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# The CIA and the JFK Assassination, Pt. 2

By Donald E. Wilkes, Jr.

This is the 2nd Part of a series. Click here to read [Part One](#).



How much did the CIA know about plans to assassinate President Kennedy?

## **CIA Obstruction of the Warren Commission**

In the 1970s several Congressional investigations discovered there had been a disturbing pattern of misconduct by the CIA in regard to the Warren Commission's investigation of the JFK assassination. The Agency had engaged in a cover-up by suppressing information it should have disclosed to the Commission, and in still other ways it had impeded the Commission's investigation.

CIA documents subsequently released under the Freedom of Information Act or the 1992 JFK Assassination Records Act expand our awareness of the Agency's misconduct.

With respect to the CIA and the Warren Commission, we now know, at a minimum, that:

Some of the testimony given to the Commission by both the director and the deputy director of the CIA was false or misleading.

The CIA was "reluctant" to share information with the Commission in regard to some CIA activities, including its Cuban operations. As a general rule, the CIA waited to receive a specific inquiry from the Commission before it would pass on information, which caused difficulties, because sometimes the Commission did not ask the right questions.

There are instances where there was unreasonable delay by the CIA in responding to Commission requests for information. There is even a CIA document, released in the 1990s, which proves that the CIA's chief of counterintelligence preferred "waiting out the Commission" rather than promptly responding to certain Commission requests for information.

The CIA did not inform the Commission of CIA plots, including the CIA-Mafia plots, to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

The CIA did not inform the Commission that it had been operating massive covert actions against Cuba since 1960; and the CIA's own investigation into any possible Cuban connection to the assassination, whether pro-Castro or anti-Castro, was passive in nature.

The conspiratorial atmosphere of violence which developed over the course of three years of activities by the CIA and anti-Castro Cuban exile groups should have but did not lead CIA investigators to ask whether Lee Harvey Oswald or Jack Ruby, who were known to have at least touched the fringes of the Cuban community, were influenced by that atmosphere. (Ruby, a Dallas nightclub owner and gangster-type with organized crime connections, murdered the

handcuffed Oswald in a Dallas police station two days after the JFK assassination.)

The CIA's inquiry for the Commission was deficient on the specific question of the significance of Oswald's contacts with pro-Castro and anti-Castro groups for the months preceding the assassination.

The CIA did not tell the Commission that its counterintelligence liaison office had been monitoring Oswald's travels between November 1959 and October 1963.

The CIA did not tell the Commission that in September 1963, three months before the assassination, an FBI report about Oswald sent to the CIA had been routed to and signed by a number of officers in the CIA's covert operations division.

Although it did give the Commission a copy of the Oct. 10, 1963 cable about Oswald that CIA headquarters sent to its Mexico City office, the CIA—perhaps in order to conceal an Agency relationship with Oswald—did not inform the Commission that the cable had deviously withheld requested information the CIA possessed about Oswald.

The CIA did not tell the Commission that shortly before the Oct. 10 cable was sent, six senior CIA counterintelligence officials discussed Oswald among themselves

The CIA did not tell the Commission that immediately after the assassination it began running a covert operation designed to falsely link accused assassin Oswald to Castro's Cuba. Specifically, it did not reveal that the anti-Castro student exile group which, the day after the assassination, published a special newspaper edition suggesting that Oswald had killed JFK in behalf of Fidel Castro, was secretly funded and controlled by the Agency. The Agency, that is, did not reveal to the Commission that, within 24 hours of the assassination, it was, covertly and via a front group, already

disseminating disinformation blaming the assassination on Lee Harvey Oswald and Fidel Castro.

If they did not, senior CIA officials should have realized that their agency was not utilizing its full capacity to investigate Oswald's pro-Castro and anti-Castro connections.

It is still not clear why senior CIA officials permitted the Commission's investigation to go forward and why they permitted the Commission to reach its conclusions without all the relevant information.

In its dealings with the Commission the CIA was, overall, deficient in the collection and sharing of information.

In part because of CIA obstruction, the Commission's investigation into the possibility of conspiracy in the JFK assassination was inadequate, and the Commission's no-conspiracy conclusion was too definitive.

It is, therefore, proven beyond reasonable doubt that the CIA withheld information from the Warren Commission and impeded the Commission's investigation, and that as a result the Commission's investigation of whether the assassination resulted from a conspiracy was inadequate.

### **CIA Obstruction of the House Assassinations Committee**

Having already obstructed the investigation of the Warren Commission in 1963-64, the CIA then proceeded to obstruct the House Assassinations Committee's investigation in 1976-79.

The Assassinations Committee conducted its investigation of whether Lee Harvey Oswald was a CIA agent and whether the JFK assassination resulted from a conspiracy on the understanding that it had been granted full access to CIA files and that the Agency was

telling the Committee the truth. In its Report the Committee conceded that the support the CIA gave the Warren Commission had numerous deficiencies, but nonetheless the Committee did agree with the Warren Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald never worked for the CIA.

Many years later it turned out that the CIA had hoodwinked the Committee by withholding pertinent documents and by repeatedly lying to or misleading the Committee.

As late as 15 years after the House Assassinations Committee issued its Report, Notre Dame law professor G. Robert Blakey, who served as the Committee's general counsel, still believed that the CIA had been forthright in its dealings with the Committee. In a 1993 interview Blakey said: "Those who had a stake in what happened in 1963 and 1964 were no longer in control of the Agency. The people in...the CIA that we dealt with in my judgment were genuinely interested in the truth coming out...When it came time to analyze the candor that the Agency had with us, it's my judgment that...in the end we had unlimited access [to the relevant CIA files and documents]."

During the next decade Blakey changed his mind, having discovered by then that the Committee had been duped by the Agency. In 2003 he withdrew his previous comments, announcing: "I now no longer feel comfortable with the conclusions I expressed here in 1993 in reference to the Central Intelligence Agency..."

This, in his own caustic words, is what Blakey now thinks about both the CIA's trustworthiness and the effects the Agency's misconduct had on the Committee's investigation:

"I no longer believe that we were able to conduct an appropriate investigation of the Agency and its relationship to Oswald. Anything that the Agency told us that incriminated, in some fashion, the

Agency may well be reliable as far as it goes, but the truth could well be that it materially understates the matter.

“What the Agency did not give us none but those involved in the Agency can know for sure. I do not believe any denial offered by the Agency on any point. The law has long followed the rule that if a person lies to you on one point, you may reject all of his testimony.

“I now no longer believe anything the Agency told the committee any further than I can obtain substantial corroboration for it from outside the Agency for its veracity...

“We also now know that the Agency set up a process that could only have been designed to frustrate the ability of the committee in 1976-79 to obtain any information that might adversely affect the Agency.

“Many have told me that the culture of the Agency is one of prevarication and dissimulation and that you cannot trust it or its people. Period. End of story.

“I am now in that camp.”

It is, therefore, proven beyond reasonable doubt that the CIA withheld information from the House Assassinations Committee and impeded the Committee’s investigation, and that a result the Committee’s investigation of Lee Harvey Oswald and his possible ties to the CIA was inadequate.

### **The Sept. 16 Revelation about the CIA Cover-Up**

Scarcely two months ago there was the first of two explosive revelations about the CIA’s cover-up of information on the JFK assassination.

On Sept. 16, 2015, the CIA declassified and released to the public the previously top secret national security briefing paper it had presented to President Lyndon B. Johnson on Nov. 25, 1963, just three days after the assassination of Johnson's predecessor. The only thing the briefing paper told President Johnson about Lee Harvey Oswald, the alleged assassin who had been murdered while a prisoner in Dallas police custody the day before, was this short paragraph:

"Press stories to the effect that Lee Harvey Oswald recently visited Mexico City are true, according to our information. Oswald visited both the Cuban and Soviet embassies on 28 September. He was trying, we are told, to arrange for visas so that he could travel to the USSR via Havana. He returned to the US on 3 October."

This paragraph is literally true but incredibly misleading. As Jefferson Morley puts it: "Some people in the CIA knew much more than that about the accused assassin...The CIA didn't tell LBJ that certain senior officers had known about Oswald's actions in Mexico City almost as soon as they occurred." The paragraph did not tell LBJ that the CIA had photographed Oswald when he visited the Soviet and Cuban embassies in Mexico City or that it had wiretapped his telephone calls to the embassies. The paragraph did not tell the new president that the CIA had been monitoring Oswald's actions since 1959. Nor did it tell the president that in the months preceding the assassination senior CIA officials involved in counterintelligence and covert activities had been discussing Oswald, or that in those discussions the officials had, as Morley says, "expressed no security concerns" about Oswald. If the CIA had been truthful with LBJ, Morley astutely notes, "some senior CIA officers could have—and probably should have—lost their jobs."

"The Nov. 25, 1963 presidential briefing represents one of the first signs of the CIA's cover-up of information relating to JFK's assassination," Morley points out. "Within days of JFK's assassination senior CIA officials were concealing their knowledge of

JFK's accused killer from ...the American people, and from the new president."

Morley's conclusion that the cover-up originated with CIA officials responsible for counterintelligence and covert operations appears to be correct.

Stunningly, therefore, the recent disclosure of the Nov. 25, 1963 briefing paper proves that the very day President Kennedy was buried, and before the Warren Commission had even been appointed, the CIA had already commenced its cover-up, in the process displaying no compunctions about deceiving a new president in regard to the cold-blooded murder of his predecessor 72 hours earlier.

### **The Oct. 6 Revelation about the CIA Cover-Up**

The second recent revelation relating to CIA suppression of JFK assassination information—a revelation journalist Steve Huff justly calls "a bombshell"—took place on Oct. 6 with the simultaneous publication in both Huffington Post and Politico Magazine of journalist and author Philip Shenon's amazingly titled piece, "Yes, the CIA Director was Part of the JFK Assassination Cover-Up."

Shenon's piece was dynamite, because it brought to public attention an article by David Robarge, the chief historian of the CIA and a member of the Agency's history staff since 1996. Robarge's article, "DCI [Director of Central Intelligence] John McCone and the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy," first appeared in *Studies in Intelligence*, the CIA's classified internal magazine, in September 2013. Quietly declassified and released with redactions to the public a year later, the article languished in obscurity until Shenon's piece.

Robarge is a CIA mouthpiece, and his article is not impartial. It acknowledges that the CIA covered up information it should have

disclosed but describes the cover-up as “benign.” It falsely says that Robert F. Kennedy, JFK’s brother and Attorney General, had overseen the CIA plots to murder Fidel Castro. Ever since the existence of those plots became a matter of public knowledge, the CIA and its admirers have tried to mitigate the Agency’s guilt by claiming it was just following orders from JFK and his brother. The truth is that neither JFK nor RFK authorized the plots.

Some of the information in Robarge’s article simply confirms what has long been known about the Warren Commission and the CIA:

The CIA did not inform the Commission of “Agency plans to assassinate [Fidel] Castro.”

The “CIA supported the Warren Commission in a way that may best described as passive, reactive, and selective.”

The CIA’s “cooperation [with the Commission]...was narrower than the numbers [i.e., the number of CIA documents and reports sent to the Commission] might suggest [because the] CIA produced information only in response to Commission requests...and did not volunteer material even if potentially relevant...”

But Robarge’s article also contains these other damaging admissions:

In withholding information about CIA covert activities, including the plots to kill Castro, from the Warren Commission, CIA Director John McCone and his Agency acted on their belief in “the best truth,” which was that the Oswald-was-the-lone-assassin theory was true—which in turn meant that the CIA deemed information on its own covert activities not relevant to the Commission’s investigation. The Agency, that is, secretly presumed that Oswald was the single assassin, and then used this presumption to justify deceiving the Commission.

In 1978, when questioned by the House Assassinations Committee about the CIA's failure to tell the Warren Commission about CIA plots to kill Fidel Castro, "McCone's answer was neither frank nor accurate" to the extent he testified that had not known of the plots at the time. "By the time [McCone] testified to the Commission in May 1964, he had known about the Mafia plots to kill Castro for nine months."

"In the long run, the decision of McCone and the Agency leaders in 1964 not to disclose information about [the] CIA's secret anti-Castro schemes might have done more to undermine the credibility of the Commission than anything else that happened."

McCone's statement to the Warren Commission that Lee Harvey Oswald had never been directly or indirectly connected to the CIA was "literally true" but "incomplete". McCone did not reveal that Oswald apparently was the source of a 1962 CIA report on the factory in Minsk where Oswald was an employee during his sojourn in the Soviet Union.

McCone "was not being forthright with the Commission" when he did not reveal that the Agency had secretly (and illegally) opened Oswald's mail.

In withholding certain information from the Warren Commission, McCone and the CIA participated in what Robarge labels a "benign cover-up"—that is, "a process designed more to control information than to elicit or expose it."

Former CIA Director Allen Dulles, who had been fired by JFK but was now on the Warren Commission, "advise[d] Agency officers of the questions his fellow commissioners most likely would ask."

Although Dulles knew about the CIA murder plots against Castro (which had been formed when he was CIA Director), he not only did not reveal them to his fellow Commissioners, but kept "a dutiful

watch over Agency equities and work to keep the Commission from pursuing provocative lines of investigation, such as the lethal anti-Castro covert actions.”

“McCone and Dulles both wanted to draw the Commission’s attention away from [the] CIA and encourage endorsement of the FBI’s conclusion soon after the assassination that a lone gunman, uninvolved in a conspiracy, had killed John Kennedy.”

Despite its alluring title and its acknowledgment that there was CIA cover-up, Philip Shenon’s Huffington Post/Politico piece borders on an apologia for the CIA. It gives the Agency the kid-gloves treatment and minimizes the significance of its cover-up. The lying, shifty McCone, who was up to his eyebrows in deceiving and misdirecting the Warren Commission, is depicted sympathetically: he was in a difficult position; his motives were pure; he truly believed almost from the beginning that “Oswald, for as yet undetermined motives, had acted alone in killing John Kennedy.” On the first page of Shenon’s puff piece, immediately below where his name appears, is a flattering photograph of the smiling McCone, impeccably dressed in suit and tie, his distinguished white hair immaculately coiffured, striding through a lovely flower garden with his attractive, smiling, beautifully-dressed wife walking at his side. What a fine handsome man and what an adorable loving couple! Whatever he did couldn’t be that bad!

Who is Philip Shenon, this CIA chum? A former New York Times reporter and author, Shenon is a Warren Report true believer, but with a slight twist. Like the Warren Commission, he thinks that Oswald was a lonely misfit and a pro-Castro leftist and that Oswald, acting by himself, fired all the shots that killed JFK. But he also thinks that Oswald committed the murder at the behest of pro-Castroites and in behalf of Fidel Castro. This is the thesis of Shenon’s 2013 book *A Cruel and Shocking Act: The Secret History of the Kennedy Assassination*. In other words, to quote David Talbot, author of *Brothers: The Hidden History of the Kennedy*

Years (2008), "Shenon continues to recycle the myth—long propagated in CIA circles—that Fidel Castro was behind the assassination." Shenon is a water-carrier for the CIA's sinister, diversionary, and long-discredited "Oswald did it, but Castro was behind it" canard—a canard which, as explained above, the CIA was anonymously circulating 24 hours after the assassination.

This explains why Shenon's gentle assessment of the CIA cover-up is sprinkled with dubious claims that tend to make the Agency look good and that bolster its pet Oswald-was-the-single assassin theory. Thus Shenon says that the ballistics experts who have studied the evidence support the lone-gunman theory (in reality, some do but most don't); that Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy oversaw some of the CIA plans to assassinate Castro (actually, he didn't); and that Robert Kennedy suspected that Castro was behind the JFK assassination (actually, RFK suspected the CIA, anti-Castro Cubans, and the Mafia). It explains why Shenon refers dismissively to "the still-popular conspiracy theory that the spy agency was somehow behind the assassination," as if there could be no reasonable grounds for suspecting CIA involvement.

Neither Robarge nor Shenon finds it convenient to mention the fact that since at least 1967 the CIA through its media assets has secretly waged a propaganda war to discredit Warren Report critics and defend the Oswald-as-sole-assassin theory.

### **Why the Agency Covered up the CIA-Mafia Plots**

The CIA's claim is that it suppressed information about the existence of its plotting with the Mafia to murder Fidel Castro solely on account of its sincere belief that, since Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole assassin, the information was not pertinent to the assassination investigation. The Agency has been spouting this claim ever since the CIA-Mafia plots were exposed by Congress 40 years ago.

The Agency's explanation of its motives is plausible but must be rejected. It is too late in the day to believe CIA protestations of the pristineness of its purposes. The Agency obstructed the official investigation of a presidential murder and deceived the investigators. It covered up the truth. It lied about the cover-up for half a century. Even today it obstinately, unrepentantly and insolently declares its cover-up was "benign."

The truth appears to be that the Agency covered up "as a matter of self-preservation," says assassination investigator and former University of Havana law professor Arnaldo M. Fernandez. In other words, the Agency covered up in order to cover its ass. This is fully explained by Fernandez.

The first purpose of the cover-up, according to Fernandez, was to conceal the CIA's relationship with Lee Harvey Oswald, including its close surveillance and extensive monitoring of Oswald. This explanation makes perfect sense. The Agency has consistently behaved as if it has something to hide about its relationship with Oswald.

As Fernandez explains: "The key is not that the CIA revealed nothing about the assassination attempts on Fidel Castro, but that it revealed very little about its close tabs on Oswald..." The CIA's cover-up "withheld information that might have prompted an aggressive investigation about Oswald's ties to Castro" in order to "avoid[] a deep investigation of Oswald's ties to itself [the CIA] and to anti-Castro exiles."

The second purpose of the cover-up, Fernandez reveals, was to conceal the CIA's spectacular error in failing to keep track of Oswald from the time he was in Mexico City until the assassination. This explanation also makes perfect sense. As Fernandez explains: "If Oswald, a former Marine re-defector from the Soviet Union, was a true believer in Marx, with the zeal to engage in a variety of pro-Castro activities in New Orleans, then it's a colossal CIA blunder

that he would be allowed to travel to Mexico City and visit both the Cuban and Soviet embassies—which were under heavy surveillance by the Agency; and that, afterward, the CIA would lose track of him, even after the former Russian defector allegedly met with a Soviet Representative in their embassy. And lose track of him to such a degree that no one from the FBI, the police, or Secret Service even talked to him upon his return to Dallas, despite it being seven weeks before President Kennedy was slated to visit the city. And incredibly, the re-defector would now actually end up on the Kennedy parade route, walking through any FBI or Secret Service security scheme in broad daylight...In fact, six senior CIA officers...knew all about 'leftist Lee' six weeks before JFK was killed."

## **Conclusion**

After adamantly denying it for half a century, the CIA (with "artful spin," notes Jefferson Morley) has conceded that its critics were right: under the supervision of its Director, it did participate in a cover-up in regard to the Warren Commission's investigation of the JFK assassination. An American president was murdered, and the Agency now confesses that it suppressed relevant information and obstructed the first official investigation of that murder.

By admitting it impeded the Warren Commission's search for the truth about the JFK murder in the 1960s, the Agency also has impliedly confessed to similarly impeding the second official investigation of the assassination, undertaken by House Assassinations Committee in the 1970s.

As a result of this unspeakable atrocity by the CIA, the public shooting death of the President of the United States was never adequately investigated; the conspirators behind the murder were never identified, caught or punished; and an ominous black cloud of profound dissatisfaction and unsettling suspicion permanently lingers over our country. A youthful, vibrant, charismatic leader who inspired hopes for a brighter future was shot in the head while

sitting inches from the First Lady and in full view of numerous spectators; and the search for the truth about how such a monstrous event could ever occur was, it is now evident, laughably insufficient, due in large part to the CIA.

To crown all, the Agency, which for 50 years falsely denied it had engaged in a cover-up, now has the unimaginable effrontery to describe its cover-up as “benign.”

Are there any words adequate to convey the malevolence and turpitude of such an organization? To describe the enormity of the harm this organization did to the people of this country and to our political system?

Finally, we must never forget the corrupting effect of a cover-up by a government agency such as the CIA. For, as Steve Huff sensibly asks, “just how many other ‘benign’ diversions took place during the JFK investigations,” whether by the CIA, the FBI, the Secret Service, or even by the Warren Commission itself?

Johnny, we hardly can believe you were treacherously ambushed and your fiendish assassins allowed to get away with it.

*Donald E. Wilkes, Jr. is a professor emeritus at UGA, where he taught in the law school for 40 years. This is his 42nd published article on the JFK assassination.*