

PROOF of Story '#1120' Requested by CASTRO (\$LSRV) on 1/07/92 8:38:52

Entered 1/07/92 at 8:38 By
Lines 220

SACRAMENTO BEE

DATE: FRI DEC 20 91
PAGE: SC1 EDITION: METRO FINAL SECTION: SCENE
LENGTH: LONG
PHOTO(S) 2 GRAPHICS:
DOCUMENT: #1120 ART FILE:
BYLINE/SOURCE: Mike Castro Bee Staff Writer
DATELINE:

HD: WHO KILLED JFK?

OLIVER STONE'S MOVIE UNLEASHES THE DEBATE OVER THE DEATH OF A PRESIDENT

LD: NO SINGLE killing in recent history has attracted the attention and energy as the murder of President John F. Kennedy.

Despite the passage of 28 years, his death continues to attract those seeking an answer beyond the early belief that the charismatic, young president was killed in Dallas by a gunman named Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone on Nov. 22, 1963.

That's one theory, anyway.

That's the one generally accepted, the one with the Warren Commission seal of approval. It's not the one filmmaker Oliver Stone has chosen to believe. Stone is the latest in a long list of those sucked into the seemingly insoluble question of who killed Kennedy, and why. His movie, simply titled "JFK," opens today after a year of controversy about Stone's own conspiracy theory.

Stone has chosen New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison to be the protagonist in his film, which uses Garrison's story and conspiracy theory, even though Garrison's investigation, in reality, ended in discredit. However, Stone said in a recent interview that his film will tell the "why," implying that powers beyond the presidency wanted the U.S. to enter the Vietnam War.

Stone joins a pretty crowded group of those trying to figure out who killed JFK. The assassination has consumed members of the national blue-ribbon Warren Commission, the Senate Intelligence Committee and the House Assassination Committee. All produced voluminous files.

In different periods, they were joined by large numbers of authors and private investigators, professional and amateur, and members of the public, all spinning their own theories. At least 57 books on the subject exist in the local library.

The Warren Commission announced in September 1964 that Oswald acted alone. Eventually, critics began picking the 888-page report apart. A poll released at the time showed that one-third of the American public doubted that Oswald had acted alone. Within a few years, the doubters would double.

Yet no one has been able to prove conclusively who might have helped him kill the president. Or why. But, as Stone shows, they're still trying.

Here's a summary of some -- hardly all -- of the theories that have swirled about the assassination of President Kennedy:

Oswald acted alone

This was the key finding of the Warren Commission. Its report said that Oswald stood behind a sniper's nest made of book cartons set as a rifle parapet in the Texas School Book Depository building where he worked. He fired three shots with a rifle, ultimately killing the president in his open convertible traveling in a Dallas motorcade.

The Commission concluded that Oswald's act was that of an alienated, frustrated man who "sought for himself a place in history."

The "magic bullet"

After extensive ballistic tests, the commission found that Oswald fired three shots: One bullet passed through Kennedy and then into Texas Gov. John Connally. It passed through Connally's body cavity, came out and broke his wrist before striking Connally's thigh.

One shot missed, hitting the pavement and sending fragments into the windshield, chrome and rear-view mirror. The third bullet struck Kennedy on the top of his head, killing him and bathing the occupants of the car in blood, bone and brain fragments. Kennedy was pronounced dead a short time later at a Dallas hospital.

The first bullet that struck Kennedy, referred to as the "magic bullet," was looked upon with some skepticism and would later come under extreme criticism. The actual bullet was reportedly found in a stretcher used to carry Gov. Connally into the hospital.⁶ It was described as being in "pristine" condition despite its supposedly having traveled through two people.

Firing the same kind of shots during testing yielded badly flattened slugs, but the finding held and the criticism began.

The second gunman

This theory comes from two basic sources. One is the scores of reports by witnesses at the assassination site who say that the shots at Kennedy came from the grassy knoll in front of the presidential limousine, instead of the rear, the location of the book depository where Oswald worked.

Defenders of the Warren Commission discount the reports, maintaining that echoes from nearby buildings might have distorted perceptions.

The second source is a home movie taken by dress maker and amateur photographer Abraham Zapruder. His silent 8mm film captured the motorcade with Kennedy, his wife, Jackie, in the rear and Connally and his wife, Nellie, in front. The view is momentarily obstructed by an object in the foreground. When the limousine emerges back into camera view, Kennedy is clutching his throat. He is hit with another shot that violently catapults him backward. Some see this as evidence that Kennedy was shot from in front, not the rear, indicating a second gunman and a conspiracy.

Nellie Connally maintained that the two men were hit with separate shots, in direct conflict with the single "magic bullet" theory.

The film is crucial for one other reason. It provides the measured time in which the shots were fired. In the time allowed, Oswald could have gotten off only three shots. More than three shots indicates a conspiracy.

Oswald was a Soviet agent

Oswald had served in the U.S. Marines in the mid-1950s. He had defected during the Cold War and went to live in the Soviet Union in 1959. He met his future wife, Marina, there and returned with her to the United States. He was said to be active in pro-Castro groups and once traveled to Mexico City, unsuccessfully seeking a visa to Cuba as a way to get to the Soviet Union. Later it was revealed that while he was there, he offered to kill President Kennedy, but was ejected from the Cuban Embassy.

British author Michael Eddowes maintained that Oswald was replaced by a Soviet agent while Oswald was in the Soviet Union. Eddowes believed that the agent returned in Oswald's place to the United States, killed Kennedy and then was shot by Jack Ruby and buried.

Oswald had a double

The theory here is that the double was killed and buried in his place. Oswald's wife, Marina, remarried and later joined an effort by Eddowes to open Oswald's grave. But the exhumation in October 1981 confirmed that it was Oswald. The move had been fought by Oswald's older brother Robert, of Wichita

Falls, Texas. Pathologists compared Oswald's teeth with records from the Marines. His skull also showed the remains of a mastoid operation conducted in 1945 when Oswald was 6 years old.

Castro ordered Kennedy killed

In a recently published book on the late mobster Johnny Rosselli, biographers Charles Rappleye and Ed Decker say this story about the Cuban premier was a plant by Rosselli to nationally syndicated columnist Jack Anderson. Rosselli at the time was the liaison between members of the Mafia and the CIA, which had sought help to kill Castro. President Kennedy knew nothing about the wave of attempts on Castro's life, according to this view.

The story was first mentioned in 1966 at about the time that New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison was about to interrogate David Ferrie, one of Garrison's alleged key conspirators in the assassination. Ferrie died of natural causes and Garrison's case later collapsed.

The story was that snipers sent into Cuba were captured, tortured and then talked about the plot. Castro, in turn, sent a team to the United States to retaliate against Kennedy. Rappleye and Becker said Rosselli later elaborated and said that the sniper team had been brainwashed and sent back to kill Kennedy.

Rosselli himself was found murdered on Aug. 7, 1976. He had been asphyxiated, his legs chopped off and stuffed, with his torso, into an empty oil drum that had been dropped, with weights attached to it, in Dumfoundling Bay near Miami. The drum had come loose from the weights and floated to the surface.

The Mafia ordered JFK's death

And it did so after a joint effort with the CIA to both get rid of Castro and to regain the Mafia's lucrative gambling casinos in Cuba. Joint efforts by the CIA and the Mafia to kill Castro for Cold War aims were documented by the Senate Intelligence Committee, headed by the late Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho. In their book "'All American Mafioso,'" Rosselli biographers Rappleye and Becker say the motivation by Rosselli-- an original member of the Al Capone Chicago Mob -- was to return Mafia elements to Cuba to regain lost casino revenue. A second motivation was Rosselli's true American patriotic fervor. Rosselli was a native of Italy and was facing deportation by the government.

Becker was present at a meeting with New Orleans Mafia boss Carlos Marcello and his associates, Carlo Roppolo and Jack Liberto. Becker remarked about then-Attorney General Bobby Kennedy having had Marcello abducted and deported to another country. Marcello jumped up and exclaimed in Sicilian, "'Livarsi na pietra di la scarpa!'" (Take the stone out of my shoe!)

In English, Marcello said, "'Don't worry about that Bobby SOB. He's going to be taken care of.'" When questioned about the trouble he would encounter in attacking the attorney general, Marcello quoted an old Italian proverb. "'If you want to kill a dog, you don't cut off the tail, you cut off the head.'" He was referring to Bobby's brother, the president.

Marcello added that he had a "'nut'" to take the fall for the killing, Becker said.

Columnist Jack Anderson said Rosselli had agreed to have Castro killed for the CIA and cleared it with mafioso Sam Giancana of Chicago and recruited the killers from Santos Trafficante's group in Tampa. The plot never succeeded.

Although Rosselli testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee, Giancana was murdered before he could talk to the committee staff.

Attorney G. Robert Blakey supported the theory that the mob killed the president. Blakey served as the chief counsel of the House Select Committee on Assassinations. The committee issued a report in 1979 that said a "'high probability'" existed that another gunman joined Oswald in a conspiracy to kill the president. The idea that a fourth shot was fired rested on a recording by a policeman's radio that had been left on. Scientists later concluded that no fourth shot was fired, that the sound was caused by a "'cross talk'" from

another channel overlapping into the recording.

Blakey maintained that the Mafia ordinarily refrains from killing officials who do their duty as long as they do not cross the line and take favors such as sex or money.

But at one point -- through an introduction by singer Frank Sinatra -- Kennedy met and had an extensive affair with former starlet Judith Campbell Exner. She was close to Rosselli and saw mobster Giancana at the same time. The implication of Blakey's theory is that Kennedy had passed the "'favors'" boundary and thus became a target of the Mafia.

Kennedy cut the romance short in March 1962 after a luncheon meeting with J. Edgar Hoover, who knew and was concerned about the liaison.

The killing was ordered by an outlaw CIA

The involvement of either the mob or the CIA in a conspiracy or killing is a cliché of modern times. But reporter Gaeton Fonzi believes that Blakey's investigation refused to follow leads showing intelligence operators may have been involved in the assassination. Fonzi said that Blakey was preoccupied with report deadlines and was predisposed to find that the Mafia did it.

Fonzi served as an investigator on Blakey's staff and earlier served on a team headed by former U.S. Sen. Richard Schweiker in conjunction with the 1975 Church committee investigating abuses by the CIA.

In a lengthy report published in the Washingtonian magazine in November 1980, Fonzi said, "'The hearings never really delved into most of the evidence of a possible connection between Lee Harvey Oswald and the CIA.'"

He said Blakey had reached a previous agreement that allowed the CIA to review any information that would be released in the final report. The deal was struck so that the agency would supply information to the committee.

Fonzi said that on March 2, 1976, during the final days of the Church committee investigation, a Cuban expatriate named Antonio Veciana revealed that a Maurice Bishop "'apparently associated with the CIA,'" was in contact with Oswald before the assassination. And that the same "'CIA operative was involved in Castro assassination attempts in which, from some reason, the Agency was not admitting participation.'" The attempts were conducted after the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

Fonzi also said the Warren Commission chose to disbelieve Sylvia Odio of Dallas because her testimony conflicted with the lone assassin theory. She testified that Oswald was one of three men in the anti-Castro movement who came to her apartment in Dallas during the last week of September 1963, two months before the assassination. Acknowledging the truth of her story would have required the commission to consider that a conspiracy existed in the death of the president.

Fonzi said the House committee also gave her story short shrift.

Sources for these theories: Bee news services, "'The Plot To Kill the President'" by G. Robert Blakey and Robert N. Billings, "'All American Mafioso'" by Charles Rappleye and Ed Becker, and the story "'Who Killed JFK?'" by Gaeton Fonzi, the Washingtonian, November 1980.

CA: President John Kennedy was slain on Nov. 22, 1963. Less than a year later, the Warren Commission concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald (inset), acting alone, fired the shots that killed the president.

Kevin Costner plays New Orleans DA Jim Garrison in "'JFK.'" The movie suggests a plot by conspirators worried that Kennedy planned to withdraw from Vietnam.
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