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Donald E. Wilkes Jr. *University of Georgia School of Law*, wilkes@uga.edu

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JFK Blown Away—Hooray! Kennedy's Dallas Visit Roiled Hate Groups

"JFK, blown away, what else do I have to say" -Billy Joet's song, "We Didn't Start the Fire."

xactly 43 years ago, on Nov. 22, 1963, 46-year old President John F. Kennedy was assassinated at 12:30 p.m. In Dealey Plaza in downtown Dallas, TX.

Dallas was then, as Matthew Smith notes in JFK: The Second Plot (1992), "the southwest hate capital of Dixie... In its politics and in its people, Dallas represented the right wing as far as it could go," Before and during his Dallas visit, local right-wingers busied themselves to make JFK unwelcome. They were angry and indignant that JFK was coming to their city. In fact, at the very time shots were being fired at President Kennedy, a right-wing protestor stood a few feet away, heckling 3FK by comparing him to Neville Chamberlain.

Later that morning, there were disparaging protests by rightvingers against JFK along the route of the presidential motorcade as it traveled from the airport to downtown Dallas. As the motorcade drove through the suburbs, with President Kennedy only minutes from death, an unfriendly-looking man in a business suit stood on a sidewalk in an aggressive posture holding a protest sign which screamed: "Because of high regard for the presidency I hold you JFK and your blind socialism in complete contempt." (A photograph of this right-wing protestor with his sign, taken by Dailas newspaper photographer Tom Dillard, is reproduced on p. 438 of Richard B. Trask's Pictures of the Pain: Photography and the

Assassination of President Kennedy (1994).)
In Dealey Plaza, at the time of the actual assassination, there was at least one protestor present publicly expressing his scorn for the president. On the sidewalk near the Stemmons Freeway traffic

Witt denied that the umbrella he had in Dealey Plaza symbolized the appeasement practices of English Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain (who often sported a black umbrella), or that the umbrella was intended to suggest that JFK was appearing Communism the way Chamberlain had appeased Hitler. This denial is not credible. Among right-wingers, it was an article of faith that JFK's supposedly soft, weak-kneed policies against the threat of Communism were the equivalent of Chamberlain's futile attempts to appease Adolf Hitler.

REJOICING

Not even Kennedy's death at 1 p.m. at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas stopped right-wingers from publicly displaying

their loathing of JFK. As William Manchester notes in his classic The Death of a President (1967): "At 3:05 p.m., when 80 percent of the American People were in deep grief, an NBC camera panned toward a group of spectators outside Parkland's emergency entrance and picked up a young man with a placard that read, 'Yankee, Go Home."

Those who angrily and contemptuously protested JFK's visit, and the many others who shared their views, were jubilant when they heard of the violent death of a man they believed to be a fiendish traitor. It is an historical truth that right-wingers all over America received the news of the assassination with celebration. There is plenty of evidence that numerous right-wingers, especially the radical ones, heartily huzzaed the JFK slaving, although they soon decided to conceal their exuberance and later denied having cheered. William Manchester's book, for example, discusses the "initial glee" with which right-wingers greeted news of the assassination. "An Oklahoma City physician beamed at a grief-stricken visitor and said, Good. I hope they got Jackie." Manchester reports that men whooped and threw their hats in the air, and he quotes an Amarillo, TX woman as saying, "Hey, great, JFK's croaked!" Soon, however, the right-wingers realized that their public gloating was a ghastly mistake, whereupon they began concealing their happiness. "[T]hey were anxious to avoid the undertow of public

opinion," Manchester says.

The far right of the political spectrum has always been a hotbed of hate. Today right-wingers give us hate talk radio, hate radio personalities, hate TV comnentators and hate books and articles. But what Gerry Spence calls "the new conservative hate culture" is not really new. In 1963, the hate of the right-wingers was directed at John F. Kennedy, a hatred so nathological and warped that it induced them to exult over the horrible public murder of a reformist American president, a war hero, a man of vision and compassion, the symbol of a hopeful generation. But the frenzied hatred that caused right-wingers to make merry when JFK was slain is the same delirious hatred that today motivates right-wingers to mock and cruelly imitate the physical symptoms of Michael J. Fox's Parkinson's Disease.

Americans have forgotten that Dallas right-wingers bitterly protested Kennedy's visit to Dallas; that the presidential motorcade was greeted with signs expressing contempt for JFK; that even as JFK's limousine came under rifle fire, right-wingers were present taunting him; that even after he was a corpse there were protesters nearby displaying insulting placards. Americans have also forgotten the joy with which right-wingers reacted to the assassination

These matters must not be allowed to sink into oblivion. The lesson to be learned is that right-wing elements poison our body politic by practicing the politics of hate, and must be stopped. As Chief Justice Warren said in a eulogy delivered in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda two days after the assassination: "[Acts such as JFK's murder] are commonly stimulated by forces of hatred and malevolence... What a price we pay for this fanaticism... If we really love this country, if we truly love justice and mercy, if we fervently want to make this nation better for those who are to follow, we can at least abjure the hatred that consumes people, the false accusations that divide us, and the bitterness that begets violence."

Donald F. Wilkes Jr.

Donald E. Wilkes, Jr. teaches in the University of Georgia School of Law

STIRRING HATRED

When the president died, the cheering stopped and for days America was filled with gloom and mourning. There were, however, in this country people who rejoiced at the news of the assassination. Right-wingers, the truth must be told, were delighted by Kennedy's death. As far as they were concerned, Kennedy deserved to die, die, die,

During his presidency, right-wingers utterly detested President John F. Kennedy, and the extreme right-wingers hated Kennedy with a venomous, malignant ferocity bordering on insanity. Because he was a liberal and pro-civil rights, right-wingers—particularly the segregationists and racists, the opponents of civil rights, the states-righters, the free enterprise loonies, the wealthy ultra-conservatives, the religious bigots, the anti-Castro Cubans, the U.N. haters and the lunatic fringe anti-Communists—regarded JFK as dangerous, destructive and downright traitorous.

For a glimpse of the seething hatred right-wingers felt for JFK, consider the false, malicious and inflam matory accusations leveled at Kennedy on the day of his fatal visit to Dallas and in the immediately preceding days.

Two days before President Kennedy's trip to Dallas, right-wingers began circulating around the city some 5,000 anti-Kennedy handbills. Titled "Wanted for Treason," these leaflets were designed to look like a police "wanted" poster, with front and profile photographs of Kennedy's head.

WELCOME TO DALLAS

On the very day JFK visited Dallas and died, the local newspaper, The Dallas Morning News, featured a full-page, black-bordered anti-Kennedy advertise ment prepared and paid for by persons affiliated with the John Birch Society, one of the most infamous right-wing extremist organizations of the 1960s. The ad claimed to be the work of "The American Fact-

Finding Committee," in reality a nonexistent organization, Bernard Weissman, listed on the ad as the chairman of the Committee, however, did exist; he was the person who actually placed the ad Weissman later testified before the Warren Commission. He was one of the few witnesses before that body who deemed it prudent to appear accompanied by an attorney.

The ad began with a sarcastic "Welcome Mr. Kennedy to Dallas," a city which had been the victim of "a recent Liberal smear attempt" and which had prospered "despite efforts by you and your administration to penalize it for non-conformity to 'New Frontierism." The ad then posed a series of belligerent, insulting loaded questions, including:
"Why has Gus Hall, head of the U.S. Communist Party, praised

almost every one of your policies and announced that his party will endorse and support your re-election bid?"
"Why have you ordered or permitted your brother Bobby, the

Attorney General, to go soft on Communists, fellow-travelers, and ultra-leftists in America, while permitting him to persecute loyal Americans who criticize you, your administration, and your leadership?"

"Why have you scrapped the Monroe Doctrine in favor of the



WANTED

POR

TREASON

THIS MAN is wanted for treasonous activities against the United States

- Betraying the Constitution (which
 he swore to unhold): Is betraying the constitution which he swore to uphold!

 He is turning the sovereignty of the U.S. over to the communist controlled United Nations.

 He is betraying our firends!(cuba, Katanga, Portugal) and befriending our enemies (Russia, Yugoslavia, Poland).

 2. He has been WRONG on innumerable issues affecting the security of the U.S. (United Nations-Berlin well-Missle removal-Cuba-Wheat deals-Test Ban Treaty, etc.)

- 3. He has been lax in enforcing Communist Registration laws.
 4. He has given support and encouragement to the Communist inspired racial riots.
 5. He has till legally invaded a sovereign State with federal troops.
 6. He has consistantly appointed Anti-Christians to Federal office Upholds the Supreme Court in its Anti-Christian rulings.

 Aliens and known Communists abound in Federal offices.
 7. He has been caught in fantastic LIES te the American people including personal ones like his previous marraige and divorce].

sign, only a few feet from the slow-moving presidential (imousine during the very moments rifle bullets were slamming into JFK's body, a mysterious man stood wearing a suit and, unlike anyone else there, holding up an open, black umbrella on this warm, sunshiny day. (The "Umbrella Man," as this enigmatic character soon was dubbed, is visible in the Zapruder film. He also can be seen in a famous still color photograph of the assassination taken by amateur photographer Phil Willis. The Willis photo is reproduced on p. 190 of Robert J. Groden's The Killing of a President (1993).)

The identity of the Umbrella Man remained a secret for 15 years. Then, in September 1978, a man named Louie Steven Witt appeared before the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations and admitted that he was the Umbrella Man. He told the Committee that he been there in Dealey Plaza to heckle JFK, and that he displayed the umbrella because he was under the impression that brandishing an umbrella would irritate JFK. He testified: "I was going to use this umbrella to heckle the President's motorcade... Being a conservative-type fellow, I sort of placed him $[{\sf JFK}]$ in the liberal camp, and I was just sort of going to kind of do a little heckling... I just knew it was a sore spot with the Kennedys... I was carrying that stupid umbrella intent (on) heckling the President."