

Grace Hiserote

Mr. Graham Rutherford

Oxford Scholars

13 November 2023

Shattered Reflections: Unraveling JFK's Assassination Conspiracies  
in the Psyche of Modern America

It is undeniable that John F. Kennedy's (JFK) death had a substantial effect on the American people, and even sixty years later conspiracy theories plague the public. Unlike many other conspiracy theories, those around the assassination of JFK seem to grow stronger and more pertinent with age. Why could this be, and why does conspiracy around the events of that fateful day of November 22, 1963, in Houston Texas seem to be fresh and unhealed in the mind of a nation? Additionally, this event was a pivotal moment in modern US history that forever changed the psychology of America. So, while there are many answers to these questions, much of their persisting nature is due to complex factors such as the history of the event, the psychology behind the American psyche, and the manifestations of this in modern American pop culture.

While much is still unknown about the particulars of the Kennedy assassination, and even more is speculated, there are a few widely agreed-upon facts. President Kennedy and his wife, Jackie, were in Texas on a two-day trip through five different cities to rouse Texas Democratic support for his planned reelection in 1964. On November 22, 1963, JFK, his wife, John Connolly, the Democratic Texas Governor, and Connolly's wife got into a custom, black Lincoln Continental and headed toward Kennedy's next venue to deliver another speech. However, once they rounded Elm Street at 12:30 pm, shots rang out, and Kennedy was hit twice, through his neck and head, one of which also passed through Governor Connelly's shoulder and wrist.

Afterward, he was hurriedly taken to Parkland Memorial Hospital where he was announced dead at 1:00 pm. Moreover, bullet casings from a rifle, later learned to belong to Lee Harvey Oswald, were found on the sixth floor of the building across from the plaza in addition to him being spotted on the sixth floor only half an hour before the shooting occurred. Needless to say, law enforcement spread the description of Oswald's likeness shortly after the shooting, and while Oswald was leaving a boarding house he was confronted by a police officer who thought he fit the description. He shot and killed this police officer and fled to a nearby movie theater, where he was apprehended. Once Oswald was in custody he proclaimed to be "a patsy" and thus innocent, but ultimately nothing was proven since when he was being relocated to the country jail after two days of questioning, he was shot and killed by Jack Ruby, a local nightclub owner with alleged ties to the Chicago Outfit, a notable mob. However, even the aforementioned facts have been tirelessly debated and even now are called into question.

As such, conspiracy theories have run rampant since the assassination, and still to this day remain very much alive. Some of the most popular being that the assassination was orchestrated by the Cuban Government, that it was carried out by organized crime, and the most common being that Kennedy was killed by the CIA itself due to his policies not aligning with the lucrative military-industrial complex. Regardless, all of the theories share the same idea that the American government actively lied about the truth or at minimum, withheld vital information. When asked about what he believes to be true regarding the assassination, my grandfather, Peter Mazzetti, responded "There was an unbelievable article in the Wall Street Journal, it's hard to know whether it's factual about the conspiracy that the CIA knew there was going to be an attempt on his life, but never passed it along....everybody knew about it, but nobody did anything. If it's true, shame on us." Needless to say, very few believe that the assassination was

as cut and dry as it was originally made out to be in the Warren Commission. Yet, there seems to be more to the enduring spirit of the conspiracies than simply political sabotage or facts misaligning. As stated by Mazzetti “Nobody could make sense of what happened,” and that “It was the end of the age of innocence.” The lack of closure of the assassination has led many to look for their own answers outside of the governmental canon in order to cope with the aftereffects of such a truly scarring national experience and the long-lasting effect on the American psyche. As a result, the national faith within long-respected government institutions was shaken by the underlying fear of their dishonesty and thus disrespect of the American public. Moreover, the previous era of McCarthyism left many Americans paranoid, and thus they turned this paranoia, whether just or otherwise, inward to the US government itself. Lastly, Kennedy was a universal symbol of American idealism and strength during the Cold War, and the fear of facing a world in which he no longer served as commander-in-chief left many Americans with a deeply seated fear of uncertainty.

Kennedy’s assassination was such a large disturbance that its effects can be felt in the myriad of works on or referencing the subject as well as the many conspiracies. This happened almost immediately after the assassination “Among the first books to challenge the Warren Report were Mark Lane’s *Rush to Judgment: A Critique of the Warren Commission’s Inquiry into the Murders of President John F. Kennedy, Officer J.D. Tippit, and Lee Harvey Oswald* (1966) and Edward Jay Epstein’s *Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth* (1966)”(Brittanica). This continued further with the creation of an almost neverending stream of documentaries, the most notable of which being *JFK Revisited* and the new, *One Day in America*. Yet, one of the most influential withstanding pieces of media regarding the Kennedy assassination is the Oliver Stone movie, *JFK*, (1991) which depicts both fact and fiction through

the retelling of the assassination. Additionally, in the movie, there was a "... little trailer at the end of the movie. And he said: All of the government's records, 95 percent of the government's records, are not public and won't be made public until 2039, or something. There was a deadline on this material and it was far, far in the future," According to Jeff Morely, *The Intercept*. The resulting popularity of this movie led to many pressuring Congress into disclosing this information, ultimately leading to the JFK Records Act. However, the government has been slow to release this information, and only in June of this year have 99% of these documents been released to the public; yet, many of which still contain significant redactions. This American obsession with media detailing the Kennedy assassination is another reason that many conspiracy theories have made such a lasting impact on American culture. Essentially, due to Hollywood capitalizing off of public confusion and mistrust, the Kennedy assassination has been sensationalized to the point that it is woven into the very fabric of America itself.

Overall, the assassination of JFK marked a turning point in modern American history as the end of an age of innocence spurred by flourishing American nationalism arrived. The Kennedy assassination resulted in abounding confusion and as many questions as there were conspiracy theories to answer them. In turn, the initial distrust of the government paired with subsequent events like Watergate and the MK Ultra program, illegal human experimentation, have propagated American mistrust. This has led many to question the validity of the official record of events, and subsequently, the institutions which declared them to be true. The public's fascination has created many blockbuster movies, intriguing documentaries, and page-turning books, effectively cementing the Kennedy assassination in the psyche of the American people. In the end, regardless of the truth, whatever that may be, the scars and triumphs of the Kennedy

administration and assassination have been immortalized as a defining event in the history and culture of America.

Works Cited

- “Conspiracy Theories.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.,  
[www.britannica.com/event/assassination-of-John-F-Kennedy/Conspiracy-theories](http://www.britannica.com/event/assassination-of-John-F-Kennedy/Conspiracy-theories).  
Accessed 10 Nov. 2023.
- Deconstructed. “Deconstructed: What We Found in the New JFK Files.” *The Intercept*, 27 Dec.  
2022, [theintercept.com/2022/12/22/deconstructed-jfk-files-cia/](https://theintercept.com/2022/12/22/deconstructed-jfk-files-cia/).
- Fossum, Sam. “National Archives Concludes Review of JFK Assassination Documents with  
99% Made Public | CNN Politics.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 1 July 2023,  
[www.cnn.com/2023/06/30/politics/jfk-assassination-documents-national-archives-review/  
index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2023/06/30/politics/jfk-assassination-documents-national-archives-review/index.html).
- John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston. ““JFK: One Day in America’  
Review: Assassination Interpretation.” *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company,  
Nov. 2023,  
[www.wsj.com/arts-culture/television/jfk-one-day-in-america-review-assassination-nation  
al-geographic-hulu-disney-20a2feac](https://www.wsj.com/arts-culture/television/jfk-one-day-in-america-review-assassination-national-geographic-hulu-disney-20a2feac).
- Mazzetti, Peter. Interview. Conducted by Grace Hiserote. 12 November 2023.
- Stone, Oliver, and Oliver Stone. *JFK*.
- Tikkanen, Amy. "Jack Ruby". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 18 Sep. 2023,  
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jack-Ruby>. Accessed 12 November 2023.

Wallenfeldt, Jeff. "assassination of John F. Kennedy". Encyclopedia Britannica, 9 Nov. 2023,  
<https://www.britannica.com/event/assassination-of-John-F-Kennedy>. Accessed 12  
November 2023.