

JFK DOCUMENTS

THE CONSPIRACY THEORIES THRIVE

The granddaddy of all conspiracy theories has re-emerged with the release of most of the National Archives' final trove of records about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. His death and the investigations that followed were simultaneously some of the most secretive and public events in modern history:

Lee Harvey Oswald

Immediately after the shooting, a witness told reporters that as shots rang out, he saw a rifle extended and then withdrawn from a window on the fifth or sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository. Lee Harvey Oswald, a former Marine, was quickly identified as the assassin. He had become "a changed man with a new and bewildering personality" when he returned to the U.S. in 1962, according to his wife, Marina, whom he married in Russia. He was shot dead by Jack Ruby while in police custody on Nov. 24.

The Warren Commission

A week after Kennedy's death, President Lyndon Johnson convened a government body to investigate, led by Chief Justice Earl Warren. Many of its findings, like the infamous "magic-bullet theory," have been contested. Ultimately, the commission ruled that Oswald had acted alone. The commission, saying that the "publicizing of unchecked information had led to 'myths' and 'distorted' interpretations," also tried to discredit the multiplying conspiracy theories behind the assassination. It didn't work.

Investigated again and again

At least two more official federal government panels convened in the 1960s and 1970s to relitigate the shooting. In 1969, Attorney General Ramsey Clark appointed four medical experts to re-examine scientific evidence, in part as a response to an investigation by the New Orleans district attorney, Jim Garrison. Clark's panel backed the Warren Commission's assertion that only two bullets had killed the president. In 1979, the House Select Committee on Assassinations released a report saying that untold conspirators had probably participated in the killing, citing newly uncovered evidence and scientific advances. According to the committee, Oswald fired three shots and an unidentified person fired one shot from the grassy knoll in front of the president's limousine. The committee cited witnesses in its findings of a second gunman, including, "a police officer who said he heard a shot from the knoll and ran immediately toward it. There he encountered a man who said he was with the Secret Service and displayed a badge. ... A check of the placement of Secret Service agents, however, disclosed that none had been in the area of the knoll."

"JFK" and rewriting history

In 1969, a jury took only 50 minutes to acquit a man named Clay Shaw of conspiring to assassinate Kennedy. The Oliver Stone movie "JFK" in 1991 re-imagined both that 34-day trial and the extensive investigation by Garrison, the New Orleans district attorney. Garrison accused anti-Communist and anti-Castro extremists in the Central Intelligence Agency of plotting the president's death to thwart an easing of tension with the Soviet Union and Cuba, and to prevent a retreat from Vietnam. The film renewed calls for answers but was criticized as a rewriting of history. A year after it was released, the President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act passes. The law mandated the release of all the government archives on the assassination within 25 years, by Oct. 26, 2017.

Case closed?

Thousands of records have been declassified since. Some files detailed the president's plans to exit the conflict in Vietnam; others showed how Fidel Castro feared the U.S. would retaliate against Cuba after the assassination. The release of the final papers may only fuel more conspiracy theories, as did the first set of files, made public in 1993.

NEW YORK TIMES



Associated Press

The debate over Lee Harvey Oswald continues 54 years after the death of President John F. Kennedy. Was he the lone killer?

INTRIGUE, HISTORY, HINTS AND RIDDLES

President Donald Trump ordered the release of more than 2,800 records related to the John F. Kennedy assassination on Thursday, but bowed to pressure from the CIA, FBI and other agencies to delay disclosing some of the most sensitive documents for another six months. The thousands of pages that were published online by the National Archives describe decades of spies and surveillance, informants and assassination plots. Here's a look at some tantalizing tidbits in newly released documents. You can read them all at archives.gov.

It was felt that the \$150,000.00 to assassinate FIDEL CASTO plus \$5000.00 expense money was too high.

\$100,000 to kill Fidel Castro: A 1964 FBI memo describes a meeting in which Cuban exiles tried to set a price on the heads of Fidel Castro, Raul Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara. "It was felt that the \$150,000.00 to assassinate FIDEL CASTO plus \$5,000 expense money was too high," the memo noted. At a subsequent meeting, they settled on more modest sums: \$100,000 for Fidel, \$20,000 for Raul and \$20,000 for Che.

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TOP SECRET

"6. A proposed price list is as follows:

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| a. Informer | \$20,000 - \$ 5,000 |
| b. Cell Leader | 40,000 - 10,000 |
| c. Block Leader | 45,000 - 20,000 |
| d. Department Head | 57,500 - 26,000 |
| e. Foreign Communist | 97,000 - 47,000 |
| f. Government Officials | 100,000 - 55,000 |
| g. Castro | .02¢ " |

Or was Fidel only worth two cents? Another document describes the well-known CIA scheme called Operation Bounty that sought to overthrow Cuba's government, and established a system of financial rewards for Cubans for "killing or delivering alive known Communists." The CIA would let Cubans know of the plan by dropping leaflets in the air, but there were rules: A reward would be paid to an individual upon presentation of a leaflet, with "conclusive" proof of death and the dead person's party/revolutionary membership card. Cubans who played along would get a certain dollar amount based on the title of the Communist who they had killed. They'd get up to \$100,000 for government officials and \$57,500 for "department heads." Castro, perhaps for symbolic reasons, would earn a Cuban only two cents.

"The article also states that more people "are working to cover up the facts than are trying sincerely to unmask the assassination plot."

Ned Touchstone, editor of "The Councilor," has been identified by a confidential informant (NO 1223-R) as a member of the Original Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. The source advised in December, 1963, that Touchstone claimed that the Klan had documented proof that President Johnson was formerly a member of the Klan in Texas during the early days of his political career.

UNRECORDED

Lyndon B. Johnson in the KKK? In an internal FBI report from May 1964, an informant told the FBI that the Ku Klux Klan said it "had documented proof that President Johnson was formerly a member of the Klan in Texas during the early days of his political career." The "documented proof" was not provided.

21 Deputy Director of Plans, is that correct?
 22 MR. HELMS: I believe so.
 23 MR. BELIN: Is there any information involved with
 24 the assassination of President Kennedy which in any way shows
 25 that Lee Harvey Oswald was in some way a CIA agent or an agent

UNRECORDED

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And JFK's real killer was? The records also reveal a deposition given before the presidential Commission on CIA Activities in 1975 by Richard Helms, who had served as the agency's director. After a discussion of Vietnam, David Belin, an attorney for the commission, turned to whether the CIA was involved in Kennedy's killing. "Well, now, the final area of my investigation relates to charges that the CIA was in some way conspiratorially involved with the assassination of President Kennedy. During the time of the Warren Commission, you were Deputy Director of Plans, is that correct?" Belin asked. After Helms replied that he was, Belin then asked: "Is there any information involved with the assassination of President Kennedy which in any way shows that Lee Harvey Oswald was in some way a CIA agent or an agent ...?" Then, abruptly, the document cuts off.

WASHINGTON POST

AN ASSASSINATION REFRESHER COURSE

As the longtime government explanation goes, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, by a lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald. Oswald fired three bullets from a nearby building, striking Kennedy and Texas Gov. John Connally. But much of the public has never fully bought that explanation. Some of the people, theories and other aspects of the assassination:

Zapruder film: A 26-second home video by Abraham Zapruder is the clearest recording available of the moment Kennedy was shot. It has been thoroughly pored over in hopes of finding the slightest of clues. The film is now too brittle to run through a projector, but in 1999, the government paid Zapruder's heirs \$16 million for it.

The "magic bullet": On Sept. 27, 1964, government investigators released an 888-page report on the assassination, forming the official explanation of the events. It concluded that Oswald acted alone, and that Jack Ruby acted alone in killing Oswald two days later. It placed no blame on suggested conspirators like communists, foreign governments, the U.S. intelligence community or right-wing conservatives. Among its more controversial contentions was that a single bullet — derisively referred to as a "magic bullet" — struck both Kennedy and Connally, who survived the shooting.

Lee Harvey Oswald: Oswald, a former Marine, fired three shots from the Texas School Book Depository, the Warren Commission concluded. He denied that he had shot the president, calling himself a "patsy." He was arrested hours later after shooting a police officer and ducking into the nearby Texas Theatre.

Jack Ruby: Two days after the presidential assassination, Oswald was being transferred from a city jail to a county jail when Ruby stepped out from a crowd and shot him at close range as millions of people watched on live television. He died in jail in 1967.

Grassy knoll: A recent poll by FiveThirtyEight found that 33 percent of Americans believed one person was solely responsible for the assassination, while 61 percent believed others were involved. A poll in 1988 found that 13 percent of Americans believed Oswald acted alone. Skeptics say it would have been impossible for Oswald to fire fast enough to hit both Kennedy and Connally, or for the same "magic bullet" to strike both men. (Connally said he thought he was struck by a separate bullet.) The explanation: a second shooter on what has become known as the "grassy knoll" ahead of the motorcade.

Umbrella Man: It was a beautiful day in Dallas. So why was one man holding up an umbrella? The man, who can be seen in the Zapruder film, became the object of fascination. Could he have been signaling messages to gunmen? Was his umbrella rigged with some kind of weapon? Josiah Thompson, a researcher, gave the mysterious figure a name: Umbrella Man. "The only person under any umbrella in all of Dallas, standing right at the location where all the shots come into the limousine," he said in 2011. "Can anyone come up with a non-sinister explanation for this?" Umbrella Man could. Louie Steven Witt testified in Washington in 1978 that his umbrella was meant to protest the Nazi-appeasement policies of Joseph Kennedy, the president's father. The elder Kennedy supported British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who often carried an umbrella, and he hoped that the president would get the message.

Mexico City: Oswald visited Mexico City for six days shortly before the assassination. He said he was there to obtain visas from the Cuban and Soviet Union embassies. But some people suspect that he worked with other people there to plan the attack, and his actions during his time there remain mysterious.

NEW YORK TIMES