

George Lardner, newsroom  
The Washington Post  
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Dear George,

You've done some fine writing but your today's Outlook piece is remarkable, beautiful, if I may use that word, and it must have been the most difficult writing you've ever faced.

after reading it- really while reading it - I wondered that you could be so close and warm and yet be so detached and fair. I could not have been and I doubt many men could have.

It is also what you clearly intended, an effective indictment of a system, really a society, that refuses to function, that cannot do the simplest things, like keeping ordinary records so necessary to protect us from what Weld correctly referred to the many walking time-bombs so loose to explode when that could largely be prevented.

It is, truly, a remarkable job of which you should be more than merely proud because it has the potential of reducing if not preventing more easily prevented such pointless tragedies.

Perhaps I react to it a little more strongly because just last evening I decided that I'd best report daily harassing phone calls to the State police. Tomorrow I'll ask the phone company to provide a gadget that records the calling number.

It will be no comfort to you but this is not new in our society. It is merely more prevalent. Years ago when I got disgusted working on the News in Wilmington and quit for a spell I worked in a department store, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturdays and although my feet were killing me I always walked some girls home before going to my own home. In hitch-hiking from college in those Depression days, when some girls, particularly one I knew had been raped, were hitch-hiking I joined them. There were desperate men then, too, and while dope was rare drunkenness was even more common.

If anything can be done to convert a senseless tragedy into something constructive, you have done it and you should be proud of <sup>both</sup> doing it and how well you did it!

It is just wonderful that the Post gave it all that space, too! That can help it become the national concern it should be.

If it is not too much trouble I'd appreciate it if you can send me two copies of it because xeroxing it with our machine will leave reading it difficult. I'd like to send one to Dave Wrone, a Wisconsin history professor friend, and another to a professor of sociology. I don't know if you've ever spoke<sup>N</sup> to Wrone, my dear friend. He is co-author of the only professional JFK assassination bibliography. He evaluated the Post's reporting as by far the best. I think he'd just like to read it. The sociologist can use it.

It would be good, I think, if something more could come of this. If you are up to it, as I fear I would not be.

I hope it makes it easier for all of you,

*Harold*

# The Crowd on the Grassy Knoll

## The JFK Assassination: Rising Stakes in the Contest of Confession and Conspiracy

By Charles Paul Freund

**T**HE MAN who shot Kennedy in Dallas 29 years ago today was a Frenchman who, during the Algerian war, was part of the fascist OAS; he may also have tried to shoot Charles de Gaulle. Another man who shot JFK that day was later discovered by his parents to have been a Dallas assassin; he then killed them too. A third man who shot Kennedy in Dealey Plaza was a Secret Service agent in the motorcade behind the president. The fourth and fifth men who killed JFK resemble remarkably

*Charles Paul Freund writes frequently for Outlook*

men who were later to participate in the Watergate burglary. A sixth man who shot the president was a Dallas cop; his own son has implicated him. A seventh man was a Dallas Lincoln-Mercury salesman. An eighth man, a Mob hit man, once confessed to police to killing JFK.

There are many others who shot Kennedy, among them Lee Harvey Oswald, who pulled the trigger in response to impulses set off in his brain by a device implanted there during a hospital stay in Minsk.

They all shot JFK, according to one book or another speculating on the apparent mysteries of Dealey Plaza. This past year has seen a huge boom in such works, a fusillade of theories, solutions and scenarios: Several of the purported gunmen described above

have been presented to the general public for the first time this year, and many older theories have been updated (or at least repackaged) and put back in print, or otherwise relished. It has been one of the biggest years in assassiniology in a long time.

The reason, of course, is the influence of Oliver Stone's movie, "JFK." Stone's extremely controversial film sparked huge interest, with possibly beneficial results. Several people have come forward with tales of inside knowledge that may help eventually to resolve questions about the case. Even the government's files on the shooting will, by an act of Congress, be opened.

See JFK, C4, Col. 3



CHRISTOPHE WOLFF FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

But judging from the enormous amount of material that has appeared in its wake, Stone's movie has done much more than reawaken interest in the murder; it has rearranged the landscape of public speculation. Kennedy conspiracism, a field with its own history, has entered yet another phase.

For one thing, Stone's revisionist movie has improved the reputation of the just deceased Jim Garrison, the New Orleans district attorney portrayed by Kevin Costner. Prior to the film, Garrison was widely reviled by Warren Report critics who believed that his grotesque investigation had set back efforts to ascertain the truth. Some thought Garrison was dishonest, protecting New Orleans Mafia boss Carlos Marcello, whom some believe was instrumental in the assassination.

Ironically, the success of Stone's film may have prompted former Mafia lawyer Frank Ragano to tell *his* story in a "Frontline" documentary last week, in which he said that Marcello had had Garrison in his pocket.

Others wondered if Garrison himself was an agent of the conspiracy. However, such "agent-baiting," in which critics accuse each other of being part of the continuing conspiracy, has long plagued the Kennedy underground. Another, more recent target is Mark Lane, the author of the newly reissued "Rush to Judgment." Years ago, Lane made a documentary featuring Dealey Plaza witnesses whose recollections were at variance with the Warren Report. Many of these witnesses later died under what are said to be suspicious circumstances. A rival critic named John Judge has lately been suggesting in lectures that Lane's movie set up these witnesses.

In any event, Garrison and his role in the investigation have now been Costner-ized and it is news to the Stone-inspired buffs that Garrison was ever controversial. A new essay critical of the D.A. by David Lifton appears as a forward in a new book by one of Oswald's Marine buddies, Kerry Thornley, who likes to speculate about whether Oswald and he were products of a Nazi breeding experiment. Anyway, Lifton's essay about the Garrison-Thornley relationship has been called "sobering" in the current issue of the conspiracy tabloid/catalogue, Flatland.

At another level, interest awakened in the last year has helped to raise the stakes in the mass-market literature. It is no longer enough, for example, to sift through the evidence and weigh it against the Warren Commission's conclusions. Such books still appear, of course: "The People vs. Lee Harvey Oswald," a

sort of novel by Walt Brown, is a newly released account of the trial Oswald never had. But it's a throwback; Oswald trials were on TV 20 years ago.

The last time there was a general reconsideration of the shooting was 1988, the 25th anniversary. It was still fairly daring then for critics to attempt an identification of alternative assassins. Now, to stay at the cutting edge, you should either offer a solution to the crime, identify the triggermen, or confess your own role in the plot. At least six new and reissued books do just that [see adjoining story.]

The mental landscape of the Dealey Plaza inferno has long featured the following circles: at the center, those who accept the Warren Report's conclusions that Oswald acted alone; beyond them, skeptics troubled by the so-called "magic-bullet" thesis, the unlikely Kennedy head snap, the never-produced notes of Oswald's interrogation, etc., but who don't accept any alternative conspiratorial explanation; beyond these, those who believe that the murder was an act of hatred or revenge perpetrated by the Mafia, anti-Castro Cubans, rogue CIA elements or wealthy American fascists (or a combination of these), or by Castro or the Soviets; farther out, those who believe that the murder was a political act, a coup d'etat. Beyond all these lies an outland of assassination gnosticism that deals in interchangeable identities, hypnotics, historical mysticism, ambiguous intelligence-agency realities, robotics and genetic engineering.

Back in 1988, much of the focus was on the revenge thesis, especially the Mafia-hit argument that had been endorsed, more or less, a decade earlier by the House assassinations committee. The Mafia theory was, as journalist Ron Rosenbaum once observed, a way out of the assassination: It offered many answers, especially why no one ever talked. Stone's movie, by ultimately focusing on Donald Sutherland's extended and ambiguous coup d'etat lecture, has retrained the spotlight in a more problematic direction.

The result is that the coup d'etat thesis has been extended by more authors to explain subsequent history. A number of authors, for example, link escalation of the Vietnam war with the assassination (Kennedy's intentions are the subject of continuing debate). And, it is becoming common to find references amid the new literature to the "Coup of '63," to the fact that They Took Camelot Away From Us, to the idea that history, if not an outright plot, is planned. This view, subscribed to by an increasing number of conspiracist authors, has become sufficiently widespread that leftist columnist Andrew Cockburn has decried it in the Nation magazine as the latest outburst of what Lenin dismissed as "infantile Leftism."

A new example of the extension of the assassina-

tion appears in Dick Russell's "The Man Who Knew Too Much." The book carries a blurb from Stone ("[A]nother turn to the light in the unfolding labyrinth of clues to the murder at the heart of the American century.") and acknowledges among its many inspirers not only Stone, but also jailed Native American activist "Leonard Peltier and others like him, whose human rights have been assassinated by the same forces that took the life of the thirty-fifth pres-

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ident." The link between injustice to Native Americans and the "forces" behind the JFK shooting locates the conspirators under an unexpected bed.

When right-wingers attributed everything they saw as evil to the same set of powerful, secret conspirators, when they suggested that Dwight Eisenhower and Chief Justice Warren were serving communism, they were widely derogated and dismissed as kooks. The kind of fevered conspiracism that Stone's film has helped into the mainstream appears, on the other hand, to be politically correct.

The two conspiracisms share not only a pillorying of Earl Warren as a tool of mirror-image conspiracies. Each may also have been encouraged by Time-Life, now Time Warner. Time-Life, when it had the Abraham Zapruder film locked away in its vault, printed misleading descriptions in Life magazine about what that film showed: One issue of Life, for example, featuring a Zapruder frame blow-up of the head snap, was recalled and replaced with an issue featuring a different frame blow-up. The substitution has never been explained. Today, Time Warner, which underwrote Stone's movie, is marketing "JFK" to schools, complete with a study guide.

Indeed, the assassination has now become a bizarre throughway between right-wing and left-wing conspiracism. Mark Lane traversed it when he defended Liberty Lobby against Howard Hunt. Liberty Lobby's newspaper, The Spotlight, has a history of printing articles suggesting that blacks are an inferior race, and that the Holocaust never happened. It ran an article suggesting that Hunt was in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. Hunt sued successfully, but Lane—who is not known to subscribe to Liberty Lobby's

views on other matters—defended the organization in a second trial, pled truth and won. Lane too has a new book about the assassination.

Stone doesn't subscribe to Liberty Lobby's views either, but he took "JFK" along the same route. His connection to the right was Fletcher Prouty, whose scenario for the assassination is delineated in Donald Sutherland's long and soliloquy; Sutherland's "Mr. X" character, in fact, is Prouty.

Prouty, a former chief of the Pentagon's special operations office, had long expounded his view that a "Secret Team" was shaping American history to its own ends. His theoretical work appeared frequently in Gallery, a magazine whose central feature is Polaroids of its readers' undressed girlfriends. Prouty's insights into 20th century history may or may not be judged by his presence on Liberty Lobby's board. His view of whether there was a Holocaust was quoted in Esquire last year: "I'm not an expert on that," he said.

Stone recently told Cineaste, a leftist film magazine, that he doesn't agree with everything Prouty says, and that he didn't use Prouty's name in the film because Prouty didn't want to be known. But Prouty's changed his mind. He too has a new book out: "JFK," it's called, "by L. Fletcher Prouty, whose theories inspired the movie 'JFK,' with an introduction by Oliver Stone."

"A Machiavellian viper pit from which you will never quite return the way you left," Stone says of the book. "A look into the way the world really works."