES
BY**

Exceptional Vintage Clothing
Victorian through 50's
655 C Street, S.E.
Opposite Eastern Market
543-7877

**CUSTOM
ELECTRONIC
SERVICE**
Component Specialists

Quality
Stereo
Repair

736-7222 667-2150
5450 Marlboro Pike 1813 Columbia Rd. NW
District Heights Washington, D.C.
Major Credit Cards Accepted

