



"There has never been a more subversive, conspiratorial, unpatriotic or endangering issue for the security of the US and the world than the attempt by the US government to hide the murderer of its President."

BERTRAND RUSSELL

This guide contains some of what we know about the assassination of John F Kennedy in 1963. Like the film 'JFK', it also begs many questions. Now that the assassination is surrounded by nearly four decades of speculation and hearsay and by the most bewildering array of conspiracy theories, it is worth focusing briefly on a few key points: the assassination, Kennedy, his supposed assassin Lee Harvey Oswald

The historian, and the film-maker are faced with almost insurmountable problems in trying to find the 'truth' what went on in Dallas in November of 1963 despite - but often because of - a literal crowd of eye witnesses the

desperate curiosity of an outraged nation, and the investigative resources of two mammoth intelligence organisations and the police departments of three major cities.

Before considering the evidence presented in the guide, it is worth thinking about the problems that a film maker faces when he or she chooses to make a film about an historical subject. Look carefully at the six questions below. See if you can answer them.

1. What should a good historian try to do when writing about history?
2. What should a feature film director try to do in his/her film?
3. What are the problems that you think face a feature film maker when he/she comes to make a film about an historical subject?

4. When a student of history looks at a feature film dealing with an historical subject, what ought he/she to bear in mind about the ways in which history is presented? How can film assist a student exploring an historical event?
5. In what ways are feature films reliable sources for historians and in what ways are they unreliable?
6. Do you think that it is possible to make a 'good historical film that would appeal to audiences and also satisfy historians?

## **OLIVER STONE ON "JFK"**

Having answered the questions on page one it is now worth looking at what Oliver Stone, the director of the film has to say about his own film and also the problems of filming 'history'

"I think we were trying to create an alternate myth to the Warren Commission, to kind of explore the true meaning of the shooting on Dealey Plaza, what the murder of John Kennedy meant to his country, why he was killed. And the movie... as a mystery, where you unravel layer after layer and you come out at the end with a very strong speculation as to what might have happened.

We don't say this is exactly what happened and this is who did it. I wouldn't be that presumptuous, nor do I know. I have taken all of the clues... all the clues that presented themselves, put them into one mosaic, followed the clues and come to some conclusions of my own, but as I say I present them as speculation, not as a definite conclusion.

Maybe the public learned some of it in one spot, or another spot, but they never seemed to get it all at one time, and I tried to put it all into one giant jigsaw puzzle.

But you know, I'm a dramatist. You do take dramatic license, hopefully not violating the spirit of the truth."

What relevance do you think Oliver Stone's final comment has on his presentation of the events of the assassination of Kennedy? Also, how do his other comments relate to some of the answers that you gave to the six questions above?

## Dallas 1963

Eastern Standard Time (Dallas, Central Time, one hour behind)

### November 22

12.25pm Air Force One lands at Love Field, Dallas, Texas. Passengers include John F. Kennedy, 46 year old 35th President of the United States and his wife Jacqueline ('Jackie") Kennedy.

12.55pm . Motorcade leaves Love Field. Lincoln limousine carries the President and First Lady, along with the Governor of Texas, John B. Connally and his wife. Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson and "Lady Bird" Johnson ride in car behind.

1.29pm Motorcade passes the Texas School Book Depository Building and into Dealey Plaza en route to lunch and political rally.

1.30pm JFK SHOT. Governor Connally seriously wounded. Panic in Dealey Plaza.



1.33pm Lee Harvey Oswald (see file) leaves Texas School Book Depository.

1.38pm Parkland Hospital admits JFK and Connally.

2.00pm JFK pronounced dead.

2.00 - 2.15 pm Officer Tippit of the Dallas police murdered by a lone gunman, later said to have been Oswald.

2.50pm Oswald seized after a scuffle in Texas Theatre cinema, Dailies.

3.38pm Aboard Air Force 1, en route back to Washington DC with former First Lady and the body of JFK, Lyndon Johnson sworn in as 36th President.

### November 23

2.30am Oswald charged with the murder of JFK.

### November 24

12.21 pm Jack Ruby a Dallas and New Orleans night-club owner, shoots Oswald in the basement of the Dallas Police and Courts building, as he is being transferred to Dallas County Jail

### November 25

JFK buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington.

## JOHN F. KENNEDY FILE

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born in 1917, one of the nine children of Joseph P. Kennedy, a Boston millionaire of Irish descent, and his wife Rose, née Fitzgerald. From an early age the children were encouraged to participate in political argument, and to be fiercely competitive in all their pursuits; academic, sporting and later in public life.

He graduated from Harvard in 1940. His graduation thesis was published under the title 'Why England Slept'. Joseph Kennedy had been appointed US ambassador to the United Kingdom shortly before the war.

Though of poor health, and suffering acute back problems, JFK served with the US Navy in the Second World War, and was awarded the Purple Heart, (for bravery) for his part in the rescue of the survivors of a Japanese destroyer attack.

- 1946 JFK elected to the US House of Representatives -the first of three terms.
- 1952 JFK elected a US Senator for Massachusetts.
- 1953 Marries Jacqueline Lee Bouvier (1929-
- 1956 Awarded Pulitzer Prize for biography 'Profiles in Courage"- stories of American political heroes, written whilst JFK convalesced from another back operation.
- 1958 Re-elected to the US Senate.
- 1960 (July) Nominated as Democratic candidate for the Presidency.
- 1960 Elected President.
- (November) Youngest ever elected President.  
First Roman Catholic President.  
First President born in the 20th century.  
Elected by narrowest ever margin, beating Richard Nixon by 119,450 votes out of 69,000,000 cast (but 303 to 219 votes in electoral college).
- 1961 Inaugurated 35th President of the USA.  
(January) "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country".
- 1961 (April) CIA trained anti-Castro forces invade Cuba at Bay of Pigs in US inspired attempt to instigate coup. Kennedy did not instigate the plan, he refused a back up of American forces, and the coup attempt failed
- 1962 (October) Announces US blockade of Cuba to halt Russian missile build-up. Apparent brink of US - USSR nuclear confrontation.  
Nikita Khrushchev agrees to dismantle missile bases in Cuba.
- 1963 (November 22) Assassinated, Dallas Texas. 1963 (November 25) Buried. Arlington National Cemetery, Washington DC

## JOHN F KENNEDY: REPRESENTATIONS

"JFK...a sort of superman, a legendary figure who presided over Camelot (a term suggested by Mrs. Kennedy), his administration one of unmatched wisdom, virtue, and style."

### A LIFE OF JOHN F KENNEDY, THOMAS C REEVES

The image of JFK and of the Kennedy administration has changed radically over the years since his death, and, though many respect him as a politician and orator, few are as credulous of the "Camelot" aura that the Kennedy family and supporters polished, for political purposes during his lifetime, and in his memory after his death. Uncomfortably for the surviving Kennedys, investigations into the President's assassination have revealed many unsavoury connections, and the preservation of the Camelot image has seemed often in direct opposition to a complete untangling of the conspiracy web.

JFK must have made enemies. He was a politician. But if he was indeed the victim of an assassination conspiracy, he must have made enemies convinced they could gain by his death. Here are some areas you might want to consider, and to investigate further. *Remember; nothing is true just because it is in print, any more than it is true just because it is presented as such in a film.*

\* The vast Kennedy family fortune (each of Joseph Kennedy's children were said to have trust funds valued at \$10 million after the Second World War) repeatedly played a part in their political careers.

\* JFK also paid researchers and typists for his student thesis, and its publication was engineered by his father.

\* Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize winning book 'Profiles in Courage' may have been ghost written. Very few of his famous speeches were his own work, His academic record at school and college was poor, his intellectual capabilities were constantly exaggerated. His war record was also exploited for political purposes.

\* The family tried to hide Jack's ill health, later denying that he was suffering from Addison's disease.

\* Once in the White House, John Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy exhibited an unparalleled enthusiasm to fight organised crime in the US. This commitment was especially puzzling to the 'Mob' who felt they had virtually delivered key 'constituencies' to the Kennedy campaign in '60, and in his elections as Representative and Senator.

\* Certain elements of America's military and intelligence were enraged by Kennedy's denunciation of their efforts following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, blaming him for not backing up the anti-Castro rebels,

\* The oil industry turned savagely against Kennedy because of his support for tax reform that threatened the lucrative oil business, especially in Texas and Louisiana.

\* The American Far Right, especially in the Southern states, was threatened by the Kennedy brothers' promise to bring full desegregation (of public amenities and areas, of schools etc to the South. Other factions in on the right were keen to blow the cover on Kennedy's many nefarious connections and frequent adulteries.

How does any of this information change your appreciation of the facts in the John F Kennedy file?

Which information is the most important to evaluate, and attempt to verify, with reference to the assassination? Why?

List five questions, in order of priority, that you would most like to have answered about Kennedy and the Kennedy administration? How do you justify your list?

You may want to consider why there is a tradition of 'muck-raking' in American political journalism. Is any of it justified?

## **FURTHER BACKGROUND TO THE CONSPIRACY THEORIES**

### **Kennedy Foreign Policy 1960-1963**

#### **CUBA**

Shortly after taking office in 1961, Kennedy was confronted with a crisis that grew out of a policy initiated during Eisenhower's second term. A number of Cuban exiles, aided by US advisors, had been secretly training for an invasion of Cuba, with the aim of ousting Fidel Castro.

The operation, which was to involve back-up support by US armed forces, needed the President's approval. Kennedy reluctantly agreed to provide the exiles with equipment for their landing at the Bahia de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs). But he refused "intervention by the US armed forces."

The failure of the enterprise in the April of 1961 engendered disapproval for Kennedy on all sides; from the "doves", because he approved the invasion in the first place, and from the "hawks" because he did not unleash America's military might to ensure the invasion's success. As it turned out, the uprising of Cubans hostile to Castro never occurred. The CIA had underestimated Castro's widespread support.

The CIA became involved in trying to assassinate Fidel Castro. There is now evidence that there were Mafia 'contracts' put out on Castro, at the instigation of the CIA. It seems both JFK and the Attorney General Robert F Kennedy knew of these covert operations. There was a strange alliance of interests over the fate of Cuba: the US, convinced that a communist power "90 miles from home" was a threat to national security, or at least to the continuation of capitalism in the important economic sphere of the Americas; and organised crime which had had big business interests in Havana, in gambling and prostitution. Of the many Cuban exiles in the United States, mainly in the South, of both pro- and anti-Castro persuasion, many were deeply hostile to the Kennedy

## VIETNAM

Under President Eisenhower, the United States began sending military advisors to aid South Vietnam in its effort to subdue rebels supported by the communist North. In November 1961 the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked Kennedy to send US combat troops to Vietnam as a way of intensifying this aid. Kennedy sent more advisors, but forbade the use of US troops. During the next two years, he maintained this policy. By 1963, Kennedy became convinced that the American involvement in Vietnam should come to an end, and that even the American 'military advisors' should be withdrawn. Kennedy signed a document called the National Security Action Memorandum 263, which provided for the first withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam by December of 1963. Four days after he died, a new NSAM was signed by the new President, reversing the policy. Lyndon Baines Johnson escalated the war greatly benefiting the so-called 'military-industrial complex' in America.

## LEE HARVEY OSWALD FILE

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1939               | Born in New Orleans<br>Lee Harvey Oswald grew up partly in an orphanage, his mother was alive, but working, he never knew his father.   |
| 1952               | Living with his mother in New York, School reports record of truancy, a psychological report registers Oswald as emotionally disturbed.   |
| 1954               | Mother and son return to New Orleans.   |
| 1955               | Quits school aged 16 and joins Marine Corps. (Oswald never learned to shoot well).  |
| 1959               | Pleading ill health and the strained economic circumstances of his mother, he requests and obtains discharge. He spends three days with his mother and then travels to USSR where he attempts to gain Soviet citizenship. |
| 1961               | Marries Marina Nikolaevna Prusakova in Minsk.   |
| 1962               | Returns to USA with wife and baby.  |
| 1963 (March)       | Using assumed name, obtains mail-order 6,5 calibre Mannlicher-Carcano rifle (1940 Italian military rifle) and an expensive Japanese telescopic sight.   |
| 1963 (Summer)      | Working in New Orleans for 'Fair Play for Cuba Committee' distributing pro- Castro leaflets.  |
| 1963 (November 22) | Arrested, and charged with the shooting of Officer Tippit of the Dallas police, and President John P Kennedy.   |
| 1963 (November 24) | Shot by New Orleans mobster Jack Ruby in basement of Dallas courthouse. Jack Ruby was found guilty of murder, and sentenced to death, but died of cancer in 1966.   |

## LEE HARVEY OSWALD SUPPOSITIONS, PROBABILITIES, RUMOURS

There are many reasons why the majority of Americans now believe that Lee Harvey Oswald did not act alone in murder of President Kennedy. The finding of the Warren Commission (1964) that Oswald acted alone and was not part of a conspiracy 'domestic or foreign' was officially discredited by the 1976 House Select Committee on Assassinations, which concluded( in 1979) that in all probability there had been a conspiracy. This is especially alarming in the context of Oswald's apparent connections to various US intelligence agencies; the CIA and the FBI.

Here are some of the more conventional possibilities concerning Oswald's past:

- \* Marine Corps. Oswald may have been recruited by US intelligence whilst stationed in Japan to become a Russophile, to learn the language and to infiltrate communist groups.
- \* On his return to the US from the USSR he was not interrogated by the CIA or FBI, or if he was the records have been obliterated, at a time when American tourists returning from the Eastern Block were routinely questioned. This has been taken as evidence that Oswald must have had some intelligence role.
- \* Some contend that Oswald must have been a KGB agent, with the converse evidence that the KGB claims no record of having debriefed him when he defected to the Soviet Union in 1959.
- \* His pro-Castro work in New Orleans in '63 is often supposed to be a cover for operational links with one or more elements of US intelligence - not least as his working address was the same as that used by a violently anti-Castro lobby group too.
- \* J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, requested information on Lee Harvey Oswald in a confidential memo in 1960.

How does any of this information change your appreciation of the facts in the Oswald file?

Which information is the most important to evaluate, and attempt to verify, with reference to the assassination? Why?

List five questions, in order of priority, that you would most like to have answered about Lee Harvey Oswald? Can you justify your list?

## **THE CONCEALED THREAD: PROBLEMS OF EVIDENCE**

**"It was a journey into a maze that had grown over the years, to bewildering proportions. Yet what emerged were similar images along many of the pathways! an indication - often only gossamer - of a concealed thread emanating from a common pool**

GAETON FONZI - CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATOR-HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASSASSINATIONS

**"I didn't shoot anybody, no sir." "I'm just a patsy."**

LEE HARVEY OSWALD TO REPORTERS IN THE DALLAS COUNTY JAIL, NOVEMBER 22, 1963

**'I knew it when I just looked down and I was covered with blood... The thought immediately passed through my mind that there were either two or three people involved or more in this.'**

GOVERNOR JOHN CONNALLY TESTIFYING BEFORE THE WARREN COMMISSION, 1964

**"On the basis of the evidence before the Commission, it concludes that Oswald acted alone."**

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION(WARREN COMMISSION) ON THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN F. KENNEDY, SEPTEMBER 1964

Findings of the Warren Commission: -

- Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed President Kennedy
- Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed Officer Tippit of the Dallas Police
- Jack Ruby, acting alone, killed Lee Harvey Oswald.
- There was no credible evidence of a conspiracy, foreign or domestic.
- The shooting in the Kennedy assassination was done from a sixth floor window of the Texas School Book Depository Building, where a rifle owned by Lee Harvey Oswald was discovered.
- Only three shots were fired at President Kennedy's limousine, one of which passed through Kennedy's neck and then through the chest and wrist of Governor Connally. Another shot hit Kennedy's head, another shot missed.

**"I don't think that they (the Warren Commission) or me or anyone else is absolutely sure of everything that might have motivated Oswald or others that could have been involved."**

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON IN AN INTERVIEW, SEPTEMBER 1969

**"Up until a few months ago I was one who believed the Warren Commission conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. But all these new developments have caused me to question some of the Commission's assumptions. To me it's like a big, public boil that's going to burst."**

SENATOR RICHARD S. SCHWEIKER, SPONSOR OF A SELECT COMMITTEE TO TAKE A NEW LOOK AT THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION, SEPTEMBER. 1975

Conclusions of the 1976 House Select Committee on Assassinations:

- Scientific acoustical evidence established a "high probability" that a second gunman was firing from the front, but missed Kennedy.
- On the basis of available evidence, Kennedy "was probably" assassinated as the result of a conspiracy, the extent of which the committee could not determine.

Do any of these sources directly contradict each other? Try to divide the evidence into opposing camps. On what question(s) do the differences hinge?

If you were on a new House Select Committee, what questions would you start with, working first from the evidence above?

Having seen 'JFK' what are the first five questions you think need to be resolved in 'solving' the mysteries surrounding the assassination? What kinds of additional evidence would you look for?

Put in order of importance the following areas of evidence'

- a) The post-mortem (autopsy) report on Kennedy.
- b) Ballistics evidence.
- c) Eyewitness accounts from Dealey Plaza.
- d) CIA and FBI files on Lee Harvey Oswald
- e) CIA and FBI files on Jack Ruby.

As much of the evidence is either unavailable not yet available or open to various interpretations, consider the stated intention of the makers of 'JFK' that "(Viewers will) realise that the major issue is not who did it, or how it was done, but why it happened... They'll wonder why the Warren Commission Report left out so much evidence..."

Put these questions into their order of importance in understanding potential assassination motivation  
There are many answers to each question, not all of them suspicious.

- a) Who gained from the assassination of JFK?
- b) Why might the Warren Commission collude in a "cover-up"? What pressure was the Commission under? What bias might it exhibit?
- c) Is there an explanation for the apparent reticence of the Kennedy family in forcing further examination of the assassination?
- d) How might American politics, foreign and domestic, have been different if Kennedy had remained in The White House?
- e) Which anti-Kennedy groups had worked together prior to 1963, and in undertaking what tasks?
- f) What other evidence is there, before 1963 or since, of under-cover operations at the highest level of American political life? Do any of these operations involve assassination plots?

## USE OF EVIDENCE THE WARREN COMMISSION AND DEALEY PLAZA

"On January 20, 1964, in his first meeting with the staff of the Commission, Warren explained why he had accepted the job. "The President stated that rumours of the most exaggerated kind were circulating in country and overseas".. Some rumours, if not quenched could lead the country into a war which could cost 40 million lives. The President convinced him that this was an occasion on which actual conditions had to override general principles...He placed emphasis on the quenching of rumours, and precluding further speculation."

MELVN EISENBERG A COMMISSION STAFF LAWYER

One of the major contentions of the Warren Commission was that, though three bullets were fired, one bullet inflicted injuries on both the President and Governor Connally. Here is a small sample of some of the evidence that faced the Warren Commission in 1964, the House Select Committee in 1976, and Oliver Stone and historians today.

Read through the information and diagrams, and consider the questions that follow.

Abraham Zapruder, a Dallas clothing manufacturer, stood on the so-called grassy knoll, from which two thirds of the eye-witnesses claimed, the shots had been fired, Zapruder recorded on film the progress of the motorcade, and provides a frame analysis of the six seconds of shooting. Governor Connally is seen to react to his injuries 16 seconds after Kennedy first reacts to being shot in the throat (the first of the shots).

Warren Commission Exhibit 399, a 6.5 mm Mannlicher-Carcano bullet, was found on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital. The Warren Commission asserted that this bullet had passed through the bodies of Kennedy and Connally in the manner shown overleaf, shattering Connally's rib and wrist.

A bolt action 6.5 calibre Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, with telescopic sight was found in the Texas School book Depository. Lee Harvey Oswald was found to be the owner, having ordered the Second World War Italian rifle by mail order.

FBI tests proved that a Mannlicher-Carcano rifle could load and reshoot within 23 seconds, if the rifle was not aimed.

"I instinctively turned to my right because the sound (of the first shot) seemed to come from over my right shoulder ....but I did not catch the President in the corner of my eye...failing to see him, I was turning to look back over my left shoulder into the back seat, but never got that far in my turn... I do not believe, nor will I believe, that I was hit with the first bullet. . I heard the first shot. I reacted to the first shot and I was not hit with that bullet".

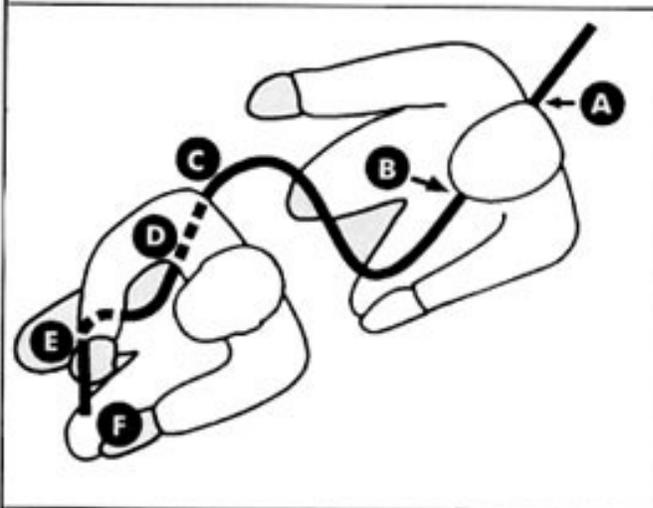
GOVERNOR CONNALLY

**ITEM A.** Shortly after noon on November 22, 1963, a procession of cars entered Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas. Within seconds, two occupants in one of these cars—U.S. President John Kennedy and Texas Governor John Connally—were shot. The map below shows the route of the motorcade. The Warren Commission, which investigated the attack, concluded that all shots came from Point 1 on this map.



**ITEM B.**

- A** Bullet enters upper right part of JFK's back
- B** Bullet hole on JFK's tie knot
- C** Bullet entry hole near Connally's right armpit
- D** Bullet exit wound through Connally's fifth rib
- E** Bullet entry and exit wounds on Connally's right wrist
- F** Bullet entry on Connally's left thigh



The map of Dealey Plaza shows the position of the presidential limousine when Kennedy and Connally were hit. Note the relative positions of the "grassy knoll" and the Texas School Book Depository.

What further questions does this evidence inspire? On which particular areas would you want more information? What are the implications of believing:

- a) that Kennedy and Connally were not bit by the same bullet?
- b) that the Warren Commission deliberately altered or ignored evidence in order to assert a "Single gunman" theory?

If you have already seen 'JFK' do you think your response to any of the evidence is altered by that experience? Do you think that we can be influenced in reading evidence by our ideas of the 'answers'? Does this help to explain any of the findings of the Warren Commission, and if so, how?

"Not everybody needs a hero, some people need a villain. For some, conspiracy theories can answer a deeply personal need to make sense of an event that, if the official version were true, would be too vast And too random to fathom... It doesn't make sense to people that a partially deranged man could have done this. The fact that a single madman could change the world in a single moment can be more unsettling than the prospect of organised action, however corrupt. The organisation suggests control; the madman suggests chaos."

LISA GRUNWALD, LIFE MAGAZINE, DECEMBER 1991

Do you think this impulse could have biased the research of the various conspiracy theorists? Try reading through the evidence above, or any other evidence you may have come across with relevance to Dealey Plaza, stating your reactions

- a) as a Warren Commissioner (remember the pressures you are under, and your own involvement in politics) how can you 'excuse evidence which counters your belief?
- b) as a conspiracy theorist (perhaps you have a theory - the Mafia, the CIA, Cubans...)

Which of the documents can be regarded as primary evidence?

Which of the documents can be regarded as irrefutable evidence?

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\* THESE BOOKS HELPED TO INSPIRE THE FILM JFK

\*These books helped to inspire the flm 'JFK'