

Letters

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Albany T. W. & M. Martin

Marianne Means views on JFK assassination challenged

To the Editor:

I am one of the 116 million Americans born after President Kennedy was assassinated that Hearst columnist Marianne Means referred to in her Nov. 19, 1991 editorial, "With 'JFK,' Stone continues conspiracy fantasy." I was exceptionally alarmed and distressed by the narrowness and historical ignorance that was suggested in Ms. Means' column and her subsequent column of Nov. 23, "Cuba and JFK."

Ms. Means suggests Oliver Stone (referring to his upcoming movie) created the rumor that Kennedy had ordered the withdrawal of 1,000 military personnel from Vietnam, an order only to be countermanded by Johnson after JFK's death. She instructs us that Vietnam was not a factor in the assassination of JFK because "his files in the face of the record." However, Ms. Means is misleading the public.

While it is true that President Kennedy increased the number of Americans in Vietnam, he was following the policies set by the Eisenhower administration. But by mid-1963, Kennedy had been informed by Robert McNamara, his Secretary of Defense, and General Maxwell Taylor, that they had reassessed our Vietnam policy and concluded the U.S. would be able to withdraw all of its military personnel by the end of 1965. Thus, Kennedy signed National Security Action Memoranda (NSAM) 263 on Oct. 2, 1963,

which directed the almost immediate withdrawal of 1,000 Americans from Vietnam. This meant not only U.S. military personnel but included CIA officers and agents as well. Stars and Stripes ran headlines, "President Says — All Americans Out by 1965." But Nov. 22, 1963, changed all that.

On Nov. 24, 1963, President Johnson signed NSAM 273 canceling the troop withdrawal and subtly changing the U.S. objectives in Vietnam from "assistance" to "victory." Shortly thereafter, McNamara and Taylor reported to Johnson that conditions in Vietnam had worsened, meriting a major expansion of American presence — in the form of combat troops and clandestine activities — in order to prevent a total communist victory. Within three years the number of Americans in Vietnam had increased to over 300,000. Who was responsible for U.S. escalation in Vietnam is not a hidden answer. By the way, NSAM 263 and 273 still exist and the information set above is verifiable if Ms. Means or anyone chooses to look.

Ms. Means also states it is her opinion that Cuban agents, seeking revenge for the CIA plots upon Fidel Castro's life, were behind the assassination. However, it makes no sense for Castro to have initiated Kennedy's death.

Castro had sent word to Kennedy in September 1963 that he desired to reach some sort of understanding with the U.S. When on Nov. 18, 1963, French Journalist

Jean Daniel traveled to Cuba to interview Castro, he carried with him a direct message from Kennedy. The U.S. wished for rapprochement.

According to Daniel, Castro was sincerely interested in this new proposal and expressed deep remorse when word of the assassination reached Cuba. Why then would Castro want Kennedy killed if (1) both Kennedy and Castro had expressed the desire for better relations and (2) Johnson, a devout hawk and a man close to the military-industrial complex, which wished Castro removed from power, would be his successor? Surely, Castro could not have been contemplating friendly relations with the U.S. in the aftermath of Kennedy's death?

I would not begin to state that I know the absolute truth about what happened 28 years ago. Nor would or could I begin to rebut each and every of Ms. Means' allegations in great detail in this letter. But without a doubt there is more to the story than that attested to by the Warren Commission or Ms. Means. Ms. Means' views serve as chilling reminders that the pre-Watergate naive of many Americans still exists.

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The author is a third year law student and has researched the events surrounding the assassination for a decade.