

New JFK papers may imply Oswald was good-guy CIA agent shooting at bad CIA agents on grassy knoll to try to STOP the assassination

Conspiracy: Cases For and Against

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by [Bill Rockwood](#)



Millions of Americans believe there exists a larger, darker explanation for President Kennedy's assassination than just Oswald, the lone, disturbed gunman. As covered in FRONTLINE's investigative biography of Oswald, here are some of the major questions raised by conspiracy theorists over the years and how science and technology have helped answer most of them.

The Magic Bullet: Critics say it was impossible for just one bullet to pass through both Kennedy and Connolly unless it pursued a bizarre zig-zag trajectory. Furthermore, the bullet emerged in good condition.

Three-dimensional graphics of Dealey Plaza, produced by a company called Failure Analysis Associates on behalf of the American Bar Association, showed that a single bullet could inflict all seven wounds on both President Kennedy and Governor Connolly. By feeding data into a computer, it was possible to model the trajectory of the so-called "magic bullet," showing how a straight line

through the two men was indeed possible. The computer modeling also showed where the gunman had to shoot from: a cone splayed out from the wound shows that the area almost centers on the southeast corner, sixth floor, Texas School Book Depository. (The technique of modern computer modeling, combined with film enhancement technology, was not available to earlier investigators.)

A single bullet could inflict all seven wounds on both the President and the Governor and emerge in very good condition. That's because, as it slowed, moving through the two men, it moved fast enough to break bone, but not fast enough to deform the bullet. Tests were conducted by both the Warren Commission and the House Select Committee that supported this conclusion.

Hollywood and History: The Debate Over *JFK*



What obligation does Hollywood owe facts, accuracy, and the truth? When popular history like *JFK* gets hold of a subject, what kind of damage can be done? Those are the central questions in this 1992 panel discussion with authors Norman Mailer and Edward J. Epstein, screenwriter Nora Ephron, and producer/director Oliver Stone. The three-hour forum was held at Town Hall, New York City, on the night of March 3, 1992, and was sponsored by [The Nation Institute](#) and the Center for American Culture Studies at Columbia University.

★ [Transcript](#)

It's clear from the start that it's largely a pro-Stone audience as speakers Ephron, Epstein, and Mailer lay out their views on the movie and its critics. Oliver Stone follows, talking about his work on the movie and how it has made him question the history he was taught in school and through the media.

The panelists are followed by guest questioners Christopher Hitchens, Bill Schapp, and Max Holland. Their responses, along with the audience's questions, produce heated moments and stormy applause throughout the rest of the evening.

★ [The Endurance of Conspiracy Thinking](#)

Polls conducted periodically since the assassination show most Americans continue to believe the president's murder was part of a larger plot. Here are events over the decades which have been a factor in keeping conspiracy thinking alive.

New Orleans: During the summer of 1963 — just months before the assassination — Oswald reportedly was in contact with men who had connections to the Mafia.

In New Orleans, Oswald entered the most mysterious and perplexing chapter of his short life, and the murky trail he left behind in that city still defies a complete explanation.

In “Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?,” FRONTLINE spends some time examining this puzzling period in his life. If there was a plot to kill President Kennedy, then it was probably hatched in New Orleans. It was here that Lee Oswald may have crossed paths with men that hated Kennedy and wanted him eliminated.

★ [Read the section of the program transcript dealing with this period.](#)

The Grassy Knoll: Was There a Fourth Shot?

The exact number and timing of the shots have been argued over endlessly, but there is a growing consensus that the Zapruder film shows three shots were fired in about eight seconds. Many believe a second gunman fired a fourth shot from the grassy knoll. Immediately after the shooting, many people followed a policeman up the embankment. But when police searched the area, they found no gunman, no gun, no cartridges. Years later it was discovered that a motorcycle policeman’s radio button had been jammed open and that the gunshots in Dealey Plaza may have been accidentally recorded.

Says [Gerald Posner](#), author of *Case Closed*: “The House Select Committee on Assassinations [1978-79] used sound experts to listen to a Dallas Police dictabelt and they concluded with a 95 percent

certainty that there was a fourth shot fired at Dealey Plaza and it came from the grassy knoll. A few years later, a National Academy of Sciences (NAS) panel reviewed their work and found a multitude of errors and omissions, the most serious of which was that the time that the Select Committee experts thought the shots were being fired was the wrong time. It was actually one minute after the assassination had actually taken place.”

But the acoustics controversy didn't end there. In 2001, Dr. Donald B. Thomas, a researcher for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, had a paper published in the British journal *Science and Justice* which challenged the 1982 NAS report and was widely circulated in the assassination research community. Members of the original NAS panel are currently preparing a rebuttal to the Thomas analysis.

★ [Read more about the acoustics debate.](#)

Mexico City: Was there an intelligence cover-up?

As FRONTLINE reported in its program, for 40 years the CIA has covered up its record on the Oswald case. However, intelligence documents released in the mid to late 1990s have helped shed light on one significant episode in this cover-up — Oswald's trip to Mexico City in early September-late October, 1963 and his visits to the Cuban consulate and Soviet embassy to obtain travel visas.