

# MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

I shall never be able to forget where I was standing on that dramatic day when President John Fitzgerald Kennedy nearly killed me. It was during the nuclear confrontation that arose out of his war on Cuba. In 1968 I visited the island in question and went to see a movie by the revolutionary director Santiago Alvarez. It was an agitprop piece called *LBJ*. The L, B and J of the title turned out to stand for "Luther, Bobby and Jack," and the whole film consisted of a none-too-elegant suggestion that Lyndon Baines Johnson was the usurping despot who had profited by, if not instigated, these three shattering American murders.

In October 1976, a Cuban civil airliner was blown up in mid-air as it left Barbados. All those aboard were killed. Among the flight attendants was the wife of Santiago Alvarez. The man arrested and jailed for organizing this then-unprecedented atrocity was a Cuban exile of the extreme right named Luis Posada Carrilles. He was and is a friend of Felix Rodriguez, another ultrarightist and a C.I.A. agent who assisted in the murder of Che Guevara and who, by dint of yeoman service in Vietnam and El Salvador, became a trusted friend of Donald Gregg. Mr. Gregg, who now serves as Ambassador to South Korea, was national security adviser to George Bush during the latter's shady vice presidency. Bush was also Director of Central Intelligence at the time of the slaughter of the crew and passengers of the Cuban airliner.

You would have to be a complete paranoid to see any connection between any of the above facts. There is, in the strict sense of consciousness and organization, no "connection" between them at all. They merely describe one aspect, and not the prettiest one, of the way things happen to be. It was highly likely, but not at all predetermined, that George Bush would be sitting in Langley at a time when a deniable subordinate of one of his deniable subordinates "went too far" in the execution of a policy—the destabilization of Cuba—that had been approved and sanctioned at a superior level. It would have taken a conspiracy to prevent such coincidences—an open conspiracy to contain the national security state and subject its agents to the rule of law—and such conspiracies, as we know, never occur.

I don't know if Oliver Stone ever saw *LBJ*, but if he did it helped give him the wrong idea (as well as the notion of a hieroglyphic three-letter film title). The dated, reactionary concept of President Kennedy as some young Siegfried of idealism is as stupid and ahistorical as the narcissistic pretense that a post-Hiroshima, post-McCarthy America was a country with "innocence" to "lose." Johnson himself, who was by no means a man of scruple, was shocked to receive a C.I.A. briefing on the Kennedy brothers and their Cuba policy, and exclaimed that his predecessor had been "running a god-damned Murder Incorporated in the Caribbean," which was no more than the truth.

But the fact that Kennedy was a howling little shit doesn't prove that there wasn't a plot to do him in. Indeed, like many a godfather before him, he may have been slain by precisely the same forces that he himself set in motion. If you run with the Mafia and with the scum of the Havana underworld, as

Kennedy did and as "rogue elements" in his own C.I.A. were ordered to do, you run with people who believe in revenge. You also run with people who are irrational. It makes no sense for a thinking person to conclude that Kennedy wanted to end the cold war racket, but the cold war racketeers themselves were certainly crazy enough to see him as a traitor, and we happen to know that the Cuban exile/Mafia leadership did think this way.

The goons, of course, would not on their own have had the power to order a cover-up. But those who had covertly used the goons would have every reason to conceal even a rumor of their part in an assassination of the head of state. Allen Dulles (who served both as C.I.A. overseer of the Mafia operations in Cuba and as a member of the Warren Commission) went to great lengths to prevent the Warren Commission from finding out what the Church Committee was, twelve years too late, to make public. If Congress and the press had known of the Kennedy-Giancana-Rosselli connection in 1963, they obviously could not have been tranquilized so easily.

On this analysis, and given Lee Harvey Oswald's ties to the Cuban exile and criminal milieu, it doesn't matter whether he acted alone or not. As Eric Ambler puts it in *A Coffin for Dimitrios*, in these cases it's not who pulls the trigger but who pays for the bullet. Obviously it would be disappointing to find that Arlen Specter, now the ghastly Senator from Pennsylvania, was forensically accurate when he devised the idea of the "magic bullet." But a conspiracy doesn't need more than one assassin. The question is not did Oswald act alone but whom did he act for?

Why would a liberal icon like Earl Warren lend himself to such an exercise in concealment? For the same reason that people like him always do—namely to insure the Establishment version of "domestic tranquillity." Once admit the C.I.A./Mafia/Kennedy triangle and, straightaway, the history of the Cuban missile crisis is rewritten with Cuba as the victim of aggression. Furthermore, public confidence in the probity of government is badly shaken. A Warren Commission staffer named Melvin Eisenberg recalls Warren saying, after a meeting with L.B.J., "The President stated that rumors of the most exaggerated kind were circulating in the country and overseas" and "if not quenched, could conceivably lead the country into a war which could cost 40 million casualties. No one could refuse to do something which might help prevent such a possibility." By a nice coincidence, this was exactly the rationale offered by Arthur Liman for his own role in muffling the Congressional Iran/*contra* inquiry. As he said at Brown University on March 1, 1988: "Even if you concluded that the President was involved in the diversion, an impeachment process has a huge price. In a nuclear age it's something to be used sparingly. We were all very mindful of the fact that there was an opportunity for the negotiations with the Soviet Union . . . that if an impeachment process was started, that opportunity would be lost."

Stone would have made a more radical and authentic film if he had only depicted what we already know.