



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on November 7, 2023

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Who Killed Kennedy?

When President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963, it threw the nation into shock. During the assassinations of President James Garfield in 1881 and President William McKinley in 1901, many people saw both the shooting and the shooter. But during the Kennedy assassination, although many people lining the street on that unusually warm late-November day saw the president get shot in the head, no one saw the shooter.



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The man accused of assassinating Kennedy was himself murdered on live national television two days later by Dallas nightclub operator Jack Ruby. It is not surprising that this raised the possibility of a wider conspiracy.

(It should be noted that the term “conspiracy theory” has come to mean an absurd assertion with no evidence. Because most of the conspiracy theories surrounding the Kennedy assassination involve questions about whether there was a second shooter firing at the president from behind a picket fence behind a “grassy knoll,” the term “grassy knoll” is almost synonymous with “conspiracy theory.”)

Speculation about the motivation for killing Kennedy began almost immediately, with the initial theories blaming “the climate of hate” in Dallas among alleged “right-wing extremists.” Then Lee Harvey Oswald was named as the prime suspect in the assassination, but he was an avowed Marxist who had defected to the Soviet Union, only to return and openly support Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. This understandably threw those on the Left into a dilemma.

A rash of conspiracy theories soon arose, arguing that Oswald had only pretended to be a communist, and was actually working for anti-communist reactionaries. Many of the conspiracy theories of the Left argued that Oswald was not even part of the conspiracy to kill Kennedy. This, of course, contradicted the conclusion of the Warren Commission, which assured Americans not only that Oswald had acted alone in murdering Kennedy, but that Jack Ruby had also acted alone in shooting Oswald to death. Over time, many on the Right understandably have had suspicions that what is now often called the “Deep State” was behind the assassination, with some of those likewise arguing that Oswald was innocent of the crime.

Any review of the various theories as to who killed President Kennedy must necessarily begin with a summary of Oswald’s rather unusual life in his 24 years on this Earth, which provide fertile soil for a variety of theories either that he did not act alone, or that he had nothing to do with the assassination but was, in his words, “a patsy.”

Was Oswald a Soviet Agent?

Lee Harvey Oswald was, according to his older brother, a vocal supporter of communism, even as a teenager. Oswald joined the Marine Corps, during which time he expressed interest to other Marines in



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joining up with Fidel Castro in Cuba, in that rebel's effort to overthrow the regime of Fulgencio Batista. After leaving the Marines, Oswald defected to the Soviet Union.

Oswald spent time as a radio operator in the Marine Corps while stationed in Japan, which gave him some knowledge about America's U-2 spy-plane program. A CIA intelligence operative serving at the U.S. embassy in Moscow said that Oswald told him that he knew some information that he was going to pass on to the Soviets. Apparently, the Soviets had been having trouble determining the altitude of the U-2 spy planes that were flying over Soviet airspace, but then in 1960 were finally able to shoot down an American U-2 with a surface-to-air missile. Interestingly, the Warren Commission withheld information about Oswald's possible knowledge of the U-2 planes in their report.

While in Russia, Oswald gave interviews to different reporters in which he strongly espoused his Marxist ideology. He attempted to renounce his U.S. citizenship, but the officer at the U.S. embassy in Moscow told him that he would have to return with some completed paperwork a few days later. Oswald never returned, but continued to live inside the Soviet Union for a couple more years.

There is little known about Oswald's time in Russia, but it is known that he had excellent living conditions in Minsk, Belarus, which, according to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, was the site of an espionage training school. Oswald was given a job as a metal worker in a radio and television factory.

While in the Soviet Union, Oswald married a Russian woman, Marina Nikolaevana Prusakova, a 19-year-old who had been a member of the Komsomol Communist Party youth organization. She joined Oswald when he returned to the United States in 1961. Despite his return to America, Oswald kept in touch with the Soviets. Of particular interest is Oswald's visit to the Soviet embassy in September 1963, at which time he met with Valery Kostikov, a staff officer of the KGB connected with a "liquid affairs" department, whose responsibilities included assassinations.

Oswald continued to support communist causes in the United States. He infamously passed out pro-Castro literature on the street corners of New Orleans for the so-called Fair Play for Cuba Committee. He also railed against well-known anti-communists such as General Edwin Walker, whom he called a "fascist" and allegedly tried to assassinate shortly before the Kennedy assassination.

One problem with the theory that the Soviet KGB was involved in the JFK assassination, however, is explaining what the Soviet Union would gain by murdering a U.S. president. Some have theorized that the KGB might have made use of Oswald as an agent, but had nothing to do with his part — whatever it was — in killing Kennedy.

Was It the Cubans?

While the communists in the Soviet Union may not have had any interest in killing Kennedy, a communist closer to home — Fidel Castro — might have had a good reason to get rid of JFK. After taking over Cuba, Castro established a totalitarian communist state complete with trials and executions of opponents, seizures of private weapons and other private property, and the welcoming of Soviet technicians and advisors. He also seized foreign-owned businesses, including American enterprises.

A plan to take out Castro was conceived during the Dwight Eisenhower administration by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) by training anti-Castro Cuban exiles living in Florida to land in Cuba and lead a revolt against the dictator. Kennedy inherited the plan, giving his approval, but it failed at the infamous Bay of Pigs invasion in early 1961. Even before becoming president, Kennedy had denounced



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Castro during his 1960 presidential campaign and called for stronger action against his regime.

Other plans to kill Castro were concocted within the CIA, including poisoning and even contracting the hit out to the American Mafia. Apparently, Kennedy approved of these schemes — or, at least, Castro believed that he did — and, according to this theory, Castro retaliated by killing Kennedy first, using Oswald or others. Oswald, after all, the “secretary” of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, had given an interview on New Orleans radio and television condemning the alleged mistreatment of Castro by the U.S. government.

But Castro was not the only Cuban who might have had a motivation to assassinate Kennedy. Another theory involves anti-Castro Cubans, who felt betrayed by President Kennedy during the Bay of Pigs operation. They had been led to believe that the Kennedy administration would provide air cover during their landing at the Bay of Pigs, and that Kennedy had reneged. Historians argue over whether Kennedy approved of air cover then reneged, or whether he had always opposed such direct involvement and the anti-Castro Cubans had been misled by CIA operatives about air cover.

A man involved in the effort to run guns to anti-Castro Cubans was Robert McKeown, who, according to the Warren Commission, was also involved in smuggling with Jack Ruby.

Was It the Mafia?

The Mafia is mentioned in several conspiracy theories involving the assassination of President Kennedy, including both pro-Castro and anti-Castro theories, as well as those involving the CIA. Some narrow it down to the mob itself, which allegedly had its own reasons to want Kennedy dead.



Conspiracy? When Dallas nightclub operator Jack Ruby — a man with ties to the Mafia — shot Oswald while the accused assassin was being transferred from the city jail to the county jail, this led millions of Americans to suspect a broader conspiracy. (AP Images)

New Orleans gangster Carlos Marcello was arrested as an illegal alien and deported on the direct order of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in the spring of 1961 as part of his war on organized crime. Marcello made his way back to the United States, and reportedly described President Kennedy as a dog. RFK, Marcello supposedly said, was the tail, and a dog will keep biting you if you only cut off his tail. But if the head of the dog is cut off, the dog will die, including the tail.



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The House Select Committee on Assassinations, which in 1979 determined that the Kennedy assassination was a conspiracy (without specifying who might have been involved in any such conspiracy), concluded that there were multiple connections between Marcello and the assassination. For example, their report noted, Marcello's Dallas associate, Joe Civello, was close to Jack Ruby. Ruby had moved to Dallas from Chicago, where he had some involvement with gangsters going back to the days of Al Capone. A Marcello employee, David Ferrie, was Lee Harvey Oswald's Civil Air Patrol leader. The mob probably felt betrayed by Kennedy. Without the mob, Kennedy very well could have lost Illinois in the 1960 presidential election. Also of interest is that the mob has had interactions with U.S. intelligence agencies going back to the Second World War.

Clearly, Mafia figures had motivation to kill Kennedy, and while that does not mean that they had anything to do with the assassination, it is understandable that they must be considered in any conspiracy theory involving the murder of the president.

Did the CIA or Other Intelligence Agencies Kill Kennedy?

Another persistent theory as to who murdered President Kennedy is that intelligence agencies — the CIA in particular — had a motivation to eliminate him. It should be noted that saying “the CIA killed Kennedy” does not mean that everyone in that agency was in on the plot, but that certain individuals within the CIA were.

When President Harry Truman signed the legislation creating the CIA, he expressed concern that he was creating a separate government. He later said that he regretted his role in its creation because of its “cloak and dagger operations.” (More recently, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) even commented that then-President Donald Trump should understand that he should not publicly criticize the CIA because it has the ability to retaliate in many different ways.)

President John F. Kennedy also came to despise the CIA, even saying, “I will splinter the CIA into a thousand pieces and scatter it to the winds,” and he fired its longtime director, Allen Dulles. For whatever reason, after Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon Johnson named Dulles to the Warren Commission, which seemed determined to exclude any conclusion that anyone other than Oswald had anything to do with the assassination.

As with most of these conspiracy theories, there are multiple “sub-theories,” including the belief that Oswald was a CIA agent, and that his “defection” to the Soviet Union was just to create a cover as some sort of communist sympathizer or agent. Under this theory, Oswald was assigned to kill JFK because he was going “soft” on communism, with other shooters operating behind the “grassy knoll” in Dealey Plaza.

Others point out that the CIA has always had pro-communist elements, or at least elements that were pushing for a globalist government.

So did the Deep State globalist cabal kill Kennedy? Supporters of this theory point to the internationalist ideology of Dulles and his brother, John Foster Dulles (secretary of state for President Eisenhower), and say that their public opposition to communism was just a cover in their use of the fear of communism to build up a one-world socialist state.

In these scenarios, individuals such as Oswald would likely not even understand the real purpose of



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their role in the assassination, so it doesn't really matter if Oswald was a pro-communist or a fake. Some point to Oswald's statements after his arrest that he was a "patsy," indicating that he realized he had been set up to take the fall.

Other Conspiracy Theories

Other conspiracy theories include involvement by either the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), right-wingers, Lyndon Johnson, or the military-industrial complex. The theory involving the FBI centers on its director, J. Edgar Hoover, who was believed to be in line for forced retirement by the Kennedy brothers after the 1964 election. Much of the same argument has been advanced concerning Vice President Johnson, who was possibly going to be dumped from the ticket in 1964. Evelyn Lincoln, President Kennedy's secretary, wrote in her book *Kennedy and Johnson* that just three days before the assassination, Kennedy confided to her that he intended to replace Johnson in 1964.

Roger Stone, who wrote *The Man Who Killed Kennedy: The Case Against LBJ*, argued that not only was Johnson going to be removed as Kennedy's running mate in 1964, but Attorney General Robert Kennedy was going to prosecute Johnson for corruption. Stone contends that Johnson had connections with the underworld and inside the U.S. government itself that could get the job done.

Certainly, some of Johnson's post-assassination actions raise eyebrows. For example, he ordered the presidential limousine in which Kennedy was riding shipped to Detroit — within 72 hours of the assassination — where the body was replaced and the interior refurbished. This is curious both for evidentiary and historical reasons. Johnson even ordered the suit worn by Texas Governor John Connally — who was also shot, though not fatally, alongside JFK — cleaned and pressed before it was presented to the Warren Commission. He also issued an executive order locking a massive amount of evidence and documents away in the National Archives until 2039.

Next in line: Vice President Lyndon Johnson was sworn in as president on Air Force One following Kennedy's assassination in Dallas. Some have speculated that Johnson himself may have masterminded the hit on Kennedy. (AP Images)



When Johnson created the Warren Commission, he told Chief Justice Earl Warren, the commission's chairman, and Senator Richard Russell, another member, it was important for them to conclude that Oswald acted alone. He claimed that otherwise the public might believe the Soviet Union was the



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culprit, which could lead to a war. In 1978, Senator Richard Schweiker — who would have been Ronald Reagan’s running mate in 1976 had he taken the nomination away from President Gerald Ford (another member of the Warren Commission) — told author Anthony Summers that the Warren Commission was “set up at the time to feed pablum to the American public,” adding that it was part of “one of the biggest cover-ups in the country’s history.”

Then there is the “climate of hate” theory, which holds that right-wingers in Dallas, including oil tycoons such as H.L. Hunt and Clint Murchison, wanted Kennedy dead because of his growing softness on communism. Although there is little evidence for right-wingers being involved in the assassination, this belief spawned most of the early conspiracy theories. Left-wingers were unwilling to accept that a communist, Lee Harvey Oswald, had killed a left-of-center president. Gerald Posner, author of *Case Closed*, who argued that Oswald and Ruby acted alone, notes that the first conspiracy book — *Who Killed Kennedy?* — was written by an American communist, Thomas Buchanan. That was followed by *Rush to Judgment* by another liberal, Mark Lane, who likewise argued that Oswald was not really a communist.

Another interesting theory is that Kennedy was challenging the monopoly of the Federal Reserve System. In June 1963, Kennedy issued an executive order calling for the issuance of U.S. notes through the U.S. Treasury, rather than through the Fed. According to this theory, this action could have caused the assassination.

Others argue that Kennedy was going to pull American forces out of Vietnam after the 1964 election, and that the military-industrial complex wanted a more intense U.S. involvement in Vietnam and believed that a President Johnson would give them that. Two days before the assassination, Kennedy approved an Accelerated Withdrawal Program, which would have ended American involvement in Vietnam in 1965. Two days after the assassination, Johnson canceled the plan.

Did Oswald Act Alone?

As Posner argues in *Case Closed*, these theories cannot all be true (although some combination of them is quite possible). Accordingly, he makes the case that while others had motivation and were no doubt happy about Kennedy’s demise, Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. Under this theory, Oswald just had an unexpected opportunity to kill Kennedy, for reasons fully known only to him. He was an ideological communist who had also tried to murder General Edwin Walker, a well-known conservative activist in Dallas.

Posner argues that Oswald got his job at the Texas School Book Depository before it was known publicly that JFK was going to be in Dallas, much less that the presidential motorcade was going to pass by the building. (Of course, if Oswald was part of a Deep State conspiracy, it would be quite plausible that such information would be known to powerful Deep Staters, who would then have passed that information on to their agent, Oswald.)

Those who contend that Oswald had nothing to do with the assassination must explain why he was the lone employee to leave the building that day. Why did he go back to his rooming house and get a gun? Why was he walking down the street in the direction of a bus station, which could have taken him all the way to Mexico, when confronted by Dallas police officer J.D. Tippit? For those who argue that Tippit was part of a conspiracy, and that his role was to kill Oswald, why did Tippit not even have his gun



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drawn when Oswald murdered him?

Posner has his own questions to answer. He buys the “magic bullet” theory, which argues against multiple shooters by arguing that one bullet passed through Kennedy, through Governor Connally’s back, through his wrist, then into his thigh, and finally ended up in near-perfect condition on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital. And if Oswald was the lone shooter, firing from behind, why did a motorcycle cop behind and to the left of Kennedy get sprayed by Kennedy’s blood and brain matter, which is what would have happened if JFK was shot from the front and to the right from behind the picket fence on the grassy knoll?

After 60 years, questions understandably remain about the assassination.



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