

The Media and the Assassination

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In the popular 1998 movie *The Truman Show* (starring Jim Carrey and directed by Peter Weir), a character named Christof created a huge, fully contained bubble environment in which the title character Truman Burbank has been raised since birth. Truman doesn't know it, but Christof has been broadcasting every moment of Truman's life to the world on television by means of thousands of hidden cameras. Truman's only knowledge of the world comes from the one Christof has built for him, and as Christof so succinctly put it, "We accept the reality of the world with which we are presented." When Truman attempts to leave his hometown to see the rest of the world, He notices that the place he has lived in all his life presents him with strange obstacles to his escape and irrational coincidences. Truman's faith in his world serves to imprison him for most of the film. But when he finally comes to believe that the truth is other than what he has been presented with, Truman's mental freedom enables him to achieve physical freedom.

How many of us realize that, to some degree, we also live in a world that is not wholly as it appears? And like Truman's world, the barriers to our discovering the reality of that which goes on around us are not so much physical as psychological. The media presents to us a version of the world that does not tell the full story, and as Benjamin Franklin once said, "Half the truth is often a great lie." If, as the famous biblical quotation engraved in the wall at CIA headquarters says, the truth will set us free, then what do lies do to us? Keep us imprisoned, like Truman, in a fictitious bubble where we are "protected" from the real world? The lesson of *The Truman Show* is especially relevant to those who wish to make sense of the media's reportage on the assassination of President Kennedy. The truth is out there and it is not hard to find, but we must seek it out for ourselves. As this article will show, it is unlikely that the truth will ever be given to us freely by the media.

One of the first questions people raise when confronted with evidence of conspiracy in the Kennedy assassination is this: if any of the evidence for conspiracy is valid, why haven't the major media organizations told us? Wouldn't breaking the story about a conspiracy be a career-maker for an investigative reporter?

On the surface of it, the question appears to be legitimate. We assume that the purpose of the news media is to give us facts about newsworthy events to help us interpret life in our time. But is that a legitimate assumption?

Thomas Jefferson used to hold the opinion that the purpose of the media was to tell us the truth. His opinion changed radically once he knew more about the events being (mis)represented. Jefferson realized the importance of the press and the threat a less-than-honest press presents to a nation. In 1787, Jefferson said, "the basis of our government is the opinion of the people," and given a choice between "a government without newspapers or newspapers without government," he would

choose the latter. In 1799, having learned a bit more, he wrote, "Our citizens may be deceived for a while and have been deceived; but as long as the press can be protected, we may trust to them for light." But by 1807, the veil of idealism had completely fallen from Jefferson's eyes:

Nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper. Truth itself becomes suspicious by being put into that polluted vehicle. The real extent of this misinformation is known only to those who are in situations to confront facts within their knowledge with the lies of the day. I really look with commiseration over the great body of my fellow citizens, who, reading newspapers, live and die in the belief that they have known something of what has been passing in the world in their time; whereas the accounts they have read in newspapers are just as true a history of any other period of the world as of the present, except that the real names of the day are affixed to their fables. General facts may indeed be collected from them, such as that Europe is now at war, that Bonaparte has been a successful warrior ... but no details can be relied on. I will add that the man who never looks into a newspaper is better informed than he who reads them; inasmuch as he who knows nothing is nearer to truth than he whose mind is filled with falsehoods and errors...

Perhaps an editor might begin a reformation in some way such as this. Divide his paper into four chapters, heading the first, Truths; second, Probabilities; third, Possibilities; fourth, Lies. The first chapter would be very short.¹

One might be tempted to dismiss Jefferson's comments as overly cynical and not applicable to our time. But our situation is very similar. Today, most people get their news from television. A 1992 study conducted by the Center for the Study of Communication at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst found that people who watched a lot of TV news had more incorrect answers regarding facts of the day than those who watched very little TV news.

So the question becomes not can we trust the media, but rather, why can't we? Respected reporter George Seldes figured this out in the course of his own journalism career after many hard lessons. He was sent to Mexico in 1927 by the *Chicago Tribune* to report on the state of affairs there. At that time, the oil companies and oil stockholders were engaged in an all-out effort to get rid of Mexico's President Plutarco Calles, who was seen at that time as a social reformer who needed to be ousted. A *New York Times* reporter told Seldes, "There is only one side to this story: we are all anti-Calles." Calles was called, at that time (by fellow reporters in Mexico), anything from "Arab" to "Bolshevik" to a "high-degree Mason" and "a crook." After doing his own investigation, Seldes found a number of people who had come to radically different conclusions, namely, that Calles was a great emancipator for his people, working to restore land to Mexicans that had been taken from them by Standard Oil and other companies. When Seldes returned from Mexico, he wrote 20 stories for his paper, a series of pro and con articles on ten subjects. For example, he wrote two pieces titled respectively, "Why the U.S. Should Seize Mexico" and "Why the U.S. Should Not Seize Mexico." The first few pro and con articles were printed as is, but shortly thereafter, only the anti-Mexico ones were printed.² The media owners were actively deciding not to present both sides of the debate. And when

Seldes realized that many media owners were also stakeholders in oil companies that had a lot to gain or lose depending on how the Mexican rebellion turned out, Seldes understood why the propaganda campaign was being conducted. He condensed his learning into this simple advice:

My own motto for many years has simply been this: *take nothing for granted*. If you take nothing for granted, and try to find the facts, you will soon be safe from false propaganda; you will recognize propaganda, true or false, and you will be able to accept the truth.

...If you look for the social-economic motive you will not have to wait for history to tell you what was propaganda and what was the truth.³

In the early 1900s, an American journalist named John Swinton responded to a toast to the “independent press” with this surprisingly honest and devastating rebuke:

There is no such thing, at this date of the world’s history, in America, as an independent press. You know it and I know it. There is not one of you who dares to write your honest opinions, and if you did, you know beforehand that it would never appear in print. I am paid weekly for keeping my honest opinion out of the paper I am connected with. Others of you are paid similar salaries for similar things, and any of you who would be so foolish as to write honest opinions would be out on the streets looking for another job.

If I allowed my honest opinions to appear in one issue of my paper, before twenty-four hours my occupation would be gone. The business of the journalists is to destroy the truth, to lie outright, to pervert, to vilify, to fawn at the feet of mammon, and to sell his country and his race for his daily bread. You know it and I know it, and what folly is this toasting an independent press?

We are the tools and vassals of rich men behind the scenes. We are the jumping jacks, they pull the strings and we dance. Our talents, our possibilities and our lives are all the property of other men. We are intellectual prostitutes.⁴

Journalists who have tried to stand up and tell the truth about very important events have typically met with doom. April Oliver met a journalistic “Valley of Death” when she and co-producer Jack Smith created a CNN special by that name about the use of nerve gas in the Vietnam War. After calls from Richard Helms, Henry Kissinger and Colin Powell, CNN lost its nerve and pulled the story. When Gary Webb reported in the *San Jose Mercury Times* about the CIA’s connection to the drug trade in Los Angeles, Webb was ultimately forced out of his job. Award-winning CBS producer Kristina Borjesson was handed her walking papers upon the discovery that she had been collecting massive evidence indicating a missile had struck TWA Flight 800. Several stories along these lines are detailed by Borjesson in her book *Into the Buzzsaw* (Prometheus Books, 2002). The buzzsaw, as she describes it, is what you walk into when you reach out for an important story. The system will rip you to shreds.

So what triggers this buzzsaw? Ask Robert Parry, the former Associated Press man turned *Newsweek* reporter who found himself suddenly *persona non grata* when he surfaced the news that National Security staffers had been phonying up records of chronologies to protect Reagan from accusations of direct knowledge of the Iran-Contra affair. *Newsweek*, to their initial credit, ran the story. But when the story hit the stands, Parry suddenly found his world turned upside down. At a talk, years later, Parry recounted this experience, and his understanding of why the buzzsaw sprang into action in his case:

And the reaction was incredible. Many of my colleagues in the press attacked us. The *Wall Street Journal*, not just in its editorial pages but its news columns attacked us ... and *Newsweek* decided that they wanted to retract the story...

So anyway, here we are, and the problem is—it's hard to understand if you haven't lived in Washington, it may not make a lot of sense, but I'll explain it anyway—there were three choices at this point:

Choice "A" was to tell the truth, to say that the President had violated a variety of laws, committed felonies, and violated our constitutional safeguards about the way we carry out wars in our country, and impeach him. Option A.

Then there was Option "B"—to tell the truth and have Congress sort of say well, it's okay with us, which creates a dangerous precedent for the future. That is, that now presidents would say well hey, look at the Reagan example, you know, if he can wage war privately, why can't I? So that was Option "B."

And then there was Option "C"—to pretend it didn't happen, or to pretend that, say, some Lieutenant Colonel had done it all. So Washington, I guess understandably, settled on Option "C."

And it didn't hit me until one evening in March of '87. The Tower board had just come out with its report, which basically said that the President was a little bit asleep at the switch. But hey, you know, it was really these crazy nuts who did it. And we had one of these *Newsweek* dinners—they're fancy affairs—and it was at the Bureau Chief's house, and they're catered, and there's a tuxedoed waiter, and he pours the wine, there's nice food, and I was new. I came out of AP, which is kind of a working class/working man's kind of news organization, so I wasn't used to this. And we had as our guest that evening, Brent Scowcroft, who had been on the Tower Board. And Dick Cheney, who was going to be the ranking minority figure on the house Iran-Contra Committee. And we're going through this little delightful dinner, and at one point Brent Scowcroft says, "Well, I probably shouldn't be saying this, but if I were advising Admirable Poindexter, and he had told the President about the diversion, I'd advise him to say that he hadn't." And being new to this whole sort of game, I stopped eating, and looked across the table and said "General! You're not suggesting that the Admiral should commit perjury, are you?" And there was kind of like an embarrassed little silence at the table, and the editor of *Newsweek*, who was sitting next to me, says—I hope partly jokingly but I don't know—says, "Sometimes we have to do what's good for the country."

So with that little bit of context, let's go back to November of 1963. The country had made it through the harrowing October 1962 missile crisis, when the U.S. and the Soviet Union nearly came to nuclear blows over Cuba. The press determined (initially) that a man who had ties to the Soviet Union was suspected of killing the president. If people in the press did sniff an early whiff of conspiracy, would they have printed it? Even if the reporter on the ground had written such a story, wouldn't his or her editor have said not to run that story for the "good of the country"? Who would have had the guts to inflame an already very tense situation in the wake of a slain President?

Then, as the years went by, each media outlet became more and more entrenched in reporting the Oswald-did-it version of events. Which of them would have had the guts to stand up and say hey, did we have that story wrong—here's the real truth! How often do people in power in your own lives come forward and admit egregious error? Even if the media reporters and organizations were truly free to report whatever they wanted (which as we have seen is definitely not the case), the media would have been hard-pressed to retract all its earlier stories and defend a new position.

There are those that argue further though, saying, no secret stays secret forever. To that point, we would do well to remember we have never learned the identity of "Deep Throat," the famous informer who gave Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein guidance as they uncovered the Watergate story. Still others will point to Woodward and Bernstein as examples of reporters who were brave and did stand up to tell the truth. But those who have done extensive research on the Watergate episode will tell you that Woodward and Bernstein may well have served as pawns to others who wanted to portray the events in a particular light.⁵

But that's not the end of why we can't trust the press, especially in the case of the Kennedy assassination. There is a much more insidious reason. The CIA has enormous control over the press, and this little known fact has only briefly and sporadically been reported on in the mainstream media outlets. The CIA's relationship with the press bears examination, as it was used directly and provably in this case to shape reporting on the issues surrounding the Kennedy assassination.

Controlling the Media

"Everything is quiet. There is no trouble here. There will be no war. I wish to return."

—Fredrick Remington, writing his employer William Randolph Hearst from Havana in 1897

"Please remain. You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war."

—William Randolph Hearst's response to Remington regarding what became known as the Spanish-American War. (Source: *Citizen Hearst*, W.A. Swanberg, 1963)

The famous exchange above indicates the unprecedented power a media owner has. In this case, a few extremely wealthy individuals, notably Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, were able to manipulate the government into the Spanish-American War by inflaming public opinion with propaganda and yellow journalism.

For a short time in the early part of the twentieth century, there was a great diversity of opinions present in the media: "muckraking," as its detractors called investigative reporting, was at its

zenith. Ida Tarbell had won international fame with her brilliant exposé of the Standard Oil Company, serialized in *McClure's* magazine before becoming a book. Upton Sinclair exposed the hideous practices of the meat packaging industry through *The Jungle*, a work which was serialized in the socialist newspaper *Appeal to Reason*, a year before being published as a book. But as World War I broke out, criticizing the establishment became taboo, and the U.S. Post Office refused to deliver *Appeal to Reason* and other similar publications. Advertisers pressured the media to lighten up. And fairly quickly, muckraking disappeared from the scene, never to return to the same degree. From time to time, journalists like George Seldes, I.F. Stone, and more recently Robert Parry, would self-publish when they realized they could not tell the truth boldly and fully in other people's publications. But these small circulation newsletters and journals could never compete with media giants such as CBS or the *New York Times*.

The Establishment in this country knew early on how important it was to control the press. Just as the representative form of government was set up to prevent direct democracy, or rather, "mob rule," so too did the press have to be protected from what Walter Lippmann called "the defective organization of public opinion." Truth could be a powerful weapon, one the elites were loath to share with masses. But keeping the truth out of the press presented a quandary. The elites themselves needed to know what the truth was. How could the elites get the information and still manage to keep it hidden from the rest of the world? As Lippmann (who served in an intelligence unit designed to aid the U.S. negotiating team in Paris as WW1 ended) argued, in his essay *Public Opinion*, "representative government cannot be worked successfully, no matter what the basis of election, unless there is an independent, expert organization for making the unseen facts [of the new world] intelligible to those who have to make the decisions." In a 1937 work, Harold Lasswell, one of the fathers of modern communication theory, made a similar and more explicit suggestion: "Propaganda must be coordinated with information and espionage services which can supply material to the propagandists and report progress of propaganda work." Lasswell, Lippman, and others presaged what William "Wild Bill" Donovan would eventually recommend to President Franklin Roosevelt as World War II unfolded.

In 1940, Roosevelt sent Donovan to Europe to scope out what was happening in Germany and elsewhere. When Donovan returned, he recommended the creation of the Office of Strategic Services, the OSS, predecessor to today's Central Intelligence Agency. In his "Memorandum of Establishment of Service of Strategic Information," (dated June 10, 1941) Donovan outlined to Roosevelt that, in addition to setting up a formal intelligence service to gather and process information regarding the Nazis in Germany, "there is another element in modern warfare" that the Germans were mastering that posed a far more insidious, serious threat, "and that is the psychological attack against the moral and spiritual defenses of a nation."⁹ Donovan urged the President to create and fund an organization to actively engage in propaganda and other actions that could be used to demoralize the enemy. To Donovan, propaganda was just one item in the psychological warfare toolbox, which to him consisted of anything, physical or intellectual, that could be used to break the will of the enemy. As the OSS War Report states, "On the one hand, [Donovan] saw it as conditioning the minds of the people as a whole; on the other, he conceived of it as a strategic weapon for the exploitation of particular objectives, whether political or military."¹⁰ Some activities were downright sinister. The definition of psychological

warfare included “propaganda, sabotage, guerilla activities, bribery, blackmail, assassination...”¹¹ Note that a great majority of Donovan’s assets were journalists. While Americans don’t typically associate journalists with assassinations, we should understand why journalists in foreign countries are often assumed to be spies, and are sometimes abducted and even killed, thanks to this precedent set during World War II.

During WWII, the OSS had several separate offices responsible for various activities relating to propaganda, covert action and psychological warfare. When WWII came to a close, several of those groups were combined into the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC), an innocuous-sounding organization set up under the auspices of the State Department and led by Frank Wisner that sought to continue the covert action that Donovan had envisioned as necessary to successful psychological warfare operations. Under Wisner, the OPC became the fastest growing unit within the nascent CIA, rising in personnel from 302 in 1949 to 2,812 in 1952, along with 3,142 overseas contract personnel. In the same period, the budget rose from \$4.7 million to \$82 million.¹²

From his seat at the head of OPC, Wisner kept the highly secret and valuable “Propaganda Assets Inventory,” more commonly known as “Wisner’s Wurlitzer.” The inventory represented a network of more than 800 news and public information organizations and individuals—opinion makers that could be called upon at any time to play the tune of Wisner’s making.¹³ The network included journalists, columnists, book publishers, editors, entire organizations such as Radio Free Europe, and stringers across multiple news organizations. When the OPC was combined with the Office of Special Operations (OSO) to form what we now call the CIA, the media assets came with it.

Tom Braden became an early head of propaganda operations when the CIA was formed. Braden, who once wrote an article titled “I’m Glad the CIA is ‘Immoral’” (and years later, recommended the abolishment of the CIA¹⁴), also headed up QKOPERA, the code name for the Congress of Cultural Freedom.¹⁵ This body was set up to combat Communist efforts to paint America as culturally bereft. The Congress sponsored artists, writers, poets, musicians and other cultural figures, some with their consent, and some without. The CIA did not limit itself to propagandizing about news items. The CIA sponsored Olympic athletes, scientists, and anyone who could be used to promote the notion of the superiority of American culture. The psychological warfare campaign was an all-out assault on people’s ability to think and feel freely not just in Communist countries, but all over the globe.

Highly regarded journalists were especially valuable to Wisner and the CIA’s efforts because they had the luxury of being able to write material that top policy makers would actually read. As former CIA officer Miles Copeland noted, “the President of the United States, the Secretary of State, Congressmen and even the Director of the CIA himself will read, believe and be impressed by a report from Cy Sulzberger, Arnaud de Borchgrave, or Stewart Alsop when they don’t even bother to read a CIA report on the same subject.”¹⁶ And although the CIA did not have the legal authority to propagandize Americans, that didn’t stop them from trying to fan winds abroad that would blow back across to America. The *New York Times* reported that the CIA had a formal operation known as KMFORGET in which stories planted by the agency in one country would be clipped and mailed to media in other countries, and “such efforts enhanced the likelihood that the stories would be seen by

an American correspondent and transmitted home.”¹⁷ CIA operative Darrell Garwood shared the information that the CIA was very concerned about domestic perceptions of the Agency, despite the prohibition from it acting against U.S. citizens: “In order to achieve its self-perceived objectives, the CIA believed it was not enough to be immune from congressional or judicial control. The agency felt it was also imperative that anti-CIA sentiment and leftist leanings in general had to be defused and combated on every front. To this end, the CIA infiltrated the groves of academia, the missionary corps, the editorial boards of influential journal and book publishers, and any other quarters where public attitudes could be effectively influenced.”¹⁸ In the ’70s, the CIA was exposed as having illegally spied on Americans and having infiltrated many anti-war organizations. The CIA specifically targeted *Ramparts*, one of the few large circulation magazines to talk openly about the holes in the official story regarding the Kennedy assassination.

Stewart Alsop, who, along with his brother Joseph, was a CIA conduit for information on occasion, gave us a special perspective on the CIA’s targeting of reporters for assets: “The key relationship of the Washington press is, of course, its relationship with the government. But the relationship of the press with the press is also important—much more important than most outsiders realize.”¹⁹ Often, as a major story breaks, reporters who are removed from the events get their stories from other journalists. Naturally, the respected journalists or those with the greatest access to information are given plenty of credibility by fellow journalists. For example, press club were a focus of CIA activity. A former CIA official told how the manager of the Mexico City press club was a CIA agent who took advantage of his position to influence other journalists. “He used to work very successfully,” the CIA man explained to the *New York Times*. “Some guys are lazy. They’d be sitting at the bar and he’d slip them things and they’d phone it in.”²⁰

The CIA also realized the threat that honest journalists could be to covert actions. For example, during the Guatemala campaign, *New York Times* reporter Sydney Gruson was kept out of Guatemala. This happened when Allen Dulles complained to the *Times* that neither he nor his brother, John Foster Dulles, believed that Gruson was capable of reporting with “objectivity” on the upcoming revolution (which was manufactured and conducted by the CIA). Arthur Hays Sulzberger complied with the CIA’s request and kept Gruson in Mexico City on the pretense that there might be some spillover action in Mexico.²¹

Although the OSS had made extensive *ad hoc* use of journalists, Wisner realized that the CIA’s efforts in this area required a more formalized approach. Together with input from his friend and *Washington Post* publisher Phil Graham, Wisner created Operation MOCKINGBIRD. Appropriately named after a bird that can imitate the calls of other birds, MOCKINGBIRD was exposed by Deborah Davis in her book *Katherine the Great*, detailing the life of Katherine Graham, Phil Graham’s wife and the eventual longtime owner of the *Washington Post*. Davis wrote:

[A]ccording to a former CIA analyst who had worked on MOCKINGBIRD, each journalist was a separate “operation,” requiring a code name, a field supervisor, and a field office, at an annual cost of tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars—there has never been an accurate accounting.²²

Davis wrote that Wisner “owned” respected members of *Newsweek*, CBS, the *New York Times* and many others, according to a former CIA analyst who had worked with MOCKINGBIRD. Carl Bernstein reported similar information in his famous *Rolling Stone* piece from October 1977, entitled *The CIA and the Media*, in which he outlined how members of all the major media in this country owed some allegiance, whether paid or as volunteers, to the CIA. According to Bernstein, some of the many who have served the CIA wittingly are William Paley, the longtime top executive of CBS; Henry Luce of the Time Inc. empire; and Arthur Hays Sulzberger of the *New York Times*. Also included are members of ABC, NBC, the Associated Press (AP), United Press International (UPI), Reuters, Hearst Newspapers, Scripps-Howard, *Newsweek*, the Mutual Broadcasting System, the *Miami Herald*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and the John Hay Whitney-owned *New York Herald-Tribune*. Bernstein noted that the most valuable relationships the CIA had were with CBS and the *New York Times*. The only major media absent from his piece was his own former employer, the *Washington Post*. Davis’ book does much to show that both Phil and Kate Graham, in addition to senior editor Benjamin Bradlee, were supportive of the CIA. In Bradlee’s case, he visited the Rosenbergs’ prosecutors in New York by order of “the head of the CIA in Paris,” after which he wrote an “Operational Memorandum” outlining the case against the Rosenbergs that was then disseminated to 40 different countries across four continents.²³ Bradlee later became friendly with Richard Helms, and notified Phil Graham when Helms’ grandfather put *Newsweek* on the block. (The *Washington Post* subsequently purchased *Newsweek*.)

How did the CIA pay for all of these propaganda efforts? By skimming off the Marshall Plan funds. Wisner and his group called the funds “candy.” CIA agent Gilbert Greenway recalled, “We couldn’t spend it all. I remember once meeting with Wisner and the comptroller. My God, I said, how can we spend that? There were no limits, and nobody had to account for it. It was amazing.”²⁴

James Jesus Angleton, head of the CIA’s Counterintelligence department for 25 years, kept his own slush fund that he did not have to account for which was used in part to pay journalists. According to Bernstein, “Angleton ran a completely independent group of journalist-operatives who performed sensitive and frequently dangerous assignments.”²⁵

One could write a book on the CIA’s relationship with the media, culture, science, sports, religion (priests were used as cover, and the CIA maintains a close relationship with the Vatican) and other areas in which the CIA leveraged assets to make a dramatic impact around the world. The Church Committee in the ’70s devoted a large section in its final report to these activities, and even so, only scratched the surface. But let’s focus now on the specific relationships between the CIA and the media as they pertain to the reporting on the assassination of President Kennedy.

The CIA and the Assassination Reportage

Day one coverage of the assassination included reports that “six to eight shots” were fired in Dealey Plaza. But soon, the reports were all consistent—three shots fired. How and why was the story changed? Similarly, Kennedy’s throat wound went through a rapid evolution. In Tom Wicker’s original article for the *New York Times* on the assassination, Wicker stated that:

Mr. Kennedy was hit by a bullet in the throat, just below the Adam's apple, they said. This wound had the appearance of a bullet's entry...²⁶

Within a few days, however, the official story had changed: the bullet wound in the throat had morphed into an exit wound. Years later, curiously, Wicker would list for Walter Karp of *Harper's* magazine the hazards to journalists who challenged the official story regarding matters of importance to powerful people. His list included "lost access, complaints to editors and publishers, social penalties, leaks to competitors, a variety of responses no one wants."²⁷ One wonders if Wicker encountered any of these personally after initially reporting the throat wound to be an entrance wound, given the *Times'* close relationship with the CIA. "It is a bitter irony of source journalism," Karp wrote, "that the most esteemed journalists are precisely the most servile. For it is by making themselves useful to the powerful that they gain access to the 'best' sources." So before we blindly trust our most esteemed journalists, let's remember Karp's information.

Dan Rather of CBS was the first to break the news that the President was dead. Howard Bliss, in his book *Now the News*, wrote that within CBS and elsewhere, there has always been a mystery as to how it was that Rather was the first to break this news on CBS radio and how CBS television was the first television network to report this. CBS was also the key to tracking down Abraham Zapruder, the man who filmed the assassination from Dealey Plaza. Rather was the first to see the Zapruder film, and gave a description of what he saw on that film that has never matched what the public saw in that film. Rather described Kennedy's head falling "forward with considerable force."²⁸ But all of us who have seen the film know that Kennedy's head goes back and to the left. Was the film edited since that first time Rather saw it? Or was Rather somehow that wrong about what he saw? Did CBS' close relationship with the CIA have anything to do with these events? CBS' Walter Cronkite, whose heartbreaking announcement of Kennedy's death is seared forever in our collective consciousness, was said to have been on the CIA's list of assets by Sam Jaffe.²⁹ Sam Jaffe was an FBI informant who was also working with the CIA.³⁰ The CIA was forbidden to operate domestically, but the FBI of course was not. On occasion, the CIA asked the FBI to work with an operative, presumably because anything of importance reported to the FBI would be forwarded back to CIA through the FBI liaison office.³¹

C.D. Jackson ordered Richard Stolley to acquire the Zapruder film for *Life* magazine. C.D. Jackson was a former OSS operative, as well as a friend of Allen Dulles. Could that CIA relationship have had anything to do with the purchase, which effectively kept the film locked up and away from public view for many years?

Hugh Aynesworth was one of the Dallas reporters who covered the events immediately following the assassination of President Kennedy for his paper. Was it just a coincidence that Aynesworth had applied to work at the CIA one month prior to this event?

Priscilla Johnson had obtained an interview of Lee Harvey Oswald during his stay in the Soviet Union. She had also made friends with a defector highly prized by the CIA: Stalin's daughter. After the assassination, she additionally made friends with Marina Oswald and later wrote the book *Marina and Lee* which Marina deemed a pack of lies. CIA documents have since revealed an *ad hoc* relationship with Priscilla Johnson, and a confidence expressed in 1962 by CIA officer Donald Jameson, chief of the

CIA's Soviet Russia/Covert Action division, that "Miss Johnson can be encouraged to write pretty much the articles we want."³²

Priscilla married George McMillan. McMillan wrote a book about the Martin Luther King assassination in which he claimed that James Earl Ray alone shot King. Never mind that McMillan himself had told a reporter before he began his work that he did not plan to investigate the assassination, and that he was therefore free to write a book solely about Ray's life. The reporter who published that comment in 1969 was the same one that reviewed his book in 1976: Jeremiah O'Leary, yet another acknowledged CIA media asset.³³ The book came out as the newly formed House Select Committee on Assassinations, formed to investigate the assassinations of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King, was struggling to get a budget that would enable it to accomplish its monumental task. O'Leary, who was friends with David Atlee Phillips, the CIA's propaganda master, wrote a glowing review of George's book, ending with this breathtakingly obvious propaganda motive: "The House Select Committee, among others, should take the reporting of George McMillan into account when it begins probing the murder of King. McMillan has done a good deal of the committee's work already when it comes to deciding whether the world knows all there is to know about Ray and why he set out to kill Dr. King..."³⁴ So we have a CIA asset pushing a book by another man with possible ties through his wife to the CIA saying James Earl Ray acted alone. Coincidence, or conspiracy?

Seth Kantor was another journalist who wrote early accounts of the assassination, having been present in Dealey Plaza the day Kennedy was shot. He was asked by his Scripps-Howard editor in Washington to call Hal Hendrix at his Florida home for some background on Oswald. Hendrix provided all kinds of details about Oswald's so-called defection, his time in Russia, and more that would soon become public knowledge. Years later, Kantor found in long-suppressed evidence that this call had been scrubbed from the list of calls he had made that day. Why had the call been purged? Kantor suspected it was because Hal Hendrix was known to be deeply connected to the CIA. (Hendrix's Agency connection was exposed during the Church Committee's investigation into the CIA's coup plotting against Chilean leader Salvador Allende.) David Phillips, the high-level CIA propaganda chief mentioned earlier, who had been seen with Oswald by an associate a short month before the assassination, was a friend of Hal Hendrix. Did Phillips give Hendrix the info on Oswald to pass to Kantor?

When Jim Garrison started his investigation into the Kennedy assassination, ultimately arresting and prosecuting Clay Shaw for participation in the assassination plot, an NBC White Paper special was produced with the express purpose of shooting Garrison down. Is it a coincidence that Walter Sheridan, the NBC producer of a special on Garrison that was deemed so one-sided that Garrison was given time on-air to rebut it, used to work for the NSA? NSA is a group so secret that only Department D, the group that conducted assassination plots within the CIA, knew about the group and worked with it.

When Garrison's investigation took off in 1967, the CIA sent out worldwide to all Station Chiefs a directive for their media assets. The full text of this directive is published in the back of James DiEugenio's book *Destiny Betrayed: JFK, Cuba and the Garrison Case*. Consider the following excerpts, as they pertain directly to this case:

RE: Concerning Criticism of the Warren Report

1. Our Concern. From the day of President Kennedy's assassination on, there has been speculation about the responsibility for his murder. Although this was stemmed for a time by the Warren Commission report, ... there has been a new wave of books and articles criticizing the Commission's findings. In most cases the critics have speculated as to the existence of some kind of conspiracy, and often they have implied that the Commission itself was involved.
2. This trend of opinion is a matter of concern to the U.S. government, including our organization. ... Our organization itself is directly involved: among other facts, we contributed information to the investigation. Conspiracy theories have frequently thrown suspicion on our organization, for example by falsely alleging that Lee Harvey Oswald worked for us. The aim of this dispatch is to provide material countering and discrediting the claims of the conspiracy theorists, so as to inhibit the circulation of such claims in other countries. Background information is supplied in a classified section and in a number of unclassified attachments.
3. Action. We do not recommend that discussion of the assassination question be initiated where it is not already taking place. Where discussion is active [business] addresses are requested:
 - a. To discuss the publicity problem with liaison and friendly elite contacts (especially politicians and editors), pointing out that the Warren Commission made as thorough an investigation as humanly possible, that the charges of the critics are without serious foundation, and that further speculative discussion only plays into the hands of the opposition. Point out also that parts of the conspiracy talk appear to be deliberately generated by Communist propagandists. Urge them to use their influence to discourage unfounded and irresponsible speculation.
 - b. To employ propaganda assets to [negate] and refute the attacks of the critics. Book reviews and feature articles are particularly appropriate for this purpose. The unclassified attachments to this guidance should provide useful background material for passing to assets. Our play should point out, as applicable, that the critics are (I) wedded to theories adopted before the evidence was in, (II) politically interested, (III) financially interested, (IV) hasty and inaccurate in their research, or (V) infatuated with their own theories. In the course of discussions of the whole phenomenon of criticism, a useful strategy may be to single out Epstein's theory [from his pro-conspiracy book *Inquest*] for attack, using the attached Fletcher Knebel article and *Spectator* piece for background. (Although Mark Lane's book is much less convincing than Epstein's and comes off badly where confronted by

knowledgeable critics, it is also much more difficult to answer as a whole, as one becomes lost in a morass of unrelated details.)

4. In private to media discussions not directed at any particular writer, or in attacking publications, which may be yet forthcoming, the following arguments should be useful:
 - a. No significant new evidence has emerged which the Commission did not consider.
 - b. Critics usually overvalue particular items and ignore others. They tend to place more emphasis on the recollections of individual witnesses. A close examination of the Commission's records will usually show that the conflicting eyewitness accounts are quoted out of context, or were discarded by the Commission for good and sufficient reason.
 - c. Conspiracy on the large scale often suggested would be impossible to conceal in the United States... Note that Robert Kennedy, Attorney General at the time and John F Kennedy's brother, would be the last man to overlook or conceal any conspiracy
 - d. Critics have often been enticed by a form of intellectual pride: they light on some theory and fall in love with it...
 - e. Oswald would not have been any sensible person's choice for a coconspirator. He was a "loner," mixed up, of questionable reliability and an unknown quantity to any professional intelligence service
 - f. As to charges that the Commission's report was a rush job, it emerged three months after the deadline originally set. But to the degree that the Commission tried to speed up its reporting, this was largely due to the pressure of irresponsible speculation already appearing, in some cases coming from the same critics who, refusing to admit their errors, are now putting out new criticisms.
 - g. Such vague accusations as that, "more than ten people have died mysteriously," can always be explained in some natural way e.g.: the individuals concerned have for the most part died of natural causes. The Commission staff questioned 418 witnesses (the FBI interviewed far more people, conducted 25,000 interviews and reinterviews), and in such a large group, a certain number of deaths are to be expected. (When Penn Jones, one of the originators of the "ten mysterious deaths" line, appeared on television, it emerged that two of the deaths on his list were from heart attacks; one from cancer, one was from a head-on collision on a bridge, and one occurred when a driver drifted into a bridge abutment.)

5. Where possible, counter speculation by encouraging reference to the Commission's Report itself. Open-minded foreign readers should still be impressed by the care, thoroughness, objectivity and speed with which the Commission worked. Reviewers of other books might be "encouraged to add to their account the idea that, checking back with the report itself,

they found it far superior to the work of its critics.” These sentiments sound familiar? If you’ve been reading anti-conspiracy literature, they should. These themes are often hit hard and repeatedly in such literature.) This document was marked for destruction, but somehow survived. How many other such directives will we never see because destruction instructions were followed?

Who received those instructions, ultimately? While the answer to that question cannot be easily proven, as the CIA never acknowledges outright its assets and works hard to protect their anonymity, it is indeed curious how many of the anti-conspiracy crowd have significant ties to the CIA.

Consider the journalists most vocally nipping at Garrison’s heels throughout his investigation: Hugh Aynesworth, James Phelan, and Edward Epstein. Would it be simply coincidence if all of them were found to have a relationship with the CIA?

Aynesworth was the same Dallas journalist already discussed who had applied to work for the CIA in October of 1963. Whether or not he was accepted is not as significant as his already expressed preference for employment. And according to Bernstein and others, many journalists were happy to serve in volunteer roles for the agency. During the Garrison investigation, Aynesworth was informing to both the FBI and the White House on Garrison’s actions. This hardly gives him credibility as an impartial journalistic observer, and calls into question the motive for his near rabid attacks in *Newsweek* on the man.

James Phelan, the second journalist in this anti-Garrison triumvirate, was also informing to the FBI on Garrison’s activities. Phelan’s activities also went beyond journalism. He tried to bribe a key Garrison witness to get him to change his story. Even more importantly, Phelan was a good friend of Robert Maheu, the man given the job of formulating CIA plans to assassinate Castro. Garrison was pointing the finger at the CIA and anti-Castro Cubans whom he believed worked in concert to assassinate President Kennedy. It’s hard to imagine Phelan would let his friend be implicated. It’s easier to imagine that Maheu was close to Phelan because he trusted him to keep his and the CIA’s secrets.

Edward Epstein, the third anti-Garrison triumvirate member, wrote an article which quickly grew into the book *Counterplot*. The book mocked Garrison’s case against Clay Shaw. But was Epstein an impartial observer? In another surviving message from CIA headquarters to its operatives, Epstein’s pre-*Counterplot* article was recommended as source material for the anti-Garrison campaign. In later days, Epstein confessed openly to his close working relationship with the CIA, although he claimed that relationship began with his work on his next book, *Legend*, in which Epstein tried to suggest that the assassination was really the result of a Soviet conspiracy.

One has to ask, is it just a coincidence that each of these journalists has provable ties to the CIA? Or worse, is it simply the case that so many journalists are affiliated with the CIA that it would have been hard *not* to find such an association? Although the first suggestion is chilling, the latter possibility is even more disturbing!

Epstein was a contributor to *Readers Digest*, another organization with a proven relationship to the CIA.³⁶ When Epstein interviewed the famous Soviet defector Yuri Nosenko, the CIA provided *Readers Digest* with Donald Jameson as a consultant—the same man who had said of Priscilla Johnson

McMillan that she could be persuaded to write whatever the CIA wanted her to. One of Jameson's roles was to bring Soviet defectors to selected journalists. This was one of the ways in which the CIA planted stories in magazines and books. (The CIA had already published *The Penskovkiy Papers*, a supposed diary of a defector which was later proven to be a work of CIA fiction.) When Epstein wanted to verify Nosenko's veracity, he called James Angleton, the then-ousted longtime head of the CIA's counterintelligence unit. Epstein had already encountered Angleton's close associate Ray Rocca during his research for his first book, *Inquest*, a lukewarm account of how the Warren Commission had made mistakes in reaching its conclusion.

Epstein is of special interest because he was an active and early member of the JFK assassination research community. Was he there out of genuine interest, or might he have been a plant, reporting back on what was discovered and injecting his own (or others) opinions into the research community? Members of the research community have expressed vehement opinions on both sides (some saying he was clearly a plant, others suggesting he was blackmailed into "changing his story" to support the agency. The latter case is harder to believe as his writing shows a clear and apparently sincere appreciation for the Agency.)

After the Garrison investigation ended, in 1970 a curious event transpired. John Leonard had written reviews in the *New York Times* of two Kennedy assassination books: Jim Garrison's first book, *Heritage of Stone*, and James Kirkwood's near love-letter to Clay Shaw, *American Grotesque*. In the review, headlined "Who Killed John F. Kennedy?" Leonard had included two paragraphs that detailed some of the remaining mysteries about the case, as well as Leonard's own expressed view that "Something stinks about this whole affair..." Within hours, however, those two paragraphs were removed from the paper, and an altered headline of "The Shaw-Garrison Affair" was substituted. Despite his best efforts, Leonard was never able to find out who had made the changes to his piece. "We've every right to be paranoid," Leonard said.³⁷

Jump ahead to the time of the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA). While the Warren Commission failed to truly investigate the crime, the HSCA's efforts can be recognized as more diligent in many ways. But in the end, Robert Blakely and Richard Billings got the first book out on the HSCA's investigation, enabling them to put the first spin on the report, which concluded there was a probable conspiracy. And how did they spin it? By saying that the conspiracy was mob-based. Blakey became the leader of the HSCA after Dick Sprague was ousted in what appeared to the research community to be a coordinated media campaign. Sprague had threatened to subpoena CIA records and officials and conduct an honest, no-holds-barred investigation of possible Agency involvement in the case. Shortly thereafter, press reports of alleged abuses of his past position (which later proved false) worked to oust Sprague from the committee chairmanship. In the wake of his departure came Blakey, who openly expressed his trust for the CIA, saying he had worked with them for 20 years. As for Richard Billings, he was very close to the CIA and had even gone on the dangerous Bayo-Pawley CIA mission with Cuban exiles to Cuba. Coincidence, or conspiracy?

Fast forward to the 1990s. Three books by two authors friendly with U.S. intelligence purport yet again that Lee Harvey Oswald, James Earl Ray and Sirhan Sirhan all acted alone. The two authors are Gerald Posner and Dan Moldea. Posner became famous for his work on the Josef Mengele case, in

which he tried to explain how the CIA never could quite catch up with this horrific perpetrator of Nazi atrocities. After that, he wrote a book on the Chinese drug trade, and thanked the various intelligence sources that provided him the access necessary to do his research. He followed that book with *The Bio Assassins*, a fictional novel glorifying an old-time CIA operative stuck in a newfangled bureaucratic post-Cold War Agency. His next book was *Hitler's Children*. How the heck does one find the children of Nazi higher-ups if not with great help from intelligence services? His first three books were published by McGraw-Hill. *Hitler's Children* was published by Random House, and marks his first work under the aegis of Robert Loomis, whose wife Gloria (according to Joan Mellen) was James Angleton's secretary of many years. Loomis was responsible for Jim Phelan's book in which he recounts his experiences on the Garrison case, among others. Loomis' next book with Posner was *Case Closed*, Posner's widely promoted but not widely respected work on the JFK case. David Wrone, a respected history professor, described *Case Closed* as "so theory driven, so rife with speculation, and so frequently unable to conform his text with the factual content in his sources that it stands as one of the stellar instances of irresponsible publishing on the subject."³⁸

Posner and Loomis teamed up again in the late '90s to produce *Killing the Dream*, Posner's book on the Martin Luther King assassination. It comes as no surprise to find he believes James Earl Ray killed MLK and that there was no government participation in a conspiracy.

Dan Moldea wrote one of the few books on the Robert Kennedy assassination. A former professed proponent of conspiracy in that case, Moldea wrote that not only did Sirhan act alone, but that he admitted to shooting Kennedy, a statement that Sirhan, those present during this conversation, and Sirhan's lawyer vehemently deny Sirhan ever made. Moldea is close to the man most often suspected of being the real assassin in that case, Thane Eugene Cesar. Moldea is also close to Carl Shoffler, the cop who was the first on the scene to capture the Watergate 'burglars' and who, as Jim Hougan and others have shown, has ties to the intelligence community. Moldea also includes in his pantheon of heroes Walter Sheridan, who was discussed earlier in this volume. As you will see, Moldea's objectivity must, as with the others listed here, be called into question.

Are you feeling queasy yet? If the CIA is using its own media assets to cover up the truth about the Kennedy assassination, what is the secret they so desperately need to protect? Did David Ferrie know it? Did George de Mohrenschildt? Both died under mysterious circumstances directly following meetings with reporters.

David Ferrie's last (known) visitor was *Washington Post* national security reporter George Lardner, Jr. Lardner claimed he left David Ferrie at 4 a.m. the day Garrison had decided to call Ferrie before the Grand Jury. There is no reason to suspect Lardner had a hand in Ferrie's death, but the coroner thought the body indicated an earlier death, and claimed 4 a.m. was the "latest possible time" of his death. In a similarly bizarre circumstance, Edward Epstein was the last person to talk with Oswald associate and CIA asset George de Mohrenschildt just prior to his alleged suicide—on the very day Gaeton Fonzi of the House Select Committee on Assassinations had come to de Mohrenschildt's Florida home to speak with de Mohrenschildt. These events may truly be bizarre coincidences. But it's not impossible to believe that someone was monitoring the activities of Ferrie and de Mohrenschildt through these journalists, and if information was to come out that might be particularly sensitive,

someone may have seen fit to silence the witnesses.

Ralph McGehee, a former CIA operative who eventually quit the Agency in disgust over the operations he had learned about during his 25-year career there, obtained a document from 1991 through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) regarding the operations of the CIA's Public Affairs Office (PAO). In no small terms, the Agency boldly announces the culmination of its press operations:

PAO now has relationships with reporters from every major wire service, newspaper, news weekly, and television network in the nation. This has helped turn some "intelligence failure" stories into "intelligence success" stories ... In many instances, we have persuaded reporters to postpone, change, hold, or even scrap stories...

Bear these relationships in mind as you read or watch the next installment relative to the Kennedy assassination. Bear in mind George Seldes' admonition to take nothing for granted. Realize that if the CIA was behind the assassination, we are not going to hear about it through the CIA-controlled media.