

and the tie [of President Kennedy]."

In August 1998, after lengthy consideration about whether the testing would be appropriate, NARA finally agreed to allow limited testing of CE 567 to complete the earlier recommendation of the HSCA's Firearms Panel. NARA also determined that the bullet fragment should be tested for "suspected biological tissue and/or organic material," the presence of which was noted by the HSCA in 1978 and the FBI in 1996.

In September 1998, testing began on CE 567 and, at the time of this writing (September 1998), was ongoing. NARA will issue its report on the results of the testing in October 1998.

Notes

1. Most of the section of this Report relating to medical evidence and medical issues was printed and distributed to the public in a Staff Report dated July 31, 1998 when the Review Board released its deposition transcripts and written reports of unsworn interviews relating to medical issues.
2. Although the Review Board does not offer opinions on the substantive issues related to the assassination, it believes that trained medical personnel will possibly be able to provide additional illuminating explanations regarding the autopsy after examining the enhanced images. It should be noted, however, that although the digitizing significantly enhanced the clarity of the images, many questions are likely to remain unanswered.
3. July 10, 1978 Letter from Henry G. Zapruder to James Moore, National Archives.
4. Transcript of Review Board Proceedings, Hearing on the Status and Disposition of the "Zapruder Film," April 2, 1997, at 5 (statements of Chairman Tunheim).
5. Id., at 11 (statements of General Counsel Gunn).
6. June 5, 1998 Letter from Chairman Burton to Frank W. Hunger, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Division.

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THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN F. KENNEDY AS COUP D'ETAT

by
Christopher Sharrett

This is in response to Ken Thompson's remarks (TFD, Jan. 1999) about my analysis of the Kennedy assassination as a state crime (TFD, Sept. 1998). My initial article was prompted by Thompson's earlier (TFD, May 1998) discussion of the assassination as a low-level plot involving possibly the Mafia and/or Cubans. Thompson has responded to only a few of my points, and these responses were, to my mind, rather disingenuous.

I never suggested that the Allende coup or the Holocaust were in any way connected to Dealey Plaza. My comments on the overthrow of Allende by the CIA were by way of responding to Thompson's various definitions of coup d'etat. The particular passage where I discussed Allende was preceded by the word "parenthetically." I stated that the Holocaust was useful to an understanding of the effectuation of power in the twentieth century, not that it was part of the Dallas conspiracy. I might underscore the importance of the Third Reich to an understanding of the current world by noting that during the Nazi era, state officials, including members of the military general staff, plotted the assassination of Hitler. One of these plots was nearly successful. Yet these conspiracies were not uncovered within this totalitarian state where everyday conduct was heavily monitored. Is it still difficult to believe that the citizens of the quiescent post-war United States would not learn all the facts of a political assassination (although this rather half-hearted cover-up has since come apart)? I raise this merely to highlight the full context of the assassination of Kennedy within the events of our age.

Thompson treats with a very light touch Truman's *Washington Post* article, published one month after the assassination (and not mentioned by anyone since) in which he expressed profound concern about the CIA's

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violation of its initial mandate. Neither does Thompson address Arthur Krock's New York Times article, published about a month before the assassination, detailing an "intra-administration war" directed at Kennedy from the CIA. These matters are not questions of nebulous "links" but of real, material conditions of the Kennedy Administration that any reasonable person must examine if interested in motivations within the state to remove Kennedy from office. Kennedy himself spoke to the importance of these matters. After reading the novel Seven Days in May in the wake of the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy confided to his friend Red Fay that after one or two more such episodes (and we know about the Missile Crisis—about which more in a moment—the Test Ban Treaty, and the American University speech), he could be perceived as weak and "soft on Communism" by others in state authority, and a coup d'état was conceivable.[1] Kennedy encouraged director John Frankenheimer to film the novel in order to further sensitize the public to the political dynamics of the period.

Thompson remarks that the leading and intimidation of witnesses during the investigation by governmental authorities may merely indicate "Hoover's neanderthal style of investigation." Is it fair to assume that all FBI agents are neanderthals? And many of the interrogations were obviously conducted not by neanderthals, but by sophisticated, erudite men learned and respectful of the law and not associated with J. Edgar Hoover. Thompson suggests that "emotions" could have motivated the prompt removal of Kennedy's body from the jurisdiction of the murder. Did emotionalism also motivate the removal and reconstruction of the presidential limousine, and subsequent destruction of forensic evidence? Thompson comments on a number of issues I did not address in my earlier piece and which hold little or no interest for me, such as the possible doctoring of the Zapruder film. He also conflates my remarks with those of other writers. While I did cite Peter Dale Scott at one point in my earlier piece, my article was not an attempt to advocate for him. I find many of Scott's insights important, but I do not subscribe to some aspects of his analyses nor to the "linkage" theory Thompson imputes to him.

Thompson also brings up issues that strike me as irrelevant to the discussion at hand, including a recent Texas Monthly article adumbrating various "conspiracy theories" related to the assassination. Is there a reason to discuss this piece? This is yet another example of the media's presentation of the research into the assassination as a gigantic hoagie sandwich proffered by "buffs." The article at no point attempts to illuminate something or provide the public with a coherent methodology for approaching this case. Instead, it poses the case as a mish-mash of confused postulations, most of which have rarely been asserted by anyone concerned with doing something other than muddying the waters. The prolonged standing ovation received by Vincent Salandria at the last COPA meeting (after he presented his paper on the assassination as a crime of the national security state) is a pretty good measure of what researchers actually think about this issue.

At the heart of Thompson's argument is the notion that the cover-up teaches us nothing, since "we cannot be sure what motivated the cover-up." I would argue to the contrary that we can today, as we could the day of the crime, know precisely what motivated the cover-up, although there is an on-going effort to complicate the important political utility of this aspect of the crime. Because the cover-up today stands exposed, there has been an effort to present it as "benign" (so described by James Hosty in the documentary The Men Who Killed Kennedy), constructed—in the best interests of the American people—to prevent a nuclear war and to protect certain agencies and individuals (including the Kennedys) from embarrassment. One phase of this narrative is represented in a book cited by Thompson, Gus Russo's Live by the Sword. The moralistic biblical admonition of this book's title offers its thesis: Kennedy got what he deserved. Thompson apparently takes seriously Russo's conception of the Kennedy brothers as the ultimate Cold Warriors, with RFK the instigator of plots against Fidel Castro that LBJ wanted to hide in the aftermath of the assassination in order to prevent a war with the Soviet Union. According to this narrative, LBJ believed that "Castro killed Kennedy in retaliation," an idea that has long had currency in the mass media. But this

discourse ignores a large part of the historical record. Marvin Watson, a Johnson staffer, told the Washington Post in 1977 that Johnson "thought there was a plot in connection with the assassination," and that "the CIA had had something to do with the plot." [2]

On the matter of RFK being the guilt-ridden instigator of the Castro plots, anguished that he had caused his brother's death due to his anti-Castro obsessions, we should note that Robert Kennedy exploded in front of assistants Peter Edelman and Adam Walinsky after he read a Jack Anderson column that put into play the idea of RFK as craftsman of the Castro assassination plots. RFK complained "I didn't start it...I stopped it. I found out that some people were going to try an attempt on Castro's life and turned it off." [3] A recent Canadian Broadcasting Company documentary on the Kennedy assassination includes taped remarks by RFK speaking very derisively of CIA covert operations specialist William Harvey. RFK termed Harvey's ideas "half-assed" and potentially very damaging to the United States [4]. Recently declassified CIA documents about its use of hoodlums to penetrate the Cuban Revolution and assassinate its leaders demonstrate that the Agency didn't brief RFK. [5] Gus Russo perpetuates the claim that RFK was convinced that Castro killed his brother, ignoring evidence that RFK contacted Jim Garrison (since RFK took seriously the notion of a domestic plot), and that he was concerned with the possibility that the CIA may have had involvement in the assassination [6]. Throughout Russo's book and similar contemporary narratives, the impression is conveyed that the Castro assassination plots and Operation Mongoose were Kennedy inventions. In 1961 John Kennedy had a conversation with New York Times journalist Tad Szulc, during which Kennedy asked Szulc's counsel about the moral and political implications of attempting to assassinate Fidel Castro. Szulc said he thought such a plan would be disastrous. Kennedy agreed, but said that he was "under extreme pressure" (Szulc felt the pressure was coming from intelligence officials) to okay such a plan. Szulc left the meeting with the impression that the Kennedy brothers were firmly opposed to assassination politics. As Arthur Schlesinger has noted, if Kennedy was in the process of creating a covert operation against

Castro, he would hardly have discussed this issue with a New York Times columnist.[7] On the matter of Operation Mongoose, the "boom and bang" that the Kennedys created in the wake of the Bag of Pigs seems largely to have been a means of protecting their credibility with the right. Gen. Edward Lansdale, who commanded Mongoose, "complained not long afterward that there had actually been no high-level decision for follow-on military intervention." [8]

It strikes me that the function of many current renderings of the Kennedy years is to present a picture of the era as ideologically seamless, with everyone from the Joint Chiefs to Allen Dulles to David Ferrie in lockstep behind the Kennedy brothers. This thinking has been touted by a few sectors of the left, who suggest that since the Kennedy brothers were members of the ruling class, no one in their number would want to kill them. This thinking does a huge public disservice, since it prevents a nuanced understanding of an important phase of the Cold War, and of the internal strife within the state that overtook people such as John Kennedy. My own research into the Kennedy assassination has never been motivated by a desire to lionize John Kennedy. Kennedy was clearly a player in the Cold War, but a large part of the historical record shows that his was one of the very few centrist, essentially cooptative positions toward the socialist bloc at a time when virtually all sectors of state power were calling for massive incursions into the colonial domain picked up by the U.S. from its enemies and allies after World War II. A surprising amount of the historical record, much of which tends to ignore the assassination, shows that at the time of the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis, "Kennedy demonstrated that he would stand up to the belligerent advice from his closest aides." [9] While Kennedy suggested a policy of restraint, Gen. Thomas Powers, commander of the Strategic Air Command, had other ideas: "Restraint? Why are you so concerned with saving their lives? The whole idea is to kill the bastards. At the end of the war if there are two Americans and one Russian left alive, we win." [10] During the Missile Crisis, Powers raised the readiness of SAC to DEFCON-2, one step away from war, without JFK's authorization.[11] After one meeting with the Joint

Chiefs during the Berlin crisis, Kennedy left the room fuming, stating "These people are crazy." [12]

Throughout Kennedy's term in office his relationship with the military was extraordinarily strained, and "the generals and admirals did not think much of Kennedy's ideas, either." [13] About Gen. Curtis LeMay, Chief of the Air Force, Kennedy remarked after one of his many walkouts on LeMay: "I don't want that man near me again." [14] After feeling misled at the time of the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy stated "...Those sons of bitches with all the fruit salad just sat there nodding, saying it would work." [15]

And while Russo and other current narratives have it that Allen Dulles and the CIA entranced Kennedy, the full record shows something much more complex. While Kennedy was indeed enamored of James Bond novels and the world of intelligence, after the Bay of Pigs betrayal Kennedy said: "I've got to do something about those CIA bastards." [16] An important book on the internecine battles that confronted Kennedy contains the following illuminating passage:

Pacing his office later, alone with his friend Red Fay, the President said: "I sat there all day and all these fellas all saying 'This is gonna work, and this won't go,' saying 'Sure, this whole thing will work out.' Now, in retrospect, I know damn well that they didn't have any intention of giving me the straight word on this thing. They just thought that if we got involved in this thing, that I would have to say 'Go ahead, you can throw all your forces in the thing, and just move into Cuba'...Well, from now on it's John Kennedy that makes the decisions as to whether or not we are going to do these things." [17]

New scholarship is also useful in countering the revisionism that has Kennedy the architect of the Vietnam invasion. In a book on Vietnam, Francis X. Winters notes that while Kennedy approved of the coup against Diem, he was taken aback by his assassination. Kennedy's ultimate intent was to install a new, reformist government that would gain legitimacy with the public, co-opt the socialist agenda, and allow the government of Vietnam to do its own policing. In contrast, the Johnson Administration regarded the reformist strategy as "do-gooder" and opted instead for

direct military intervention. [18]

On the matter of the assassination cover-up being put in place not out of official guilt but out of a desire to prevent a nuclear confrontation with the Soviets, I would have thought by now that this risible notion was long since put to rest. One recent book shows that not only were the Soviets appalled by the events of Dallas (this was known to U.S. state authority rather quickly), they were informed by an emissary of the Kennedy family that the Kennedys felt JFK to have been the victim of a rightist coup. [19]

The issue of David Atlee Phillips seems to be an inconvenience to those who feel obliged to defend state authority in this matter. Thompson avoids the Phillips issue entirely, not even attempting to pose Phillips as a "renegade." Thompson cites a recent book by a HSCA staff attorney who seems fixed on protecting the legitimacy of state power in the matter of the JFK assassination, opting, like Thompson, for some vague low-level cabal. But this same attorney was present when David Atlee Phillips told bold-faced lies to the Congress. Gaeton Fonzi's The Last Investigation observes that the HSCA avoided the opportunity to have Phillips indicted, and thereby open a full inquiry into the CIA's role in the assassination.

Fonzi's account of the Phillips affair and the HSCA non-investigation of the CIA contains other instructive material. At the time the Congress became interested in reopening the assassination inquiry, Clare Booth Luce, widow of Time-Life magnate Henry Luce and former lover of Allen Dulles, gave out a good deal of malarkey (about Cubans no less) to investigators designed to send them on a wild goose chase. The Luce nonsense—Clare was an official in an organization of retired CIA officers—is especially instructive as we see it within the context of the overall cover-up. In 1977, Carl Bernstein wrote an article for Rolling Stone in which he described virtually all of the major media as essentially handmaidens of the CIA and the rest of the state apparatus. [20] A three-part article in the New York Times this same year did Bernstein one better by noting the ways by which the CIA used the media to discredit critics of the Warren Report. [21] This activity continued long after fears of Soviet missiles flying at the U.S. had been abetted,

long after the deaths of Johnson and RFK, long after a concern for Kennedy privacy had faded from the governmental agenda as JFK was steadily portrayed as a profligate degenerate—unworthy of serious study—by these same media.

Let me make it country simple. The evidence in the assassination of John Kennedy was taken control of and represented to the public by those sectors of state and private power who despised Kennedy and his policies. It is true that Mafia types and various exile groupings appear within the assassination scenario. These same groups appear within Watergate and Iran/Contra. Does appreciating the presence of these groups go very far to aid our understanding of these events as state crimes, in facts as crimes against the Constitution and the people of the U.S. carried out by state authority? Does the presence of these groups make these crimes other than state crimes? More important, would the American media and much of officialdom continue to attempt to bolster the various official narratives as a favor to the Mafia and some Cuban exiles? Would they do this to prevent a member of the Kennedy clan, or Allen Dulles or J. Edgar Hoover, from being “embarrassed”? Would they do this to prevent hostile relations with other lands, even years after the collapse of the Soviet Union? Thompson suggests that the Joseph Milteer tapes are “a valid pointer to the source of the true assassination conspiracy.” Did not the federal authorities have access to these tapes many years ago? Were they attempting to assist a southern racist group by hiding Milteer’s “true” connections to the assassination? I suggest that these provocative tapes, which have been in the public’s hands for years, were another small attempt to divert public attention from the state’s implication in the assassination.

I would hope that eventually we will have no more talk of Shadow Governments and Cabals. The invisible government discussed by various researchers is no more invisible than our political-economic system. This system is synonymous with the postwar national security state. Kennedy was killed when he became a flashpoint for a debate that began immediately with the creation of this state. The Great Depression brought U.S. capitalism to its knees; this ter-

rible economic collapse was halted by the wartime military build-up. The collapse threatened an immediate return after the war, and was prevented by the government’s hooking the economy to military production. The public was forced to subsidize the biggest military expansion in history as corporations began to depend on public revenue for their survival. Many within state power saw the potential problems of the new “Pentagon system.” Senator Arthur Vandenberg told President Harry Truman: “You are going to have to scare the hell out of the public” in order for them to accept a huge increase in taxes, and an economic system that would give extraordinary authority to the military and the intelligence agencies, who soon became essentially lobbyists for sectors of capital involved in military production. Indeed, fear became the currency of the national security state. Although the Soviet Union suffered twenty-seven million dead in World War II, with most of its major cities and industrial plant destroyed, the American public coughed up billions of dollars to support the U.S. “free enterprise” system and its expansionist aims, as public programs soon went begging.

Cold War propaganda gave legitimacy to the national security state, although debate raged on within state and private power against the backdrop of the sleepy fifties.[22] Many felt that the creation of the “garrison state” would bring about an enormous deficit and weaken us in relation to our Western capitalist rivals. Kennedy was not the first victim of the fierce internecine battles that began almost immediately with the creation of the national security state. Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal became a victim in 1949 of what was referred to as “the revolt of the admirals.” As each sector of the military fought over their share of public revenues, with the Joint Chiefs “at each other’s throat” in a climate of unbridled avarice, Forrestal attempted at least to inject a note of civility as the military sensed its unprecedented authority. Forrestal was eventually “ground down by the bickering and backstabbing in the Pentagon.” He was “under constant attack from the admirals and generals he supposedly commanded.” The national security state’s lapdogs in the press, including Walter Winchell and Drew Pearson, ridiculed Forrestal, terming him a “liar

and a coward.”[23] Forrestal suffered a nervous breakdown and eventually committed suicide.

Like many in the previous administration, Eisenhower faced problems in reigning in the national security state. Long before he spoke of the “military-industrial complex,” Eisenhower warned America and the world that “humanity was hanging from a cross of iron.” He stated that “every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired,” represented “a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.”[24]

Into this arena entered John Kennedy, at first arguing that the U.S. faced a bogus “missile gap” in its competition with the Soviets, but soon arguing against the plans of the Joint Chiefs and the CIA for massive military incursions into Southeast Asia and the Caribbean. The body of John Kennedy, and all evidence related to his murder, was commandeered and represented to the public by the military and the intelligence agencies. Over these many years, intelligence satraps—who also represent corporate America—in the mass media, have presented the official stories of the assassination. They are the same people and organizations who advocate for the new supranational corporate state that guarantees the immiseration of millions.

There is nothing arcane about the murder of John F. Kennedy. It is no more cabalistic than the political-economic system we have come to accept. Only if we choose to shed our denial about the assassination’s historical context—and refuse to immerse ourselves in further endless ruminations about oddball plotters and Dealey Plaza minutiae—can we come to terms with the assassination’s meaning to our present circumstances.

Notes

1. Richard Reeves, President Kennedy: Profile of Power (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), pp.303-305. I am grateful to Vincent Salandria and Ray Marcus for continuing to insist on the importance of this book.
2. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Robert Kennedy and His Times (New York: Ballantine books, 1978), p. 665.
3. *Ibid.*, 532.
4. “The Murder of John F. Kennedy: A Revisionist

History,” The Passionate Eye, CBC Newsworld, Nov. 22 and 29, 1998. I am grateful to Joe Martines for bringing this film to my attention.

5. One of these documents is published in Steve Jones and Barbara LaMonica, “New Evidence in the Assassination of JFK,” privately printed, Philadelphia, PA, 1998.
6. Schlesinger, pp. 664-665.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 529.
8. Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, eds., The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 34.
9. Jeremy Isaacs and Taylor Downing, Cold War: An Illustrated History, 1945-1991 (New York: Little, Brown & Co. 1998), p. 212.
10. *Ibid.* p. 232.
11. Reeves, pp. 401-402.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
13. *Ibid.* p. 306
14. *Ibid.* p. 182.
15. *Ibid.* p. 103.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.* p. 104.
18. Francis X. Winters, The Year of the Hare: America in Vietnam, January 25, 1963-February 15, 1964 (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1997), pp. 115-116. Winters firmly subscribes to the notion that Kennedy planned to withdraw all American forces from Vietnam after the 1964 elections.
19. Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy 1958-1964 (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 344-346.
20. Carl Bernstein, “The CIA and the Media,” Rolling Stone, October 20, 1977, pp. 55-67.
21. John M. Crewsdon, “CIA: Secret Shaper of Public Opinion,” New York Times, Dec. 27, 1977, p. 1.
22. See Michael J. Hogan, A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State 1945-1954 (Cambridge,UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
23. *Ibid.* pp. 184-186.
24. *Ibid.* p. 417