

Videos Trace JFK Conspiracy Theories

By Reed Kirk Rahlmann
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Conspiracy buffs and others intrigued by Oliver Stone's new movie, "JFK," will be able to find, if they look hard enough, a number of documentaries on video dealing with the assassination of President Kennedy.

Here is a roundup of the videos, which provide a wealth of information and/or opinion about various Kennedy assassination conspiracy theories. Some of the videos that have been around for years echo issues raised anew by Stone's film, and some of them present other theories.

"Rush to Judgment," Fusion Video (1967), \$29.95

Made only three years after the assassination, "Rush to Judgment" is based on the book with the same title and is narrated by its author, lawyer Mark Lane. Methodical and plodding, "Rush" consists mostly of interviews and little physical evidence. Over a dozen witnesses tell, among other things, of hearing the shots from the grassy knoll and seeing a puff of smoke there. Some stick to their stories, and others, hammered into submission by the Warren Report and public opinion, shrug and say that they must have been mistaken.

The tape is divided into five segments: Oswald — His Marksmanship (lousy), Bullets and Wounds (four wounds for Kennedy, five for Connally and a questionable number of bullets),



Mark Lane narrates the video version of his book about JFK, 'Rush to Judgment'

Where Did the Shots Come From? (everyone says the grassy knoll, but who's listening?), Some Witnesses May Not Testify (that's expected when they're dead from a karate chop, or suspiciously hanged in a jail cell while up for a disturbing-the-peace charge), and Jack Ruby and the Dallas Police Force.

The last one is the most fascinating, and by far the best for comic relief, showing Dallas Police Chief Jessie Curry defending the force's integrity. A nervous and sweating Curry says that only 50 of

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his 1,200 men even know who Jack Ruby was, and only four ever went into the infamous Carousel Club.

In contrast, Nancy Hamelton, who managed the club for Ruby in 1963, tells how it was a virtual cop clubhouse for the whole force, complete with free booze, gambling and hookers. The argument is that it was this chummy relationship that allowed Ruby to waltz into the basement of the Dallas police station unquestioned and kill Oswald.

While "Rush to Judgment" is on the slow side, it is an interesting collection of vintage interviews of people who were the witnesses in one way or another to events surrounding the tragedy. Most were never called to testify before the Warren Commission.

"Two Men in Dallas," Andrew Thompson Inc. (1977)

The first man is Kennedy. The second is Deputy Sheriff Roger Craig, who worked in Dallas at the time of the assassination and had first-hand experience at Dealey Plaza, at the book depository and with Oswald himself.

Mark Lane appears again here, waxing somberly that Craig was akin to Rosencranz and Guildenstern, just another guy trying to do his job and winding up in circumstances beyond his control.

Fortunately, the bulk of the video is a 1974 interview with Craig, a personable man who is shattered by the turns his life took since November 1963. He was present the moment that Kennedy was shot and recalls hearing shots from the picket fence above the knoll. He says he was eight inches away from the supposed murder weapon at the book depository when it was identified as a 7.65 millimeter German Mauser, even seeing the name stamped on the barrel. He was as surprised as anyone when it magically became a 6.5 millimeter Italian Mannlicher Carcano while being held by Dallas police.

Particularly interesting is his account of Oswald's famous statement, "Everyone will know who I am now." Played up in the press as

a boast of a cocky psycno, Craig says it was the worried admission of someone who has had his cover blown and was worried about the consequences, not someone who was trying to make a place for himself in history.

Craig details three failed attempts on his own life, each more harrowing and contrived than the next. A year after the interview was taped, he died of a rifle shot to the chest. Even though he owned two pistols and no rifle, it was ruled a suicide.

"Two Men in Dallas," the only video that focuses on the experience of a single witness, is a sometimes moving personal account.

"Best Evidence — The Research Video," Rhino Home Video (1990), \$14.95

Also based on a book, this is easily one of the best tapes on the subject. Author/narrator David Lifton begins by casually dropping his academic credentials and then presents a theory that someone tampered with the president's body while it was on Air Force One.

Lifton narrows his investigation to the contradictory autopsy reports of Highland Hospital in Dallas and the Naval Hospital in Bethesda. Between the time Kennedy's body left Parkland and arrived in Bethesda six hours later, not only do autopsy documents show the body was altered, it came from different packaging. It left Dallas wrapped in sheet and was placed in a ceremonial bronze casket. When it was off-loaded in Bethesda, it was in a body bag and a government-issue gray box.

Lifton interviews witnesses who were sworn to secrecy for nearly two decades, which gives the video a "startling new evidence" mood. There are also autopsy photos, more eerie than graphic, that were never before made public.

Lifton's case is laid out clearly, the elements kept to a minimum and explored thoroughly, and the pace is quick. After viewing "Best Evidence" you will not be closer to knowing who was involved in the conspiracy, but there will be no more denying that something fishy was going on.

"Reasonable Doubt: The Single-Bullet Theory," White Star Video (1988), \$29.95

As with "Best Evidence," this tape narrows its focus to one aspect of the assassination. It also presents physical evidence of monkeying with the truth, not just speculation of circumstantial connections.

The single bullet theory was the keystone of the Warren Com-

mission report. Without it, the lone-assassin story falls apart. Later dubbed by doubters as the magic bullet theory, it was a claim by the Warren Commission that the same bullet that caused all Governor Connally's wounds also was the first bullet to hit Kennedy. To accomplish this, however, the bullet would have had to strike Kennedy, exit, make a sharp right turn for a foot or so, a hard left in mid-air, then angle downward to Connally. When this discrepancy in physics was pointed out, the answer was, "Bullets do strange

things."

The video methodically examines the timing of the shots (impossible with the gun supposedly used by Oswald), the alignment of the two victims, how entrance wounds were changed to exit wounds, location of wounds (moved or destroyed) and the bullet itself. Listed as exhibit 399, the bullet was in near pristine condition after supposedly inflicting all the wounds. "Reasonable Doubt" is an excellent examination of the most famous chink in the Warren Report's armor.

"The Killing of President Kennedy — New Revelations 20 Years Later," Vid-America (1983), \$19.95

Little in the way of hard evidence is presented here, but there are so many documented connections between key players that it is impossible to assume it was all coincidence.

This tape explores the Mafia-CIA-FBI involvement in the assassination. It claims that between them, Attorney General Robert Kennedy and the president made many enemies among organized

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crime and powerful politicians, including Vice President Lyndon Johnson. With Kennedy out of the way, they could get down to business as usual. Though it was RFK who antagonized the crime bosses (he once had New Orleans' mob boss Carlos Marcello abducted and dumped on a lonely road in Guatemala with nothing but the clothes on his back), it was said that "If you cut the head off a rooster the tail falls off." Killing the president would send a message to the attorney general.

Not that the Mafia had any

great love for the president, either. After refusing to authorize air support for the Bay of Pigs debacle, and calling off other covert operations, Kennedy had signaled that he was going to stop interfering with Cuba. The mob bosses, still smarting from losing Havana to Castro, had buddies in the CIA who now felt that JFK was going soft on communism.

One bonus of "New Revelations" is watching the film crew nervously wait for a witness who never shows up. In a letter that arrives a few days later, the witness says he couldn't risk going public with his information. It's a "You Are There" occurrence that

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reinforces the idea that we may never know exactly what happened.

The tape is slow at times, and is made confusing by the number of people involved. But the interviews, the documentation of Oswald's connection to the CIA (was he a "mole" while he was in Russia?), and the outlining of the depth of the conspiracy makes this worth watching.

"Declassified — The Plot to Kill President Kennedy From the Files of the CIA," Vid-America (1988), \$14.95

A shorter version of "New Revelations," it contains most of the same footage and information, with fewer details and sidetracks.

"Four Days in November," MGM/Pathé (1964), \$29.95

In this David Wolper documentary, history is presented in detail, almost down to the minute. It is worth a look because it is a record of a time when America was more innocent.

Where it falls apart is the depiction of Oswald as a psycho, and Ruby as just another patriotic grieving American out to do Jack-

Trading Cards for Conspiracy Buffs

San Francisco writer-violinist Paul Brancato and artist Bill Seinkiewicz have created 36 trading cards that bring key players in various Kennedy assassination conspiracy theories together in one box, called "Coup d'Etat."

With so many characters, such as David Ferrie and Guy Bannister, to keep track of, it's handy to have a short history of events that can fit in a shirt pocket. Each card focuses on a different person, explains his place in history and how he fits into the conspiracy puzzle. The writing is concise but draws no conclusions. The illustrations capture the mood and personality of each character, and evoke a mood of dark skullduggery. The cards are available at comic-book stores and other specialty outlets.

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ie Kennedy a favor by knocking off her husband's murderer. After viewing the other tapes, you wonder why this simply isn't called "The Warren Report — The Movie."