

Harold: for your
Stone file
+
film file.

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Building myths, burying mistakes

by Steve Perry

On November 25, 1963, three days after John Kennedy's assassination and a day after Lee Harvey Oswald's murder, acting attorney general Nicholas Katzenbach sat down to draft a memo for Lyndon Johnson. The investigation had scarcely begun, but on that Monday morning when it was clear that the case would never go to trial, Katzenbach wrote to Johnson aide Bill Moyers: "The public must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large; and that the evidence was such that he would have been convicted at trial."

That document is one of many thousands in the files of Harold Weisberg, a former reporter and Senate investigator whom *Esquire* has called "the dean of assassination researchers." In Weisberg's view, the Katzenbach memo became the blueprint for official policy: Make the assassination look like the work of an unstable loner to forestall embarrassing questions about why intelligence agencies failed to uncover a plot. Working out of his home in Frederick, Maryland, the 78-year-old Weisberg has written several books on the case and amassed more than a quarter-million pages of previously secret files obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. Hardly anyone ever comes to look at what he's got. "The people who write conspiracy theories aren't interested," he says. "They're only interested in what they can torture into seeming to support preconceptions of their own invention. For the most part these records have not been looked at. And I make them available to everybody. The most recent and egregious case is that of Oliver Stone."

It was Weisberg who started the avalanche of bad pre-release publicity for Stone's *JFK*, which is set to open the week before Christmas. When he heard that Stone planned to base his movie on a book by former New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison—a man whose rambling investigation of the Kennedy case led him to speculate about conspiracies

involving (pick two or three) Russians, Cuban exiles, the CIA, neo-Nazis, the Dallas police, the U.S. military, and a homosexual ring—Weisberg got a bootlegged copy of the script and dispatched it to Washington Post reporter George Lardner. A story lambasting the project followed, and it proved the first of many. I reached Weisberg on the phone last week for an hour-long talk on Kennedy, Stone, and the dim prospects for our ever knowing any more than we know now.

City Pages: *There have been a number of new books on the assassination over the past 10 or 15 years, theorizing various conspiracies. Are any of them worthwhile?*

Weisberg: There hasn't been a book that I can remember that hasn't been flawed. The

reason is very simple. The government never investigated the case, and never intended to. That may seem impossible to believe, but that gets to some of the many records I got under the Freedom of Information Act. With the crime not actually investigated, private investigators have nothing on which to proceed. We don't have any real leads. There are too many theories that *might* be reasonable, and you can't begin to eliminate from them. It is and in all probability will remain an unsolved crime.

In the 1960s you played a role in trying to convince Jim Garrison his investigation was on the wrong track. Could you tell me about your dealings with him, and when you knew he was off-base?

It was right after the election in 1968. I was in Dallas, and he insisted I come back to New Orleans. While I was there, I found out he was going to mark the fifth anniversary of the assassination by charging two people with being grassy knoll assassins. One was Edgar Eugene Bradley, who was then the West Coast representative of the right-wing New Jersey preacher Carl McIntire, and the other was a man named Robert Perrin. Well, I knew Perrin had killed himself in '62.

Garrison's staff had tried to talk him out of this, and they couldn't. And they asked me to do the work that would make it impossible for him to proceed. Among the things we found were the morgue book that showed the day in 1962 when Perrin died, and the hospital records that show his admission after taking poison. I put together an investigative report that said [Garrison investigator] Bill Boxley was going out and feeding back to Garrison what Garrison wanted—what Garrison himself had made up. Garrison wasn't

going to fire himself, so he fired Boxley. And in firing him, he said that Boxley had been infiltrated onto the staff by the CIA to wreck the investigation. Well, nobody infiltrated Boxley. Everybody on the staff had objected to him, and Garrison hired him anyway.

Do you think Garrison's investigation was onto anything of merit?

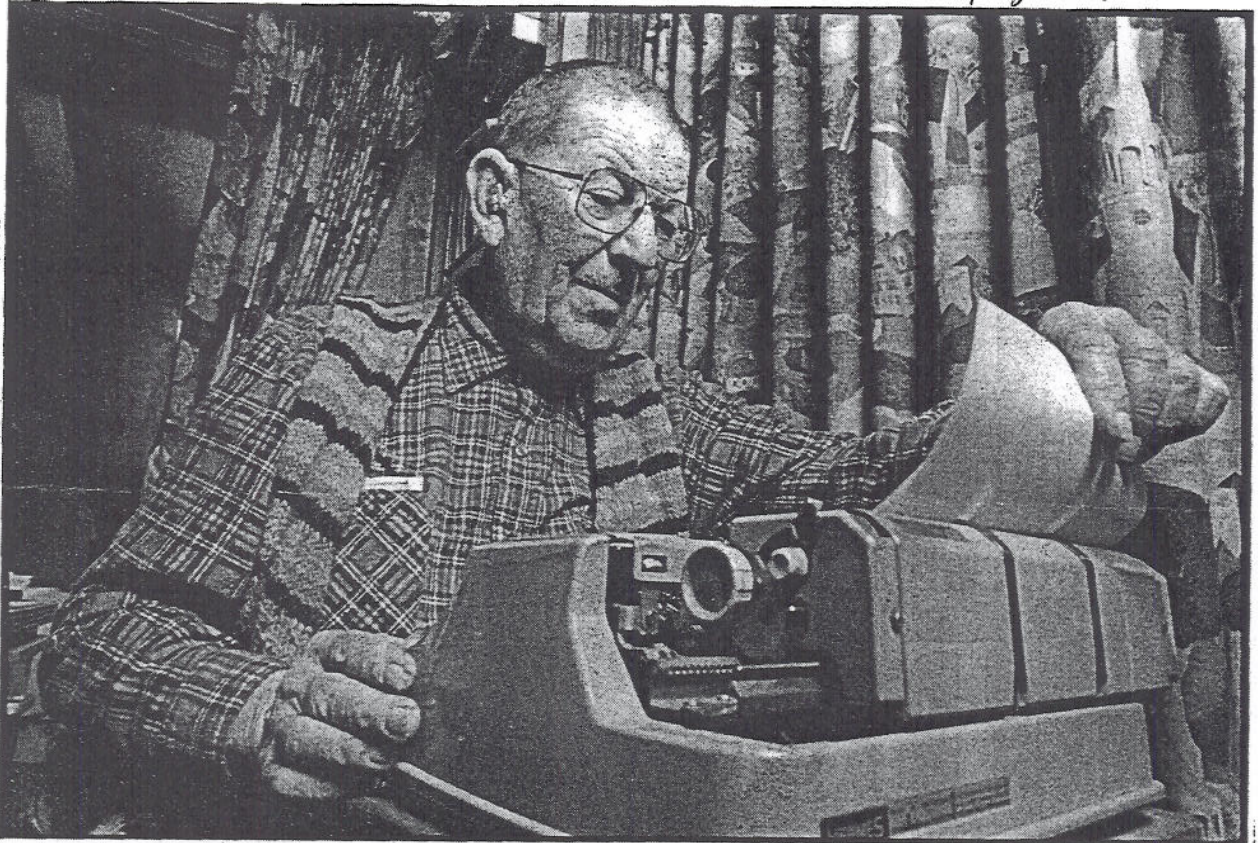
No. He made it all up as he went. And he never proved what he made up because he couldn't. I can't remember a single thing that is factual and has any relevance that he brought to light.

You've objected to the way Oliver Stone went about putting together and promoting his movie.

Stone has been propagandizing, saying that all of the evidence is withheld at least until 2039, and some of it may be withheld longer. What about the quarter-million pages I have? And others have more. Mark Allen, for example, has continued along the same lines I have with the same lawyer I used, and he's gotten a lot of information. Some of it pretty significant. But nobody gives a damn. They want theories only. Conspiracy sells, and that's all they care about.

At the same time that Oliver says these records are being suppressed, he knows damn well I have them and that I make them available to everybody. Including him. Yet he says everything is suppressed by the government, particularly the CIA. If he says that, how can you trust anything he says? And frankly I don't. Except one. He said he was scared to The New York Times, and he ought to be.

Is there any way to generalize about what Weisberg to page 14



Harold Weisberg, "the dean of assassination researchers," says we'll never know who conspired to kill Kennedy because the government never wanted to know.

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you've found in that quarter-million pages of material?

It's very simple. The government knew beyond question that there had been a conspiracy, and it lied. The government's own records disclose that it was a crime beyond the capabilities of any one man. There are other factors—for instance, that Oswald's rifle didn't have the capability of firing that many shots within the time period. This alone is enough to tell you they knew better. But they lied. You could understand that for the first few days, when people in Washington on a higher level had to be concerned with whether there were gonna be other evil events—was there going to be an effort to overthrow the government, from within or without? Were they going to try to assassinate any other people? But once it became clear that wasn't going to happen, there's no excuse for the government's dishonesty.

Does the coverup lead you to believe that elements in government were involved in a conspiracy, or just that they wanted to cover up their failure to detect it in advance?

I think it's the latter entirely. Some people believe there are three parts to a conspiracy and they're all one: You first have the conception, then you have the execution, then you have the coverup. But coverup is the way a bureaucracy works. It doesn't have to have any connection with the crime itself. And from what I know, it has no connection.

There are a couple of lines of popular speculation I wanted to ask you about. Has the paperwork you've uncovered documented any of the alleged connections between Jack Ruby and Oswald?

No, and there's no reason to believe there was any.

Did the Ruby file suggest to you any connections between Ruby and other potential parties to a plot?

No. Nor is there any real reason to think that Ruby was connected in any way at all to the mafia except on his own efforts. Nobody would have trusted Ruby with anything. He was sick in the head. You couldn't

print some of the things that were true.

Do you think the material you have holds any clues about who else was involved?

No. They didn't want that information, so if they heard of it they didn't use it. Let me give you an example. This is one of the records that was secret until I obtained it. There was an engineer named Bronson in Dallas who had both a Leica and a very good quality 8mm camera with him. He called the Dallas office of Eastman-Kodak and he called the FBI on Monday morning, three days after the crime. An agent named Newsom went there and came back and filed a report. He said the pictures didn't show the building where the shots were fired. Actually there were 87 different pictures of that one window. He said one picture did show

the car at the precise time the president was killed, but they couldn't use it for identification purposes. Translation: Nothing he had showed Oswald with a smoking gun. The still pictures showed the president being killed, and showed the positions of all the occupants of the car, and it showed a lot of people in the background—people who were witnesses. So what does it say about the FBI when they dismiss these pictures?

Do you have any hunches about what happened that you'd be willing to voice publicly?

I'll tell you in general terms only—that people who wanted to change policy are responsible for it. Back in 1966, when I wrote the epilogue to my second book, I thought we might approach this like lawyers: Qui bono? But before too long I realized that wasn't true. There were just too many people who could have seen benefit for themselves. The only thing you can use that line of thinking for is perhaps to eliminate some people.

Those who talk about the crime being committed by some group that could benefit have no basis for picking out that group and eliminating the others. They can say it's reasonable, but they can't say it's proven. To tell the people it is proven is to deceive the people. That's what I think Oliver Stone is doing.

CP

Do computer-enhanced photos capture a second JFK assassin?

by Miles Moffeit

In the sixth-floor museum in the old Texas School Book Depository, tourists wind through slick exhibits detailing the saga of President John F. Kennedy's life and death. Among the neatly packaged evidence, most of which concerns Warren Commission-sanctioned suspect Lee Harvey Oswald, a meager portion of wall space goes largely ignored. A few lines of text stand out with haunting clarity: "A group of witnesses said gunshots came from the grassy knoll."

In conspiracyspeak, they call him "Badge Man." The suspicion that there may have been another killer lurking on the grassy knoll has clawed at JFK researchers for nearly 30 years. Phantom or fact, the grassy knoll gunman remains one of the murkiest figures in recent history. Now, however, leading assassination researchers say they are closer than ever to coaxing a second assassin out of the shadows of Dealey Plaza.

Their breakthrough centers on advances in computer imagery enhancement that may provide the link between two fragile pieces of evidence: a grainy Polaroid and a mysteriously missing film.

"I saw it right away," recalls Dallas's KXAS-TV Channel 5 film archivist Gary Mack of the first time he saw Badge Man. "It was eerie how it jumped out at me."

Mack had been studying a slide enlargement of a Polaroid picture depicting Kennedy being struck in the head against the backdrop of the grassy knoll. What drew Mack's eye to the imposing image projected on his office wall was a figure in the background—though hazy, it appeared to be a rifleman holding his arms upright in firing posture, a flash of light obscuring parts of his face.

Mack and a fellow researcher, graphic artist Jack White, rushed to enhance the image even more, adjusting the contrast and brightness and later adding color to some copies. After months of sequestering themselves in a darkroom, the image unfolded dramatically. The figure took on frightening features: a gunman apparently wearing dark clothing with a shiny mark on his left chest and possibly a patch on his left shoulder. Most detectable were the outlines of portions of his face and hairline. The burst of light dispersed from the center like a flash from a gun muzzle.

Many researchers agree the image resembles a man clad in a Dallas Police Department uniform. The shiny mark on the left breast is consistent with the location of a badge, and the patch above it resembles a police department decal. Taken together, the patterns match the design of a Dallas police officer's uniform in 1963.

The Polaroid was taken by Mary Moorman, who was a receptionist for an area real

estate company in 1963. She had come downtown to take pictures of a policeman she knew who was going to be in the presidential motorcade. Now living in Gainesville, Texas, Moorman declines to be interviewed, preferring to let Mack speak on her behalf.

Since their discovery of Badge Man, the researchers have also done little to publicize their work. Instead, Mack, White, and fellow researcher Robert Groden (a Pennsylvania-based photo analyst whose enlargement made it possible for Mack to see Badge Man for the first time nine years ago) have quietly but assiduously searched for new ways to bring out images in the photograph and in other films—through radiation methods, new-fangled darkroom techniques, and digital computer analysis.

Mack says he feels that all his years of tenacity are close to paying off. "You can safely say I'm closer to a breakthrough than I have ever been," he says. Although he declines to comment on the details, he confirms that he has worked out an arrangement with a Japanese news organization to help finance advanced computer enhancements of both the Moorman photo and another piece of the Badge Man puzzle every bit as important. The significance of ongoing research, however, may hinge on whether that piece—the original of an assassination film shot by now-deceased Dallas engineer Orville Nix—can be found.

Of all leads, the most damning evidence may exist in the 8mm film taken by Nix, who captured the assassination sequence while standing between Main and Elm streets, about 75 feet from where Mary Moorman stood. In enlargements of reproductions of the Nix film, Mack and other researchers say they

find figures in addition to flashes of light. It is believed that the original Nix film will reveal the gunman seen in the Moorman photo, as well as Gordon Arnold, a Dallas soldier who claims he heard and "felt" a bullet pass by him while filming, from the knoll, the motorcade's fateful turn onto Elm Street. Verification of either Arnold or Badge Man in the photos could be enough to reopen the Kennedy probe, Mack thinks.

The problem is, the original Nix film, which Groden thinks will reveal 50 percent more detail than available copies, is missing.

After working an all-night shift on November 22, 1963, air conditioning engineer Orville Nix ambled down to Dealey Plaza with his trusty Keystone Auto

Nix heard the shots ring out but kept his viewfinder trained on the president, shakily capturing the shooting sequence. After the tragic events had unfolded, Nix found himself among only three people who had recorded the shooting on movie film.

A soft-spoken and patriotic man, Nix hurriedly turned his film over to the Dallas office of the FBI the day after the assassination. When the camera and film were returned four days later, camera springs had been removed

Photo to page 13

Zoom camera to capture the president greeting the downtown crowds. Stopping on the grassy infield south of Elm, he staked out his vantage point and let his film roll while Kennedy's motorcade slowed to a crawl on Elm Street.

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and the film ribbon appeared to have been altered, Nix said.

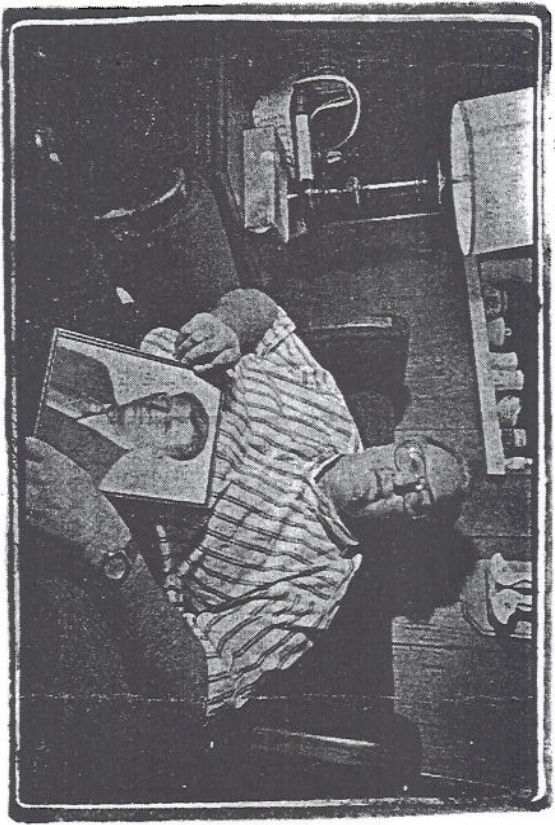
Tommy DeGough, a friend of Nix's, vividly recalls watching a copy of the film in a dimly lit basement of the U.S. Postal Annex. He says Nix, who died in 1972, believed the FBI tampered with the film. "He got a motion picture projector out of his locker and showed all of us the pictures he had taken," DeGough says. "I remember [Nix] saying at the time that he believed the pictures had some frames missing because the footage skipped as the camera rolled."

The government's handling of the film has sparked questions ever since the elder Nix and his son turned the film over to the FBI. Says Orville Nix Jr., "We still can't figure out why the Dallas office kept the film four days when everything else was being sent to Washington, D.C. There's still some question about whether that was the original they gave us."

Soon after the assassination, Orville Nix sold his film to UPI for \$5,000. Orville Nix Jr., who accompanied his father on the trip to New York to sell the film, says they were a bit naive when they entered into a verbal agreement that the film would eventually be returned to the family. "We didn't really know what we were doing," he says. "We were small-town types in the big city and we weren't aware of what the film's real value was."

Gayle Nix Jackson, 33, Nix's granddaughter, has spent the past two years conducting her own full-time detective work, eight hours a day, phoning sources around the world while her brothers and sisters help her father run the family tax consulting business. Jackson first inquired about getting the film back from UPI in 1988, reminding them of the verbal agreement. UPI officials delayed for two years, she says, ultimately admitting that they did not know where the film was. (The Marie Muchmore film, the third to cap-

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Orville Nix Jr. with a photograph of his father, who took one of three home movies of the assassination.

ture the actual shooting, was bought by UPI and is also missing.) UPI officials ranging from Senior Vice President Mill Capps to former managing editor Burt Reinhardt say the original was placed in a safety deposit box in the Clinton Trust Bank, near UPI's office in New York City, in 1976. That bank has since been shut down.

"I am certain I was never in possession of a key to the safety deposit box in question, although I am aware of its existence," wrote Alexander Bock, former treasurer for UPI, in a letter to the Nixes. "Certainly some successor institution must have come into possession of the vault of the bank." Jackson is checking property transfer records through the New York secretary of state's

office in case it recovered the safety deposit key or turned it over to another bank.

"I really feel sorry for UPI," says Mack. "I mean they don't look very good here. I'm guessing that someone might have just taken the tape home with them. Being in this business for a long time, I've seen it happen."

In addition to Badge Man, Mack and White say they have found two other figures in the Moonman photo—one standing behind the stockade fence close to the south leg of the pergola (a few feet north of Badge Man), the other in front of the fence. Mack believes the figure in the foreground is Gordon Arnold. Arnold says he was standing in front of the picket fence on the knoll when he heard

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shots and dived to the ground. Having been in U.S. Army training at the time, Arnold says he recognized the sound of gunfire and is certain it came from over his left shoulder. In *The Men Who Killed Kennedy*, a British documentary shown last month on the Arts & Entertainment cable network, Arnold is driven to tears when Mack shows him the Mary Moonman blowup.

Badge Man is also consistent with the acoustic findings of the late-1970s House Select Committee on Assassinations, which ruled that a motorcycle officer's open mike recorded a gunshot fired from the northern knoll vicinity. Arnold says that after the shooting, two armed police officers approached him, asked for his camera, and removed the film. Arnold also claims that, before the shooting, a man sporting a badge approached him behind the stockade fence and identified himself as a police officer. Arnold was never questioned by the Warren Commission, nor did the investigative committee interrogate him. He left for Alaska shortly after the assassination and did not return until years later.

While the Warren Commission made only scant reference to the Moonman photo, the House Select Committee on Assassinations said the photograph deserved more scrutiny. Gary Mack maintains that recent enhancements expose the "smoking gun." Mack says he has recently detected an image in a copy of the Nix film in front of the picket fence and behind the wall extending from the pergola. It is in the same location where Arnold says he was standing, the same area where he seems to be depicted in the Moonman photo. The researcher reasons that the Nix film may have captured Arnold as he was throwing himself to the ground following a burst of gunfire.

The Nix family, meanwhile, believes the most interesting turns of events in the ongoing investigation still lie ahead. They are **Photo 10 page 14**

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confident that Mack and Groden's work could yield dramatic results.

Groden, who worked as Oliver Stone's technical adviser on assassination-related photos, has taken recent trips to Washington, D.C., to follow up on Gayle Nix Jackson's leads that the original might be in the National Archives. All he left with were duplicates, however. For Groden, the Nix original also represents the smoking gun, if its quality has been maintained. He says there are at least three questionable figures on the grassy knoll in various pictures, and most laymen can recognize them. "Anyone with an open mind can see there are people on the grassy knoll," he says. "But with the original [Nix film], I can prove to everybody that there is something. If the original film is 100 percent of its capability, I can possibly get 50 percent more detail... You lose information with each generation of copy."

"In copies [of the Nix film] I have worked with," Groden continues, "I see three suspect images—one a man crouched in a military position; I also see shadows against the white wall. Gordon Arnold may be one of the figures. I see not just shadows but skin tone, and there's nothing in the area that would have cast a shadow."

Groden says he hopes the computer enhancement work Mack has arranged will corroborate what he has found recently. "If this firm finds it, without any knowledge of what I've done, then it would be important independent verification," he says.

Bobby Hunt, a leading research engineer in the field of image processing at the University of Arizona, says computer enhancement capabilities have improved dramatically.

"It's advanced by a factor of four," says

Hunt, who testified on JFK films before the House Select Committee on Assassinations. "It isn't magic, though. The available technology really can't be explained well for public consumption. There is more computing power and various mathematical modeling that can prove whether images are there."

Hunt says computer programs do not add anything to the image but "rearrange it for the human eye," similar to the strategy Groden uses in his darkroom.

Some of the most advanced computer photo enhancement is used in space exploration. It relies on digital processing of pictures. While an ordinary photograph is an analogue representation (recorded in gradation of tone and color), computer programs reproduce it with digital elements. With various breakthroughs in mathematics and microelectronics, dramatically more information can be gleaned from a photograph or videotape.

"Thankfully, there are lots of people in various areas of technology that have expressed interest in my project," Mack says. "Mainly because this is such a controversial subject."

Mack and Groden say they would prefer to believe the Nix film is not being withheld from the public to shield its damaging contents, although they still suspect there are always officials seeking to deodorize the "official" government probe.

Mack says the ultimate verdict will come after the scientists currently working with the Dallas photos reveal their findings. "I think we might be 80 to 90 percent there," says Mack. "I have no timetable for the end of the project. Almost nine years after discovering Badge Man, I am amazed that I don't have a definitive answer yet. But I'm confident it's coming." CP

Hey! That Guy in the Papier-Maché Tree Has a Gun!

Wacked-Out Theories

A person's position with regard to the Kennedy assassination is almost like a religious conviction," says Charles Nelson. "It stands above dispute. You don't need evidence anymore. It's

sad, but that's what it's come to." Nelson, a professor of history at Drake University in Des Moines, is talking about the true believers he's encountered in studying the assassination controversy for the past 20 years. (He's taught a popular course on the subject for the past 15.)

"A good mind," concedes Nelson, "can write a plausible account of almost any Kennedy conspiracy scenario they wish. He had a lot of enemies." It's a testament to the American spirit that the relative ease of coming up with plausible theories hasn't deterred more ambitious souls from breathtakingly implausible ones. Nelson cites some of the more memorable theories he's come across through the years:

● The assassin(s) were really shooting at Jackie:

● The assassin(s) were really shooting at Connally (there's even an evidence-bite to go with this one. Oswald mistakenly wrote a letter to Connally after he'd stepped down as Secretary of the Navy, complaining of the dishonorable discharge from the Marines Oswald got after he defected to Russia);

● The assassin(s) were really shooting to miss;

● The assassin(s) were really shooting on the orders of Lyndon Johnson, out to wreak vengeance on the much-loathed Kennedys;

● A papier-maché tree was placed in Dealey Plaza to provide a sniper's nest, and it was removed after the shooting;

● There were between seven and nine different shooters situated around Dealey

Plaza—behind the fence on the grassy knoll, in buildings behind the president, in the sewers—and they were all killed later that night when a plane carrying them away exploded over the Gulf of Mexico;

● Forces in the executive branch had Kennedy killed because he was going to pull us out of Vietnam (look for this to figure in the Oliver Stone movie);

● The Soviets decided as a matter of Cold War policy that it just made good sense to wipe out the president of the United States;

● Right-wing oil millionaires opposed to Kennedy's civil rights sympathies had him killed;

● It was a homosexual plot to eradicate a notoriously heterosexual icon;

● Kennedy isn't really dead.

—S.P.