

Public Relations and the JFK Case

The 50-Plus Year Battle for Public
Perception, Opinion and Resolution

By Mike Kilroy

Pre-Assassination PR

Setting the stage

- Cold War battle of ideologies
- USSR-style communism considered a viable – and dangerous – competitor to US-style capitalist democracy around the world
 - Dangerous militarily but also financially to US global business interests
- Cuba becomes flashpoint – Bay of Pigs
- ‘Hot war’ danger peaks during Cuban Missile Crisis



Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil (DRE)

- Background
 - Student Revolutionary Directorate in English
 - One of the largest and most well-known anti-Castro exile groups
 - Secretly funded and guided by CIA for propaganda purposes in US and Latin America
 - Started by CIA's David Atlee Phillips in Cuba then later reformed in US
- November 1962 Today Show appearance post missile crisis
 - JFK asks CIA to intercede with group to tell them to stop
- Richard Helms, CIA director of covert operations, steps in
 - Strengthens relationship rather than cuts them off
 - Personally appoints new DRE case officer – George Joannides
 - Helms has Joannides report directly to him
 - In '63, Joannides rises to chief of Psychological Warfare at JM/WAVE station in Miami



CIA officer
George Joannides

Fair Play for Cuba Committee

- What was the FPCC?
 - U.S. liberal group to reinstate relations with Cuba
 - Famous liberal intellectual members, e.g. Mailer, Capote, Sartre
 - Chapters around country
 - Support from Castro
- In 1963, FBI and CIA step up campaign to discredit FPCC
 - Part of COINTELPRO program later used against anti-war demonstrators, civil rights movement
 - Anti-FPCC campaign led by CIA's David Atlee Phillips



"SUMMARY OF HIS SAID PLAY FOR HONORABLE A. MARSHALL"

TO BELIEVE:

Mr. Carlos Bringuier, Delegate in New Orleans of the Cuban Student Directorate, wants to make public that Mr. Lee H. Oswald, Secretary of the "Fair Play for Cuba Committee" has declared himself a "Marxist" in a debate held at WDSU Radio at 8:00 p.m. today and directed by Bill Gray and Bill Blaker.

Mr. Oswald who spent about three years living in Moscow, who agreed in the debate that he gave his passport to the American Embassy in Moscow in order to obtain the Soviet citizenship, refused to make public the name of the members of his organization and declared himself a "Marxist".

In that program the Delegate of the Cuban Student Directorate asked Mr. Oswald to change the name of his organization from "Fair Play for Cuba Committee" to "Fair Play for Russia Committee", because in that before Castro the Cubans had 1 atom bomb for every 47 persons in Russia had 1 for every 100 persons; 1 radio for every 2 persons in Cuba against 1 for every 20 persons in Russia; 1 T.V. set for every 10 persons in Cuba against 1 for every 25 in Russia; and right now Castro destroyed the Cuban economic and made Cuba a Russian Colony. Bringuier said that the Cubans who are escaping every day from Cuba don't agree with Oswald in that he represent the People of Cuba in that debate. Finally added that the only thing Mr. Oswald could represent would be a Russian spy.

We are proud, as Cubans, that another time we discovered a - - - - - agent, an agent of those ideologies against which thousands of young Americans had been dying fighting in Korea, Laos, Viet Nam and more recently here another time, trying to preserve freedom and democracy in the World

we, Cubans who want to regain our freedom in Cuba, and at the same time protect your freedom, ask you Americans for four things:

- 1) Help us to destroy Communism in Cuba.
- 2) Write to your Congressman asking for a full investigation on Mr. Lee H. Oswald a confessed "Marxist".
- 3) Help those organizations such as "INCA" directed by Mr. Edward Butler, whose lives are dedicated to fight communism all over the world and specially in Latin America.
- 4) Be alerted alert about the Communist infiltration in this Country, because Khrushchev said "I will bury you".

New Orleans, August 21st., 1963.

Carlos Bringuier
Carlos Bringuier
New Orleans Delegate,
Cuban Student Directorate.

Oswald and the DRE

- Aug 1963 LHO visits Carlos Bringuier, publicity director for DRE in New Orleans
- Shortly after seen handing out FPCC fliers
- Street fracas, trial and jail
- Publicity – newspaper stories, TV interview, radio interview and debate
 - DRE, Ed Butler of INCA, LHO all contact media
 - LHO outed on-air as Russian defector
 - DRE issues press release warning about LHO
 - LHO becomes most well-publicized assassin in history *before* the crime

Post-Assassination PR

First 24 hours

- Ed Butler and the Oswald film
 - Oswald handing out pro-Castro fliers
 - Aired by CBS and other networks before LHO charged with JFK's murder
 - Not from WDSU-TV in New Orleans – personally delivered by anti-communist propagandist aligned with CIA
- DRE – ‘The Presumed Assassins’
 - First JFK conspiracy theory – Castro did it
 - New Orleans activities of LHO as pro-Castro leftist included in major papers next day
 - DRE holds press conference to push for reprisal attack on Cuba
 - WDSU-TV debate tape sent to ‘Howard’ of CIA in Miami – Joannides – used in CIA broadcasts in LATAM
- LBJ admin call to Dallas District Attorney Wade
 - Shuts down talk of ‘communist conspiracy’



November 25, 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. MOYERS

It is important that all of the facts surrounding President Kennedy's Assassination be made public in a way which will satisfy people in the United States and abroad that all the facts have been told and that a statement to this effect be made now.

1. The public must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large; and that the evidence was such that he would have been convicted at trial.

2. Speculation about Oswald's motivation ought to be cut off, and we should have some basis for rebutting thought that this was a Communist conspiracy or (as the Iron Curtain press is saying) a right-wing conspiracy to blame it on the Communists. Unfortunately the facts on Oswald seem about too pat--too obvious (Marxist, Cuba, Russian wife, etc.). The Dallas police have put out statements on the Communist conspiracy theory, and it was they who were in charge when he was shot and thus silenced.

3. The matter has been handled thus far with neither dignity nor conviction. Facts have been mixed with rumour and speculation. We can scarcely let the world see us totally in the image of the Dallas police when our President is murdered.

I think this objective may be satisfied by making public as soon as possible a complete and thorough FBI report on Oswald and the assassination. This may run into the difficulty of pointing to inconsistencies between this report and statements by Dallas police officials. But the reputation of the Bureau is such that it may do the whole job.

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DEC 9 1963

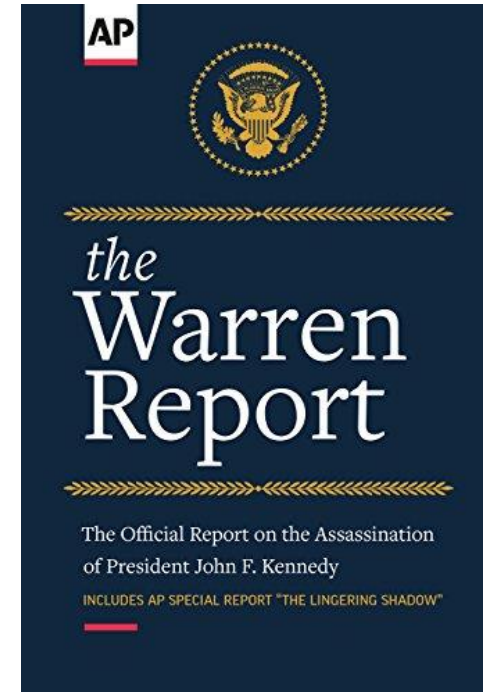
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ENCLOSURE

Next 48 hours

- Jack Ruby real-time fact checks Dallas PD spokesperson regarding FPCC during press conference
- Oswald's death changes everything – conspiracy talk in the air
- Cronkite assures public of thorough investigation
- Hoover's reactions:
 - Nov. 23 phone call transcript with LBJ
 - "The evidence against Oswald is not very very strong."
 - Nov. 24 after LHO shooting by Ruby
 - "There is nothing further on the Oswald case except that he is dead."
- Dep. AG Katzenbach Nov. 25 memo focuses federal investigation on LHO
 - "The public must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large."

1964 Warren Report

- James Tague and emergence of the ‘magic bullet’
- NY Times and CBS News
 - Accept conclusions immediately and never conduct independent investigations
- Advent of ‘citizen researcher’
 - Mark Lane – Rush to Judgment, then Six Seconds in Dallas, others follow
 - Many credible revelations
 - Few journalists tackle issue (‘Unanswered Questions’ by Sylvan Fox best from journalist of that era)
- Story too complex, controversial for media
- Helms serves as CIA liaison to WC – lies under oath, never mentions DRE relationship

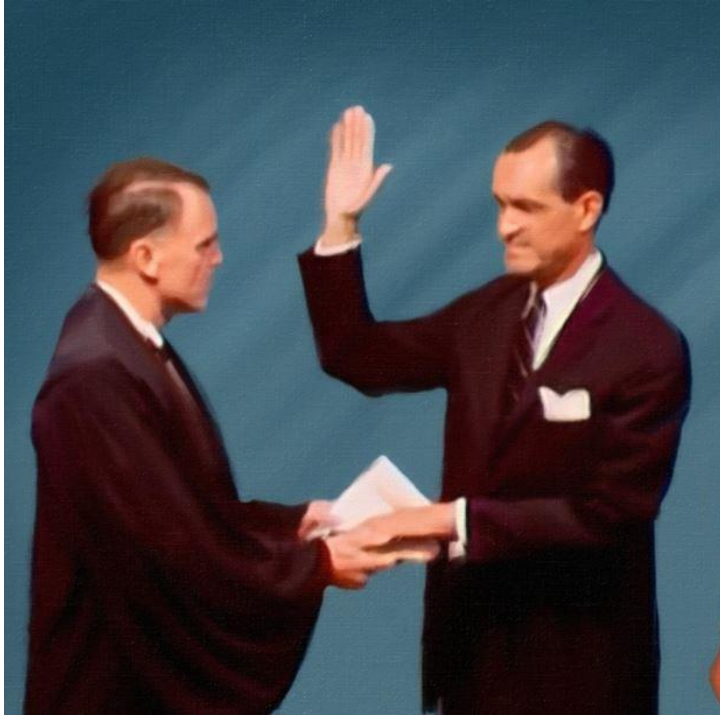


1967 - Jim Garrison

- Opens New Orleans investigation into assassination as district attorney
- CIA responds with 'conspiracy theory' meme
 - [Countering Criticism of the Warren Report](#)
 - Sent to agents and friendly editors as part of Operation Mockingbird program
- NBC does hour-long special (hit job) on Garrison
- Garrison gets 30 minutes in primetime for response due to court ruling
- Infamous Tonight Show appearance



1976-1979 HSCA



- Second major federal investigation
 - After Church Committee found CIA/mafia worked together to kill Castro
 - Also after Zapruder film was first shown on national TV
- Initially led by two big-city prosecutors of complex mafia/union murder conspiracies – Sprague and Tanenbaum
 - Immediately focus on David Atlee Phillips
- Sprague gets negative press due to CIA assets in Congress and media
 - Sprague leaves after refusing to sign CIA secrecy oath and Tanenbaum follows
- Replaced by Robert Blakey (who signs oath and focuses on mob)
- CIA denies any relationship with DRE during time of Oswald
 - Shuts down further document releases
 - Helms lies under oath again, never discussing DRE or Joannides



1990s – ‘JFK’ movie & aftermath

- Media attack Stone and movie before release
- Popularity of film and public outrage leads to JFK Records Act
 - Unanimously passed by Congress and signed by Bush I
- Media mostly ignores records except for handful of independent writers led by former WaPo reporter Jefferson Morley
- **2001 Morley discovers Joannides was DRE case officer in time of Oswald – also served as CIA liaison to Congress in HSCA in ‘70s**
 - Years of articles by Morley about Joannides, Helms, Angleton show CIA’s ‘keen interest’ in LHO
 - Decades-long lawsuit against CIA to get Joannides records as case officer
- 2003 HSCA former chief counsel Blakey [open letter](#)
 - “Can no longer trust anything the CIA told HSCA or WC about case”
- 2005 [open letter](#) to CIA from cross-section of JFK authors (including leading ‘lone nut’ theorists Bugliosi, Mailer & Posner) – published in NYT Book Review section

Recent status

- 2017 - Trump stymies release of last records, including those of Joannides, due to pressure from CIA and FBI
- January 2019 - [Letter](#) signed by 60+ prominent Americans including children of RFK, calls for public tribunal into 1960s political assassinations
- Nov. 22, 2019 – First in-depth, independent and relevant look at JFK story from records in mainstream media (USA Today)
 - [JFK files: CIA spy in Cuba ‘befriended’ Castro, Che; played key role amid nuclear-war fears](#)
 - Let’s reader be the judge – no ‘theories’ but also no knee-jerk acceptance of WC
 - Shows context and lead-up to DRE’s Today Show appearance that set Helms in motion
 - DRE case officer before Joannides immediately suspicious of official story
 - A major victory for real journalism and US public to get complete story of assassination



Need to stay out of the rabbit
hole to get to resolution