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# The Boys in Brazil

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## Op-Ed Piece on the JFK Seminar in Brazil by William W. Turner

**A**t first glance it would seem an incongruous setting for a seminar on the assassination of John F. Kennedy: the auditorium of the Tribunal of Justice in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Tribunal is, after all, the superior court for the State of Rio de Janeiro, which puts it at the center of the country's judicial power. For it to co-sponsor, along with the Secretariat of Culture of the city, a post-mortem on a foreign event 33 years after the fact suggests that there was more than curiosity in play.

A hint to that effect was contained in the formal invitation issued by cultural secretary Helena Savaro to myself and six other long-time American investigators of the murder. She somewhat cryptically alluded to "parallel powers" connected not only to the JFK assassination but contemporary society.

During the International JFK Seminar, held on the last three days of August, the theme was elaborated upon by the chief justice and five sitting judges of the court who moderated the panel discussions. In opening remarks they deemed it a foregone conclusion that JFK was the victim of a conspiracy so that it was unnecessary to debate that point. They made it plain that the assassination was a watershed event in recent history whose negative effects on the world fester to this day. They fear that the past might be prologue because of the threat of parallel powers, which we would call a secret government, to the emergent democracy of Brazil. It was only six years ago that the first free elections were held after the long night of the military dictatorship, which in 1964 sprang a coup against the popularly elected government of President Goulart. "We have a fragile democracy," Judge Tecio Lins e Silva said. "We need to know how to recognize the threat and protect against it."

In the United States the most recent manifestation of the

secret government to bob to the surface was in the Iran-Contra diversion of funds from arms sales to Iran to the Nicaraguan rebels to surreptitiously skirt the congressional ban on aid. Known as *The Enterprise*, its main players were retired U.S. General Richard Secord and Admiral John Pomeroy, Marine Colonel Oliver North and an international arms dealer, with continuity from previous unauthorized covert operations against Cuba and in Vietnam provided by the CIA-connected airline,

Southern Air Transport. From the Brazilian perspective, the unsolved 1988 assassination of Francisco Mendes, head of the rubber-tappers' union, remains a counterpart to the JFK case since it is suspected to have been carried out by a "parallel power" of millionaire plantation owners and narco-traffickers.

The Rio seminar was widely covered in the Brazilian press, with *O Globo* running in-depth interviews with Wayne Smith, formerly with the State Department's Cuban Interest Section in Havana, who led the U.S. delegation, and Cuban General Fabian Escalante, who was running counterintelligence operations against the CIA's Cuban exile action groups in Florida when JFK was killed. Smith had interfaced with Escalante in 1978 when the Cubans were cooperating with the House Select Committee on Assassinations, which

concluded there probably had been a conspiracy but that it was limited to the Mafia.

The consensus of the seminar was that a combination of the CIA, Cuban exiles and Mafia that had long tried to overthrow Fidel Castro switched their sights onto Kennedy when it discovered that he was secretly intending, among other no-nos, to normalize relations with Cuba. That JFK was trapped in a classic paramilitary ambush was implicit in the presentation by Dr. Cyril Wecht, a leading forensic pathologist who has been the

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## I was a Burglar, Wiretapper, and Spy for the FBI

was more a visceral thing, like the time I narrowly missed being discovered by a friend of the subject who had a key to the house. It was one of those dilemmas that agents on bag jobs dread: discovery and arrest or... the alternative is to act like a burglar by knocking the man out and fleeing. It is the alternative that most old hands recommend. Yet I never intended to resort to it. Perhaps I would have compromised by throwing a body block and dashing out.

Although the FBI high muckamucks keep their hands clean of break-and-enter dirty work, they are quick to acknowledge the fruits of a successful bag job when submitted to Washington in carefully paraphrased form. Often the risk-taking agent is rewarded with an "incentive award" of \$500 or \$1,000 in cash. A few recidivist "badgeless burglars of the Bureau" make a steady supplemental income this way.

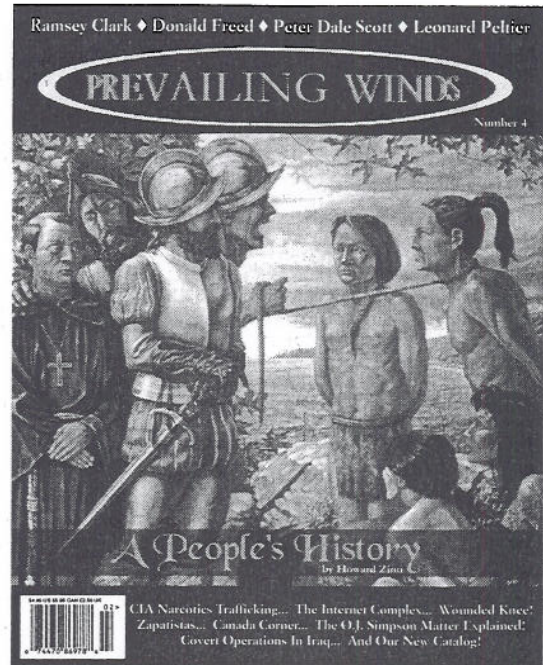
Probably because of the FBI's formidable image and its ability to cry "national security" when confronted, its illegal activities have not been challenged by a timid Congress. A case in point is the Subcommittee on Administrative Practice and Procedure headed by Senator Edward V. Long of Missouri. For over a year now the subcommittee has been busily exposing a thicket of electronic snooping by government agencies, mainly the much-maligned Internal Revenue Service. But when Long's group cautiously peeped inside the FBI's closet in Miami (where it heard testimony from a private detective that he had bugged under FBI hire) and Kansas City (where the G-men had tuned in on the conversation of suspected racketeers), it gingerly shut the door.

For one thing, Long was sternly taken to task by his home state newspapers for trifling with the sacrosanct FBI. For another, in December 1965, he received a visit at his Missouri home from no less a personage than Nicholas deB Katzenbach. The attorney general's mission, reportedly undertaken at the behest of the President himself, was to prevail upon the senator to lay off the FBI. Evidently he agreed. When San Francisco hearings opened after the first of the year, the FBI had been quietly removed from the agenda and the stentorian senator concentrated instead on eliciting admissions of bugging and illegal entry from agents of the beleaguered IRS.

Yet the Las Vegas casino operators are not vulnerable to the situation, and the issue will shortly come to a head in the courts. Already the preliminary sparring is underway. On July 13, 1966, U.S. Solicitor General Thurgood Marshall stepped before the Supreme Court to advise that the bug found in the suite of Fred Black Jr., the convicted lobbyist, had been installed on the express authorization of J. Edgar Hoover himself. Marshall acknowledged that, until recently, the FBI chief had possessed a blank check from the Justice Department to bug whenever he unilaterally decided that "the interest of internal security or national safety" was at stake or whenever combatting organized crime required it. There was no indication of how much previous attorneys general had known about the scope of FBI bugging.

July 13th shaped up as one of the most unlucky days for the FBI in its recent history. But before the day was out G-men had closed in on the principals in a couple of penny ante spy cases that had been kept simmering on the back burner, and stories of FBI prowess once again commanded the headlines.

As the bugging controversy heats up this fall it will be a fascinating game to see if Hoover has enough spy cases up his sleeve to go around.



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## The Boys In Brazil

NBC' on-camera expert on the O.J. Simpson case. Wecht detailed the wounds ballistics which show that shots were fired from a frontal angle as well as from the rear, meaning at least two shooters were involved. When he disclosed that one of the military doctors who had conducted the autopsy on Kennedy subsequently burned his notes in his fireplace, Judge Evaristo da Moraes Filho peppered him with questions expanding on that intriguing twist.

What has long been seen as an enigma is Lee Harvey Oswald's role at Dealey Plaza, the assassination scene. The answer probably lies in his connections with U.S. intelligence agencies, a subject tackled by John Newman, a former Army intelligence officer and author of the new book *Oswald and The CIA*, and myself. Since no paper trail would lead to him if he was a CIA contract operative, a circumstantial case must be built. But it is compelling. After "defecting" to the Soviet Union in the late '50s, he photographed sensitive Russian military facilities, observed troop and aircraft deployment and looked for the contrails of high-flying planes, according to a fellow worker in Dallas in whom he confided. He owned a palm-size Minox camera which was developed by the Germans for spying, not family picnics. In New Orleans in the summer of 1963, he postured as a Castro partisan under the direction of W. Guy Bannister, who was linked to the CIA and FBI and had run a provocation operation integrated with the Bay of Pigs invasion two years earlier.

In September 1963, two months before the assassination, Oswald left New Orleans. He showed up at the Cuban and Soviet consulates in Mexico City boisterously demanding visas to visit both countries. Escalante, who has investigated the episode, pronounced it an attempt to depict Oswald as a Cuban agent in the hope of provoking a U.S. military response when JFK was shot.

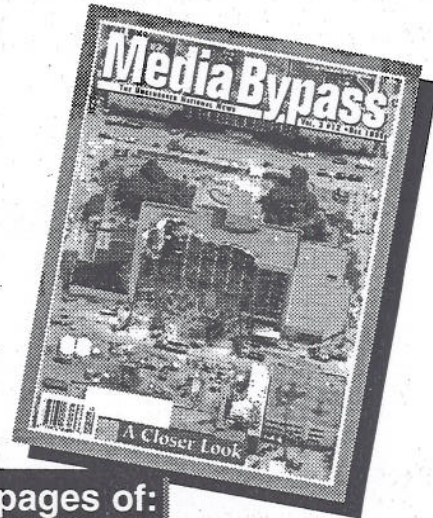
A significant product of the seminar was the inauguration of dialogue between American investigators who attended and the Cubans, whose archives undoubtedly are a rich vein of intelligence. For example, Escalante revealed that at the time of Kennedy's death CIA-directed exile forces in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua were poised to launch a second invasion of Cuba. And I had recently learned through an exile source that the invasion, which was set for December 1, 1963, was called Plan Judas because it incorporated the fail-safe features of a simultaneous military coup sprung by one of Castro's most trusted aides, and an assassination attempt by a returning Cuban diplomat. In fact the envoy, Rolando Cubela, was given a lethal syringe by ranking CIA official Desmond Fitzgerald in Paris on the day Kennedy was shot. How this plugs into the JFK plot, if at all, is a matter of further research. At this point, however, we know that Cubela was a life-long associate of Victor Hernandez Espinosa, an exile arms procurer, who was among those busted in an FBI raid on a training camp north of New Orleans on August 1, 1963. At that same time Oswald, as an ex-Marine, was volunteering to train recruits at the camp.

The Brazilian authorities took the seminar deadly serious, providing us with plain-clothes military police bodyguards and supplying our bus with a motorcycle escort. American authorities can take the assassination investigation deadly serious by expediting the full release of FBI and CIA documents to the federal Review Board, recently set up for that purpose.

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